

DRAFT

**KNOWSLEY METROPOLITAN
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**ANNUAL GOVERNANCE
STATEMENT**

2025/26

1. Executive Summary

The Council is required to review its corporate governance arrangements, and their effectiveness, at least annually and conducts this review against its Code of Corporate Governance. This Code is consistent with the principles of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy/Society of Local Authority Chief Executives' Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government and is available on the Council's website (www.knowsley.gov.uk) as part of the Constitution.

The Annual Governance Statement provides an account of the processes and systems which give assurance of the effectiveness of the Council's discharge of its responsibilities. This statement covers the period from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 and takes into account the CIPFA guidance "Delivering good governance in local government: framework – Addendum covering the annual review of governance and the annual governance statement".

The Council is committed to good governance and to improving governance on a continuous basis through review, learning and identification of best practice. Good governance adds value to an organisation; it ensures that the Council operates in a transparent manner, seeking to deliver the best outcomes for those residing, working or visiting the Borough. Good governance for the Council is ensuring it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people, in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. The Council seeks to achieve its objectives while acting in the public interest at all times. Through its governance arrangements the Council seeks to build a sustainable and improved Borough, supporting the delivery of the Council's, and its partners', strategic outcomes. The Council is keen to work with others to achieve this; examples include:

- Independent External Auditors – the Council maintains an effective relationship with its external auditors, responding to enquiries, requests for information or similar, in a timely manner. The Council retains an honest and transparent dialogue with its external auditors over a range of items.
- Appointment of Independent Chairperson to Governance and Audit Committee – to ensure independent challenge and oversight of the work of the Council, increasing accountability and transparency.

This Statement includes an outline of the Council's Governance Framework, evidencing how governance is implemented and practiced on a day-to-day basis, and provides an evaluation of any particular issues and associated controls that have been, or are to be, put in place as a result.

2. The Purpose of the Governance Framework

The Governance Framework comprises the culture, values, systems and processes which direct the way the Council works and through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its communities. The key elements of the systems and processes that comprise the Council's governance framework are set out at Appendix 1.

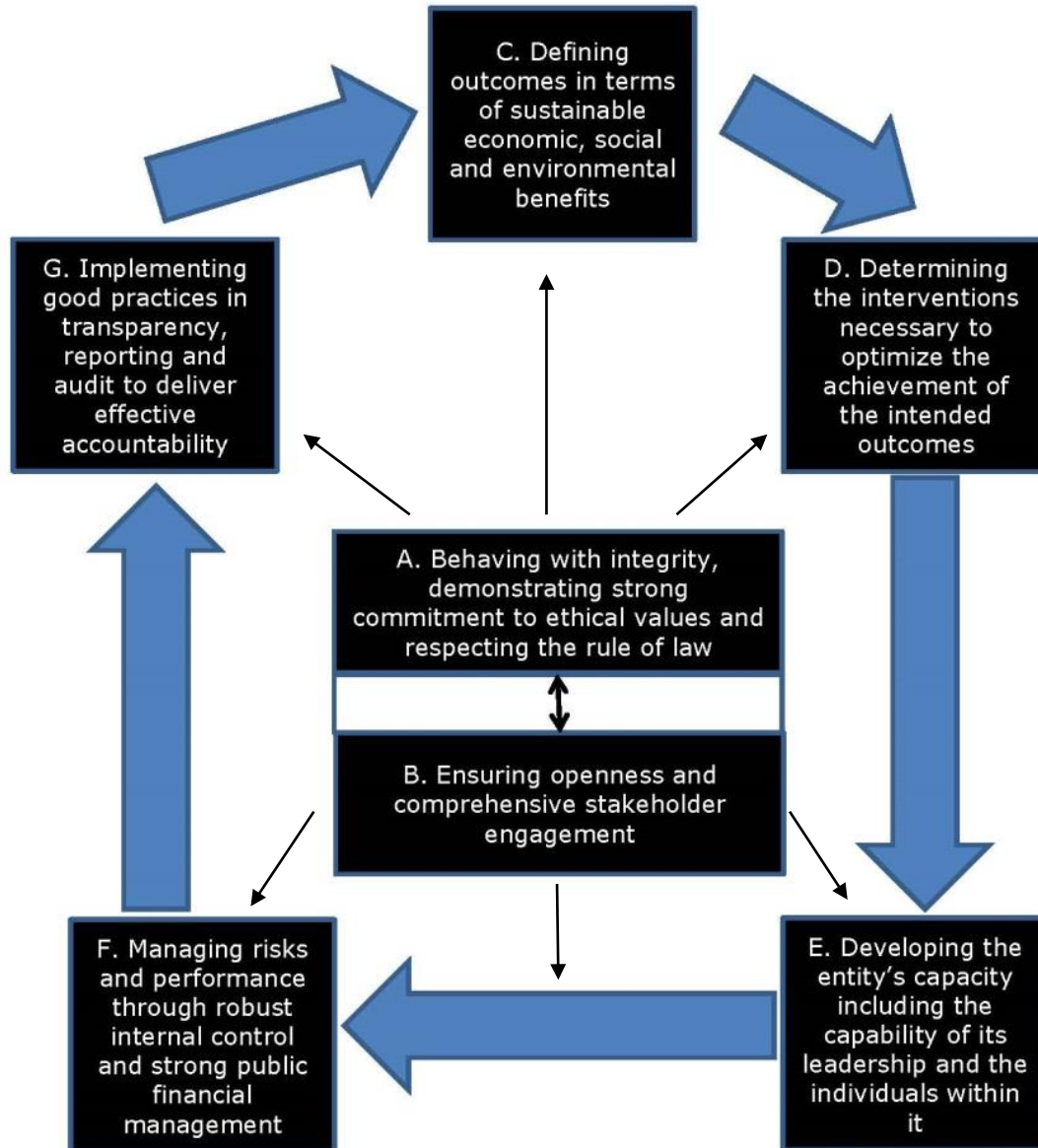
The governance of the Council is based fundamentally around its Constitution, and is supported by numerous policies, procedures, codes of practice, management processes, and a system of delegation and accountability. The Council's governance arrangements are reflected in its Code of Corporate Governance, which brings together all aspects of corporate governance, grouped according to the seven core principles of effective governance.

The Council's Constitution clearly defines the roles of councillors and officers, and this clarity contributes to effective working relationships across the Council. The Constitution is reviewed annually to examine the governance arrangements and to ensure their continued robustness. During 2025/26 this review led to a number of changes to the Constitution which were considered and agreed by the Council at its Annual Meeting held on 22 May 2026.

The Council continued to work closely with its partners through the 2025/26 financial year and, in particular, with all strategic partners via the continuing development of the Knowsley Better Together Board.

3. The Principles of Corporate Governance

There are seven principles and sub-principles of Corporate Governance adopted by the Council from the CIPFA/SOLACE framework:



How Knowsley meets each of the seven core principles are set out in the following tables with links to the key documents which demonstrate such commitments.

A Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

How we meet this principle

- Our Constitution sets out a series of ethical standards and values for both officers and Elected Members. It also includes an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy Statement (which includes the “whistle blowing” procedure and relevant contact details in this respect). These are reviewed on an annual basis as part of the formal review of the Constitution.
- The Officer Code of Conduct (which forms part of the Constitution) is also reviewed annually.
- We require the Register of Interests to be completed by Elected Members. Officers are also required to complete annual returns setting out any interests they may have for sign-off or action by their line manager as appropriate.
- We have put in place complaints procedures, including procedures for complaints regarding the behaviour of elected or co-opted Members.
- We have appointed a Monitoring Officer in accordance with Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 who is responsible for ensuring that, at all times, the Council acts within its legal powers. This officer makes regular reports to the Executive Management Team and the Governance and Audit Committee.
- The Chief Executive is the Head of Paid Service. He leads the Council's officers and chairs the Executive Management Team. Our statutory officers (including the Council's Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer) meet regularly with the Executive Management Team to ensure compliance with the Council's policies, legal duties and relevant guidance.
- Following a pay and grading review, we have implemented a pay and grading structure for all posts below senior officer level. A similar review of all senior officer posts was also undertaken and implemented during 2016. These principles are now routinely applied to any subsequent posts that are established or amended. (NB The Council now uses the Local Government job evaluation scheme, which is regularly updated, and any revisions and amendments are reflected to ensure that the Council's pay and grading structure remains current.)
- Financial and Contract Procedure Rules are contained within the Council's Constitution and are reviewed annually to ensure that they remain up to date and fit for purpose.

Where this is demonstrated

- [Constitution - Elected and Co-opted Member Code of Conduct \(Part 5 Section 1\)](#)
- [Constitution - Anti-Fraud Corruption Statement \(Part 5 Section 5\)](#)
- [Constitution - Officer Code of Conduct \(part 5 Section 2\)](#)
- Members' declarations of interest are published on the Council's website (accessible via the details of each [individual elected member](#)) and recorded as appropriate within [minutes of meetings](#)
- [Have Your Say - Compliments, Complaints and Feedback](#)
- [Making a complaint about an elected or co-opted member's conduct](#)
- [Constitution - Functions of the Monitoring Officer - Article 11 \(Part 2\)](#)
- [Constitution - Financial Procedure Rules and Contract Procedure Rules \(Part 4 Section 7\)](#)
- [Ethical Care Charter](#) (Minute Number 74(2))
- [Declaration of Intent – Race Equality \(Minute Number 43\(1\)\)](#)

- Our Council Plan (The Knowsley Council Plan) contains a number of behaviours and values which the Council is committed to. This is supplemented by a number of Council resolutions, which support particular values and behaviours, that the Council's decision makers are required to act in accordance with; for example the principles of the UNISON Ethical Care Charter which aims to establish a minimum baseline for the safety, quality and dignity of care provided to clients; the declaration of intent – race equality; and the declaration of a climate emergency.

- [Climate Emergency](#) (Minute Number 42(1)) [Knowsley Council Plan 2025-2030](#)) and the [Knowsley Council Plan - Annual Delivery Plan 2026/27](#)

Assurance received and/or issues identified

The Council's Governance and Audit Committee considers regular reports in relation to ethical matters, both in respect of officers and Elected Members. Any proposals, decisions, or omissions which would give rise to unlawfulness or maladministration would be reported to the Council by the appropriate statutory officer. Such a report would have the effect of halting the proposal or implementation of the decision until the Council considered the report.

All Elected Members are prompted to revise their Register of Interests on an annual basis, and then as required throughout the year, and ethical standard Member training sessions are provided on an annual basis. Any interests made by Elected Members throughout the year are published on the Council's website and a register of any gifts and hospitality received is also maintained.

Officers are reminded of their responsibilities in terms of behaviours via the Officer Code of Conduct. The Council continuously reviews the Code and responds to any issues that may have been highlighted during the course of the municipal year as part of the annual review. Any breaches of the Code during the year are taken seriously and dealt with promptly. Sessions have been delivered to senior officers on behaviour and ethical conduct and the principles within the Officer Code of Conduct are reflected in the Council's policies.

To assist with the management of the Officer Gifts and Hospitality Policy and the Personal Interests Policy, a recording process is in place. Officers are required to review any interests they have and make an electronic declaration in this respect on an annual basis for review and, where appropriate, action by their line manager. Officers are also required to record any Gifts or hospitality they receive on the system.

The aim of the above policies is:-

- to ensure that there is a consistent approach across the Council to any offers of gifts or hospitality as well as personal interests; and
- to protect Council Officers and ensure that they are not compromised in any way or put into a situation that is deemed to conflict with their role within the Council.

A series of values and behaviours have been incorporated in the Knowsley Council Plan in respect of the priorities to be achieved, which have also been reflected in the Council's Constitution and form part of the "My Time" discussions between senior officers and staff. My Time provides an opportunity for staff to reflect on these qualities and how they demonstrate them, to agree goals for the year in line with the Knowsley Council Plan (i.e. as defined within the relevant Service's Plan) and to discuss issues that affect staff. The aim is to identify any specific support or development

needs and to recognise and support better partnership working, both internally and externally, aligned with the Knowsley Better Together culture. The process of “My Time” is currently under review as part of a broader review of People Performance policies and practices across the organisation; this will include determining whether any change is required to improve the current process. The Council is also moving away from values to focusing on behaviours. A new set of behaviours, building on the previous qualities, have been developed and tested. They will replace the qualities and will be integrated into processes and procedures.

In addition, professional officers are required to comply with their professional code of ethics as appropriate, for example the Council's Internal Auditors must comply with the ethical requirements as part of the Global Internal Auditing Standards (GIAS).

The officer pay and grading review for posts below senior officer level was undertaken as part of the Authority’s commitment to the 1997 national Single Status Agreement, which aims to ensure fairness and equality in relation to pay for local government employees. The senior management pay and grading review was subsequently undertaken in accordance with the nationally developed Local Government Association “Chief Officer” Scheme. This ensured that the approach to the pay and grading of all of the Council’s workforce was transparent, consistent and in accordance with the same principles, and continues to be applied to any subsequent posts that are established or amended. To maintain transparency and equity the Council is currently refreshing job descriptions to ensure that all job descriptions remain accurate, with grading considered in consultation with Unions if appropriate.

B Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

How we meet this principle	Where this is demonstrated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council's planning and decision-making processes are based upon the presumption of openness and transparency, with all decisions published on the Council's website. These decisions provide clear reasoning and rationale. • Our planning and decision-making processes are designed to include consultation with stakeholders and the submission of views by local people. • We have undertaken service specific consultation with key stakeholders and service users directly through letters, emails, surveys and meetings. • All Members offer surgeries for their constituents. All Members are also available by email and mobile telephone. • The Knowsley Engagement Forum acts as a central co-ordinating forum for engagement and consultation direct with the public, including a locality perspective. The six Partnership Boards supporting the Forum (covering Older People, Carers, Learning Disability, Autism, Dementia and Independent Living) also include people with lived experience. 	<p>Council Committees, Delegated Decisions and Forthcoming Key Decisions</p> <p>Members’ surgery details are available on the Council’s website (accessible via the details of each individual elected member) and the public are encouraged to make comments via the on-line “Have Your Say” facility.</p> <p>Information on the Knowsley Better Together Board is available here.</p>

- We also work extensively in partnership with other organisations in the Borough in keeping with our Knowsley Better Together approach (NB see “Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes” below for further information in this respect).
- The Council is invited to nominate Members to sit on a wide range of outside bodies. These outside bodies vary considerably in their status and purpose, with some having a specific Knowsley focus and others concerned with Merseyside-wide or national matters. Such appointments are determined at the [Council Annual Meeting - 16 May 2025 \(Item 8 refers\)](#). Details of the appointments are also listed in the information for each [individual elected member](#) on the Council’s website.
- In terms of the formal meetings of the Council and its Committees, public meetings are held ‘in-person’ on site and continue to be livestreamed for public viewing. This footage is available to view for up to 12 months after the relevant meeting.

[Annual Meeting 2025](#) (item 8)

Assurance received and/or issues identified

The Knowsley Engagement Forum provides assurance that appropriate networks, groups and individuals are being engaged in the commissioning and development of services and investments on behalf of the partnerships in Knowsley.

Specific consultation exercises undertaken by the Council during 2025/26 included:

- Annual review of the Constitution;
- School Admission Arrangements 2027/28;
- Scrutiny Public Consultation 2026-2027;
- Mill Dam Café Consultation;
- Knowsley Moving Traffic Offences Consultation;
- Priorities for Kirkby Consultation;
- Call for Sites Consultation;
- Zero Waste Strategy Consultation;
- Stadt Moers Park Public Consultation;
- Single-use Vapes Policy Consultation;
- Blackburne Drive / Higher Road – Active Travel and Safety Scheme Informal Consultation;
- Tower Hill Park Public Consultation;
- Licencing Policy Consultation;
- Planning Validation Checklist Consultation;

- Huyton Town Centre Regeneration;
- Prescott Town of Culture Bid (i.e. a drop-in consultation to help shape the bid); and
- Electoral Review of Knowsley by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (and associated local consultation to help formulate the Council's submission in this respect).

Users of social care services are surveyed routinely, and the results are used to inform service development and improvement.

C Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

How we meet this principle	Where this is demonstrated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Knowsley 2030 Strategy has been co-produced with strategic partner agencies, Knowsley residents, businesses, and Elected Members. The commitments within the Strategy are co-owned by all key partner agencies within the Borough with a view to being collectively delivered following Knowsley Better Together principles. The Strategy is the culmination of an extensive process which began with gathering and understanding a range of evidence and insight from stakeholders about Knowsley today and about the aspirations of communities and businesses for the Borough in the year 2030. Working with partner agencies, Council officers have analysed this significant body of evidence and subsequently developed the aspirations and commitments within the Strategy. • The Strategy focuses on five strategic outcomes which describe a vision for the kind of Borough stakeholders want Knowsley to be by 2030. Those outcomes are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A place with welcoming, vibrant and well-connected neighbourhoods and town centres; - A place with a thriving and inclusive economy with opportunities for people and business; - A place where people are active and healthy and have access to the support they need; - A place where people of all ages are confident and can achieve their full potential; and, - A place where strong and safe communities can shape their future. <p>The recently revised Knowsley Council Plan 2025 – 2030 sets out the Council's vision - <i>Supporting Knowsley Residents to Thrive</i>. To ensure that the Council realises this vision, the Knowsley Council Plan is focused on three key priorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Deliver effective, high quality services and support – that positively impacts the lives of Knowsley residents. (ii) Encourage growth that benefits everyone - ensuring our communities and town centres can flourish. 	<p>Knowsley 2030 Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Knowsley Council Plan 2025-2030

(iii) **Deliver targeted support to encourage fairness and opportunity** – for those residents facing the biggest challenges.

The Knowsley Council Plan also includes the following five proposed guiding principles that signal to stakeholders how the Council intends to achieve its Knowsley 2030 ambitions:-

- Identifying issues early and taking action before problems escalate;
 - Understanding our people and our communities better and helping them find their own solutions;
 - Effective and efficient services for all;
 - Inclusive growth – everyone benefits, and no one is ‘left behind’; and,
 - Knowsley Better Together – more can be achieved if people, organisations and communities work together.
- The Knowsley Council Plan 2025-2030 provides a focus on how the Council intends to achieve its Knowsley 2030 ambitions and ensure that the Council continues to support those in greatest need amongst Knowsley’s communities, working alongside strategic partner agencies to reduce longstanding inequalities in the Borough. The Knowsley Council Plan 2025-2030 was approved by the Council on 5 March 2025.
 - As part of the wider Liverpool City Region and its Combined Authority, we play an important part in the ongoing implementation of the City Region’s Devolution Agreement with the Government and the wider work of the Liverpool City Region Metro Mayor.
 - We have established a Health and Wellbeing Board, a Council committee which assesses the health and wellbeing needs of the local population and leads the statutory joint strategic needs assessment, promotes integration and partnership and holds the partner organisations to account.
 - The Council’s Whole Life Commissioning Team is responsible for commissioning services on behalf of Adult Social Care, Children and Young People’s Services and Public Health. The Whole Life Strategic Commissioning Plan 2024-2027 outlines the priorities, plans and key areas of focus for the areas and helps shape and underpin the team’s decision-making. The Plan supports the delivery of a number of local strategies including the Knowsley 2030 Strategy and delivery is achieved through a variety of commissioned contracts in conjunction with the activities of other Council services and numerous stakeholders and partner agencies.
- [The Knowsley Council Plan 2025-2030](#)
 - [Liverpool City Region Combined Authority information](#)
 - [Constitution - Knowsley Health and Wellbeing Board Procedure Rules \(Part 4 Section 5\)](#)
 - [Whole Life Commissioning – Strategic Commissioning Plan 2024-2027](#)

Assurance received and/or issues identified

By delivering high quality services which provide value for money and are aligned to the needs and priorities of the local community, the Council continues to make a vitally important contribution to achieving the long-term vision of the Strategy for Knowsley.

The Knowsley Council Plan is an essential tool in setting out what the Authority will do to make the contribution referenced above, providing a framework for financial planning and performance management. The improvements to be achieved through the actions in the Plan are set out in more detail in the Annual Delivery Plan approved by Cabinet each year, and through the Council's internal annual Departmental and Service planning process. Key actions, performance measures and risks contained in these plans are monitored and reported to Elected Members to ensure successful delivery.

The Annual Delivery Plan provides an essential focus for the work of services during the year, including the high level actions that will be taken in order to support the achievement of the priorities included in the Council Plan 2025-30.

Departmental Plans set out in more detail how Council services will contribute towards the delivery of the priorities set out in the Knowsley Council Plan. These Departmental Plans are monitored on a quarterly basis in consultation with the relevant Cabinet Portfolio Holders. These foundations have enabled an effective approach to monitoring and reporting, with a tighter focus on progress against agreed milestones and impact, and on risks.

Following the Knowsley Council Plan 2025-2030 being agreed by Full Council on 5 March 2025, quarterly update reports are presented to the Cabinet on the delivery of the Knowsley Council Plan. These reports set out the achievements made together with the identification of the challenges to be addressed in relation to the delivery of specific priorities that are carried through to subsequent Council Plan monitoring update reports as areas of focus, see:

[Knowsley Council Plan Monitoring Report \(Cabinet, 11th June 2025 - Minute 7 refers\)](#)

[Knowsley Council Performance Report \(Cabinet, 3rd December 2025 - Minute 35 refers\)](#)

[Knowsley Council Performance Report \(Cabinet, 18th March 2026 - Minute 66 refers\)](#)

In December 2025 the local authority implemented a new style report for Cabinet which includes progress against priorities and delivery of actions, key performance indicators and strategic risks. This approach is based on Local Government Association best practice and has been adopted as part of Knowsley Council's commitment to performance improvement and transparency.

Like all local authorities, Knowsley Council faces the constant challenge of balancing day-to-day service delivery with the longer-term requirement to transform and reform public services, including addressing inequalities. The linking of performance and resources is of critical importance in view of the ongoing financial challenges being faced by the public sector and the impact this has on the level and quality of services that can be provided. At a strategic level, the Council's priorities and budget-setting processes have been aligned with the Council Plan and Financial Strategy being developed and monitored together.

In terms of external assurance, following an inspection in February 2025, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) rated Knowsley Council's adult social care and support as being 'Good', with 'Good' ratings being achieved across all nine areas inspected. Amongst other things, the assessment team found that:

- Knowsley Council demonstrates a commitment to providing high-quality and safe services;
- safeguarding remains a priority, with robust quality assurance measures in place; and
- the Transformation Plan for 2024-2027 demonstrates a commitment to continuous improvement and reflects the Council's vision of supporting people to live independently, with a focus on early intervention and prevention.

D Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

How we meet this principle

Where this is demonstrated

- "Knowsley Better Together" (formally agreed by the Cabinet in July 2017) has been developed with a view to encouraging greater partnership working between the Council, businesses, residents and other stakeholders.
- The Council's Medium-Term Financial Plan, Revenue Budget and Capital Programme set out how the Council allocates resources to priorities.
 - The Medium-Term Financial Plan is approved by the Full Council each March. The Medium-Term Financial Plan for 2025/26 was approved by the Council on 5 March 2025.
 - The Capital Programme is monitored and reported during the year. The final monitoring report for 2025/26 will be reported to Cabinet on 4th June 2026. An update on the Capital Programme for 2025/26 and future years was reported to Council on 4 March 2026.
 - Having considered Cabinet's budget proposals the Council's 2025/26 Revenue Budget was approved by the Full Council on 5 March 2025.
 - Regular budget monitoring reports were considered by the Cabinet throughout the year. The final budget monitoring report for 2025/26 will be reported to the Cabinet in June 2026.
- We have a planning process (part of the Council's overarching performance management framework) which sets out in detail the actions to achieve the priorities in the Council Plan which, in turn, is reviewed on an annual basis.

[Knowsley Better Together](#)

[Medium Term Financial Strategy \(minute 55 refers\)](#)
[Capital Programme for 2025/26 and future years \(minute 52 refers\)](#)

[2025/26 Revenue Budget \(minute 57 refers\)](#)

- The “Assurance and Delivery Unit” reports to the Assistant Chief Executive to ensure that there is an early warning system in place to identify potential risks and issues in relation to service delivery and the achievement of key priorities. In addition, a quarterly Oversight and Assurance meeting takes place with the Executive Management Team which takes a risk-based approach to reviewing issues across the Council. The categories are those issues that can be controlled, those that we can influence and those that we need to either accept or adapt to and intervention/action is discussed and agreed as appropriate.
- Our Contract Procedure Rules within the Constitution include requirements in relation to the consideration of Social Value, and we have adopted a “Social Value Statement” which sets out the Council’s social value outcomes and measures to support the vision, priorities and actions of the Council Plan to make Knowsley the “Borough of Choice”.
- All decisions made by the Council, the Cabinet, or Committees are made on the basis of written reports, which include information on legal and resource implications, equality and environmental assessments, consideration of the risks involved and their management, and communication issues. All such reports are required to include, as an appendix, a completed Equality Impact Assessment.

[Constitution - Contract Procedure Rules \(Part 4 Section 8\)](#)

[Social Value Statement](#)

Assurance received and/or issues identified

Departmental plans are monitored and reported to Elected Members to ensure successful delivery. These plans, updated annually, include clear identification of objectives and targets, reflect Council Plan priorities, set out key performance indicators and include risk registers identifying risks in meeting the objectives. In response to COVID-19, all services were required to demonstrate that they have Business Continuity Plans in place and that these are being reviewed on a regular basis to identify key risks and priorities, with associated control mechanisms.

In recent years the Council has not had to make significant cuts to service budgets due to the strong decisions taken by the Council over the previous decade. However, the national economic climate remains challenging with continued risk of future cuts in overall local government funding allocations. It is important that the Council continues to identify savings as part of the budget setting process to reduce the risk that future budget shortfalls have to be resolved by unplanned or reactive service cuts. In order to mitigate this risk, the Council has adopted a performance-based approach to its Financial Strategy. The core principles of this approach are that the Authority’s budgets should be allocated to deliver the most sustainable impact on the Council’s priorities and to ensure that statutory and regulatory requirements are met most efficiently and effectively. To enable this, a more integrated approach to budget setting and service planning has ensured that budget allocations are more directly linked to agreed performance levels, expected levels of efficiency, and the adoption of key policy principles including prevention, behaviour change and social value. These principles are established in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Capital Strategy – as approved by the Full Council each March.

To inform the budget process, Cabinet agreed the need for a Transformation Programme to develop and implement improvements which will improve outcomes for residents and at the same time drive down the future levels of demand and cost built into the medium-term financial forecasts.

E Developing the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

How we meet this principle	Where this is demonstrated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All new Elected Members and employees undertake an induction to familiarise them with the protocols, procedures, values and aims of the Council. • We run a Member Development Programme to assist Members and strengthen their capacity as confident and effective political and community leaders, who are capable of forming healthy and productive relationships, networks, and partnerships. • We run regular senior manager conference sessions and senior manager networking sessions, chaired by the Chief Executive. • We provide opportunities for staff to study for professional qualifications; for example, those accredited by the Institute of Learning and Management (ILM) which supports the Leadership Development Programme. • We have continued to revise our governance arrangements on an annual basis to ensure that they remain appropriate and fit for purpose. • A review of the Council’s departmental structure and senior officer arrangements has been undertaken and implemented in order to ensure that there continues to be clear lines of accountability and to ensure maximum value for money for the Council. • With effect from April 2023, all service plans include key workforce planning priorities. 	<p>Elected Member Induction Programme</p> <p>Employee induction programme</p> <p>Member Development Programme</p>

Assurance received and/or issues identified

As part of the Council’s strategy for Elected Member development, a Members’ Training and Development Programme was introduced in July 2004. The Programme has been reviewed and updated annually by the Members’ Training and Development Task Group taking account of the financial challenges that the Council has faced over the past few years, corporate priorities and ongoing feedback from Members.

The Task Group agreed the programme for 2025/26 at its meeting held on 11 February 2025 in preparation for the 2025/26 municipal year, which was divided into the following seven elements:

- Essential Training;
- Role Specific Training (which was classed as “essential” for relevant members but offered out to all Elected Members where appropriate to do so);
- Ad Hoc Seminars;
- Online training/ Workbooks;
- Leadership Academy Programme;
- Leadership Essentials Programme; and
- Training Needs identified by Elected Members.

A personal training plan is drawn up for each Elected Member reflecting the essential, in-person training at the start of their term of office and is revised annually dependent upon their appointments to Committees.

In terms of employees, the HR function helps support employee recruitment, retention and development across the organisation. Our Learning and Development approach ensures, through linking closely with the Corporate Priorities and via a series of cascaded training and development priorities, that employees are supported to have the essential skills and competencies to carry out their roles. Specific service budgets and external funded streams are allocated to resource this learning and development. Knowsley Council also maximises the use of the Apprenticeship Levy (where possible), Skills for Care Funding and partnerships with HE (Higher Education) Educational establishments to align learning and development needs to accredited, funded qualifications and access to newly qualified staff to support our recruitment strategies as well as grow and upskill existing employees. We are using close relationships with services to identify training needs and to predict growth areas, identify changing workforce planning and succession planning needs and take account of local regional and national skills shortages and labour markets.

During 2025/26, the following planned training interventions have taken place to support our Learning and Development approach:

- 547 face to face training courses, which occupied 7043 training places to the workforce across all occupational areas and to employees occupying full, part time, fixed term and temporary contracts. A total of 35,900 hours of face-to-face training has taken place.
- In addition to the occupational training course places (above), the Council continued to deliver an intensive two day induction programme for all new starters to the Council and followed this up with a 6 monthly review on new starter progress by the Chief Executive. Content includes a range of facilitated topic areas such as a Welcome to the Council by all members of the Executive Management Team, the Knowsley Better Together Journey, Communication and Resources, Culture and Compliance and a personal ‘meet and greet’ by the new line manager to support the transition from induction into the workplace.
- 119 existing employees began apprenticeship levy funded qualifications during 2025/26 which covered 23 different occupational qualifications. 13 new members of staff joined Knowsley as a ‘new hire’ apprentice and have also enrolled in an apprenticeship qualification to secure their professional skills and knowledge and 39 learners successfully completed apprenticeship qualifications.

- On externally accredited management qualifications, 3 more employees enrolled on the Level 7 MSc in Public Sector Leadership/ Systems Thinking Practitioner, 19 delegates have participated in the Level 5 CMI in Operations Management, 9 employees participated in Level 4 Lead Practitioner qualifications and 13 employees participated in the CMI Level 3 Team Leader. In addition, new training has been developed and rolled out on a range of topics for all managers including Attendance Management and Crucial Conversations.
- 32 students have completed/started their Social Work placement within Knowsley, participating in 560+ hours of support sessions. We continue to work closely with both Adults' and Children's social care to maximise opportunities for quality recruitment pathways and examining the important matter of retaining the talent that we have developed across this space and the wider organisation.
- We continued to commit to our wider early talent programmes through the employment of 25 graduates currently on a graduate programme across various services within the Council. 80% of graduates who complete these programmes are retained within roles in the Council for at least a year after the programme concludes.
- Over 34,000 hours of training have been accessed by employees via e-learning on our virtual platforms period which host over 450+ targeted e-learning, video and podcast resources.
- This year we have continued to support a range of needs led workshops for target groups such as our 9 Employee Networks which support not only those colleagues with protected characteristics but also those who represent proportions of our workforce who would benefit from having their voices heard with regards to the influencing and feedback of Council policies and practices.
- The annual employee survey saw a 9% increase response rate to 58% and some very useful feedback which has been actioned to improve all employees' experiences and sense of worth across the organisation. This survey will re-run again in 2026. Following feedback received from this, we have introduced a range of improvements to further improve the employee experience and drive engagement, including re-introducing long service awards recognising employees with 25, 40 and 50 years' service to Knowsley Council. Additional training and development, including Career Conversations, have been piloted and launched to strengthen learning and development opportunities, following feedback from the survey.
- The Council programme of Exit Interviews has been further strengthened to help better understand why employees are leaving the organisation and where employment practices can be strengthened. All employees have the opportunity to complete an exit questionnaire, and all are invited to an exit interview with an independent member of staff. Intelligence from this, aligned with other data including the employee survey, has been used to help develop our emerging People Strategy.
- This year we have made huge strides to continue to improve the employee experience via the recruitment process and also improved the visibility and accessibility of job vacancies. This has included the attendance at a wide range of careers events at schools, colleges and universities as well as public promotions of careers in Knowsley at public events such as Culture Festivals and the Knowsley Flower Show.
- The HR Business Partner role within HR has further strengthened skills and capacity across HR, and has led to considerably improved communication and has enabled our management teams to be more responsive and supportive of the diverse needs within services. The Business Partners have also increased strategic HR capacity including future workforce planning and looking at ways to bridge critical skills and workforce challenges. Continuous opportunity for employee development plays a large part in psychological investment with employees and we make sure that all opportunities are offered in a transparent and accessible way in order that we can attract, recruit, develop and retain the best talent.

F Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

How we meet this principle	Where this is demonstrated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In September 2025, the Cabinet approved the Performance Management and Risk Management Handbooks, setting out the roles and responsibilities of Elected Members and Council officers which must be fulfilled to ensure that the Authority continues to implement an effective approach to risk management. The documents were produced using guidance provided by the Local Government Association and ALARM (the Association of Local Authority Risk Managers). • Regular review of the Knowsley Council Performance reports and Strategic Risks. An update was received at Cabinet in December 2025 and March 2026. • The Governance and Audit Committee meets regularly to provide independent assurance to the Council in relation to the effectiveness of the governance, internal control environment, treasury management, standards, and risk management framework. It receives regular reports on performance and reviews progress against any internal audit recommendations previously made. The Committee undertakes the core functions as identified in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy’s Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities, and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provides independent scrutiny and assurance on the adequacy of the internal control environment and risk management framework; - reviews the Council’s policies relating to governance and audit matters; - considers the strategic direction of counter fraud and internal audit, and the review of the effectiveness of internal audit; - supports and reviews standards of conduct; - reviews the treasury management strategy and performance; and, - oversees the financial reporting process. • The Council’s Scrutiny Committees examine the operations and policies of the Council. 	<p>Performance Management and Risk Management Handbooks (minute 19 refers)</p> <p>Knowsley Council Performance Report for Quarter 2 2025/26 and Review of Strategic Risks (minute 35 refers)</p> <p>Knowsley Council Performance Report for Quarter 3 - 2025/26 and Review of Strategic Risks (minute 66 refers)</p> <p>Governance and Audit Committee Annual Report 2024/25 (Minute 12 refers)</p> <p>Governance and Audit Committee Meetings</p> <p>Scrutiny Committees</p>

- We have an independent counter fraud team and an internal audit team with arrangements for reviewing the implementation of their recommendations. The Governance and Audit Committee approves the Internal Audit Operational Plan and receives progress updates during the year.
- Performance and progress against the Council Plan is evaluated regularly using a performance management framework which provides for:
 - the systematic review and reporting of performance across the Council; and
 - the establishment and monitoring of achievement of the Council's aims.
- Our Medium-Term Financial Plan, Revenue Budget and Capital Programme set out how the Council allocates resources to priorities. These are approved by the Full Council each year and monitoring reports are submitted throughout the year to the Cabinet.
- The Council agreed an overall Capital Strategy for 2025/26, which explains how the Council's capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of local public services. The overall Strategy includes the following components:
 - A Capital Strategy report;
 - The Capital Programme Monitoring Report;
 - The Treasury Management Strategy; and
 - The Investment Strategy.
- The Council's 2025/26 Treasury Management Strategy sets out the Council's plans for the overall management and control of the Council's cash income and expenditure for 2025/26. The Strategy takes into account updated forecasts on interest rates and covers various aspects of the treasury management function including:
 - identifying the controls and limits in place to minimise the risk of the treasury activities of the Council;
 - determining the Council's borrowing requirements for the year;
 - establishing the strategy for borrowing in terms of sources and types of loans;
 - setting an approach to be followed in the event of any rescheduling of debt which may be required;
 - outlining the Council's Minimum Revenue Provision Policy in line with regulations; and,
 - detailing the Annual Investment Strategy to be adhered to when placing funds on deposit.

[The Knowsley Council Plan 2025-2030](#)

[Council Budget Meeting - 5th March 2025](#)

- The Council's Statutory Officers report regularly through to the Chief Executive highlighting any issues and areas of risk along with actions taken/to be taken to address them. Regular "Golden Triangle" meetings also take place between the Chief Executive, Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer.
- The Council has an Anti-Fraud and Corruption Statement, supported by a number of policies such as Whistleblowing, Anti-Bribery and Anti-Money Laundering. This provides an avenue for people (both internally and externally) to report issues anonymously. A panel considers the issue reported, chaired by the Head of Finance if the matter is financial or by the Monitoring Officer in any other instance.

[Anti-Fraud and Corruption Statement \(Part 5 Section 5\)](#)

Assurance received and/or issues identified

The Cabinet agreed a "Performance Management Handbook" and a "Risk Management Handbook" at its meeting of 24 September 2025 which set out the Council's approach to managing performance and risk going forwards, including the roles and responsibilities of officers and Elected Members. The Risk Management Handbook requires all strategic risks to be reported quarterly to the Executive Management Team and to the Cabinet on a quarterly basis in the new Council Performance Report that was launched in December 2025. The Strategic Risk Register is also reviewed at each meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee.

A formal review of the Strategic Risk Register is carried out following the annual refresh of the Knowsley Council Plan in order to ensure that the Strategic Risk Register remains aligned to the Council's priorities. Risks are also assessed on a quarterly basis through departmental performance and risk management discussions as part of the Council's wider approach to performance management.

The performance of services - including the implementation of actions linked to the delivery of the Council Plan priorities, key performance indicators and risks – are reported to Portfolio Holders on a quarterly basis. Any changes to risk registers, including changes to risk scores, the identification of new risks, and the escalation/ de-escalation of risks from the strategic risk register/ departmental risk registers, are made in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to ensure a dynamic and timely approach is maintained.

In terms of cyber security, all staff are required to undertake annual online training which highlights potential risks and best practice to ensure staff are equipped with the knowledge to protect themselves and the Council. Security advisories and awareness updates are communicated regularly, alongside periodic phishing exercises, to strengthen user vigilance and resilience against cyber threats.

In terms of Data protection, appropriate organisational and technical measures are in place to mitigate the risk of data breaches. This includes mandatory annual Data Protection training for all staff, which includes guidance on how to handle data securely and compliantly in line with the Council's legal obligations. The training also includes guidance on the use of AI to highlight potential risks but how it may be used to create efficiencies whilst protecting data held by the Council. Additionally, information security risks are mitigated through email encryption to ensure secure transfer of sensitive and personal information when sent outside of the Council's network.

Each year the Council considers a Governance and Audit Committee Annual Report which summarises the work of the Committee during the year and sets out how the Committee examined and challenged the arrangements for effective governance. The Annual Report also indicates the breadth of the Committee's role in ensuring that every aspect of the Council's work should be compliant with standards and transparent to its stakeholders. In this way, the Annual Report demonstrates the value of the Committee to the Council and the public, ensuring that governance is on a sound footing. The Governance and Audit Committee, at its meeting held on [6 October 2025](#), approved the Governance and Audit Committee Annual Report for 2024/25 and this was endorsed by Full Council at its meeting held on 22 October 2025.

As referenced above, the Governance and Audit Committee reviews the Strategic Risk Register (which the Cabinet subsequently approves). The Committee, at its meeting held on [10 March 2025 - Minute 31](#) considered a report on the Council's revised Strategic Risk Register, following a full review of the Risk Register. This ensured that the strategic risks remain aligned with the Council's priorities. The updated Strategic Risk Register included a full update on the work which had taken place to mitigate significant risks during a period of unparalleled challenges. There were 39 risks on the Strategic Risk Register – 16 were rated "High", 18 were rated "Medium", and 5 were rated "Low". In addition, at its meeting of [9 March 2026 \(Minute 46\)](#), the Committee considered a detailed update against two of the Council's strategic risks: "NHS Reform"; and "The Council delivers the priorities set out in its Economic Growth Plan".

The Council's five Scrutiny Committees (Children, Climate Emergency, Inclusive Growth and Skills, Health and Adult Social Care, and Stronger Communities) supported and enhanced the Council's decision-making processes during the year; they also supported the development of policy, monitored performance and made recommendations to support improvement. Each year, Council considers an Annual Scrutiny Report that provides a brief overview of how Knowsley's Scrutiny Committees work and what they have achieved over the previous municipal year (see [Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/25 \(Minute 25 refers\)](#)).

The audited 2024/25 Statement of Accounts and the External Audit Report were considered by the Governance and Audit Committee at its meeting on 26 January 2026. The statutory deadline to publish the audited accounts was 30 September 2025; however, because of sector wide capacity issues within external audit firms, the Government issued a statutory "backstop" date for the 2024/25 accounts of 27 February 2026. At the meeting of 26 January 2026, the Committee considered a draft version of the audit report and a verbal update by Grant Thornton which confirmed that there were no significant weaknesses in the Council's arrangements and that there were no key recommendations. As a result, the Committee agreed the Statement of Accounts, which were published on the Council's website on 29 January 2026 – one month ahead of the statutory "backstop" deadline of 27 February 2026.

The Auditor's Annual Report also noted the ongoing issues regarding the weaknesses in Children's Services identified by the recent Ofsted inspection and noted that the Council had made positive progress in addressing these matters. The report also identified a significant weakness with regard to the growing deficit on the Dedicated Schools Grant and raised a key recommendation. However, there were no significant weaknesses identified with regards to wider financial planning and how the Council plans to bridge funding gaps in the future. The Committee noted that these matters do not undermine the wider assurance regarding the overall quality of the Accounts, the soundness of the Council's financial standing, and the probity and stewardship of the Council's resources. The Auditors also concluded that there were no other matters to be reported relating to the Authority's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources.

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

How we meet this principle

- Our governance roles and responsibilities are defined within the Constitution and allocated so that accountability for decisions made and actions taken are clear. Additionally, there are several committees established to discharge the Council's regulatory and scrutiny responsibilities.
- In accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2016), our Section 151 Officer is professionally qualified, reports directly to the Chief Executive, and is a member of the leadership team with a status equivalent to the other members.
- In accordance with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Code of Practice for the Governance of Internal Audit in UK Local Government (April 2025), the Chief Internal Auditor is a professionally qualified and suitably experienced senior officer who leads and directs an internal audit service that is resourced to be fit for purpose, and has regular and open engagement across the organisation (particularly with the Executive Management Team and the Governance and Audit Committee). The Internal Audit team operates in accordance with the requirements of the Global Internal Auditing Standards in the Public Sector and has an established Quality Assurance and Improvement Programme (QAIP).
- Various Internal Audit and External Audit reports are considered by the Governance and Audit Committee throughout the year.
- Our Constitution sets out how the Council operates and the process for policy and decision making, and budget setting. Meetings are open to the public (except where items are exempt under relevant Access to Information legislation), and forthcoming key decisions are published on the Council's website and are made available to the scrutiny committees at the earliest opportunity to secure their engagement where appropriate.
- All decisions taken by the Council, including decisions taken by officers in accordance with the Scheme of Delegation set out in the Constitution, are published on the Council's website in accordance with relevant statutory requirements.

Where this is demonstrated

- [Constitution](#):-
 - Part 3 – Articles (in particular, Article 11 provides information on the Council's Statutory Officers)
 - Part 3, Section 1 – Cabinet Portfolios and Scrutiny Committee Arrangements
 - Part 3, Section 2 – Terms of Reference
 - Part 3, Section 4 – Scheme of Delegation to Officers
 - Part 3, Section 5 – Proper Officers
 - Part 4, Section 3 – Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules
 - Part 4, Section 7 – Financial Procedure Rules
 - Part 4, Section 8 – Contract Procedure Rules
- [Governance and Audit Committee information](#)
- [Forthcoming Key Decisions](#)
- [Council Committees](#)
- [Delegated Decisions](#)

- We are continually developing the information we make available via our Publication Scheme and review procedures to ensure that the information held by the Council is compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- We have joined the national scheme with PSAA Ltd in relation to the appointment of the Council's external auditors. The Financial Reporting Council (FRC) continues to act as the independent regulator for corporate governance, financial reporting, and audit. The PSAA is still responsible for the procurement and contract management of external auditors.

[Publication scheme](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

Assurance received and/or issues identified

The Constitution is reviewed at least once each year in consultation with Elected Members and with officers from across the Council and amended as appropriate when necessary. The Constitution defines and facilitates policy and decision-making processes and includes Rules which determine the financial management of the Council and the reporting of financial matters. It also includes mechanisms for ensuring compliance with established policies, procedures, laws and regulations, including those relating to the publication of decisions and associated information.

The Internal Audit service reviews the systems for governance, risk management and internal control. Compliance checks are carried out with Council policies and, where incidents of non-compliance are identified, appropriate action is taken. An important aspect of governance is the need to ensure that all of the Council's policies are up to date, relevant, and consistent, and the Council's Policy Framework documents, which are reported to Council, are kept under regular review.

All draft proposals and reports with financial implications are dealt with in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and he also has responsibility for the Financial Management Service including the Counter Fraud and Internal Audit teams. Crucially, he leads the promotion and delivery of good financial management across the Council so that public money is safeguarded and used appropriately, economically, efficiently, and effectively at all times.

During May/June 2024, with regard to the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) across the authority, an extensive mandatory training programme was undertaken for all Council employees. Staff were required to complete a Data Protection Essentials (May 2024) E-Learning Module which reminded employees of their personal responsibility to ensure that data was used in accordance with GDPR. For those employees who failed the online assessment, feedback was given on the data protection requirements in order to assist them to complete the re-take assessment. All staff have also been reminded of the need to complete an annual return in relation to their interests and any gifts or hospitality in line with the Officer Code of Conduct.

The Council has entered, and continues to enter, into a number of formal and informal partnership arrangements. These are integral to developing and delivering the Knowsley 2030 strategy and enabling services to operate efficiently and to continue to meet the needs of Knowsley's communities and businesses. With this in mind, a Partnership Policy has been developed with a view to providing assurance that strong governance arrangements are in place in this respect; in particular, to ensure that all partnerships are acting in the best interests of the Council and appropriate risk management arrangements are in place. For the purpose of the Policy, a partnership is defined as "any arrangement that involves an agreed association between the Council and at least one other outside body, group or organisation with a view to working together to

achieve shared goals, aims or objectives”. Any service area engaged in a partnership, or thinking of establishing a Partnership, must complete the governance checklist proforma. To assist and support staff, a dedicated website has been developed.

The Council’s external auditors during 2024/25, Grant Thornton, were invited to all meetings of the Governance and Audit Committee held throughout the year. The following items have been presented to the Committee by Grant Thornton during 2024/25:-

[Grant Thornton - Draft External Audit Plan \(June 2024\);](#)

[Grant Thornton - Audit Progress Report \(September 2024\)](#)

[Grant Thornton Update \(February 2025\)](#)

[Grant Thornton Update \(March 2025\)](#)

In addition, during 11-14 November 2025, a team of local government peers led by the Local Government Association delivered a [Corporate Peer Challenge](#). The review concluded that Knowsley Council is a well-managed organisation with significant achievements and “an almost forensic-like approach to financial monitoring which supports grip and understanding across the organisation regarding budget pressures, the delivery of savings, and responding to forecast future demands”. As expected, a number of recommendations were included for the Council to consider and an Action Plan was developed in response which was agreed by Full Council at its meeting of [21 January 2026 \(minute 41\)](#). A progress review in this respect is due to be undertaken in October 2026.

4. Review of Effectiveness

The principles of being a co-operative council embody an approach to local governance for the Authority in terms of community leadership, partnership and co-operation, retaining jobs and investment locally, building social value, and empowering residents to take an active role in their communities. This recognises the need to move focus from universal service provision to supporting people to be less dependent on public services and more able to find solutions from within their communities to the challenges and opportunities which they face and is reflected in the principles of Knowsley Better Together.

Specific areas of review, along with issues facing the Council during 2025/26 and the Council's response to these, are set out below. Actions undertaken during 2025/26, and further actions proposed for 2026/27, are set out in Appendices 2 and 3 respectively.

Financial Management

On 5 March 2025 the Council approved its Net Revenue Budget for 2025/26. The net revenue expenditure budget of £261.406m (£239.280m in 2024/25) was funded by Retained Business Rates and Grant Funding of £138.364m (£134.418m in 2024/25), other Government Grants of £46.552m (£33.155m in 2024/25) and Council Tax receipts of £76.601m (£71.707m in 2024/25).

Financial performance against the approved service budgets has been monitored and reported to Members throughout the year. The final 2025/26 Budget Monitoring Report to the Cabinet on 4 June 2026 confirms that a balanced position was achieved at the end of the year after the allocation of £3.968m of one-off resources which had previously been set aside for this purpose.

When setting the 2025/26 Budget, the budget reports in March 2025 noted the range of potential financial risks facing the Council - in particular, continuing high inflation, pay inflation and social care pressures. Significant contingency budgets were therefore set aside for managing these pressures during 2025/26: £2.0m was available from these budgets to offset the overall deficit against service budgets. Further variances included £0.3m from council-wide budget savings on salary sacrifice schemes and pension contributions; 0.250m due to lower than forecast costs for temporary accommodation following the intervention at Beech and Willow rise earlier in the year; and £0.4m from the final cost of the 2025/26 pay award.

Ofsted

Ofsted inspected the Council's Children's Social Care Services between 18 and 29 November 2024. The overall judgement was that the services were found to be inadequate. The Council has appointed a long term interim Executive Director of Children and Young People who has experience of improving Local Authorities whose Children's Social Care Services have been judged to be inadequate. A comprehensive improvement journey is ongoing, which included the development of an Improvement Plan which is now been implemented.

The Council has adopted a 'whole Council' approach to improvements in Children's Social Care to ensure that the improvements are sustainable. It is acknowledged that the improvement journey is being undertaken within a context of significant challenges currently facing all local authorities - such as a lack of social workers nationally, high agency costs, and lack of appropriate placements and foster carers for those children who need to be cared for by the Local Authority.

The Children's Services Improvement Board benefits from being independently chaired by the Department for Education Advisor Anthony Douglas CBE, who has extensive experience working with Local Authorities on an improvement journey. The membership of the Improvement Board includes senior officers from across Children's Services and the wider Council, Elected Members and partners (including the Police, schools and health) to drive forward the required improvements and monitor progress against the Improvement Plan implementation.

Ofsted is currently undertaking Monitoring Visits on a quarterly basis to provide a view on how the Council is progressing in terms of the improvement journey. The second visit was undertaken in February 2026 with positive feedback and confirming that the Council remains on track with its improvement journey.

Adult Social Care

The outcome of the inspection in February 2025 by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) was positive with the outcome rating Knowsley Council's adult social care and support as being 'Good', and 'Good' ratings being achieved across all nine areas inspected. Rather than pinpointing issues or areas requiring improvement, the CQC highlighted areas where work had already commenced, and where they would like to see further development, as follows:

- Whilst waiting lists for occupational therapy had improved, there remain challenges to shorten waiting times and reduce delays.
- Partners welcomed the approach to co-production and were keen to see more diversity in the people engaging in service development – something the Council is already committed to doing in line with changing population demographics.
- Continuing with steps to increase nursing home placements in the Borough.

Work is ongoing in relation to the above.

Statutory Officer Reporting

Neither the Section 151 Officer nor the Monitoring Officer was required to report any adverse matters during the course of the year as required under the various Acts.

The Knowsley Offer

Building on the aspirations of the Knowsley 2030 Strategy, the key purpose of the Knowsley Offer is to work with residents and businesses to identify what needs to be in place to enable them to thrive and to enable the Borough to achieve its 2030 ambitions. Extensive engagement was undertaken over the summer of 2022 to find out people's views on living and working in Knowsley. Following analysis of the engagement findings, the Knowsley Better Together Partners developed the content of the public-facing Knowsley Offer which was launched in early February 2023 and is hosted on the Knowsley Better Together website www.knowsleybettertogether.co.uk/TheOffer.

The Knowsley Offer is a powerful tool for residents and businesses as a one stop shop of all essential services and support available to them to enable them to thrive. The Offer consists of ten chapters as follows:-

- (i) Your Money;
- (ii) Health;
- (iii) Housing;
- (iv) Community Safety;
- (v) Children and Young People;
- (vi) Jobs and Training;
- (vii) Business;
- (viii) Support for Adults;
- (ix) The Place; and
- (x) Get Involved.

As the Knowsley Offer is online, extensive communications have been shared to support residents to get online. This includes Digital Buddies being available in all of the Borough's five libraries, as well as promoting the digital drop-in sessions being delivered through Knowsley's Family and Community Education (FACE) service.

Service Complaints and Compliments

The recording, monitoring, and reporting of complaints and compliments is integrated under the Council's "Have Your Say" policy and procedure. The approach divides complaints and compliments between three broad categories - Adult Social Care, Children's Social Care, and other Council services. Overall, 588 complaints were received, made up of 499 corporate complaints, 55 adult social care complaints and 34 children's social care complaints. This was a 42.3% decrease from the previous year's total of 1019. A fundamental review of the complaints process took place in 2024/25 and the decreasing volumes were, in part, a result of improved triage, actively resolving issues before becoming a complaint and improved service delivery.

Of the 588 complaints received, 88% were resolved successfully at the first stage of the complaints process without the need for further review and 49% were upheld or partially upheld.

The Council also received 120 compliments for the year through the Have Your Say process. There are many other compliments received through different channels and directly to services.

On 21 May 2025, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman issued, and subsequently published, the Council's 2024/25 Annual Review Letter. The content of the Annual Review Letter was reported to the Governance and Audit Committee in September 2024 (see [Agenda](#)).

Internal Audit Activity

As an independent and objective assurance function, the Council's Internal Audit service completed a programme of reviews throughout 2025/26 providing an opinion on internal control, risk management, and governance arrangements. Where appropriate, the audit review also considered whether value for money was being obtained. The Internal Audit Team is working towards full conformance with the new Global Internal Auditing standards in the Public Sector. The standards have been fundamentally reviewed by the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA). New standards, Global Internal Audit Standards (UK public sector), were mandated from April 2025 consisting of the Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) of the IIA, and the Application Note: Global Internal Audit Standards in the UK public Sector issued by CIPFA, were effective from April 2025. CIPFA have also issued a new Code of Practice for the Governance of internal Audit in UK Local Government which is also effective from April 2025. The Code is designed to work alongside the new internal standards and replaces the organisational responsibilities set out in the Statement on the role of the head of internal audit (CIPFA 2019). CIPFA advised internal audit teams to work towards general conformance with the new requirements during 2025/26.

The Internal Audit Operational Plan 2025/26 was submitted to the meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee on [16 June 2025](#). Full details of the audit work undertaken during the year is due to be reported to the Council's Governance and Audit Committee on [15 June 2026](#). The report confirms that, during 2025/26, Council systems were working in an efficient and effective manner. Operation work focused on core financial systems and financial risk, while strategic reviews examined governance, risk management and internal control. No significant concerns were identified during the year and, overall, the report provides assurance that controls to safeguard assets, prevent error and fraud, ensure legal compliance and minimise inefficiency are working as intended. In addition, the report confirms that follow up work was undertaken to establish the status of previous audit recommendations and follow-up reviews confirmed that a large majority of the audit recommendations had been implemented by service managers within the agreed timescales.

A series of Strategic Audit reviews were undertaken in 2025/26 focussing on the systems of governance, risk management and internal control.

Governance

The Council remains committed to investigating all allegations of employee fraud, whistleblowing concerns, and serious information security breaches. A review of fraud prevention governance is underway, including updates to Anti-Fraud, Corruption, and Whistleblowing policies. This will address risks associated with the failure to prevent fraud offence, introduced on 1 September 2025, which creates corporate liability where organisations fail to prevent fraud by employees, regardless of management awareness.

During the year, the Council led a working group of 11 authorities to develop a Fraud Risk Assessment approach. Each authority completed assessments with service managers to identify fraud risks across Council services. A consolidated risk framework has been produced to inform the 2026/27 audit plan. Further work will assess the Council's fraud and corruption controls against CIPFA best practice. The outcomes of the Fraud Risk Assessment have been reported to the Executive Management Team and the Governance and Audit committee.

A review of the Oracle HCM (HR and Payroll) implementation project was completed in October 2025 to capture lessons learned and inform future high-risk projects. The findings were reported to the Executive Management Team in January 2026, setting out best practice for major projects, including the need for robust business cases and detailed specifications.

Risk Management

A review of Cyber Security risk was planned to assess business continuity arrangements in response to a cyber incident. Terms of reference have been developed with the Head of IT and Safety and Resilience Manager. The audit has been deferred to early 2026/27 to allow additional controls to be implemented and embedded.

Under the Council's new approach to reporting Strategic Risk Management, the Governance and Audit Committee receives detailed "deep dive" updates on selected risks at each meeting. These provide greater insight into how risks are being managed. Internal Audit support this process by undertaking targeted reviews where assurance gaps are identified and making recommendations to strengthen controls.

Internal Control

Service-based assurance reviews were completed in consultation with departments to provide senior management with assurance over the effectiveness of internal controls.

The Land and Property Acquisitions audit (carried forward from 2024/25) recommended consolidating property records into a single database.

Reviews of Overtime and Procurement of Agency Workers identified the need for stronger monitoring, challenge, and financial reporting. Executive Directors have been tasked with reducing expenditure and reliance on agency staff.

For the remainder of the Council's significant activity, assurance can be obtained from the systems and processes outlined in this statement and the audit coverage of these systems and processes during the year. Audit work undertaken covered a range of the key risks within the organisation and combined with other sources of assurance, considered the arrangements for governance, risk management and control over key corporate risks. Audit activity increased in 2025/26 due to additional resources being available following a successful recruitment process. This enabled the Chief Internal Auditor's overall conclusion to improve from moderate to reasonable assurance that the Council systems are operating effectively.

No significant concerns were identified during the year as no audits were rated as limited assurance. There were only two critical recommendations raised relating to a school audit. Follow up work was also undertaken to establish the status of previous audit recommendations, which confirmed that for the large majority of recommendations the recommended actions had been implemented within agreed timescales.

More detailed definitions of the levels of assurance in relation to the Chief Internal Auditor's opinion are set out in Appendix 4 to this Statement.

During 2025/26, the Counter Fraud Team transferred into the Internal Audit team. In order to maintain robust counter fraud arrangements, the team has undertaken planned activities reflecting the CIPFA Code of Practice – Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption. This work focuses on identifying fraud risks and emerging fraud trends. The Council also takes part in the National Fraud Initiative data matching exercise. A fraud awareness campaign was developed to support International Fraud Awareness Week in November. Assurance is also gained from the role of the Council's Investigation Panel which continues to ensure that all allegations of fraud or suspected irregularities are investigated fully.

To give assurance to school governors that there is secure financial management in place, schools complete annually the Schools Financial Value Standard self-assessment, which is available to the Council. These returns were reviewed by Internal Audit and were consistent with the most recent audits undertaken. Of those 15 schools audited during 2025/26 there were no schools where systems provided limited assurance that internal controls were effective. One school was allocated a moderate assurance opinion; however, recommendations have been made which, if implemented, will ensure that the systems are fit for purpose.

Information Security and Data Handling

Regarding information security and data handling, the Assistant Chief Executive is designated as the Senior Information Risk Owner, whose role provides a focal point for resolving information risk issues and investigating data security breaches. Further, the Council employs a Data Protection Officer and has established an Information Governance Team (which sits within Legal Services) who lead on training, implementation and oversight of the Council's data protection responsibilities and delivery of the Council's paperless office programme. There have been seven notifiable data breaches (where the Council had been responsible for the data breach) reported to the Information Commissioner's Office in 2025/26. All data breaches reported resulted in no further action.

Other Risks

Increased demand across Children's and Adult's Social Care services presents financial risk in terms of costs of care packages and sufficiency of placements. Alongside this, the challenges to recruit sufficient numbers of experienced social workers presents risks around consistency and quality of practice. A Workforce Action Plan, focused on the recruitment and retention of staff and linked to the wider Knowsley People Strategy, has been developed to assist in managing these risks with "workforce objectives" being a key objective in the Council's improvement journey in relation to Children's Social Care.

In addition, across the country a number of councils have received equal pay claims. The claims relate to historic "task and finish" working practices. Under such arrangements, employees are paid on completion of tasks rather than hours worked, which can at times result in a higher effective hourly rate compared to other employees on the same grade, creating potential equal pay comparators. The practice of "task and finish" was ended in February 2026. The Council is reviewing its position in this respect.

Finally, cyber-attacks on the public and private sector have increased significantly over recent years, increasing the risk of such an attack on the Council. Additional measures have therefore been put in place to mitigate against such attacks, although with new threats emerging on a daily basis the need for vigilance remains.

5. Conclusion

This draft Statement will be reviewed by senior officers within the Council over the coming months, prior to the final Statement being considered by the Governance and Audit Committee. As it is the senior officers within the Council who are responsible principally for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, assurance is obtained from Executive Directors that there are satisfactory internal controls in place. They are also asked to identify any significant internal control issues which need to be reported in this Statement. The requirement to review internal controls alongside the routine monitoring of finance, performance and risk is embedded in the management of services.

Based upon the information set out in this Statement we have been advised on the implications of the result of the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework by the Governance and Audit Committee, and the arrangements continue to be regarded as fit for purpose in accordance with the governance framework.

Senior officers will also review the Council's compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code of Practice. An updated self-assessment will be reported to the Governance and Audit Committee in due course. At the time of preparing this draft Statement it is expected that the self-assessment will continue to demonstrate that the Council is fully compliant with all elements of the Code and continues to have in place strong, effective financial management (see Appendix 5).

Based upon the information set out in this Statement, we can reasonably conclude that there are no unresolved significant internal control issues. We took into account the actions of the Section 151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer, the assurances obtained from Executive Directors, the work of the Counter Fraud and Internal Audit service, and various external reviews that were reported.

6. Significant Internal Control Issues

Although there are no significant internal control issues identified in this Statement, we propose to undertake the actions identified in the attached plan (see Appendix 3) over the coming year to enhance our governance arrangements further.

We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for any improvements which were identified in our review of effectiveness and we will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Any matters arising from the review of this draft Statement over the coming months will be reflected when the final Statement is considered by the Governance and Audit Committee for approval.

Signed on.....:

***Councillor Graham Morgan
Leader of the Council***

***James Duncan
Chief Executive***

Knowsley Council Corporate Governance Framework

Corporate Governance comprises the culture, values, systems and processes which direct and control the way the Council works and through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its communities. The key elements of the systems and processes that comprise the Council's governance framework (as detailed in the Code of Corporate Governance) are set out below.

Assurances Required	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivery and communication of an agreed vision and Knowsley Council Plan • Stakeholder engagement • Quality services are delivered efficiently and effectively and are outcome focused • Clearly defined roles and functions • Management of risk and performance • Effectiveness of internal controls • Development of Members and officers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance with laws, regulation, internal policies and procedures • Value for money and efficient management of resources • High standards of officer and Member conduct and behaviour • Public accountability • Implementation of previously agreed actions and/or recommendations
Governance Framework Providing Assurance	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowsley Council Plan • Strategy for Knowsley • Children and Young People's Plan • Knowsley Strategic Partnership • Knowsley Health and Wellbeing Board • Section 75 governance arrangements • Annual review of the Constitution • Scheme of Delegation to Officers • Corporate Risk Management and the Risk Register • Business Continuity Plans • Health and Safety Audits • Financial Procedure Rules and Contract Procedure Rules • Service plans • Performance management framework • Internal Audit Plan • External Audit Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent external reviews • Medium Term Financial Plan • Budget Monitoring process • Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy Statement • Codes of Conduct (officers and Members) • Members' Allowances Scheme • Governance and Audit Committee • Statutory Officers' reports • Communication Strategy • Scrutiny arrangements • Comments and complaints system • Information governance framework • Performance Review and Development (of officers) • Leadership Development (Senior Officers) • Accountability Framework • Members' training programme • Performance led budget-setting process
Assurances Received	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Governance Statement • Statement of Accounts • Council approval of annual budget • Management of budget pressures within approved resources • Public consultation on budget process • External Audit report • Annual performance and finance reports • Annual report on counter fraud and internal audit activity • Governance and Audit Committee annual report • Review of the implementation of internal audit recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Have Your Say" annual report • Annual Local Government Ombudsman report • Director of Public Health annual report • Knowsley Safeguarding Children's Board annual report • External Audit annual report on grants and returns • Ethics and standards update reports • Scrutiny annual report • Scrutiny reviews • Independent Remuneration Panel • Published records of decisions • Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge November 2026

UPDATE ON 2025/26 ACTION PLAN

Action No.	2025/26 Actions identified	Action undertaken during 2025/26	Comments
(1)	To complete the review of the Council's approach to risk management, including the frequency of reports to the Governance and Audit Committee and the number of strategic risks included on the register.	<p>Following recommendations from the Council's external auditors in February 2025 to consider its approach including the number of risks on the strategic register, a full review of the Council's approach to risk management was undertaken. Following this review, the Cabinet agreed new models and associated Handbooks in relation to performance and risk management at its meeting of 24 September 2025.</p> <p>The Cabinet Reviewed Strategic Risks at its meeting of 3 December 2025.</p> <p>Under the new approach to risk management, the Governance and Audit Committee fully endorsed the Risk Management Handbook at its meeting on 6 October 2025, and agreed and welcomed the recommendation to receive more frequent reports going forward that include 'deep dives' into particular risks at each meeting, with all risks to have been subject to 'deep dives' during the annual meeting cycle.</p>	The review indicated that the majority of the risks facing Knowsley are not significantly different to those facing many local authorities across the country, and the Council continues to do all that it can to manage its strategic risks as effectively as possible.
(2)	To continue to review the implementation and effectiveness of the Knowsley 2030 Strategy which focuses on reducing inequalities in Knowsley.	The Knowsley Better Together Board sets the overall strategic direction for the borough through the shared long-term Knowsley 2030 Strategy. The Board is the key governing body that approves the Strategy and provides oversight to ensure its collective goals are achieved.	

		<p>Regular performance and progress reports were submitted to the Board at the following meetings:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 February 2025 (minute 16 refers) • 25 March 2026 (Item 3 refers) 	
(3)	To continue to monitor the impact of inflation and the cost of living crisis on Council budgets and ensure that appropriate budget management and review plans are in place to address such pressures in a timely manner.	Regular budget monitoring has been reported to Members throughout the year. This has focused on the impact of cost and demand related financial pressures. The final 2025/26 Budget Monitoring Report to the Cabinet on 4 June 2026 confirms that a balanced position was achieved at the end of the year after the allocation of £3.968m of one-off resources which had previously been set aside for this purpose.	Budget monitoring will continue in 2026/27 with a continued focus on strong financial management in all areas of the budget.
(4)	To review the implementation of the new Knowsley Council Plan and continue to develop "Journey 2" to align with this with a view to launching "Journey 2" by April 2026.	The Knowsley Council Plan 2025-2030 was agreed by Full Council on 5 March 2025 with the vision "Supporting Knowsley Residents to Thrive". Initial scoping has previously taken place for "Journey 2" to bring the new Knowsley Council plan, information about the Borough and the new People Strategy to life.	Launch of Journey 2 has been pushed back to allow time for the People Strategy to be signed off, and behaviours to be finalised. The Executive Management Team agreed it was important to get the People Strategy and behaviours right, and consult widely, accepting that this may cause timescales to slip. The People Strategy will be signed off over the summer, with the Journey 2 due to launch in April 2027.
(5)	To review the Managers' Programme and the implementation of the leadership expectations, with the leadership programme to be launched by April 2026.	A leadership portal has been developed and is live on Bertha (the Council's intranet site). The leadership expectations have been co-designed and reviewed in line with the vision for the People Strategy.	As above, the People Strategy sign off has been delayed. Proposals for leadership expectations have been created and early consultation has begun; however, they will require supporting tools and training which comes with a cost and therefore this will be subject to budget planning and approval.

(6)	To review the pilot of succession planning, workforce planning and career conversations with a view to this being rolled out across the Council to help develop, retain and attract talent and bridge skills gaps.	A pilot of succession planning, workforce planning and career conversations has launched in some departments before a wider rollout to help develop, retain and attract talent and bridge skills gaps.	Succession planning pilots took place in some Directorates; however, the feedback was that services would prefer to undertake strategic workforce planning first to understand the roles that will be required in the future workforce. Some areas also shared concerns about capacity to participate in succession planning.
(7)	To continue to develop the integrated Human Resources and Payroll system (introduced in April 2023) and further maximise its benefits.	<p>Payroll is now running well, with the final pieces of payroll functionality now rolled out. Payroll is operating at an exceptional accuracy rate based on the information provided in the system by managers.</p> <p>Focus has now moved to maximising benefit realisation. Manager reports providing information on annual leave and establishment have been developed, with further reports planned. The user interface is being updated with Oracle Redwood which improves user experience and functionality and further system developments such as an AI assistant in Oracle are in development.</p> <p>An audit on mileage claims and overtime has been completed and recommendations implemented.</p>	
(8)	To complete the second phase of the audit of Children and Families' paper records held at Stretton Way and implement any actions arising.	The second phase of the Children Social Care paper records audit is close to completion, greatly assisted by the temporary provision of additional Business Support Assistant officer support.	

(9)	To continue to data cleanse the data set that will feed the 'Papyrus' end-to-end corporate electronic paper records management system and continue a phased roll out.	<p>The Papyrus project remains a work in progress and is nearing completion. Children Social Care records are being uploaded and that process is near to completion.</p> <p>IT is being supportive in fixing bugs as they are detected to ensure file locations are displayed correctly.</p> <p>A data cleansing exercise is currently underway.</p>	
(10)	To establish and deliver an effective Improvement Plan in respect of Children's Social Care Services.	A Children's Services Improvement Plan has been developed and submitted to the Department for Education. A copy of the plan can be viewed here .	<p>The Children's Services Improvement Board, chaired by the Department for Education Advisor Anthony Douglas CBE, meets regularly in order to drive forward improvement and monitor progress against the improvement plan implementation.</p> <p>The formal DfE Progress Review was undertaken in May 2026, which is due to be reported to Full Council on 15 July 2026 – further information will be available here in due course.</p>
(11)	To re-run the Employee Recognition event and carry out a further whole staff survey with a view to recognising performance and achievement and supporting continuous improvement and development.	The Executive Management Team reviewed feedback from the Employee Recognition event that was held to celebrate the Council's 50 th birthday celebrations and considered options for ongoing reward and recognition. The Executive Management Team agreed to introduce a long service awards scheme rather than repeat the Employee Recognition event.	The introduction of a long service awards scheme allows for ongoing and inclusive recognition. Achievements are also celebrated on a regular basis in the Chief Executive's weekly update.

2026/27 ACTION PLAN

Action No.	2026/27 Actions identified	Responsible Officer(s)
(1)	To review the implementation of the Council's new approach to risk management, including the frequency of reports to the Governance and Audit Committee and the number of strategic risks included on the register.	Head of Policy and Performance
(2)	To continue to review the implementation and effectiveness of the Knowsley 2030 Strategy which focuses on reducing inequalities in Knowsley.	Head of Policy and Performance
(3)	To continue to monitor the impact of inflation and the cost of living crisis on Council budgets and ensure that appropriate budget management and review plans are in place to address such pressures in a timely manner. In particular, to develop a transformation programme to develop and implement improvements which will improve outcomes for residents and, at the same time, drive down the future levels of demand and cost built into the medium-term financial forecasts, with a view to addressing the current anticipated budget gap in 2028/29.	Head of Finance
(4)	To review the implementation of the new Knowsley Council Plan and continue to develop "Journey 2" to align with this with a view to launching "Journey 2" by April 2027.	Head of Policy and Performance, and Head of Workforce
(5)	To review the Managers' Programme and the implementation of the leadership expectations, with the leadership programme to be launched by April 2027, pending funding allocation.	Head of Workforce
(6)	To review the rollout of strategic workforce planning in all Departments by April 2027, laying the foundations for succession planning and career conversations with a view to this being rolled out across the Council to help develop, retain and attract talent and bridge skills gaps.	Head of Workforce
(7)	To continue the second phase of the audit of Children and Families' paper records held at Stretton Way and implement any actions arising.	Head of Legal Services and Information Governance
(8)	To continue to data cleanse the data set that will feed the 'Papyrus' end-to-end corporate electronic paper records management system and continue a phased roll out.	Head of Legal Services and Information Governance
(9)	To continue to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the Children's Services Improvement Plan.	Head of Assurance and Delivery
(10)	To sign off, launch and deliver the People Strategy and new employee behaviours by September 2026. Also, delivery of the initiatives detailed within the People Strategy, including increasing leadership and line management capability, integrating the new behaviours into processes and policies, updating HR policies and launching a people performance framework in April 2027.	Head of Workforce

**Definitions of Levels of Assurance when Providing the
Chief Internal Auditor's Conclusion**

The table below sets out the four types of annual conclusion that the Chief Internal Auditor considers, along with an indication of the characteristics for each type of conclusion. The Chief Internal Auditor will apply judgement when determining the appropriate conclusion, so the guide given below is indicative rather than definitive.

Opinion	Description	Indicators
Substantial	There is a sound system of governance, risk management and internal control in place. Internal controls are designed to achieve the system objectives and controls tested during the course of internal audit work were being consistently applied.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through internal audit work undertaken and/or other sources of assurance the arrangements for governance and risk management were deemed to be robust and consistently applied. • Few, if any individual assignment reports were rated as "Limited Assurance". • Few or no critical rated findings were identified. • A limited number of high and medium risk rated findings were identified within the audit work undertaken and management have provided assurance that action will be taken to address the risks. • Management demonstrates good progress in the implementation of previous audit actions.
Reasonable	Whilst there is an established system of governance, risk management and internal control in place, there are weaknesses, which put some of the system objectives at risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of internal audit reports rated as "Limited" or "Moderate" assurance does not outweigh those with "Reasonable", "Substantial" or "High" assurance. • Assurance over systems of control that are pervasive across the organisation (for example corporate functions) was generally positive (i.e. Reasonable, Substantial or High assurance opinions). • Frameworks for governance and risk management are in place and generally operating effectively. • No or few critical risk rated findings were identified in the audit work undertaken. • Any high risk rated findings were isolated to specific activities and were implemented in line with agreed timescales. • Medium risk rated findings do not indicate a systemic or pervasive weakness in governance, risk management or internal control. • Management demonstrate reasonable or good progress in the implementation of previous audit actions.

Moderate	<p>a) <u>Moderate by volume</u> Internal Audit undertook a limited number of audits. The work undertaken combined with other sources of assurance considered the arrangements for governance, risk management and control over a number of key corporate risks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No individual assignment reports were rated as “Limited Assurance”. • Few or no critical risk findings were identified. • Work undertaken covered a range of the key risks within the organisation. • Any major or significant risk rated findings were isolated to specific activities and were implemented in line with agreed timescales.
	<p>b) <u>Moderate by results</u> There are gaps in the arrangements for governance and risk management and/or those arrangements have not been applied consistently and robustly through the year and/or Control environment is not effectively designed and/or the level of non-compliance with internal controls puts the systems objectives at risk.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of internal audit reports rated as “Moderate” or “Limited” assurance outweighs those rated as “Substantial” or “High” assurance. • A number of Critical and High-risk findings were identified in the audit work undertaken. • Internal Audit findings indicated that improvements were needed to the design and/or operating effectiveness of the wider frameworks of governance and/or risk management. • No more than three critical risk findings were identified and they were in relation to specific activities as opposed to indicating systemic failures and were rectified quickly. • Management do not demonstrate good performance in implementing audit actions.
Limited Assurance	<p>The arrangements for governance, risk management and internal control is generally weak, leaving the system open to significant error or abuse and/or Significant non-compliance with basic controls leaves the system open to error or abuse.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit reports are generally rated as “Moderate” or “Limited” assurance. • Findings rated Critical and High outweigh those rated as Medium priority. • Audit findings indicate systemic non-adherence to control procedures, indicating a poor control environment. • Frameworks for governance and risk management are not in place. • Audit actions are consistently not implemented in line with agreed timescales.

