

# Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

---

## Scope of responsibility

Runnymede Borough Council (“the Council”) has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which it works, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. This includes a responsibility to ensure that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for.

In discharging this duty, the Council must put in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

The Council has formally adopted a code of corporate governance which is consistent with the seven principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE<sup>1</sup> framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government 2016* and the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) explains how the Council has complied with its code.

Production of the AGS also meets the requirements of Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 to review its system of internal control and to publicly report on the outcome of that review. In line with the CIPFA/SOLACE framework, the AGS should be “an open and honest self-assessment” which:

- describes key elements of the Council’s governance arrangements, covering key corporate systems and the range of activities for which the Council is responsible
- describes processes applied in reviewing their effectiveness
- lists actions to deal with significant governance issues identified.

## The purpose of the Governance Framework

The governance framework comprises:

- the systems, policies, processes, culture and values by which the Council is directed and controlled; and
- the Council’s activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads the community.

The framework enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an ongoing process designed to:

- identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of Runnymede Borough Council’s policies, aims and objectives;
- to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised; and
- to manage those risks efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework outlined in this document has been in place at Runnymede Borough Council for the year ended 31 March 2026 and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts for 2025/26.

## Response to the external environment

While the governance framework sets out the internal processes that the Council follows in order to deliver outcomes, it must also be responsive to the changing external environment. For

---

<sup>1</sup> CIPFA Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy / SOLACE The Society of Local Government Chief Executives and Senior Managers

# Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

---

example, on-going cost-of-living pressures, including high energy costs and food prices, saw the Council continuing to administer grant funds during 2025/26, such as the Household Support Fund, alongside its own Runnymede Support Fund, requiring robust policies, processes and governance arrangements to be in place to ensure support reached those in need. This was supplemented by the Council's financial inclusion work which was fully embedded from April 2025 following a successful pilot scheme. This award-winning work includes a single view of debt, aggregating Council Tax, Housing Benefit overpayments, parking Penalty Charge Notices, sundry debt, and rent into one profile, preventing departments from competing for limited household income. Accelerated support is made available to vulnerable residents while the Council's webpages include an embedded benefits calculator to assist residents to identify unclaimed support entitlement.

The Council continued to respond to other external stimuli, such as supporting those fleeing conflict, through the continuation of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and on-going participation in the Local Authority Housing Fund to purchase properties to support both Ukrainian and Afghan refugees.

A significant area of governance focus during 2025/26 has been the backlog of outstanding external audit opinions. The Council's previous external auditor completed their work during the year and issued their final audit opinions for 2019/20 to 2022/23 in March 2026. The Council's current auditor was then able to issue their audit opinions for 2023/24 and 2024/25, allowing both the Council and the auditor to move forward to preparation for the audit of 2025/26.

Throughout the year the Council has responded to regulatory and legislative change, including consultations on potential changes and preparation for future implementation. Examples include:

- **Local Authorities (Changes to Years of Ordinary Elections) (England) Order 2025** (SI 2025/137; in force 4 March 2025): postponed the May 2025 ordinary elections to May 2026 for *East Sussex, Essex, Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey, Thurrock, West Sussex*; made consequential provision on councillor terms and casual vacancies.
- **Local government reorganisation (LGR) programme** (implemented via Structural Change Orders under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007): during 2025/26, government invitations/decisions and area-specific orders begin to implement moves from two-tier to unitary local government (with associated changes to governance, staffing, finance, service transfer, and election arrangements in affected areas).
- **English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill** (introduced July 2025; progressing through 2025/26): proposes a statutory devolution framework and "strategic authorities", powers relating to local government reorganisation, and reforms to the *local audit system* (among other measures relevant to councils).
- **'Simpler Recycling' reforms (Environment Act 2021 powers; secondary legislation rollout)**: key operational milestones include separate recycling requirements for *workplaces and relevant non-domestic premises* from **31 March 2025**, with *household* service requirements due from **31 March 2026**
- **Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 – planning reform commencements (phased)**: further commencement and transition towards the new plan-making system continues into early 2026 (including changes affecting local plan preparation/examination arrangements and related duties), requiring monitoring by local planning authorities as the new framework is implemented.

In recent years, all Councils have been working in an environment where the sector is under increasing scrutiny in respect of concerns about financial resilience and financial risk. During 2025/26, the Council continued its quarterly engagement sessions with MHCLG following the lifting of its [non-statutory Best Value Notice](#) (NS BVN) in December 2024. The NS BVN Programme Board was replaced by the Continuous Improvement Programme Board, to ensure that any remaining actions from the NS-BVN Programme were progressed, to continue the improvement journey and to ensure preparedness for local government reorganisation (LGR).

# Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

---

The AGS will demonstrate how the Council's programmatic response, alongside a range of self-assessment and external reviews, continues to provide a significant base of evidence to demonstrate how the Council's governance processes have been challenged and tested throughout the year, and that action plans for improvement have been developed where appropriate, to support positive outcomes.

The Council made a self-referral to the Regulator of Social Housing in June 2025, after identifying issues relating to rent setting. The Regulator subsequently carried out an inspection as part of its planned regulatory inspection programme to assess how well the Council was delivering against both the consumer standards and rent standard. A regulatory judgement was published following the inspection and responsive engagement from the Council, which was completed in February 2026.

The [Regulatory Judgement](#) confirms a consumer grade of C4 while also concluding that there are serious failings in how the Council is delivering the outcomes of the Rent Standard.

---

Consumer C4

Our judgement is that there are very serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the consumer standards. The landlord must make fundamental changes so that improved outcomes are delivered.

---

Rent

Our judgement is that there are serious failings in the landlord delivering the outcomes of the Rent Standard and significant improvement is needed.

---

Examples of the impact of external events on the Council's governance framework are included in the AGS and demonstrate a constantly evolving, responsive approach to risk, adapting and strengthening governance arrangements where appropriate.

## Forward Look

2026/27 will be a unique period in the lifetime of Runnymede Borough Council, as it enters its final year before the creation of West Surrey Council, which will deliver services across the footprint of the current council areas of Guildford, Runnymede, Spelthorne, Surrey Heath, Waverley and Woking. The new authority will also be a unitary council combining upper tier services currently provided by Surrey County Council (such as Adult and Children's services, education and waste disposal) with lower tier services, currently provided by existing District and Borough councils (such as council tax administration and waste collection).

Preparation for reorganisation will have a significant impact on the governance framework both for Runnymede during 2026/27 and beyond as new governance arrangements are prepared and implemented for West Surrey.

The Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for Surrey local government reorganisation is the Chief Executive of Surrey County Council. The SRO leads the implementation team that is responsible for overseeing the transition to the new councils in East and West Surrey. Strong leadership and governance will be crucial to ensuring a safe and legal transition.

Along with all existing councils in the West Surrey area, Runnymede will play its part in the transition with officers sitting across all areas of the workstreams within the implementation programme. The Council's own governance framework will evolve around this transition process as it ensures that it maintains its own service delivery and continues to comply with its own governance arrangements, whilst also interacting with LGR programme governance, and the new governance arrangements commencing with the election of Members of the Shadow Authority for West Surrey which will run alongside existing democratic arrangements during 2026/27.

Risks for the Council will likely centre around resource capacity, recruitment and retention of staff, clarity of new processes and the complexity of the task ahead, maintaining existing internal controls while developing new processes within a limited timeframe.

# Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

---

Alongside this, the Council will be responding to areas for improvement identified during 2025/26 (as set out in Appendix A) including its response to the Housing Regulator's judgement.

## Review of the Governance Framework

Key elements of the governance framework in place at Runnymede Borough Council are set out in the Code of Corporate Governance contained within the Council's constitution. This framework supports delivery of the seven CIPFA/SOLACE principles of delivering good governance. The annual review undertaken, and culminating in the production of the AGS, ensures its continuing effectiveness in supporting these important principles.

In preparation for the annual review, a gap analysis was undertaken against the Cipfa / Solace framework addendum published in May 2025 which informed the methodology for the review and proposed enhancements to the AGS. This included the addition of a forward look to the AGS, a more robust conclusion, and a clear differential between significant issues identified for focus in the forthcoming year and other governance matters.

The Council has undertaken a comprehensive and evidence-based review of the effectiveness of its governance arrangements for the year ended 31 March 2026 and up to the date of approval of the Statement of Accounts.

The review has been informed by a robust assurance framework drawing on multiple sources, including;

- The Head of Internal Audit's annual opinion on governance, risk management and internal control
- Senior officer governance declarations
- External audit findings and regulatory inspection outcomes
- Internal audit reviews and follow-up monitoring
- Self-assessment exercises (including the Standards and Audit Committee and best value exercises)
- Performance, financial and risk monitoring reports
- Outcomes of external challenge, including peer review and regulatory inspection
- Stakeholder engagement and feedback

The review has included input from members of the Senior Leadership Team, the Standards and Audit Committee and the Continuous Improvement Programme Board, ensuring both officer and Member perspectives are reflected.

A map of key assurance sources is included at **Appendix A**.

Significant changes or areas of improvement to the governance framework that will be actioned in the forthcoming year are set out in **Appendix B** alongside commentary on the delivery of the key improvements identified as part of last year's review. Matters identified for attention have been drawn from across the range of assurance sources mapped at Appendix A. Progress in-year will be monitored through the Continuous Improvement Programme Board and reported to the Standards and Audit Committee in the 2026/27 AGS.

Examples of how the Council has reviewed the effectiveness of its governance, and where it has made improvements to the system during the past year, are shown against each of the seven principles of delivering good governance in the tables set out in **Appendix C**.

The Council's organisation chart as at the end of the 2025/26 financial year is provided at **Appendix D** of the statement.

# Annual Governance Statement 2025/26

---

## Conclusion

The Annual Governance Statement for 2025/26 reflects a governance environment that is generally robust, with clear evidence of effective internal controls, strong compliance culture, and proactive improvement work. Significant issues have been acknowledged, most notably those that resulted in the Social Housing Regulator judgement, however, the Council has robust plans and proven governance structures in place to address them. The Council is therefore satisfied that its governance arrangements continue to operate effectively and that appropriate actions will be taken to address the improvement areas identified during the year.

Through conducting its own gap analysis and engaging with its internal auditor to identify further improvements, the Council is wholly satisfied that its governance arrangements are fit for purpose when reviewed against the Cipfa / Solace Framework Addendum. Evidence demonstrating the Council's compliance with each Principle under its Local Code of Governance is set out at Appendix C.

In conclusion, based on the comprehensive review of the effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements, the council is satisfied that:

- Governance arrangements supporting each of the seven principles were in place and operating effectively during the year
- These arrangements supported delivery of the Council's objectives and outcomes, including its responsibilities for stewardship and best value
- The Council's core governance arrangements (including financial management, risk management, internal control, audit, ethics, and partnership governance) were operating effectively, except where areas for improvement have been identified

The Council recognises that governance is dynamic and requires continuous improvement. While arrangements are considered fit for purpose, improvements are required in specific areas, as noted in the action plan. The Council is committed to maintaining and strengthening its governance framework to ensure it remains resilient, transparent and capable of supporting the delivery of sustainable outcomes.

**Signed on behalf of Runnymede Borough Council by:**

**Councillor L Gillham**

**Councillor R King**

**Councillor D Whyte**

**Co-Leaders of the Council**

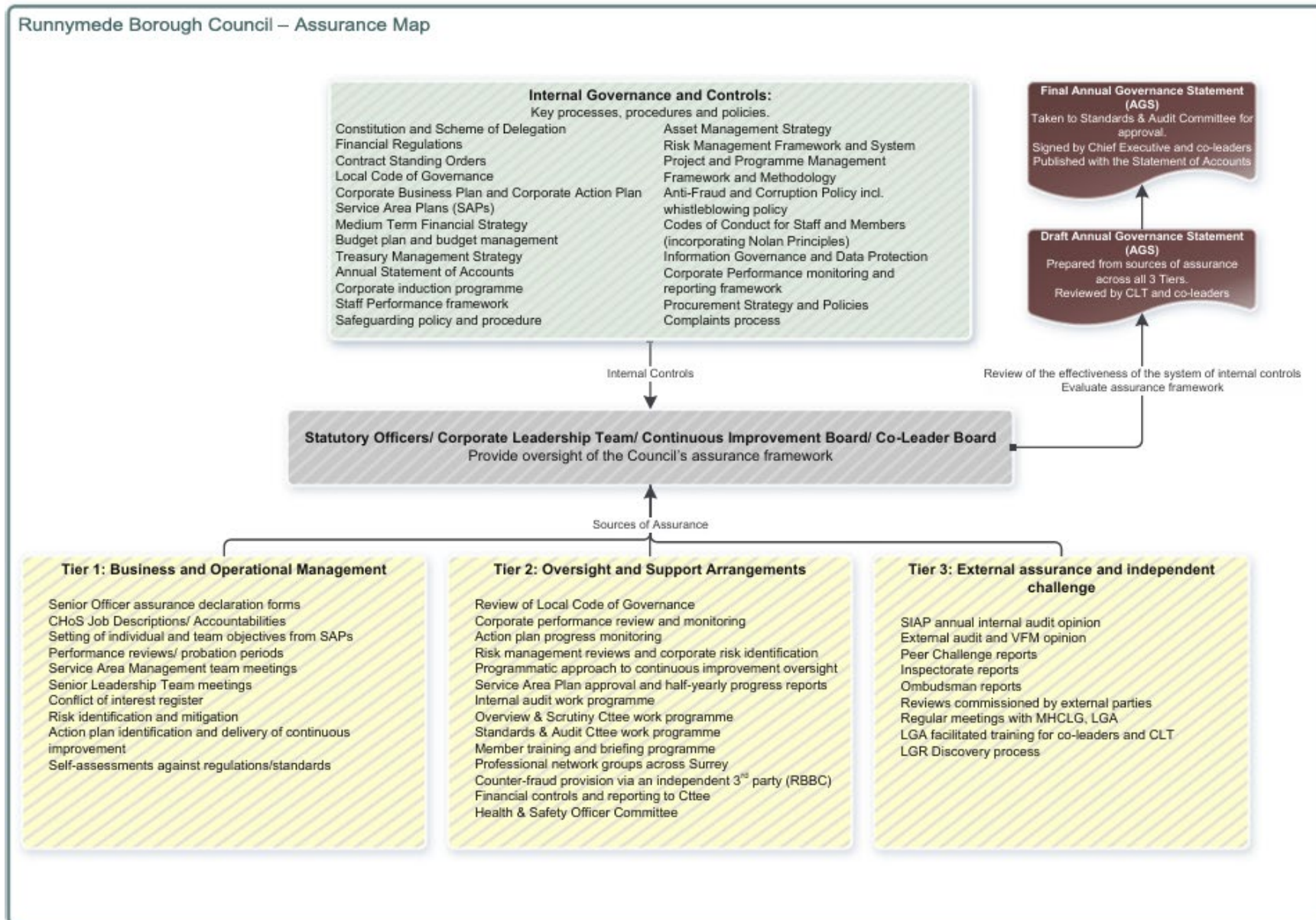
**Date: xx xxx 2026**

**Mr. A Pritchard**

**Chief Executive**

**Date: xx xxx 2026**

# Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 - Assurance Map - Appendix A



## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Action Plan - Appendix B

**Table 1: Review of actions from 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement**

Item	Issues raised in 2024/25 for action in 2025/26	Progress made in 2025/26
1.	<p><b>Responding to Local Government Reorganisation</b></p> <p>The Chief Executive is the sponsor for the Continuous Improvement Programme, and a Continuous Improvement Programme Board (CIPB) has been set up that reflects the successful approach to the NS BVN. In addition to seeing through the outputs from workstreams under the NS BVN, including the Corporate Peer Challenge, and monitoring key programmes such as Savings and efficiencies, Service Review and Digital Transformation, the Board will also monitor the Council's progress towards LGR, in accordance with the government's response to the submissions made in May 2025 from Surrey councils. Should LGR proceed in the currently expected timescales, then a vast amount of collaborative work will be required, which will span the period up to (and beyond) the vesting date of the new unitary authorities. Other forms of governance will likely supplement the work of the CIPB such as a joint Programme Management Office and will be superseded in time by the formation of a shadow authority. Nevertheless, it will be important for the Council to maintain its own strong governance processes to ensure that it is managing its inputs into the process and understanding its preparedness and readiness for change. This will therefore be the most significant governance action for the Council during 2025/26, much as the NS BVN response was for 2024/25.</p> <p><b>Responsible officer:</b> Chief Executive</p>	<p><b>Ongoing up to vesting day</b></p> <p>Significant staffing resource has supported the various phases of LGR during 2025/26 including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• development of the 3-unitary proposal, supported by 9 of the 11 Surrey borough and district councils, which was submitted in May 2025.</li> <li>• data and information collection and analysis during the discovery period</li> <li>• supporting the integrated Project Management Office once a decision was announced in October 2025 to proceed with the 2-unitary model</li> <li>• leading themes and workstreams within the implementation programme</li> <li>• nominating subject matter experts / single point of contact for all workstreams and sub-workstreams to support transition to the new authority</li> <li>• taking the lead for elections to the Shadow Authority for West Surrey</li> </ul> <p>In terms of governance, the governance of the Implementation Programme is led by the Senior Responsible Officer (Chief Executive Surrey County Council) who chairs the Implementation Programme Board (IPB) which includes the Chief Executives from each district and borough.</p> <p>Internally the Council reports its LGR preparedness to the CIPB and has received reports from HR, Finance, IT &amp; digital, Procurement and other service areas as the delivery of the LGR implementation plan gathers momentum. This will continue during 2026/27. Issues and risks are escalated through theme leads to the IPB but also internally to the CIPB, particularly in relation to internal capacity or prioritisation of workloads.</p> <p>The Council's Chief Executive has been designated as the Returning Officer for the Shadow Authority elections for West Surrey.</p>
2.	<p><b>Implementing the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of Internal Audit in the UK</b></p>	<p><b>Complete</b></p> <p>During 2025/26 both the Council and its internal auditor (Southern Internal Audit Partnership (SIAP)) made progress against the action plan that had been developed. Actions include:</p>

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Action Plan - Appendix B

	<p>An action plan has been developed in collaboration with the Council's internal auditor to ensure the Council is meeting the requirements of the Code.</p> <p><b>Responsible officer:</b> Assistant Chief Executive (s151) and the Corporate Head of Law and Governance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reference to compliance with the Code to be included within the AGS</li> <li>• review of the Internal audit charter and mandate by senior management and approval by the Standards and Audit Committee</li> <li>• appropriate support for internal audit is provided by senior management and the Standards and Audit Committee</li> <li>• sharing the results of SIAP's External Quality Assessment (EQA) conducted in Autumn 2025 with the Standards and Audit Committee</li> </ul> <p>In February 2026, SIAP presented a summary the Council's compliance with the Code of Practice for discussion with the Assistant Chief Executive (s151). Following clarification on 2 elements (the Terms of Reference for the Standards and Audit Committee, and its rolling work programme contained in the Forward Plan for Committee meetings) all areas were deemed compliant.</p>
3.	<p><b>Review of Cipfa's updated guidance on the annual governance review and production of the Annual Governance Statement</b></p> <p>Councils are expected to comply with the new guidance when completing the 2025/26 governance review and AGS.</p> <p><b>Responsible officer:</b> Assistant Chief Executive (s151)</p>	<p><b>Complete</b></p> <p>An internal review was conducted to ensure alignment with the 2025 Addendum and to test the effectiveness of the annual review and support improvements to the AGS for 2025/26.</p> <p>SIAP were also engaged to deliver an independent assessment of preparations for the 2025/26 Annual Governance Statement (AGS), with a focus on readiness to meet the strengthened requirements of the CIPFA Addendum (2025), as part of the 2025/26 Annual Audit Plan.</p>
4.	<p><b>Review the practicality of appointing co-opted independent members to the Standards and Audit Committee</b></p> <p>This action would be in line with Cipfa's Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022 and is referenced in the Annual Report of the Standards and Audit Committee presented to Full Council in April 2025.</p> <p><b>Responsible officer:</b> Assistant Chief Executive (s151) and the Corporate Head of Law and Governance</p>	<p><b>Complete</b></p> <p>Following informal discussion with neighbouring authorities, and in light of the Council's own experience in securing interest in similar roles (such as Independent Remuneration panel members), it is not deemed practical to pursue the appointment of co-opted independent Members to the Standards and Audit Committee at this time. Further, the limited time left before the Council transitions into West Surrey Council, would mean that any persons appointed would have few meetings to attend and contribute to. The Standards and Audit Committee endorsed this approach when considering their Annual Report to Full Council and their self-assessment exercise on the effectiveness of the Committee.</p>

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Action Plan - Appendix B

5.	<p><b>Implementation of improvements recommended following the self-assessment of the effectiveness of the Standards and Audit Committee</b></p> <p>The Standards and Audit Committee undertook two self-assessment exercises in April 2025, identifying actions to be undertaken, and areas where improvement is required to how the Committee undertakes its work, which are to be progressed during 2025/26.</p> <p><b>Responsible officer:</b> Assistant Chief Executive (s151) and the Corporate Head of Law and Governance</p>	<p><b>Complete</b></p> <p>The Standards and Audit Committee repeated the self-assessment exercise at its meeting in March 2026. As part of the report an update on the recommendations arising from the review in 2024/25 was provided, alongside capturing any additional improvements to be considered during 2026/27. <a href="#">Self-assessment exercise on the effectiveness of the Standards and Audit Committee 2025.26</a></p>
----	--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

**Table 2: Significant issues identified during 2025/26**

Item	Issues raised in 2025/26 for action in 2026/27	Responsible Officer
1.	<p><b>Local Government Reorganisation</b></p> <p>The impact of preparing for LGR was recognised in 2024/25, with significant work being undertaken across the Council in the early stages, both pre- and post-submission of the initial reorganisation proposals and since commencement of the Implementation Programme (see table 1, item 1).</p> <p>Having collected and analysed base data and recorded the current position for services across all Surrey authorities, the next phase of the Implementation Programme will be to define the essential activities necessary to ensure a safe and legal position for the new council from vesting day. This will include the transfer of staff, contracts, IT systems, land, property and other assets, in addition to ensuring a sound democratic process is enabled and major policies and plans are put in place (e.g. corporate plan, revenue and capital budgets, financial strategies).</p> <p>This significant workstream will run alongside the Council’s business as usual activity, delivering services to residents and completing existing projects, ensuring that these are conducted within the Council’s own governance processes while also having regard to matters regulated by the Shadow Authority. It will be essential that strong governance is maintained to deliver all of this, within challenging but immovable deadlines.</p>	Chief Executive
2.	<p><b>Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) inspection judgement</b></p>	Assistant Chief Executive (Place)

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Action Plan - Appendix B

<p>The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) in England implemented a new proactive inspection regime, driven by the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. Runnymede Housing Services underwent its first Inspection between August 2025 and February 2026.</p> <p>Following the on-site inspection and follow-up engagement, in February 2026 Runnymede Borough Council (RBC) received a Consumer Standards grade of C4, indicating very serious failings in delivering consumer standards outcomes, and serious failings in delivering the outcomes of the Rent Standard.</p> <p>Following self-assessment against the Consumer Standards in 2025, which was reported to Housing Cttee in June 2025, an Improvement programme and action plan had already commenced to deliver continuous improvement.</p> <p>However, as a result of the RSH Inspection, the existing Improvement Plan is being formalised and a programmatic response set-up to deliver further continuous improvement to meet the expectations of the Consumer Standards, Rent Standard and Competence and Conduct Standard. Corporate resource from the project management office has been assigned to manage the programme. To provide corporate governance and oversight, the Housing Improvement Programme will report to the Continuous Improvement Board as an interdependent programme.</p>	
---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--

**Table 3 Other governance matters requiring attention**

Item	Matters identified in 2025/26 for action in 2026/27	Responsible Officer
1.	<p><b>Consistency in risk management responsibilities</b></p> <p>In Q4 of 2024/25, the Assistant Chief Executive (S151) and the Head of Business Planning, Projects and Performance attended service area management team meetings to brief officers and provide an opportunity for feedback. This served as a reminder of responsibilities in managing risks associated with service delivery, projects and contracts. Regular reminders were issued in 2025/26, via the senior leadership team meeting and by email to Corporate Heads of Service and risk owners, to review risk registers, provide updates and rescore as necessary.</p> <p>The corporate leadership team reviews the risk records held in the risk management system regularly. As part of that review, during 2025/26, limited progress on the mitigation for a high-scoring risk was raised. Delivery of the mitigation action plan was added to the Service Review programme for monthly oversight of progress and to provide an escalation route to the CIPB.</p> <p>Despite the reminders and reviews, inconsistency in the depth of review and updates provided has been identified in Q4 2025/26 from the review of the risk management system and from statements made in the Annual Governance declaration forms. Two service areas failed to review or update their service risk register in Q4 2025/26. One Senior Officer commented in the AGS submission that they were not confident that risk monitoring was carried out regularly, that risk controls or mitigation in place could be appropriately evidenced or that actions taken to mitigate risks were sufficiently recorded within their service area.</p>	Assistant Chief Executive (Place)

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Action Plan - Appendix B

2.	<p><b>New digital systems</b></p> <p>The organisation has implemented a new Financial Management System and delivered new modules of the integrated Housing Management System during 2025/26. Project risks associated with data migration were identified to be mitigated by additional audit and control checks. It is also recognised that documentation relating to processes and procedures will need to be updated and refined to meet information governance requirements and assure internal controls are in place to prevent errors in data processing and handling. These actions need to be followed up in 2026/27.</p>	Corporate Head of Finance / Corporate Head of Housing
3.	<p><b>Processes that are reliant on manual data handling</b></p> <p>To deliver aspects of the Waste &amp; Recycling Service (street cleansing and grounds maintenance scheduling) there remains reliance on manual data handling and processing that could result in data accuracy issues. Work is underway to digitise this process.</p>	Corporate Head of Environmental Services / Corporate Head of Customer, Digital and Collection Services.
4.	<p><b>Lack of a reliable IT asset inventory</b></p> <p>As part of the discovery phase of LGR, digital services produced an IT asset inventory. This was cross-referenced with the information held in the Security Information and Event Management (SIEM) system and discrepancies identified between the number of assets held and those monitored by SIEM. This needs to be resolved ahead of vesting day 2027. This issue was raised in the response to the AGS officer declaration form but is also a finding of the internal audit during 2025/26. As a result, management actions have been set and will be monitored through the internal audit process.</p>	Corporate Head of Customer, Digital and Collection Services.
5.	<p><b>Review of FOI themes for governance issues</b></p> <p>As part of the review into preparation for the AGS for 2025/26, the internal auditor suggested that data captured through freedom of information (FOI) requests could be a valuable source of information for identifying emerging governance themes. Following discussion with the Corporate Head of Law and Governance, it has been agreed to consider amendments to the process for collating the Information Requests Register in 2026/27, to allow for the identification of themes, with quarterly reporting to the corporate leadership team.</p>	Corporate Head of Law and Governance
6.	<p><b>Improvements considered as part of the Standards and Audit Committee’s self-assessment exercise 2025/26</b></p> <p>In addition to those improvements set out in the report to the Committee in March 2026 (<a href="#">Self-assessment exercise on the effectiveness of the Standards and Audit Committee 2025.26</a>) the interactive discussion also identified the need for a survey of Standards and Audit Committee Members to be conducted in May to identify any training needs for the year ahead.</p>	Assistant Chief Executive (s151)

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

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

- ✓ The Council has adopted a [Constitution](#) which sets out how the Council operates and how decisions are made. The Constitution details the roles and functions of its various Committees and of its key statutory officers; sets out rules of procedure, standing orders and financial regulations; and includes various codes of conduct, operating protocols and key policies. The Constitution also contains the Council's [Local Code of Corporate Governance 2025-26](#).

A rolling programme of review of the Constitution is undertaken by the Constitution Member Working Party who make recommendations to the Corporate Management Committee for onward consideration by the full Council. During the municipal year 2025/26, the Working Party considered the following matters:

- Removal of ability to hear employee grievance procedures from Standards & Audit Committee
- Update on remote meeting attendance
- Debate on removing the requirement for Members to stand at Council meetings when speaking
- Review of the Corporate Code of Governance for the 2026/27 municipal year

Corporate Management Committee and Full Council considered the Working Party's recommendations, and other changes to the constitution, at their respective meetings during April, with Full Council approving the changes subject to a minor wording amendment regarding the recording of delegated decisions.

- ✓ In October 2025, the Council adopted a new [Corporate Business Plan 2026-27](#) at the heart of which sit the Council's values and goals, providing a golden thread that runs through [service area plans](#), and ultimately to individual objectives and expectations of behaviour across the Council.

- ✓ The Council undertook an assessment of its Organisational Culture in 2024/25 including a staff survey, plus group and individual feedback on the senior leadership team (SLT) with follow up individual coaching sessions. The survey results were published and socialised across the organisation in December 2024 and an action plan running through to the end of 2025/26 was developed. The action plan has been fully implemented. Highlights include:

- The introduction of a regular 1-day induction session for new employees, including attended by representatives from the corporate leadership team to introduce the Council's values.
- HR Policy development workshops were held to gather feedback which has been incorporated into policy and procedure changes.
- Fostering a workplace where everyone feels valued, supported, and celebrated through the **Belong@Runnymede** programme, designed to promote inclusion and belonging at work, celebrate diversity and improve employee wellbeing.
- Continuation of the Disability Staff Network
- Achievement of Disability Confident (level 2) employer status in August 2025
- The annual appraisal system was updated, with the focus on the employee, and includes performance against key objectives alongside examples of how the employee has embodied the Council's behavioural framework.

A further council-wide survey was undertaken in November 2025 which demonstrated progress in many areas via improved satisfaction scores. An action plan has been developed in response to the latest survey results, structured around five key areas, with a focus on realistic and achievable actions over the next six to seven months:

- Leadership visibility and trust
- Employee voice and involvement
- Recognition, wellbeing and psychological safety

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

- Collaboration and organisational effectiveness
- Career development and LGR support

- ✓ A major project has been undertaken to review the Council's Pay and Grading Structure and introduce a new job evaluation scheme. These measures ensure that the pay structure can encompass increases in the National Living Wage, that all roles are fairly and consistently evaluated, reducing the risk of Equal Pay claims.
- ✓ The [Standards and Audit Committee](#) continues to have oversight of governance issues including ethical standards and code of conduct. In the municipal year 2025/26, four complaints were accepted about Councillors and/or Co-opted Members. A further complaint was not accepted as the accusation was deemed to concern something over which the Monitoring Officer did not have the power to make a finding, and that, in the Monitoring Officer's opinion, the Councillor had made a robust challenge of officers rather than treating them with disrespect. In the cases which were accepted, all were closed after initial enquiries were made of the complainant(s). There were no Hearings in 2025/26 concerning the Member Code of Conduct.
- ✓ In May 2025, the Staff Code of Conduct was amended to include reference to [the Seven Principles of Public Life](#) (also known as the Nolan Principles) of selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. Principles which apply equally to elected Members and employees.
- ✓ In March 2026, Corporate Management Committee considered a revised [Whistleblowing Policy](#) which had been reviewed and updated in accordance with good practice and recent changes to employment legislation for recommendation to Full Council for adoption. The revised policy reflected the requirements of the recently introduced Employment Rights Act 2025, most notably the explicit inclusion of sexual harassment as a type of wrongdoing that can be raised through whistleblowing routes. The policy was approved by Full Council in April 2026 and will be communicated to the workforce by various channels, including a webinar for all staff, alongside in person sessions and an updated intranet page to ensure that the policy was properly embedded within the organisation.
- ✓ The Council takes fraud seriously, identifying and resolving cases during 2025/26 with a notional value of £911k and cashable savings of £55k.
- ✓ The Council also has a [Customer Complaints Policy](#) which recognises the importance of providing an excellent service to every member of our community. A core part of this is an open, responsive approach to feedback and complaints, the central monitoring of which is a key governance role. Complaints (and compliments) are analysed quarterly and a report on these and any lessons learnt is considered by the Standards and Audit Committee.

During 2025/26, the Council continued to make improvements to its automated complaint handling system which was designed to support the monitoring of responses to complainants and to capture service requests. In addition, an annual self-assessment against the Local Government Ombudsman's complaint handling code is reported to the Standards and Audit Committee in May, alongside consideration of a set of performance indicators.

- ✓ Members and Officers are required to disclose any [gifts or hospitality](#) received in the course of their duties, where the value exceeds £50. Members are required to declare any personal interest in items coming before Committees and as part of the governance regime all Members are required to declare if they hold any executive positions with organisations that carry out business with the Council. All Related Party Transaction declarations were received from Councillors for 2025/26 as part of the evidence base to support the production of the relevant note in the Statement of Accounts.
- ✓ Senior officers across all services have completed governance declarations confirming their understanding of, and compliance with, the Local Code of Corporate Governance. Across 39 returns received, responses indicate strong levels of assurance regarding statutory compliance, internal control, risk management, financial stewardship, safeguarding, ethical conduct, performance management and partnership governance.

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

This demonstrates that governance principles are generally well embedded across the organisation. Where gaps were identified, these have been added to the list of actions to be addressed during 2026/27. Some issues raised were consistent with management actions flowing out of internal audit reviews, demonstrating an awareness of the required action and how it supported the wider governance system.

- ✓ The Council ensures compliance with relevant laws, regulations and polices through a variety of means, including;
  - Subscription to relevant communications and newsletters (e.g. Local Government Association District Councils' Network, Government newsletters, DEFRA circular economy newsletter)
  - Strong Monitoring officer role, with full access to management and Members
  - Performance framework (appraisals, one-to-ones, reporting of performance indicators)
  - External review e.g. Social Housing Regulator, external audit reports, internal audit

### Principle B – Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

- ✓ The Council is committed to making information available to the public as part of its normal business activities. Details about how to [access and request](#) information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, can be found on the Council's website along with the Council's FOI [Publication Scheme](#). The Council also publishes [information](#) in line with the Local Government Transparency Code 2015. The Council publishes its [Purchase orders and contracts](#) on a quarterly basis of all purchase orders and live contracts with a value above £5,000.
- ✓ The Council's Annual Governance Statement is published online as part of its [Statement of Accounts](#). Information notifying local electors about their rights to access this information, and the periods in which they can raise issues with the Council's external auditors, is also published on the Council's website.
- ✓ All Council meetings are open to the public except where personal or confidential matters are to be discussed. All agendas are published on the Council's website and are available by contacting the Council should electronic access not be possible. A full record of decisions taken is also published. The Council is currently reviewing its process for recording delegated decisions. Standing Order 42, which provides an approval route for urgent items which cannot wait until the next Committee or Council meeting, is used sparingly, to ensure the majority of items are debated in open meetings. Where urgency powers are used, these are reported at the next available meeting of the relevant committee. Efforts have also been made to reduce the number of reports which are exempt from publication. Where only a small part of the report is considered to fall under the exemption rules, this is moved to an exempt appendix so that the majority of the report can be made public. Greater challenge is provided in the process, by requiring the report author to identify the reason behind any exemption request, which is then reviewed by the monitoring officer, thus supporting transparency of decision-making.
- ✓ The Council installed new audio equipment in its Council Chamber during April 2025, including equipment to record and stream Council meetings online. The system was used for the first time at the Council meeting on May 6<sup>th</sup>, when the final submission to government on LGR in Surrey was debated.
- ✓ The Council engages with local businesses via [Business Runnymede](#), a partnership between the business community, education providers, police and the Council.
- ✓ As part of its budget preparation for 2025/26, the Council decided to cease publication of its magazine, Runnymede Talks, and use other methods to communicate with its residents, businesses and local communities. The Council also has a strong social media presence as well as providing information on its own website, using these and other channels of communication to explain the work of the authority and promote decisions made by Members. Residents and other stakeholders are encouraged to engage through meetings, consultations and other methods.

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

- ✓ The Council set up a Local Government Re-organisation information hub to share information and updates with staff on this significant process. It also joined with other District and Boroughs to issue a survey to local residents and key stakeholders entitled “Have your say: the future of local services in Surrey” to inform its submission to Government about reorganisation in Surrey.
- ✓ The Council runs a residents’ e-newsletter which is sent to 2,000 subscribers as well as producing other service specific newsletters such as for housing or climate change. Further work will be undertaken in 2026/27 on tenant engagement as part of the Council’s response to its recent judgement from the Social Housing Regulator.
- ✓ Internal communications include monthly all-staff emails; weekly “Friday message” from a member of the Corporate Leadership Team; the staff intranet and a regular in person and on-line staff forum featuring topics such as Organisational Development plans including the staff survey process, updates to the appraisal system and the Pay and Grading Review, and sharing information about LGR and what this might mean for staff.
- ✓ Following the successful launch of the Citizens’ Engagement Panel, the panel undertook its first engagement in July 2025, which sought to explore how residents wished to be engaged/communicated with by their Council in the future. 33% of panel s responded to the first consultation, which was considered a positive starting point from which to support increased public engagement.
- ✓ The Council builds relationships with public, private and not for profit enterprises to improve service outcomes. Examples include:
  - The Community Safety team work closely with the Police and other agencies on initiatives to reduce anti-social behaviour and criminality in the Borough. This work is carried out through effective partnership working events organised or supported include Junior Citizen, water safety and promoting awareness weeks. This service also co-ordinates the work of Community Safety Partnership, Joint Action Group and Community Harm and Risk Management Meetings (CHaRRM). A more proactive approach has recently been developed through the introduction of additional resources, enhancing direct engagement with residents and introducing the use of Community Protection Warnings and Community Protection Notices, where appropriate.
  - The Community Development team work across health and wellbeing, sport and health and arts development, linking in with local clubs and organisations and partners such as Active Surrey, Schools, Children’s Centres, Youth Service, Royal Holloway University, and Surrey Arts Partnership. There are a number of annual events and activities delivered including the Surrey Youth Games, Living Well Week, Sportability Festival, summer holiday programme and parks events such as Xplorer.
- ✓ A Planning Policy and Strategy Consultation Database has been developed to ensure residents do not miss out on important consultations and updates relating to the review of the Runnymede 2030 Local Plan and production of other planning policy documents.
- ✓ A list of open [consultations and surveys](#) is published online. During 2025/26, this included a survey to collect resident’s views on proposals to establish a parish council for Englefield Green, a survey of housing tenants on building safety engagement strategy and policy, banking hubs and building safety policy, a survey to gauge the need for banking hubs in the area.

### Principle C – Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits.

- ✓ Reports to Members for decision-making are assessed for any financial, legal and staffing implications and for any impact on equality and diversity. The Council has also introduced mandatory requirement to consider any environmental, sustainability and bio-diversity implications of any proposed actions alongside risk implications. Where applicable, reports set out the options considered and discounted, in addition to the recommended option. Reports set out not only the immediate financial consequences of the proposed action, but also the effect over the medium-term horizon. As part of its

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

2026/27 budget preparation, the Council developed a 30-year capital replacement plan to inform its capital programme and understand the longer-term liabilities for maintenance of its assets.

- ✓ The Council's Financial Strategy seeks to deliver a sustainable budget to enable the Council and its successor authority under reorganisation, to continue to deliver services into the future. In addition to its usual financial monitoring reports, reports detailing the achievement of savings and efficiencies and the progress made with service reviews, were presented throughout the year to the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee. Approximately £1.45m of savings have been removed from the medium-term financial forecast as part of the budget setting process for 2025/26 and 2026/27 via the successful delivery of budget challenge sessions with service managers and the delivery of savings initiatives. Recognising the constraints of delivering LGR alongside its business-as-usual during 2026/27, a longlist of savings initiatives has been produced, with only those feasible to be delivered in year, and which will continue to provide a benefit for the new West Surrey authority, being taken forward for delivery. The remaining initiatives will be shared with the new authority for future consideration.
- ✓ The Council has set out its vision and intended outcomes within its [Corporate Business Plan 2026-27](#) which was approved at Full Council in October 2025. The plan contains 4 themes: Tackling the climate emergency and enhancing nature, Improving health and wellbeing for all; Supporting our communities through change; and Growing a fair and sustainable economy. A golden thread flows from the Corporate Business Plan through to individual [Service Area plans](#), ensuring that the work of services supports the strategic aims of the Council and is adequately planned and resourced. The plan is focussed on clear deliverables within the remaining life span of the existing organisation. Progress against the plan is used both as a tool for performance management and to assist in business planning for the year.
- ✓ A significant proportion of the budget growth approved as part of the financial strategy in November 2025, centred around social and environmental benefits. For example, targeted spend for additional grounds maintenance and green infrastructure upgrades to improve the quality of Runnymede's green spaces; a contribution to the Runnymede Support Fund to continue to provide a safety net for vulnerable residents; funding to protect the quality of the Borough's environment by remedying breaches of planning control; replacement of aging litter bins to improve the appearance of the Borough and the operational efficiency of street cleansing; and funding to enhance the natural environment in several council parks and open spaces through the removal of invasive plant species and the creation of artificial nesting habitats at priority sites
- ✓ In April 2025, following a successful 12-month pilot project, the continuation of the financial inclusion and corporate debt services were approved. The holistic approach to debt and the support provided to those struggling to pay, supports positive outcomes for some of the Council's most difficult to engage customers. This award-winning service supports residents to access available benefits, to set up and manage on-going payments and in some cases has helped to prevent the eviction of vulnerable tenants. The Council also supports successful outcomes through the provision of short-term financial assistance via distribution of funds such as the Household Support Fund, the Runnymede Support Fund and the Council Tax Hardship Fund alongside the administration of its Council Tax Support Scheme.
- ✓ The Council's Procurement Strategy was updated during the year to reflect changes under the Procurement Act 2023, which came into force in February 2025, with the revised Strategy and associated policies being formally approved in April 2026. The Social Value policy was updated to introduce a tool from the Social Value Portal, an online platform that helps organisations measure, manage, and report the social, economic, and environmental value they create through their activities and contracts. The tool was piloted with 2 works contracts and leading to social value commitments totalling £483,270 being offered by the successful bidders. These commitments will need to be managed during the life of the contract to ensure that they are fully delivered
- ✓ The Council has declared its intention that all its operations will be Carbon Net Zero by 2030 and has thereby committed to tackling climate change across every aspect of its service provision and estate. A detailed climate change and nature action plan was

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

presented to Corporate Management Committee in April 2025 with progress reported throughout the year. The Council's Housing Team, supported by its Grant Finder and Bid Writer, have successfully secured further rounds of government funding to support energy efficiency measures across its housing stock such as external wall insulation, cavity wall insulation and the installation of solar panels. Plans have also been agreed to install solar panels on several Council-owned operational properties to support carbon reduction.

- ✓ In January 2026 Members considered a climate change communication plan focussed on local food growing and sustainable cooking.
- ✓ A budget of £100k each year for 3 years was previously approved in the Council's financial plans to support climate change initiatives. In 2025/26, this funding supported initiatives including the installation of electric hand dryers in the Civic Centre, specialist consultancy advice to produce a high-level costed decarbonisation plan for the Council's estate, nature and biodiversity enhancements in Council-owned open spaces, contributions towards building refurbishment focussed on sustainability and the replacement of 2-stroke tools from the workforce with battery-powered electric alternatives. A priority list of projects to be completed in 2026/27 was agreed by Members in January 2026, alongside a high-level, costed decarbonisation plan for the Council's estate and operations
- ✓ Local Plan updates were taken to the Planning Committee in September 2025 and February 2026 to provide an update on plan making activity. The latest report included a proposed revised timetable for the preparation of the next Local Plan, designed to ensure that not only would plan making hit the 30th June (publication of Notice to Commence Plan Making) and 31st October (Gateway 1) milestones which would need to be met by the Council to secure Local Plan implementation funding, but also that the next iteration of the local plan could be produced in 30 months in line with the new arrangements.

The updated Local Plan will be prepared under the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), under which development plans should take a proactive approach to mitigating and adapting to the impacts of climate change, and supporting the transition to net zero.

They should do this by proposing development patterns through their spatial strategy and allocations which reduce emissions and avoid increased vulnerability to the effects of climate change; which address any specific risks from climate change in site allocation policies; by setting water efficiency standards; and by identifying opportunities for green infrastructure provision and nature-based solutions which can safeguard and improve carbon storage, support nature recovery and resilience, and which take account of Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

- ✓ In order to manage capacity and support the delivery of sustainable services, the Council developed a workforce planning tool that is being rolled out across the organisation. Significant work has been done to support workforce planning in key areas such as Assets and Regeneration, and Legal services, while mindful that both areas continue to be testing for recruitment and retention.
- ✓ The Pay and Grading review, completed during the year and being implemented in 2026/27, should support recruitment and retention through the implementation of a recognised job evaluation scheme, a pay structure that encompasses uplifts to the National Living Wage, and a clear grading structure with set intervals for incremental progression within grades. All job descriptions were updated as part of this exercise. This project will provide essential data to ensure staff transfer appropriately into the new West Surrey council.
- ✓ The Council ensures it holds a minimum level in its general fund reserve to support unforeseen fluctuations in income and expenditure as well as holding a range of earmarked reserves designed to mitigate specific risks. Coupled with scenario planning, this supports the Council with sustainable financial planning.

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

### Principle D – Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.

- ✓ The Council sets overall strategy and policy, and has in place a well-defined organisational structure, with clearly understood lines of responsibility and delegation of authority to help ensure that strategies and policies are effectively implemented and adhered to. The system of internal control is based on a framework contained within the Constitution which sets out how decisions are taken and the processes and controls required in managing risk. As noted under Principle A, the Constitution is reviewed each year following consultation with staff and Councillors via the Constitution Member Working Party, ensuring this important framework document is constantly evolving to support delivery of the Council's work
- ✓ As outlined under Principle B, the Council uses a number of methods of engagement with its stakeholders in order to determine when and how interventions are necessary.
- ✓ Corporate key performance indicators continue to be monitored by Members alongside regular reporting on the progress of key projects. A development for 2025/26 was to ensure biannual reporting of progress against service area plans is made by all service areas to the relevant committee, as the approach was not previously consistent across all services. This I intended to include the reporting of service performance indicators which are not included in the corporate reporting set.
- ✓ As noted under Principle C, a revised Corporate Business Plan was approved in October 2025, setting out the administration's priorities and objectives, and taking account of the impact of LGR on the resources and work programme of the Council over its remaining lifespan.
- ✓ The Financial Strategy sets the context for annual budget setting, ensuring resources are matched to priorities. Realistic estimates are drawn up, taking account of the whole life costing of capital projects, and ensuring a sustainable funding strategy is developed alongside other key strategies such as the Treasury Management Strategy, Minimum Revenue Provision Statement and the Capital and Investment Strategy. This provides a core framework to underpin the delivery of the Council's intended outcomes as described in the Corporate Business Plan. Growth items approved alongside the financial strategy were focused on priority areas within the Business Plan.
- ✓ Greater alignment between the business planning and budget planning processes have provided efficiencies, with closer working between the Project Management Office, the Corporate Head of Finance and the Corporate Head of Human Resources and Organisation Development; supporting the delivery of savings and efficiencies, budget challenge workshops, establishment reviews and Member engagement.
- ✓ The Council's rolling programme of service reviews continued during the year with progress reported to the Continuous Improvement Programme Board, in addition to reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee. The programme has refocused on key projects such as supporting local clubs and voluntary organisations into self-management, ahead of LGR.
- ✓ A small number of Member Working Parties continued to meet during the year to support key areas of governance such as Climate Change and Nature, Constitution changes and Digital Transformation.
- ✓ The Council's risk management framework was further embedded during the year, with quarterly review of the Corporate Risk Register by the Corporate Leadership Team and biannual reporting to the Standards and Audit Committee, including detailed focus on specific risk areas such as compliance risk (May 2025) and the impact of LGR (May 2026). In January 2026, the Council reviewed its [Risk Appetite Statements](#) for 2026/27, setting out a clear rationale for retaining the risk appetite for each of its 14 risk categories at the existing level. The monitoring of risk and the measures put in place to mitigate risk is an important element of determining what further interventions may be necessary.
- ✓ 2025/26 saw the second year of internal audit services delivered by Southern Internal Audit Partnership (SIAP). SIAP take a risk-based approach to audit planning for the year, taking the Council's risk register and the prevailing local government landscape into

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

account when pulling the plan together. The assurance reports themselves are also presented from a risk perspective in that the scope of the audit and its terms of reference are built around identification of the risk or risks that the review is designed to test. All management responses to the observations made in the reports are tracked with progress on implementation reported back to the Standards and Audit Committee, thus ensuring that all identified interventions are actioned.

- ✓ SIAP were requested to undertake a review of the Council's annual governance review and preparation of the Annual Governance statement for 2025/26, in light of updated guidance. The output from this work has been used to reshape this year's Annual Governance Statement, for example by the inclusion of a forward look and more targeted evidence demonstrating how the governance principles have contributed to the delivery of outcomes.
- ✓ Risks raised by internal audit have been cross-referenced against the Council's Risk Register and mitigating actions included in the Annual Governance Statement action plan where appropriate.
- ✓ During the year, the Council has continued to support and embrace a range of external and internal reviews, some of which were born out of the workstreams sitting under the NS BVN response programme. These reviews have been designed to test and challenge, and to support improvement and development of, the Council's governance processes in support of delivering improved outcomes for its residents, communities and staff and have resulted in a set of actions to be taken forward.

The most significant of these has been the Council's self-referral to the Social Housing Regulator and subsequent planned inspection by the Regulator. The action plan arising from this work provides a key governance focus for the year ahead, which will be delivered and monitored through its own Programme Board, with exception reporting to be provided to the Continuous Improvement Programme board.

The Council previously participated in the Local Government Association's Peer Challenge Process and in September 2025 the Peer Review Team returned to complete a follow-up exercise.

[Update on CPC action plan Sept 2025, LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review 2025](#)

The Council undertook a self-assessment against the Best Value duty, preparing a heat map and action plan and repeating the self-assessment in 2025 to gauge progress.

[Progress update on BV action plan Sept 2025](#)

The Standards and Audit Committee undertook a self-assessment exercise in March 2026 to determine its impact and assess the need for improvements and provided an Annual Report on the work of the Committee to Full Council in April 2026.

[Self-Assessment exercise on the effectiveness of the Standards and Audit Committee, Self-assessment exercise 1](#)

- ✓ Throughout 2025/26, the Council has continued its engagement with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to provide assurance that the Council is managing its debt position and delivering on its best value duties. As part of this on-going assurance, the Council used the receipts from two asset sales to repay borrowing, making use of significant discounts available via the PWLB. In December 2024 and February 2025, the Council repaid £12m and £7.3m of debt, attracting discounts of £5.7m and £3.7m respectively, and set aside additional voluntary repayments to supplement the Council's already planned repayment of debt. The Council is currently exploring further debt restructuring options.
- ✓ The Council also focused on the management of key investment property assets during the year, particularly those with high income where leases are coming up for renewal in the next 2 years, in order to consider alternate use for the assets, continued income or potentially divestment for capital receipts. This work is on-going.

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

### Principle E– Develop the entity’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.

- ✓ As noted under Principle D, the Council carries out service reviews to ensure it has the capacity to deliver outcomes. This programme has continued throughout 2025/26.
- ✓ The Council’s Financial Strategy is aligned with the Corporate Business Plan so that appropriate levels of resources (financial and staffing) are allocated to programmes of work. Horizon scanning is an integral part of budget planning. Sector appropriate news articles are used to inform and review the Council’s risk register.
- ✓ The Council participates in a number of partnership arrangements which enable it to address capacity and resilience. These include:
  - In 2015/16 the Council set up an employee-led mutual with Spelthorne Borough Council called Applied Resilience. This has increased both Councils’ capacity to respond to civil emergencies including severe weather events such as storms, flooding or heatwaves, and to address business continuity. This arrangement continued in 2025/26 and has included a Borough Emergency Control Centre (BECC) exercise, designed to check the effectiveness of existing policies and plans and to inform and shape revisions to the plan.
  - Community Services provides a range of services in partnership with Surrey Heath Borough Council.
  - Safer Runnymede provides a CCTV service for a number of other organisations including neighbouring councils, Thorpe Park and various NHS establishments. The service has seen further expansion during 2025/26.
  - The Council also works with other partners such as the Surrey Environmental Partnership and the Heathrow Strategic Planning Group which highlight potential future capacity and resource requirements allowing the Council to properly plan for them.
  - During 2025/26, the Council continued to collaborate with colleagues across Surrey councils to draw together the final submissions to government for the shape of local government reorganisation in Surrey. A 2-unitary model was chosen by Government in October 2025, Joint Committees were set up in January 2026, and the structural change order was approved in Parliament in March 2026. In May 2026 elections were held for the Shadow authorities of East and West Surrey.
- ✓ 2024/26 saw the continuation of a number of Member working groups, providing access for all Members to be involved in developing policy, supported by a range of cross-departmental officer working groups. This has been particularly effective in progressing climate change activity which affects every service area within the Council. The working group provides a focus point to ensure a shared understanding of the aims and priorities of the climate change programme and how each department can contribute, bringing together the right people to ensure progress is made.
- ✓ The Organisational Development Strategy, which supports the delivery of the Corporate Business Plan, includes a Talent Management Strategy.
- ✓ Annual budgets are set aside for both corporate training and professional development. The Council commits to supporting the cost of membership of appropriate professional bodies for officers.
- ✓ The Council has a leadership and staff competency framework that sets out the behaviours expected by managers and staff in the delivery of their daily work and the aims of the Council. The framework forms part of the conversations held during continuous performance management meetings which consist of regular one-to-one sessions, a six-month review and an annual appraisal. An individual development plan is produced alongside the appraisal process. An e-form was introduced for the 2024/25 year-end appraisals to help streamline the process and the recording of outcomes. Feedback has resulted in further amendments to the process for the closing appraisals for 2025/26 and target setting for 2026/27. Digitalising the annual performance review

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

process ensured that 95% of Council employees had an annual performance review and enabled senior managers to have management oversight and control of the process and any areas of non-compliance

- ✓ Mandatory completion of a suite of e-learning modules is required of all staff including topics such as safeguarding, cyber security, data protection, manual handling and stress awareness. This is monitored via the induction process for new staff and has been incorporated into the appraisal form to ensure compliance. A variety of optional e-learning modules are also easily accessible. Specific training sessions including drop-in sessions are held to advise staff of new policies, procedures or tools that can support service delivery, such as use of co-pilot and Prince 2 project management training.
- ✓ A Workforce Planning tool has been developed internally to support services to review their resources.
- ✓ The apprenticeship scheme was refocused on encouraging existing employees to take up apprenticeships, supporting recruitment and retention, developing existing skillsets as well as encouraging staff to gain new skills in new areas. The outcome of the apprenticeship training drive was reported to management in June 2025, and a wide range of apprenticeships were agreed for staff, covering 2025/26 and 2026/27.
- ✓ Two senior staff were successfully nominated to SOLACE's Developing Strategic Leaders programme, designed to challenge, inspire and equip senior leaders to lead strategically in complex systems at a time of significant change. The Council also supported a successful application to the [Solace Springboard Leadership Programme](#).
- ✓ Secondment opportunities have been used across the Council, with examples in Housing, and Customer, Digital and Collection Services to provide greater opportunities for staff to try a new area of work or to step up into a more senior position.
- ✓ The Project Management Office has responsibility for embedding a project management approach across the organisation to support, monitor and report on the progress of projects within the Council's Project Portfolio. This includes the provision of a range of in-house training and support tools.
- ✓ The Council is supported by bodies such as the Local Government Association who can provide advice and support where required, to Members and officers.
- ✓ The Senior Leadership Team, comprising the Chief Executive, Assistant Chief Executives, Corporate Heads of Service and members of the Chief Executive's office, meet on a monthly basis to debate cross-service issues. The Corporate Leadership Team led by the Chief Executive and supported by the Monitoring officer and the two Assistant Chief Executives meets on a weekly basis. The officer structure in place at the end of 2025/26 is appended to this Statement.
- ✓ Following the Local Government Association facilitated workshops in 2024/25, designed to support good working relationships between the co-leaders of the Council and senior officers, the co-leaders developed a protocol for working together and for their engagement with officers which has supported clear lines of leadership across the Council during 2025/26.
- ✓ The Council undertook to provide an assessment of organisational culture and leadership capacity across the Council and to develop an action plan to support a high performing, one team corporate culture across all council departments, that actively contributes to strong governance and delivery. The initial action plan has been implemented, and a second leadership survey of all staff was carried out in November 2025, with results reported in late 2025/26. As noted under Principle A, a further action plan has been developed to respond to the outcomes from the survey.
- ✓ The health and wellbeing of staff is of paramount importance to the Council, and it supports individuals in maintaining both their physical and mental health in a variety of ways including a focus on stress awareness, the provision of free taster meditation sessions, quiet rooms made available for staff use, lunchtime walks, mental health first aiders and much more. The Council is also committed to fostering a workplace where everyone feels valued, supported, and celebrated. Rooted in the Council's Organisational Development Strategy (2022–2026) and Employee Wellbeing Strategy,

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

the Belong@Runnymede programme is designed to promote inclusion and belonging at work, celebrate diversity and improve employee wellbeing

- ✓ Member induction sessions are held for new Members after local elections and an on-going Member training programme is delivered throughout the year. In 2025/26, this included the opportunity for Members to be briefed on complex topics such as budget preparation, and asset disposals.

### Principle F– Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.

- ✓ The Council’s system of internal financial control is based on a framework of regular management information, financial regulations, administrative procedures (including segregation of duties), management supervision, and a system of delegation and accountability. Managers within the Council undertake development and maintenance of the system. The system includes:
  - Comprehensive budgeting systems
  - Clearly defined capital expenditure guidelines
  - Named budget managers who hold devolved responsibility for delivering services within their approved budget
  - Setting and monitoring of key performance indicators
  - Regular financial monitoring reports comparing financial performance against forecasts
  - Project management and procurement training and templates
  - Financial regulations and contract standing orders as set out in the [Constitution](#).
- ✓ The Council undertook a detailed self-assessment against CIPFA’s Financial Management Code in January 2022 and had implemented all outstanding actions by the close of 2024/25.
- ✓ The Standards and Audit Committee undertook its second self-assessment of its effectiveness in March 2026 and presented its annual report to Full Council in April 2026. Any areas identified for improvement have been captured in the action plan attached to this Statement.
- ✓ The Standards and Audit Committee monitor the implementation of recommendations made by the internal audit service, ensuring that management action is taken to address any identified weaknesses or potential improvements to the system of internal control. Potential risks identified in the audit reviews undertaken in 2025/26 have been cross-checked against the Council’s risk register and used to inform the governance action plan within the AGS. The Assistant Chief Executive (s151 Officer) raises internal audit matters on a regular basis at SLT meetings, encouraging engagement with the audit team and timely response to the implementation of recommendations. The Council joined the Southern Internal Audit Partnership to deliver the Council’s internal audit service from April 2024. The internal auditor has engaged with Members and senior officers and considered the Council’s risk register alongside the Partnership’s in-depth knowledge of the sector, to provide a risk-based audit programme. The overall internal audit opinion for 2025/26 provides “reasonable” assurance over the controls in place at the Council. The monitoring of actions arising from the assurance reviews during the year, ensures that risks are adequately mitigated.
- ✓ The [Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee](#) may review decisions made or actions taken relating to the discharge of any of the Council’s functions. In exceptional cases it may “call in” the decision of another Committee for further consideration before it is implemented. The Committee makes reports and recommendations to the Full Council or the appropriate Committee and presents [an annual report](#) on its work programme to the Full Council. The main aim of the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committee is to act as a “critical friend” to the Council to promote better services, policies and decisions. No Member may be involved in scrutinising a decision in which they have been directly

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

involved. The Committee also played a key role throughout the year in the monitoring of the delivery of savings and efficiencies under the approved approach to achieving financial sustainability. Following the success of last year's process, a workshop session has been arranged with the Committee ahead of the first formal meeting of the municipal year, to discuss the work programme for the year and any area of focus. Alongside this, both members of the Committee and senior officers will be asked to submit potential areas for scrutiny so that a balanced and focused work programme can be devised, with clear understanding of the scope of the work.

- ✓ The Council also has [Planning](#), [Licensing](#) and [Regulatory](#) Committees which discharge the regulatory functions in respect of planning applications and enforcement, and the regulation of taxis, private hire vehicles and other licenses including liquor and public entertainment.
- ✓ Work continued in the year on embedding and maturing the Council's Risk Management Framework. The Standards and Audit Committee's work programme includes twice early reporting of risk matters while the Corporate Leadership Team review the Corporate Risk Register on a quarterly basis. Risk Appetite Statements were reviewed and amended in line with current views on the level of risk the Council is willing to accept under each risk category and held at existing levels for 2026/27. All Committee reports include a mandatory section on risk, which can then be linked back to the risk register. The Council's s151 officer and the Head of Business Planning, Projects and Performance attended service area team meetings across the Council to increase the visibility of the risk management framework and to facilitate wider discussions about risk management beyond the senior leadership team. In addition, they undertake a consistency check across the risk register, identifying anomalies and escalating any issues arising e.g. from lack of progress on implementation of mitigation measures, to the Continuous Improvement Programme Board,
- ✓ Business continuity plans are regularly updated.
- ✓ The Council's Whistleblowing policy and procedures were reviewed and updated in March 2026 in accordance with good practice and recent changes to employment legislation. The Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy is due for review during 2026/27. The Council participates in the National Fraud Initiative and has a strong record of dealing with fraud, achieving its highest savings to date during 2025/26, with £911,160 notional savings (calculated under Cabinet Office methodology) and £54,762 cashable savings delivered. (2024/25 results were £768,120 and £106,895 respectively). A Member briefing session on risk and fraud awareness was delivered in April 2025.
- ✓ Procurement and contract management have been strengthened through the provision of training and awareness sessions. Contract standing orders have been reviewed in light of the Procurement Act 2023 and amendments made to the Procurement Strategy and associated policies (Social Value, Sustainability) in April 2026. The number of waivers approved in year has been reduced and an [annual report](#) was presented to Standards and Audit in May 2025 to increase Member awareness of this service area. In All contract renewals are now being considered in the context of LGR.
- ✓ Cyber security remains high priority for the Council and was the subject of 3 internal audit reviews the outcomes of which have been reported to the Standards and Audit Committee during 2025/26 and are included in the internal auditor's annual conclusion on the effectiveness of the Council's internal controls.
- ✓ The Council has produced a data quality policy in response to an improvement recommendation from Council's external auditor, which forms part of a robust information management framework. As part of its 2026/27 internal audit plan, the Council has asked SIAP to conduct a review of this framework, focusing on the effectiveness of data collection, validation, and reporting processes across key service areas.
- ✓ Service delivery is managed via monitoring against Service Area Plans and the delivery of actions in the Corporate Business Plan. All services provide a mid-year and end-of year report against these plans and their service's key performance indicators (KPIs). A set of corporate KPIs is also reported regularly to senior management and Members throughout the year.

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

- ✓ The Council has a Continuous Performance Management system in place including regular one-to-one conversations and performance reviews, promoting the following benefits;
  - Greater individual and, as a result, Council success
  - The clarification of roles and responsibilities
  - The ability to adapt to change and align with Council priorities
  - Enabling succession planning through regular personal and career development discussions
  - The identification of training and development needs
- ✓ All job descriptions were updated during 2024/25 as part of a Council-wide pay and grading review which will support robust performance management though having an up-to-date description of roles and responsibilities against which performance is measured. The new Pay Grades will be applicable from 1st April 2026. The review also introduced an established job evaluation process, and training has been rolled out to a cross-section of staff.
- ✓ As part of Global Internal Audit Standards, the internal audit function is required to undergo an External Quality Assessment at least once every five years by a qualified, independent assessor or assessment team. SIAP reported the results of its EQA to the Standards and Audit Committee in March 2026 and provided a progress report against the resultant action plan in May 2026. The Council and the internal auditor collaborated during 2025/26 to ensure adherence to the requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of Internal Audit in the UK (details can be found in the updates to the 2024/25 actions in the AGS action plan). These actions provide assurance to the Council of the independence of the audit service and its alignment to strategic objectives as set out in the Audit Mandate and Audit Charter (also reported to the Standards and Audit Committee).
- ✓ The Standards and Audit Committee promote effective governance through the oversight of risk management and the system of internal control as set out in its terms of reference; through consideration of a range of governance matters throughout the year; and via its self-assessment exercise (March 2026). It provides assurance to all Members as “those charged with governance” via its annual report to Full Council.
- ✓ A thorough review of the annual review process and the preparation of the AGS have been undertaken, to ensure the AGS meets with updated guidance and provides a robust “stress test” of the Council’s system of internal control.

### **Principle G – Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.**

- ✓ The Standards and Audit Committee conduct an annual self-assessment of the Committee’s effectiveness and identifying improvements to be implemented in the year ahead. For example, in 2025/26 the Committee recommended that a survey of the Committee’s membership be undertaken at the start of the next municipal year, to identify any training needs. The Committee’s annual report sets out the outcome of self - assessment and a summary of the work undertaken by the Committee in the year, to be shared with all those “charged with governance” at a meeting of the Full Council.
- ✓ Following delays with external audit, the final audit reports for the years 2019/20 to 2022/23 from the Council’s previous auditor, BDO, were reported to Full Council alongside the Council’s responses to the issues raised in the 2019/20 audit report.
- ✓ New external auditors were appointed to Runnymede Borough Council by PSAA for the 5-year period from 2023/24. The new audit team are engaging with Members and officers and progressing their audit planning and Value for Money reporting for the 2025/26 financial year.
- ✓ All annual audit reports (up to 2024/25) are publicly available on the Council’s website,

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

along with the Annual Governance Statements for each year.

- ✓ The implementation of internal and external audit recommendations is monitored by the Standards and Audit Committee. Both the Head of Internal Audit and the External Auditor have unfettered access to the Committee and can meet in private with Members should the need arise.
- ✓ The Council has a standard template for committee reports designed to capture relevant information for the reader, stakeholder or decision-maker in a fair, balanced and understandable way. The template has been updated during the year to improve clarity and consistency and to encompass recommendations from committees on mandatory sections. Financial reporting on property transactions has been developed to include a greater level of detail to aid understanding of options when considering the sale or letting of assets. The number of decisions made via urgency procedures under Standing Order 42 has remained low, aiding transparency. A delegated decision notice has been developed to ensure consistency in capturing decisions made under delegation from a committee or under the Scheme of Delegation in the Council's constitution. The constitution has been amended to make clearer the instances when such a notice is required.
- ✓ All public reports are available on the Council's website. Where reports cannot be made public due to containing sensitive, personal or commercial information for example, this is made clear on the relevant agenda. Where exemptions from publication exist, consideration has been given to moving sensitive information to an exempt appendix so that most of the report can be made public.
- ✓ Members of the public have access to formal Committee and Council meetings and have rights to speak at public meetings as laid out in the Constitution. Live streaming of Council meetings has been introduced from May 2025.
- ✓ The Council regularly reports on its performance, through the monitoring of key performance indicators, project performance and financial monitoring reports in addition to receiving reports from its internal and external auditors. In 2025/26 a consistent approach to the reporting of progress against service area plans and service KPIs was introduced.
- ✓ The Council's internal auditor regularly attends both the senior leadership team and corporate leadership team meetings, to consider input into the audit plan and progress against the plan, to share feedback and discuss improvements to processes.
- ✓ In January 2025, SIAP reported to the Standards and Audit Committee on the [Implementation of Global Internal Audit Standards](#), setting out the [Standards](#) to be applied and a [Roadmap](#) to implementation by April 2025. The report also referenced consultation on the Code of Practice for the Governance of Internal Audit in the UK which closed in November 2024. The Head of Internal Audit met with the Council's s151 officer and Monitoring Officer to discuss the approach to changes introduced following the consultation and an action plan was developed and implemented within the year. The Council is confident of its conformance with the Code.
- ✓ Updated guidance on the annual governance review and the preparation of the AGS was issued by Cipfa in May 2025. The Council has carried out a full gap analysis against the guidance and made improvements to its processes and the AGS itself to reflect the new guidance. In addition, the internal auditor was asked to perform an independent assessment and provide a position statement to aid production of this year's AGS.
- ✓ The Council supports both the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government and its Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit.
- ✓ As part of the annual governance review, senior managers are asked to complete a declaration that acknowledges their role in upholding the internal control and assurance framework. This covers areas such as reviewing internal controls and implementing audit recommendations, deployment of resources, achievement of targets and production of service plans, risk management, familiarisation with Council procedures and decision-making. The declarations also provide an opportunity for Managers to request further guidance or training. The officer declarations have been updated and digitalised as part of this year's review, with a clear summary collated of any issues arising, which have

## Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Evidence - Appendix C

then been fed into the AGS action plan.

- ✓ The Council reports its partnership arrangements in its Statement of Accounts and ensures robust mechanisms are in place for monitoring the delivery of partnership work, thorough contractual arrangements and Service Level Agreements.
- ✓ The Council welcomes peer challenge, reviews and inspections from regulatory bodies which help it form action plans for continuous improvement. In February the Regulator for Social Housing issued a C4 judgement in relation to Runnymede's conformance with the Housing Consumer Standards. The Council is using its programmatic approach to respond to the Regulator's concerns, has developed a Programme Charter and clear governance arrangements, and is meeting initially fortnightly with the Regulator. The Housing Improvement Board will report progress to the Continuous Improvement Programme Board.

# Annual Governance Statement 2025/26 – Organisation Chart - Appendix D

