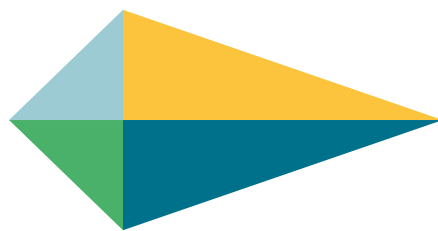


DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2024/25



EASTSUFFOLK
COUNCIL

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APPROVAL OF THE DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

2024/25 will herald the biggest change to local government in 50 years. The publication of the Government's Devolution White Paper, along with Suffolk's inclusion in the Devolution Priority Programme, means that the current structure of county and district/borough councils will be replaced by a unitary council structure in April 2028. Also, from May 2026, Suffolk and Norfolk will have a Mayoral County Combined Authority. Work towards this has dominated the latter part of the year.

This Annual Governance Statement continues to show that our high standards of governance have been maintained. During 2024/25, the Council has continued to strengthen its governance framework. Highlights have included the approval of a new Procurement Strategy along with updating our Contract Procedure Rules. Our staff survey attracted a response rate of 71%, up 16% from the previous survey, and recorded high levels of staff satisfaction. We also agreed an Armed Forces and Reservists Policy - achieving the Bronze Level Award through the Military of Defence Employer Recognition Scheme.

As well as continuing to exhibit strong financial management, we have introduced a new Corporate Project and Programme Board to tighten up on the management of the Council's major projects and the capital programme. Alongside many other local authorities, the Council received a disclaimed audit opinion due to the parlous state of the national audit environment. We hope this will return to some stability for the 2024/25 Financial Year Audit.

Finally, we completed the review of the Council's Constitution, which was signed off at Full Council in May 2025. We will continue to review elements of the Constitution as required and 2025/26 will see other improvements including the development of the Council's policy and governance arrangements for using Artificial Intelligence; commencing work on an East Suffolk Local Plan; and continuing to improve the condition of our housing stock. Local Government review and Devolution will continue to be a major part of our work.

We are grateful to the Councillors, Managers and Staff of the Council for all their efforts to ensure that the Council is well run, transparent in its decision making and administers the necessary bureaucracy which goes with the management of local authorities effectively and proportionately. We approve this statement and confirm that it forms the basis of the Council's governance arrangements.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Topping'.

Councillor Caroline Topping
Leader of the Council
May 2025



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Bally'.

Chris Bally
Chief Executive
May 2025





WHAT IS CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Good governance is important in ensuring good decision making and leadership in local authorities. It is important that things are undertaken in the correct way, for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. The importance of having good rules, systems and information is important to have and maintain good governance. Weakness in governance can have far reaching implications and it is important that these are identified and minimised to ensure good governance.

The Council strives to meet the highest standards of corporate governance to help ensure it meets its objectives. Members and Officers are responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of the Council's affairs and the stewardship of the resources at its disposal. It comprises the systems and processes, cultures and values by which the organisation is directed and controlled and through which it is accountable to, engages with, where appropriate, and leads its communities. It ensures that appropriate mechanisms for control are in place and that risks and opportunities are managed effectively.

Scope of Responsibility

The Council's responsibilities are to:

-  Ensure its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards;
-  Safeguard and properly account for public money;
-  Use public money economically, efficiently and effectively; and
-  Meet its duty under the Local Government Act 2000 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) reports publicly on the extent to which the Council has to comply with its governance duties on an annual basis, including how the Council has monitored the effectiveness of its governance arrangements in the year, and on any planned changes in the coming period.

The Council has produced a [Code of Corporate Governance](#) which is consistent with the principles of the revised CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government. The Code of Corporate Governance sets out the governance arrangements that support each principle and was reviewed on 30 September 2024 by the Audit and Governance Committee before it was reported and adopted by Full Council on 27 November 2024.

The AGS also explains how the Council has complied with governance elements within the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

In May 2025, CIPFA issued an addendum entitled 'DDelivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework' requesting authorities to ensure that the AGS for 2025/26 onwards complies within this guidance, and they are encouraged to consider it for 2024/25. Work is actively being considered and forms part of the work programme.

The Purpose of the Governance Framework

The governance framework is the systems, processes, culture and values which direct and control the Council. The framework also includes the activities with which the Council accounts to, engages with and leads the community. It 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. It is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. This is an ongoing process:



To identify and prioritise risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives;



To evaluate the likelihood of those risks occurring and the impact if they do;



To manage risks efficiently, effectively and economically.

The system of internal control cannot eliminate all risk of failure so only provides reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The governance framework has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31 March 2020 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and statement of accounts.

Governance Framework

The Council has committed itself to the pursuit of proper corporate governance throughout its services and to establishing the principles and practices by which this can be achieved. To support this, briefings on topical issues are held to enable Member development.

Corporate governance is the system by which the Council leads, directs and controls its functions and relates to the community and its partners. Through various systems and processes the Council strives to adhere to the principles of good governance: openness, inclusivity, integrity, and accountability.

The Council's governance environment is consistent with the seven core principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE framework, pictured below, which illustrates the various principles of the good governance in the public sector and how they relate to each other.

Extract from CIPFA/SOLACE 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government' entitled 'Achieving the Intended Outcome while Acting in the Public Interest at all Times'

Achieving the Intended Outcomes While Acting in the Public Interest at all Times



Principles A and B permeate implementation of principles C to G. The diagram also illustrates that good governance is dynamic, and that an entity as a whole should be committed to improving governance on a continuing basis through a process of evaluation and review.

Each of the core principles above have multiple sub principles and the framework in operation is evidenced.

The framework in operation directly supports the Council's strategic themes. The Council also recognises the importance of governance and has an internally focused theme to support the delivery of the East Suffolk Strategic Plan and ensure good governance within the Council.

HOW THE COUNCIL WORKS



Constitution

The Council's Constitution sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made, and the procedures which are followed to ensure that decisions are efficient, transparent, and accountable to local people. It clearly specifies the roles and responsibilities of the executive, non-executive, scrutiny, and officer functions, setting clear delegation arrangements and protocols for effective communication and governance.

During 2023/24, the Council established a cross-party Constitution Review Working Group (CRWG) to review and revise the Constitution to ensure that it is accessible and simple to follow, provides proportionate governance and appropriate democratic accountability. The CRWG brought its recommended changes to the Constitution to Full Council in stages in 2023/24 and 2024/25. The fully reviewed and revised Constitution is due to be taken to Annual Council for adoption in May 2025.

The Constitution includes the Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules which provide the framework for the administration of the Council with a view to ensuring that procurement and financial matters are conducted in a sound and proper manner, constitute value for money and minimise the risk of legal challenge.

Code of Conduct

In accordance with the Localism Act 2011, East Suffolk Council, in common with the County Council and the other district and borough councils in Suffolk, has adopted the LGA Model Code of Conduct for Councillors. The Code supports the Council's duty to promote and maintain high standards of conduct within the district and is based on the Nolan 'principles of public life' identified by the Committee on Standards in Public Life. All Councillors receive training on the Code from the Monitoring Officer.

A Code of Conduct for Officers is also in place to help employees to understand what is expected of them. Observance of the Code helps to maintain and improve standards and protect employees from conflicts of interest, misunderstandings or criticism. A copy of this Code is made available to every employee of the Council.

Our Direction 2028

Following elections in May 2023 work took place to develop a new Strategic Plan for the Council called 'Our Direction 2028'. The plan was created by working with the aspirations of the new administration, and undertaking consultation with staff, residents and stakeholders. At its meeting on 22 November 2023, Full Council approved the adoption of Our Direction 2028, which presents the Council's key ambitions and priorities through to 2028, becoming the new East Suffolk Strategic Plan.

During the 2024/25 financial year, a rigorous process of understanding key priorities enabled the development and publication of the Strategic Action Plan, demonstrating the actions the Council will be taking to deliver to Our Direction 2028, and a complete new set of strategic KPI dashboards were published so that each theme of the Strategic Plan has measures in place by which to understand delivery, this includes an underlying theme named 'Our Foundations' which also ensures the Council is operating appropriately, including its governance arrangements. The dashboards are published internally on SharePoint for all staff and members to access and externally on the Council's website to ensure complete transparency in how it is performing.

Strategic aims and objectives filter down through the organisation into Service Plans and ultimately into individual's objectives through the 'My Conversation' process. This creates a golden thread of linking everything the Council does through to its Strategic Plan.

Our aim is to promote a bright, green, open, free, and fair future for all East Suffolk



Delivering positive climate, nature, and environmental impacts through the decisions we make and actions we take.



All homes in East Suffolk are safe, suitable, and sustainable, in communities where residents are proud to live.



Improving quality of life across the district by tackling financial, social and health inequalities.



Enabling residents to benefit from, and contribute to, a thriving economy.



Our Foundations

Our Direction 2028 recognises the importance of solid foundations and providing quality services across all functions of the Council. The Council will measure and reflect on its performance, including how it delivers this plan as part of Our Direction 2028. This includes undertaking robust internal audits across all service areas.

The Golden Thread



Project Management

A corporate-wide Project Management Framework is in place and can be scaled to the size and need of any project, this framework was extended to include the Council's trading company East Suffolk Services Limited (ESSL) who also use the same project management framework.

During the 2024/25 financial year, a series of one-day training sessions were put in place and widely attended to ensure the framework is used across the organisation, along with strengthening the Council's approach to successful project delivery by reviewing its governance arrangements for major projects including those delivering to the Strategic Plan. Each Theme of the Strategic Plan has an officer team in place to monitor progress of delivery to the theme and a Corporate Programme and Projects Board now oversees major projects and the capital programme across the organisation.

Where necessary, programme or project boards combining Members and Officers are established for larger capital projects and the Council also works with various stakeholders to deliver significant projects. These boards ensure adequate project controls are in place and allow fast reaction to any specific project issues if they occur.



Golden Triangle Meetings

Golden Triangle Meetings are a meeting of the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service), the Monitoring Officer and the S151 Officer of the Council – the three statutory officers of the Council. This provides a space for the three officers of the Council to share intelligence related to areas of governance, assurance, budgets, risk and organisational decision making. The meeting has been held quarterly during 2024/25 but moved to bi-monthly from 4 March 2025. From the March meeting the Head of Internal Audit will also attend every other meeting.

Corporate Leadership Team

The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) provides collective, accountable and visible leadership; inspiring and enabling colleagues throughout the organisation to deliver the priorities, projects and actions set out by the Council's political administration.



CLT meets four times each month. This incorporates a three-hour strategic meeting and three further one-hour sessions focused on specific aspects of the Council's leadership and management, namely:

- Performance and Risk
- Finance
- The Council's and CLT's Forward Plan
- Governance

Strategic Meetings focus on items relating to the Council's strategic priorities, matters of operational importance, 'deep dives' on topics, key structural and staffing changes, horizon scanning and political issues.

CLT has published a Charter governing its operation and further information is available to the whole Council on the intranet site.

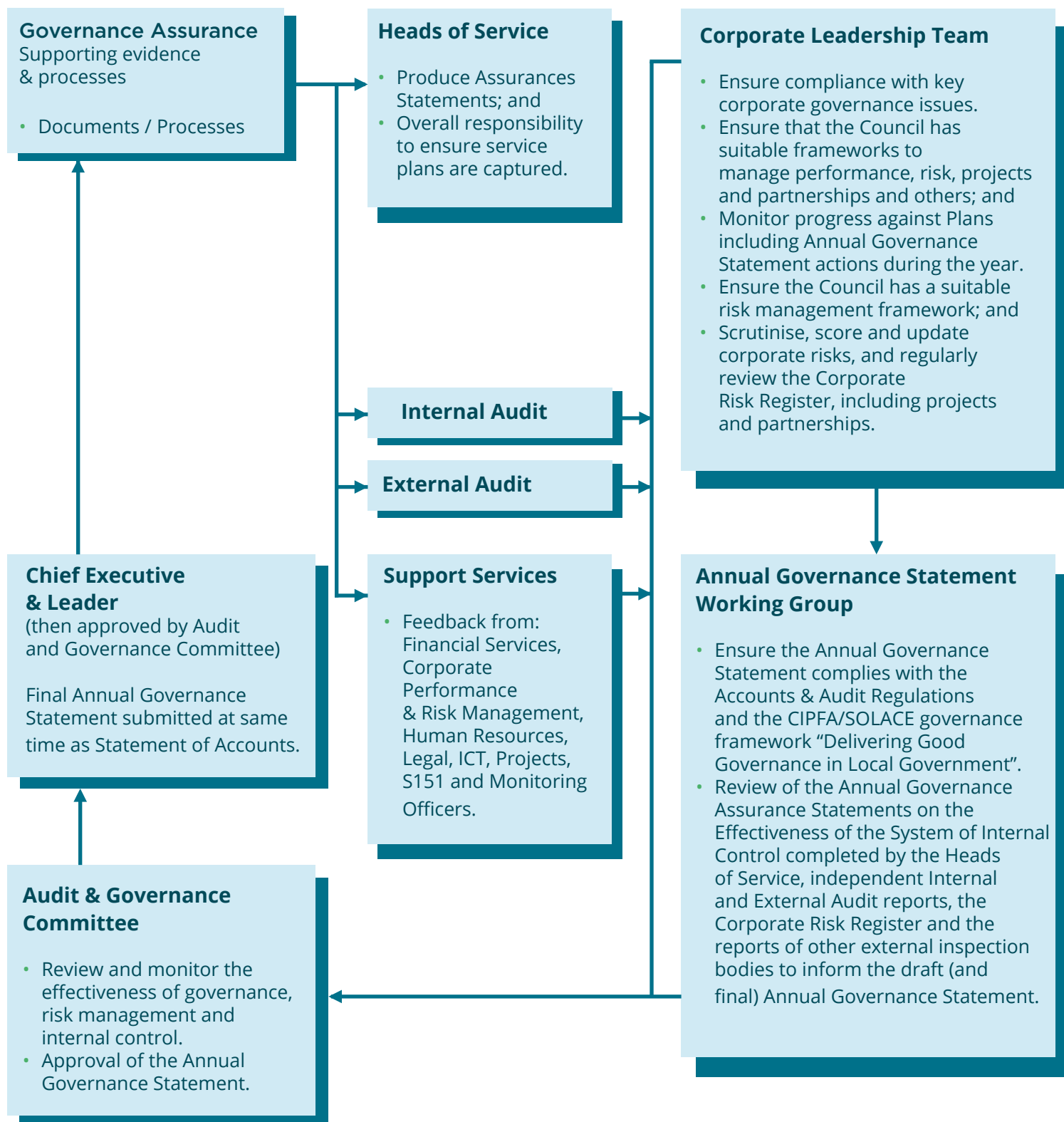
Key Roles

The key roles of those responsible for developing and maintaining the Governance Framework are:

The Council	<p>Approval of East Suffolk Strategic Plan.</p> <p>Approves the Constitution (including the Financial Regulations).</p> <p>Approves key policies and budgetary framework.</p>
Cabinet	<p>The main decision-making body of the Council.</p> <p>Cabinet membership is the Leader of the Council and relevant Cabinet Members with responsibility for different portfolios.</p>
Audit and Governance Committee	<p>Provides independent assurance to the Council on the adequacy and effectiveness of governance arrangements, risk management framework and internal control environment.</p> <p>Promotes high standards of Member conduct and approves the Annual Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement.</p>
Overview and Scrutiny Committee	<p>Support and challenge in carrying out its responsibilities.</p>
Corporate Leadership Team	<p>The Chief Executive has overall accountability for the governance framework and operation of the organisation and staffing.</p> <p>Implements the policy and budgetary framework set by the Council and provides advice to Cabinet and the Council on the development of future policy and budgetary issues and oversees the implementation of Council policy.</p> <p>Accountability for developing and maintaining of the Council's performance and risk framework.</p>

Chief Finance Officer (S151)	<p>Leads and directs the financial strategy of the Council and ensures the Council controls and manages its money well, being suitably qualified and experienced, and ensures the Financial Services Team is fit for purpose.</p> <p>Assist the Council to put in place an appropriate control environment and effective internal controls which provide reasonable assurance of effective and efficient operations, financial stewardship, probity and compliance with laws and regulations.</p> <p>Contributes to the effective corporate management and governance of the Council.</p>
Monitoring Officer	<p>Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 requires the Council to designate one of its officers as the Council's Monitoring Officer.</p> <p>Responsible to report on matters they believe to be illegal or amount to maladministration, to be responsible for matters relating to the conduct of Councillors and officers and, to be responsible for the operation of the Council's Constitution.</p>
Internal Audit	<p>Provides independent assurance and opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's governance, risk management and control framework.</p> <p>Delivers an annual programme of risk-based audit activity, including counter-fraud and investigation activity.</p> <p>Overall responsibility for the maintenance and operation of the Whistleblowing Policy and contributes to the effective corporate management and governance of the Council.</p> <p>Makes recommendations for improvements in the management of risk.</p>
External Audit	<p>Audits / reviews and reports on the Council's financial statements (including the Annual Governance Statement), providing an opinion on the accounts and use of resources, concluding on the arrangements in place for securing economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in the use of resources (the value for money conclusion).</p>
Directors, Heads of Service and Managers	<p>Responsible for developing, maintaining, and implementing the Council's governance, risk, and control framework. Contribute to the effective corporate management and governance of the Council.</p>

Governance Framework Assurance Process



REVIEW OF EFFECTIVENESS

The Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the Heads of Service within the Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Head of Internal Auditor's annual report, and also by comments made by the External Auditor and other review agencies and inspectorates.

Monitoring Officer

Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 requires the Council to designate one of its officers as the Council's Monitoring Officer. It is the role of the Monitoring Officer to report on matters they believe to be illegal or amount to maladministration, to be responsible for matters relating to the conduct of Councillors and officers and, to be responsible for the operation of the Council's Constitution.

Elections to all 55 of the Council's wards were held on 4 May 2023. A comprehensive induction programme was prepared for all Councillors, whether new or returning. The training covered the Council's governance arrangements including decision making, the Code of Conduct, finance, the Council's values, safeguarding, health and safety and quality, diversity and inclusion. A Member programme for training and development is in place to ensure continued development is undertaken for all Members. In January 2024, the Council was reaccredited with Charter Plus in recognition of its excellent work in supporting and developing Members.

There were two byelections in February 2025 for the Rushmere St Andrew and Woodbridge wards. The newly elected Councillors attended an induction session with officers in March 2025.

The Local Government Association's Model Code of Conduct was adopted by Full Council on 23 March 2022, with effect from 1 May 2022. In the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, two Code of Conduct complaints, were made against two East Suffolk Councillors. The Monitoring Officer upheld one of the two complaints.

Between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, decisions on 34 complaints made against the Council to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) were issued. One complaint was recorded as being upheld by the LGSCO in 2024/25. In this case, ESC had accepted fault in responding to the complainant and the Ombudsman was satisfied with the remedy provided by the Council'.

Two complaints were referred to the Housing Ombudsman (HO) between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, one was found justified with maladministration and one was closed with orders and recommendations.

Chief Finance Officer

In accordance with the 'Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government' (published in April 2016), the Section 151 Officer/Chief Finance Officer, is a professionally qualified Accountant, and is a member of the Council's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), reporting directly to the Chief Executive and Leader on key strategic finance matters.

The Council's financial management arrangements conform with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government and are contained in the Finance Procedure Rules, which form part of the Council's Constitution. CIPFA's Financial Management Code (FM Code) provides guidance for good and sustainable financial management in local authorities and provides assurance that authorities are managing resources effectively. Quarterly budget monitoring continues to be reported to Cabinet and Finance is a quarterly standing agenda item on the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) agenda.

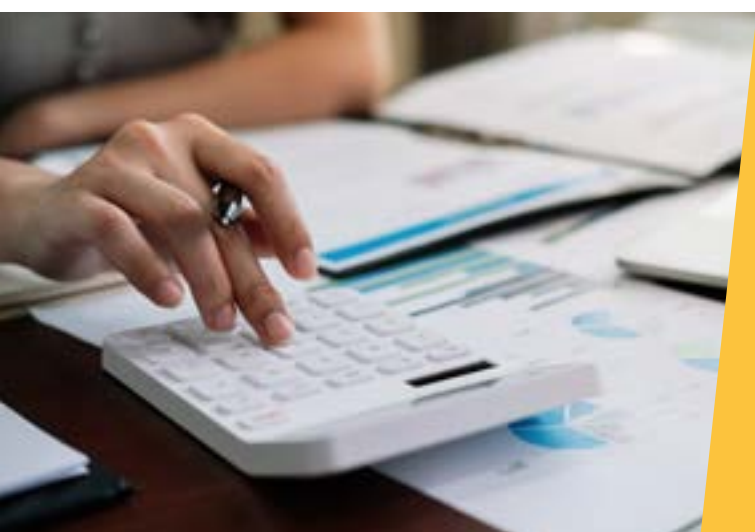
The Council's annual budget is subject of extensive updating, scrutiny, and consultation throughout the budget setting process with Cabinet Members and the senior leadership team. This includes the Council's General Fund, Capital, and Housing Revenue Account budgets.

During 2024/25, the Council continued to be impacted by increasing costs due to inflation and large scale and complex capital projects. Budget headings have been reviewed and revised as part of the budget process where demand and inflationary impacts are evident. A balance budget for 2024/25 was approved by Full Council in February 2024 and the outturn position will be reported to Cabinet in July 2025.

The Government's fair funding review, which will affect how funding is allocated and redistributed between local authorities, has been delayed for several years but is now expected to be implemented from 2026/27. This review will also include a reset of the business rates system. Reset of the system and the establishment of new funding formulae is likely to result in the Council losing a degree of financial advantage under the current system, which derives from the fact that actual Business Rates income is above the baseline in the system.

In-year monitoring of the Council Tax collection rate showed a slight fall against target in 2023/24, suggesting the impact of the cost-of-living crisis. 2024/25 rates have not improved but remained stable. Business Rates income collection has performed in line with target and slightly improved on the prior year.

The Council has a large and ambitious Capital Programme and the realisation of capital receipts and external funding will be important in ensuring affordability and delivery of the programme. The Council recognises the importance of ensuring that capital assets continue to be of long-term use especially against a rapidly changing operational and technological backdrop. Enhancing the management of the Council's existing asset base and looking beyond the traditional medium-term financial planning horizon is a priority. Major capital projects are delivered by dedicated project managers within the Council, with leadership and oversight provided by the CLT, and the newly created Corporate Project and Programme Board.



Whilst the Council faces cost pressures, higher interest rates have provided the Council with additional income from its treasury management activities. For 2024/25 this is in the region of £0.750 million to £1 million of additional income. Existing loans are all at fixed rates and therefore not susceptible to market increases. During the year, the Council constantly receives advice from its Treasury Advisors regarding the creditworthiness of financial institutions and lending on the local authority market. Security of the Council's cash is the over-riding consideration in setting its Treasury Management Policy Statement and the Council maintains a diverse treasury management investment portfolio.

The Council created East Suffolk Services Limited (ESSL) to operate as a Local Authority Trading Company (LATCo) following a thorough review of its joint venture (JV) partnership with Norse, which ended on 30 June 2023. Following the company's first year of operation the focus continues to be about financial health and stability and the identification of opportunities for the development and improvement of the various services the company delivers. As with other council services, ESSL has faced cost pressures such as increases in pay awards, fuel for vehicles and waste disposal costs. This has contributed significantly to the required uplift in the company's base budget from previous years, along with recognising some additional resourcing needs to support the delivery of services. ESSL has prepared a zero-based budget for 2025/26 which has been discussed with the Council and a further annual uplift of £2m has been included in the MTFS for ESSL delivering Council service.

With the creation of ESSL it has become clear that there has been an under investment in the service for a number of years and a lack of visibility of costs to deliver the services. The financial stability of ESSL presents a high risk to the Council's budget and MTFS, for both revenue and capital, as the budget has been increased significantly for two consecutive years.

The Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) manages the delivery of revenue services of the Council in partnership with four other Local Authorities, to provide economies of scale and provide a robust flexible service. The ARP Joint Committee and Operation Improvement Board maintained oversight of performance and ensures compliance with the ARP agreement. The latest ARP Business Plan covers the period 2024 to 2028 and supplements the annual service plan. In 2024 ARP won the IRRV (Institution of Revenues, Ratings and Valuations) Award 2024 for Local Taxation and Revenues Team of the Year (Unitary and Partnership working). ARP demonstrated that they were raising the standards of service to achieve high levels of performance, customer satisfaction and effective administrative procedures in revenues.

The Council has been able to set a balanced budget for 2025/26 by using reserves, including responding to emerging matters during the year. A key element of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is maintaining an adequate level of balances and reserves, so that resources are available to allow a managed and considered response should any significant variations or emergencies arise. Significant use of reserves to balance the budget is not a sustainable or appropriate position to continue. The Council's approach is not to use reserves to fund longer-term budget gaps, but for reserves to be used in a managed way to support the actions required to address underlying budget gaps.

The MTFS report to Council in February 2025 indicates that future years beyond 2025/26 continue to show budget shortfalls in core funding compared with budgeted expenditure. The primary concerns regarding the Council's Budget and MTFS are reform of the local government finance system, increased demand for council services, rising costs and the management of large scale and complex project. A strategy for a combination of actions will be needed in the next budget round to ensure a longer-term sustainable position, including a phased use of reserves, maximisation of income, and the achievement of savings. The Council's overall balance on reserves is currently healthy, which will provide the time for actions to embed and outcomes to be realised.

Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief Finance Officer and Section 151 Officer to formally report to Council as part of the tax setting report on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of reserves. In the budget report to Full Council on 19 February 2025, the Section 151 Officer/Chief Finance Officer, concluded that the overall budget estimates are robust, taking into account known risks and mitigating strategies, and the reserves are adequate for the 2025 to 2026 budget plans.

Head of Internal Audit

The Council's Head of Internal Audit conforms with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Local Government, www.cipfa.org/roleofthehia.

Internal Audit is an independent, objective assurance and consulting activity designed to add value and improve the Council's operations. It helps the Council accomplish its corporate objectives by bringing a systematic disciplined approach to evaluate and improve the effectiveness of risk management, control and governance processes.

The Head of Internal Audit issues an annual audit opinion each financial year to notify the Council of the objective assessments undertaken by internal audit and the degree of confidence available in the organisation's governance, risk management and control processes.

Based on the findings of the audit reviews carried out throughout 2024/25 and other sources of assurance available, it is the opinion of the Head of Internal Audit that Reasonable Assurance may be given on the Council's risk, governance and control environment. The Council's definition of Reasonable Assurance is that "Some specific control weaknesses were noted and some improvement is needed; evaluated controls are generally adequate, appropriate, and effective to provide reasonable assurance that risks are being managed and objectives should be met."

The opinion of Reasonable Assurance is broadly consistent with the view from previous years. Although some high priority findings have been identified during the year, these are to further mitigate risks already recognised on the Corporate Risk Register. Follow up of previously agreed actions has seen notable improvement during the year.

The annual internal audit opinion is provided in line with risk-based internal audit assessments compliant with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the Internal Audit Charter, and based on the risks and evidence available to the Head of Internal Audit in May 2025. Assurance is contingent on the accurate representation and future continuation by Management of tested systems and processes.

Information Governance and Fraud

Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO)

The Council has a designated SIRO (the Head of Internal Audit) who has responsibility for the Council's information management (governance) framework and acts as the champion for information risk. The SIRO aims to mirror the model prescribed by central government (Cabinet Office). Following this 'best practice' approach allows for uniformity across the public sector as it strives to meet the competing demands of further transparency and public/private engagement in contrast to increased cybersecurity threats and the need to prevent data leakage. By treating information not as a business priority and not as an ICT or technical issues, the Council can ensure that risks are addressed, managed, and capitalised upon.

SIRO Annual Report

The following paragraphs represents the SIRO Annual Report. The main purpose of such reporting and management is to provide accountability and greater assurance that information risks are addressed.

Risk Register

Information Governance is regularly considered during Corporate Leadership Team meetings and is closely monitored, with mitigation plans implemented, when necessary, by officers and Councillors.

Designated Posts

Experienced and qualified postholders in operation throughout the year include Data Protection Officer, Deputy Data Protection Officer, and Senior Information Risk Owner, Freedom of Information Strategic Lead and Infrastructure and Operations Manager, Information Governance Officers. In addition, appointed Information Governance Champions exist across all services.

Policies

Key information governance documents are promoted across the organisation.

UK General Data Protection Regulations (UK GDPR) and Data Protection Act 2018

Qualified and experienced staff in post. Any additional impact on UK GDPR and the granting of the UK's adequacy decision by the EU (due to expire 27 June 2025) following from the UK exiting the EU continues to be monitored, and any Government guidance on this subject will be followed.

Personal Data Breaches

The Data Protection Officer has investigated 136 potential personal data breaches, 77 were confirmed breaches. Three data breaches were reported to the Information Commissioners Office (ICO). The ICO is taking no further action and was satisfied with the immediate action taken by the Council.

Freedom of Information Act (FOI) & Environmental Information Regulations (EIR)

The Information Governance Team received 644 FOI requests and 270 EIR requests. 99.8% of requests completed within target. No issues have been highlighted to the SIRO over concerns raised by the Information Commissioners Officer during the year

Anti-Fraud and Corruption and Whistleblowing Policies

A Whistleblowing Policy and Hotline exists. An Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy is also in place along with a refreshed Anti-Bribery Policy that was presented and approved by the Audit and Governance Committee on 17 February 2025. An Anti-Money Laundering Policy has also recently been refreshed and was presented to the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting in February 2025.

The Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy and the Whistleblowing Policy were endorsed by the Committee at its meeting in December 2023. The next review of both documents is scheduled for December 2025.

Risk Management

The East Suffolk Risk and Opportunity Management Strategy sets out the framework, arrangements and responsibilities in respect of how risks relating to the delivery of key outcomes and priorities are identified and managed. The Strategy assists officers to apply sound risk management principles

and practices across their areas of responsibility recognising employees, Members and those who act on behalf of the Council have a role to play in effective management of risk. The Strategy was developed further to provide comprehensive details on governance and management of risks.

The Strategy was approved at the Audit and Governance Committee on 13 December 2021. Independent experts, Zurich Insurance, undertook a health-check of the Strategy, which was very positive and resulted in minor amendments, providing further validation it was fit for purpose and meets good practice. The Audit and Governance Committee has responsibility to provide independent assurance on the adequacy of the risk and internal control framework. The Council also has an established risk management process/toolkit to evaluate and monitor the risk levels against the Council's risk matrix.

Risk Management covers all services and operations and is continuously monitored and managed across the Council by the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT). Regular meetings are held to review all corporate risks and ensure effective processes are in place. The Council's risk management activity is coordinated and led by CLT, chaired by the Chief Executive and supported by CLT members who have delegated responsibilities along with other senior officers. All corporate risks are reported to the Audit and Governance Committee to provide assurance and report significant updates on each risk and what is being undertaken to manage risks accordingly. Reports were initially taken annually which increased to twice yearly (July and December) as requested by the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 8 January 2024.

The annual report also provides high level details on developments relating to risk management within the Council. The Committee report template includes a section which must be completed to identify risks, and the project management framework includes risk management within its toolkit to ensure the same process is applied to managing risks within projects.

As part of the Risk Management Training Programme Zurich Insurance facilitate annual 'Horizon Scanning and Corporate Risk Challenge' sessions for CLT (and nominated senior officers), the most recent session was held on 4 February 2025. The session demonstrated that risks relevant to the Council, and identified within the global risk report, are captured within the Council's Corporate Risk Register (e.g., cyber-attacks) and provided an opportunity to consider other risks which could impact the Council. The Council has a mature risk process and following the session risks were reviewed and included.

Procurement and Contract Management

The Contract Procedure Rules form part of the Council's Constitution. The Contract Procedure Rules were updated in 2024/25 and have been supported by the production of a detailed guidance document or "Supplementary Notes" which support effective procurement by setting out detailed responsibilities, actions and minimum requirements for officers to undertake compliant procurement activities on behalf of the Council. The level of detail in the Supplementary Notes will be continually reviewed and updated as a result of developments in best practice and any legislative changes.

The Procurement Act 2023 and Procurement Regulations 2024 came into force on 24 February 2025. All internal processes, procedures and guidance have been updated in light of these legislative changes and training was offered to all officers before the go live date. The Procurement Team is continuing to liaise with the Cabinet Office and local Communities of Practice to ensure the Council can learn from examples of best practice under the new regulations.

The Council's Procurement Strategy 2024-2028 was approved by Cabinet in June 2024 and the Procurement Team is working on delivering the priorities of the four-year strategy. This has included setting up meet the buyer events for suppliers twice a year, the creation of an East Suffolk Social Value Ask, the introduction of a spend analysis tool in order to gain a better oversight on the Council's spending and the publication of procurement pipeline on www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk

In 2025/26 the Procurement Team will merge with the Contract Management Team and the focus will be on how the Council can get the most out of its contracts, starting with the contract with East Suffolk Services Limited.

Emergency Planning and Business Continuity

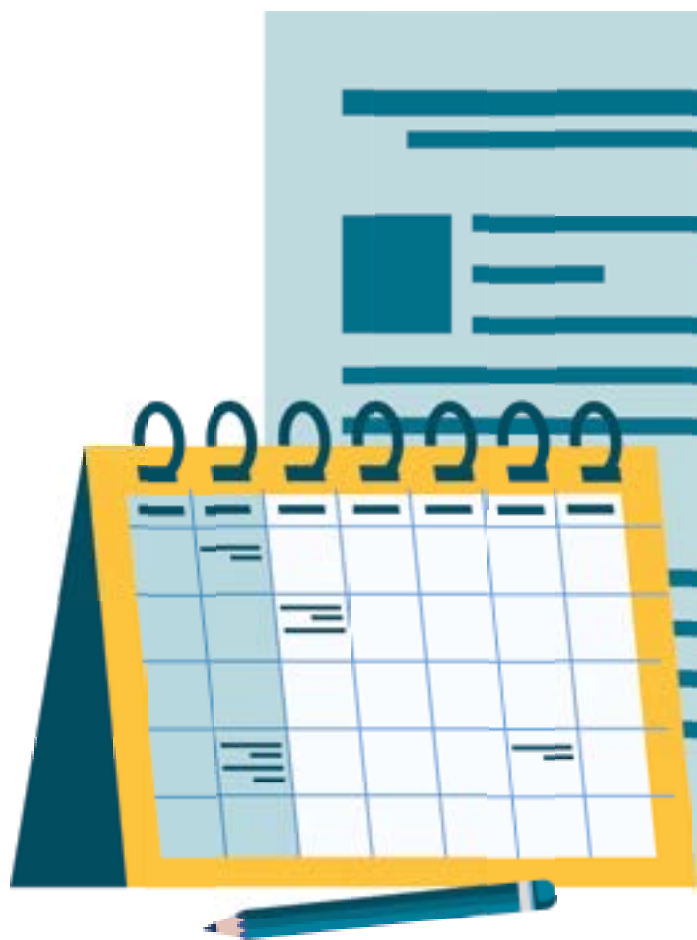
Emergency Planning and Business Continuity are the responsibility of the Strategic Director for Corporate Services. Emergency Planning and internal Business Continuity Services for the Council are provided by the District Emergency Planning Officer and the Emergency Planning Officer, employed by the Suffolk Joint Emergency Planning Unit (JEPU).

This enables the Council to react effectively to infrequent Major Emergencies, in partnership with other agencies, as required by the Civil Contingencies Act 2004. Further information is available on the Council's intranet, while general information on the multi-agency response to Major Emergencies, together with plans available for public scrutiny are available at www.suffolkresilience.com.

To maintain effectiveness of the Council's contingency requirements for emergency planning incidents, a hybrid solution was put in place from 2022/23 with the Activation Officer on call and switching to a rota when unavailable. As part of this action all Directors and Heads of Service completed training which ensures appropriate cover for the Activation Officer.

In 2024, the Chief Executive, Strategic Directors and Head of Operations attended a Multi-Agency Gold Incident Command (MAGIC) training course. Objectives of the course included defining roles and responsibilities of different agencies during the various stages of a major incident/civil emergency; take strategic 'Gold' command of a major incident/civil emergency; and plan, implement and review civil contingency plans and multi-agency communication strategies. Further business continuity exercises are planned for 2025/26 including planning for an incident related to Sizewell. This service area engages with CLT via quarterly sessions at the main CLT meeting.

In addition to the JEPU led emergency response functions, East Suffolk Council has appointed a Community Resilience Coordinator, working alongside JEPU, with a remit of working with communities at risk of flooding and the impact of climate change – for example, through coastal erosion. The Resilience Coordinator post is also responsible for managing the distribution of grants to Town and Parish councils in the event of a flood to assist with clear ups and recovery.



Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The Council undertook a self-assessment against the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG) in late 2021 and used this to identify fourteen key actions to progress. These actions are now included in the Council's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan, which was developed through two workshops in 2023. The workshops confirmed the Council's ambition to work towards Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in all that it does – as an employer, as a service provider and as a community leader. This Action Plan also includes the actions that the Council has agreed to undertake in order to demonstrate its commitment to the Unison Race Equality Charter. The Council is one of the first authorities in the East of England to sign up to the Charter.

The Action Plan recommends a refresh of the Council's key Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives and policy and identifies a range of actions that it can take to further embed equality, diversity and inclusion. These themes are integral to the new 'Our Direction 2028' Strategic Plan and individual service plans. The Council remains committed to the use of Equality Impact Assessments to ensure that it understands the impact of its proposed actions, services and policies on the ten protected characteristic groups (including economic disadvantage as well as the nine characteristics set out in the Equalities Act) and guidance and forms are currently being reviewed

The Council's work around the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Agenda is overseen by the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and the Corporate Services for All Group which includes representatives from across services and plays a key role in cascading key information to staff and capturing best practice, lessons learned and challenges to feed into CLT. At a Councillor level this agenda is overseen by the Cabinet Member for Communities. In 2023 the Council refined training for Councillors and officers and further additional training was piloted in 2024, including a 15-minute bitesize EDI session. The Leadership Forum (CLT and senior managers across the Council) attended Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Leadership Training delivered by the Ipswich and Suffolk Council for Racial Equality, Suffolk Pride and Disability Advice Service in 2024.

The Council funds the two Disability Advice charities that work in East Suffolk (and increased their funding by 50% in 2024) and continues to work closely with groups such as the two Disability Forums in East Suffolk, and to lead/support projects including Men's Sheds, intergenerational activities and Women's Groups. In 2023/24, work started towards East Suffolk becoming an Age Friendly Community but this has been superseded by the Council signing up to be part of the Marmot Place programme which focuses on all types of inequality within its communities and will commence in June 2025.



The new East Suffolk Youth Council launched in 2024 and met twice (in addition to its induction day) to develop and debate motions, some of which will be presented to Full Council. The Council continues to support Youth Take Over Day in November each year which provides students with an opportunity to take on a specific challenge from designing a new shopping centre, devising a project to reduce isolation and loneliness in young people and leading a communications campaign.



The Council has been successful in securing an Apprentice for 2025-26 who will support its ambitions over the next twelve months which include a further review of the Equality Policy, updated Equality Impact Assessment form and guidance (to reflect the socio-economic duty) and additional work to develop additional training for Councillors and officers.

The activities outlined above will help to ensure that the Council continues to meet its legal obligations under the Equalities Act 2010, specifically Section 149, the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Health and Safety

Governance arrangements: e.g. to meet the requirements of the Section 2(7) of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and Health and Safety (Consultation with Employees) Regulations 1996 (as amended), the Council has a Health and Safety Group chaired by the Council's Head of Environmental Services and Port Health and members include a Strategic Director, the Health and Safety Manager, the Corporate Health and Safety Team, HR, Unison and employee champions from all service areas across the Council. The function of the committee is to provide an open forum for exchange of information relating to health, safety and welfare. The minutes from the meeting are made available to all Council employees via Teams and SharePoint. The group does not make decisions but will make recommendations when appropriate. The Head of Environmental Services and Port Health reports on the key matters via the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT).

A Housing Health and Safety Board has been set up by the Head of Housing in response to the need to demonstrate effective and safe management of the Council's housing stock and, in particular, those that are deemed high risk either by their height, type of construction or the needs of the occupants. The Council's Health and Safety Manager attends the board meetings.

The Council's health and safety management function is subject to regulation by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). HSE's national priorities currently have an increased focus on health risks such as asbestos, silica dust and workplace stress and some form of intervention from HSE is expected in 2025/26. Incidents such as accidents, injuries, verbal and physical threats and near misses are captured and reported via the Council's reporting and investigation system on DASH. The data from that system is reported to the Health and Safety Group with a breakdown of type and service area along with summaries of any civil claims made. Some incidents are required to be reported to the HSE under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR). Over recent years the Council has reported very few incidents to the HSE each year. In 2024/25, two relatively minor reports have been made under RIDDOR.

The annual health and safety cycle was reintroduced to assist managers to plan health and safety related tasks to assist them to achieve compliance within their teams. Compliance data will be reported to CLT in 2025/26 along with the Corporate Health and Safety Team workplan.



Human Resources

The Council has extensive employment policies, guidance, toolkits and procedures in place which are regularly reviewed, refreshed and promoted to ensure that they are relevant and used effectively by managers and staff. Policies reviewed in line with revisions to legislation within 2024/25 included Paid and Unpaid Leave Policy, Redundancy Policy, Redeployment Policy, Fostering Policy, Maternity/Paternity Policy, Probation Policy, Sickness Absence Policy and Dignity at Work Policy.

Oracle Fusion HR system continues to capture staff data from which dashboards are produced. The system monitors staff absence, leave, pay details and training. The system allows data for all staff to be monitored and managed effectively. The Council has a robust recruitment process in place and Oracle is used to manage/upload details from potential candidates. In addition, the Council procured a Strategic Recruitment Partner through OPUS People Solutions to support the recruitment of temporary and permanent staff. This enables managers to source suitable temporary staff for occasions such as absences, project demands, and on occasion support permanent recruitment solutions, and ensures teams are fully resourced to deliver on the Council's corporate objectives through Our Direction and its People Strategy.

The **"My Conversation" performance framework** for managing performance and personal development was refined and relaunched in Quarter 2 of 2024/25. This initiative aims to foster meaningful, ongoing dialogues between managers and their team members to enhance individual and organisational performance. The strategy emphasises setting clear, achievable objectives and recognising individual's contributions to the Council's Strategic Plan. It integrates principles of diversity and inclusion to create an equitable workplace and underscores the importance of regular feedback, personal growth, and well-being. The document also details the "My Conversation Path," a tool for self-evaluation and development planning, and provides various resources and guidelines for effective performance management, including setting SMART objectives and exploring different learning and development interventions.

People Strategy: A new Organisational Development Lead role was introduced in Quarter 4 of 2024/25 to oversee and assist with implementation of the People Strategy. The new People Strategy (2024-2028) was launched in February 2024, guiding every aspect of the Council's relationship with its people. The strategy ensures that the Council attracts, develops, and retains talented individuals to deliver the best possible outcomes for its communities and stakeholders. In developing this brand-new strategy, the Council aims to provide the best possible environment for its workforce between now and 2028.

The People Strategy has two strategic themes with clear key priorities, along with actions to be achieved within the next four years. There is an ambitious four-year action plan linked to the People Strategy.

THEME 1: PEOPLE



Wellbeing



Ways of Working



Tools and
Resources



Recruitment
and Retention



Connectivity

THEME 2: CULTURE



Values



Communication



Reputation



Relationships



Consistency

The Council also has five core embedded staff values which lay the foundation for the way its people work, engendering a common purpose that everyone understands, buys into and embodies in all they do.



Transforming the
future with you in mind



Honest and clear
in all we do



Believing in who we
are, what we do
and where we live.



Whoever we work
with, we work as
one team



Delivering outstanding
services, smartly and
economically

Corporate learning and development is in place to ensure officers have the appropriate skills and training in order to carry out their roles. The Council's training programme has also been developed to align to the themes identified in the Strategic Plan and the People Strategy. A Corporate Induction Session takes place for all new staff and is accompanied by a thorough Induction Programme.

The Council continues to support the apprenticeship scheme and is committed to both the recruitment of new start apprentices and maximising the use of the apprenticeship levy to upskill existing staff and 'grow our own' particularly in positions and areas where recruitment has been difficult.

In 2024/25, the Council had 9 new start apprenticeships, i.e., employees that have been appointed as 'Apprentices' to complete an apprenticeship qualification. However, including these 9, there are 60 employees undertaking apprenticeship qualifications from Level 2 – 7. The Council has been employing apprenticeships in group cohorts since 2012, and 60 current employees were new start apprentices who are still in the organisation since completing their apprenticeship.

To ensure the wellbeing of its staff, the Council regularly conducts staff surveys and evaluates the results. The most recent engagement survey, conducted in Quarter 3 of 2024/25, achieved a 71% completion rate, reflecting a 16% increase from 2022 and indicating high engagement. Following a comprehensive analysis, the outcomes were reported to the Corporate Leadership Team. The data from this survey is being utilised in the Service Review exercise and to inform future training and development planning.

In line with the People Strategy, it was recognised that the Council needed to invest in a dedicated wellbeing role to ensure it could deliver its objective of prioritising the health and wellbeing of its employees. In September 2024, a Workforce Health and Wellbeing Advisor was appointed into the HR team to drive this agenda. One of the main priorities was to develop a Wellbeing Strategy and action plan to ensure the Council is consistent in its approach across all levels and service areas. Through focusing on the four main areas of wellbeing, physical, mental, social and financial, positive working environments can be created where employees can thrive in an open and supportive culture, having a direct impact on absence, retention and employee engagement rates.

Under legislation that came into force in October 2024, there is an increased duty placed on employers to take all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace, as defined in the Equality Act 2010. The Council now has a legal obligation to take proactive measures to prevent sexual harassment in the course of its employment and by third parties, either at work, off site, outside work such as work-related social functions, in person, or online.

The Anti-Racism Charter Action Plan outlines a comprehensive approach to fostering an inclusive and anti-racist environment within the Council and its community. Key actions include championing a racially diverse workforce, challenging racism through mandatory training, and supporting staff wellbeing. The Council has developed and regularly reviews its Equality and Diversity Policy, ensuring it reflects community diversity and includes anti-racism commitments. Initiatives such as unconscious bias training, robust equality impact assessments, and monitoring ethnicity pay gaps are integral to the plan. Additionally, the Council promotes solidarity through communication and engagement, actively stands against racism, and provides support facilities for staff experiencing racism. This plan demonstrates the Council's commitment to being anti-racist in all its actions and decisions.

Recruitment and Retention

The People Strategy 2024-2028 was launched in January 2024 following wide-ranging discussions and consultation with staff. This is a refreshed approach to guide every aspect of the organisation's relationship with its people, ensuring that the Council attracts, develops and retains talented people to deliver the best possible outcomes for its communities and stakeholders. The People Strategy also identifies 'recruitment and retention' as a key priority within its people theme and there is an action plan in place. In 2024/25, targeted advertising was introduced through Opus, the Council's recruitment partners, and exit interviews became compulsory which capture reasons why people leave the Council's employment. In 2025/26, there will be a branding launch for recruitment to create a positive image of the Council as an employer which will be used in all recruitment initiatives.

Recruitment and retention of staff is a risk on the Council's Corporate Risk Register and CLT is continuing to work to find suitable solutions to those particularly specialist areas where positions are difficult to recruit such as in Building Control and Environmental Health. In 2024/25 the Council's Pay and Reward Strategy for hard to fill posts was reviewed and new initiatives implemented to ensure recruitment and retention of key staff.

Other initiatives progressed in 2024/25

Armed Forces and Reservists Policy

The Council has introduced an Armed Forces and Reservists Policy to support Veterans, Reservists and their families during their employment with us and any potential deployments. This is in line with the pledges and commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant. In addition, the Council offer paid leave days specifically for Reservists to undertake their duties and commitments outside the Council.

Level 3 Certified Disability Confident Leader status

During 2024, the Council achieved Level 3 Certified Disability Confident Leader status. The scheme helps to support disabled employees, open the doors to new talent and increase employee retention.

Information Technology and Data

Digital technology can transform the way we work and live; the Council uses technology to make services efficient and easily accessible to all, without excluding those who cannot use digital means of communication themselves.

Key Performance Indicators monitor the robustness and effectiveness of the digital services the Council has in place, both from an internal perspective to meet the needs of the authority and externally to meet the needs of its customers and district. An extensive digital work programme is in place to deliver improvements to ensure technology remains relevant and the IT environment is protected and governed appropriately, including ensuring appropriate protection for our digital assets and data.

A Digital Strategy states the Council's approach to managing the priorities and is published on its website and intranet. Demand for data and insight continues to be a key focus for the Council along with ensuring we are robust in terms of cyber security and our Digital platform. Other key areas of focus for our Digital Work Plan include key service improvements and customer experience enhancements.

CYBER SECURITY

To ensure our ICT infrastructure performs to a high standard and is secure and well protected, we complete the following checks and are members of the following organisations:

- 24 x 7 Security Information and Event Monitoring
- Annual IT Health Check (National Cyber Security Centre approved)
- Cyber Assessment Framework - LGA Cyber360 Review
- Cyber Resiliency - Incident Response Service
- Cyber Security Information Sharing Partnership member
- East of England Warning, Advice and Reporting Point member
- Education - Phishing exercises
- Monthly network vulnerability scans
- Monthly patching
- National Cyber Security Centre Mail Check
- National Cyber Security Centre Protective DNS
- National Cyber Security Centre Web Check
- PCIDSS Compliance

There have been 0 cyber security breaches in 2024/25, and 0 security breaches in previous years

Companies

East Suffolk Holdings Limited is wholly owned by the Council and is the sole shareholder in four subsidiary companies:

- East Suffolk Services Limited (ESSL)
- East Suffolk Property Investments Limited
- East Suffolk Property Developments Limited
- East Suffolk Construction Services Limited

ESSL took over services from the Norse joint venture from 1 July 2023 and is currently the only company actively trading.

A Shareholder Reference Group (SRG), as a committee of Cabinet, performs the Council's role as shareholder/owner of its group of companies and exercises the Council's rights under the Articles of each company and under the Shareholder Agreement, except for any rights reserved to Cabinet or Full Council. The decisions of the Shareholder Reference Group are subject to 'call in' by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members of the Council may attend meetings of the SRG and may ask questions with the permission of the person presiding.

The Shareholder Representative is the Chair of the SRG. They act as a two-way channel of communication between the Directors of the company and the SRG. The day-to-day operation of the companies is the responsibility of the Directors of the company.

The SRG meets quarterly from September 2023. The Council also meets with ESSL as part of the Strategic Operational Performance Group which meets bi-monthly. This arrangement allows the Council and the company to focus on operational and strategic matters of performance and governance.

In February/March 2025 Local Partnerships provided a nine-day consultation funded by a Local Government Association grant under the Intensive Transformation Support scheme. The review assessed the current ways of working between the Council and ESSL, including the role of SRG.

Freeport East

The Council is the Accountable Body for Freeport East, overseeing the proper governance and administration of financial affairs within the Freeport, including managing grant payments and business rates, monitoring and reporting against the use of funding, managing financial risk and fraud, upholding procurement practices in relation to public sector procurement, and providing assurance to Government that Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) seed capital expenditure proposals have been subject to appropriate levels of scrutiny.

Freeport East Limited was incorporated on 6 December 2022. The Council is a Member of Freeport East Limited with the right to appoint a Director. There are governance controls in the Articles of Association and Members Agreement. For example, any decision of the Directors must be taken collectively/unanimously, the Council's Director must be in attendance for Board meetings to be quorate, and Freeport East's Business Plan requires approval by the Board. The Council's Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer are entitled to receive notice of, attend and speak at Board meetings as observers.

A programme-wide subsidy scheme is in place for Freeports in England, covering seed capital, business rates relief, and the four HMRC reliefs. This means that, for eligible seed capital and business rates subsidy awards, the Council will not need to develop its own control principles assessments or make referrals to the Competition and Markets Authority.

As the Accountable Body, the Council is subject to an annual assurance review by MHCLG. The purpose of which is to secure assurance to MHCLG that the Accountable Body has all the requisite checks and balances in place to ensure satisfactory:

- Governance, Risk and Transparency Processes
- Scrutiny and Counter-Fraud Measures
- Procurement and Expenditure
- Subsidy Control

External Assurance

External Audit

The Council's auditors, Ernst & Young LLP (EY), independently audit the Council and provide an opinion on the truth and fairness the financial statements, the Council's use of resources and providing value for money in the way services are delivered. In reaching an opinion, EY take account of statutory requirements, national standards, their own audit work and the reports of Internal Audit.

The Finance team meet the statutory publication date for the annual draft statement of Accounts. The draft Statement of Accounts for 2023/24 were published on the Council's website by the statutory deadline of 31 May 2024 and presented to the Audit and Governance Committee on 8 July 2024.

Due to the national backlog in the local audit system the Council's Statement of Accounts for 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24 have all received disclaimed opinions due to the external audits not being fully completed. The audit opinion for 2021/22 and 2022/23 was issued by the statutory backstop date of 13 December 2024 and considered by the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 9 December 2024. The Audit opinion for 2023/24 was reported to the Audit & Governance Committee on 17 February 2025, and by the statutory backstop date of 28 February 2025.

Value For Money – The external auditors produced a Value for Money report covering two financial years, 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2023. The non-compliance with the rent standard impacted their assessment for 2021/22 but did not identify any significant weaknesses against their assessment criteria for 2022/23. Based on the work performed, the Council had proper arrangements in place in 2021/22 and 2022/23 to enable it to plan and manage its resources to ensure that it can continue to deliver its services. The Value for Money report for 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 identified no risks of significant weakness in arrangements.

Housing External Assurances

Regulator of Social Housing:

The Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) confirmed that an independent audit of housing compliance is required. This has now been completed and shared with the RSH. It showed that whilst the stock is compliant, there are issues with the ICT systems being used and improvements need to be made to provide greater assurance.

Rent and Service Charges:

Following an external audit of housing charges by David Tolson Partnership in 2022 and 2023 all Housing tenants have been paying the correct rent charges since 3 April 2023. Using data from the audit a programme of refunds to tenants has commenced which is correcting historical overpayments of rent and a service charge for heating systems

Keystone Improvement Project:

A Keystone expert has supported Housing to implement a new Servicing and Inspections module for cyclical compliance, and to undertake some data cleansing. A recent review of Keystone and compliance data, has identified that there are specific issues with Keystone which are contributing to the decision to self-refer to the RSH. An improvement plan has been formulated and a key activity in the plan will be to replace Keystone with a system that delivers effective management of compliance.

Compliance capability in Housing:

A requirement for the removal of the RSH Regulatory Notice is an independent audit of the compliance capability in the Council's Housing by an expert third party. A scoping document for the audit has been drafted and shared with the RSH in early April 2024 for feedback. Procurement of an Auditor will follow. The external review is now complete and specific concerns were identified relating to management information system. Alongside this review, there has been further investigations which have led to concerns relating to the ESC Decent Homes compliance rate at 50% which will mean that ESC will be self-referring to the RSH on the new findings and therefore the Regulatory Notice will not be lifted in the timeline previously expected.

HRA Business Plan:

Housing Finance Associates supported the Council to review the 30-year HRA Business Plan, and the output was incorporated into budget setting and planning.

Health check of Housing Maintenance Service:

External consultants carried out a health-check of the housing maintenance service and following their recommendations an overarching improvement plan was implemented. A number of actions were identified and improvement work is ongoing:

- Update the HRA Asset Management Strategy. A new Asset Management Strategy will be published in November 2025.
- Develop a new Housing Logistics Hub at Barnards Way, Lowestoft. A proposal will be submitted to Cabinet in July 2025.
- Develop a clear asset information management protocol and engage with staff to define a business-critical data set, its owners and mechanisms to maintain the information. The service is in the process of procuring a new housing asset management system.
- Implementation of Totalmobile for the in-house repairs and maintenance team. Following a recent healthcheck of the system, a full implementation plan is being developed to deliver this objective.
- Provide ad-hoc advice related to the successful, safe and affordable delivery of housing asset management and repairs to the Council. Aimed to provide best practice and knowledge sharing from across the housing sector to inform service improvement and operational efficiency. This will be set out in the new Asset Management Strategy.

CORPORATE CAPACITY

The Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) has continued to meet in a structured way three times each month and there have been no material changes to the CLT Charter following a review in November 2024.

The changes to the team implemented in March 2024, following a review of CLT, have worked well and CLT has strengthened its role as leaders of the organisation by investing time in a facilitated session using the Insights Discovery model to build further on skills around communication, collaboration and being more adaptable to the situations and people around them. This took place in November 2024 and the Model has been used frequently since.

Whilst corporate capacity and prioritisation is an ongoing consideration for CLT, it has been brought to the fore following publication of the English Devolution White Paper by HM Government on 16 December 2024 and Suffolk's subsequent inclusion on the Devolution Priority Programme. As a result, the Council (along with all councils in Suffolk) has been working on developing proposals for Local Government Reorganisation in Suffolk with new organisations coming into effect from 1 April 2028. CLT has been working closely with the Council's Administration on the priorities and legacy that we want for East Suffolk and CLT is supporting this by ensuring that the right capacity is in place to support delivery of these priorities.

In January 2025, the Council created the Corporate Projects Programme Board to improve project governance, streamline decision-making and improve corporate oversight of reputationally and financially significant projects across multiple service areas. The Board's role is to ensure strategic alignment with 'Our Direction 2028' so that all new projects and programmes align with the Council's corporate plan and that resources are allocated based on priority, impact, available financial resources and other corporate needs. The Board has a number of aims but specifically, in relation to corporate capacity, it carries out the following functions:

-  Prevents duplication and enhances cross service working to improve financial efficiencies and address staff resource.
-  Facilitates an avenue for new project ideas to come forward which are in line with all other Council constraints (financial, capacity and conflicting priorities).
-  Continually reviews the Capital Programme as a whole to assist with the prioritisation of resources (human resources as well as financial resources).
-  Ensures alignment between the Council's corporate processes, resources, culture, systems and the strategic ambitions of the Administration.

Following formation of the East Suffolk Leadership Forum in November 2023, this group of senior officers has continued to meet quarterly with CLT and, as a result, it has built a strong, collaborative leadership culture with the capacity to adapt to change. This leadership and management cohort provides a focus for future planning and organisational design and a sub-group of seniors officers have been working on 'Services in Place' since October 2024 with the aim of identifying ways to improve the join up of service delivery in place to make the Council more efficient and effective and easier to do business with.

GOVERNANCE ACTION PLAN

In arriving at the areas to address during 2024/25, the Council has been informed by the review of the effectiveness of the governance framework within the Council arising from last year's reports, by the outcomes of internal and external review bodies that report on the Council's performance to date, by undertaking a gap analysis of the seven core principles that underpin delivering good governance in local government, and by consulting Members. Outstanding actions from previous reports along with actions identified in 2024/25 are in the following areas:

Outstanding Actions from previous reports

AGS Action	Issues/Challenges Identified	Progress 2024/25
Housing Regulation	Breach of the Rent Standard and the 'Home' Consumer Standard.	<p>Following report to Full Council in January 2023, an independent Housing Governance Review reported to Audit and Governance Committee in July 2023. Governance recommendations for whole Council as well as Housing specifically adopted.</p> <p>The Council is now compliant with the RSH "Rent Standard" and will confirm this with the RSH at the regular meeting in May 2025.</p> <p>There are a number of challenges that exist in relation to property compliance which will impact on the Council's ability to request that the RSH lift the Regulatory Notice. The Council has been liaising with the Regulator on these matters.</p> <p>Progress includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rent Standard: Since April 2023, ESC has been charging the correct levels of rent and currently we have completed 98.84% of the work required to correct overpayments and issue refunds. • Homes Standard: ESC has recruited a new team with responsibility for managing compliance and this is reflected in higher levels of KPI performance at a workstream level. <p>The next priority is to put in place a dedicated Compliance Management System that will ensure that there are controls, consistency of process, storage of all relevant documentation and accurate reporting of performance.</p>

AGS Action	Issues/Challenges Identified	Progress 2024/25
Philis Replacement System (PRS)	The Port Health software system, PHILIS, is now 10 years old and needs to be redesigned if it is to remain a leading piece of software for imported food control.	Cabinet approved the investment in PRS and agreed the project governance arrangements and the Project Initiation Document. Port Health ICT reorganisation is in progress and business analysis work commenced. Good progress is being made with successful migration to the Cloud and recruitment to key posts to enable delivery. The project was delayed due to implementation of Border Target Operating Model and a report was taken to Cabinet in October 2024 requesting additional funding to deliver Minimum Viable Product by July 2025. Funding agreed and on track for delivery.
Appointment of independent members of Audit and Governance Committee	To meet CIPFA guidance for local authorities to appoint two non-elected independent members attending Audit and Governance Committee.	A report was presented to Audit and Governance Committee on 24 March 2025 and the Committee's recommendation to make the appointments will be reported to Full Council in May 2025.
Complete Review of the Council's Constitution	Refresh of Constitution	A Constitution Review Working Group (CRWG) was created to carry out a full review of the Constitution adopted in 2019. In 2023/24, CRWG completed its review of Functions and Responsibilities, the Council Procedure Rules, Cabinet Procedure Rules and Committee Procedure Rules with proposed changes agreed by Full Council. In 2024/25, the CRWG reviewed the Contract Procedure Rules and Finance Procedure Rules, along with Officer Code of Conduct which were agreed by Full Council. The full review and revised Constitution will be reported to Full Council in May 2025.

New Actions identified in 2024/25

AGS Action	Issues/Challenges Identified	Context as at 31/3/2025
Implementation of a Full Artificial Intelligence (AI) Policy	Adaptation of AI guidelines or inclusion in ICT Security Policy.	AI Policy drafted and session arranged for CLT, Cabinet and senior leaders. Policy and guidance will then be developed. An additional role is currently going through job evaluation to enable us to take this forward with additional capacity and technical expertise.
Embed the Corporate Programme and Project Board (CPPB) throughout the organisation	Improve governance and control of major projects and programmes	A Corporate Programme Board was established in March 2025. During 2025/26 all corporate capital and revenue projects above £250K will be reported to the CPPB. It will also serve as the basis for oversight of the capital programme and agreement for new projects in line with availability of budget. Within this there are new measures for project compliance and assurance and a requisite for projects to be 'audit ready'. Projects are scrutinised based on level of risk and those out of tolerance will be escalated and discussed accordingly. The CPPB has a forward plan and all major projects will have to present their project at least once (in a deep dive) throughout the course of the year.
Implementation of actions associated with the Local Partnerships review of governance and internal actions of East Suffolk Services Limited (ESSL) governance arrangements	Review of ESSL governance by Local Partnerships	January to March 2025, Local Partnerships reviewed ESSL governance arrangements and made several recommendations which are under consideration. An action plan has been drafted and is being implemented.

AGS Action	Issues/Challenges Identified	Context as at 31/3/2025
Review of East Suffolk Services Limited (ESSL) financing arrangements in light of LGR	Review of ESSL financing arrangements	<p>November 2024 – Grant Thornton carried out a financial review of ESSL and related funding and financing proposals.</p> <p>March 2025 – ESSL financing arrangements discussed at Shareholder Reference Group</p> <p>April 2025 – Letter on ESSL financing arrangements received by ESC from Managing Director of ESSL</p> <p>May 2025 – Second stage of work has been commenced with Grant Thornton considering options for the council's LATCO in the context of LGR. The financial impacts of each option will be considered</p>
To commence the review of the Local Plan	Unable to meet Local Plan deliverables.	<p>Details of timetable for Local Plan preparation subject to information on new system from Government, more information to become available in early 2025/26. The Local Development Scheme was approved by Cabinet in March 2025.</p> <p>Planning reform - current uncertainty about the detail of the new planning system which Local Plan preparation is dependent on.</p>
Embed use of Opus for agency staff to address inconsistent use of agency staff for recruitment in some service areas across the Council	Corporately identified a need for improved governance and control of agency staff recruitment which was insufficient and had resulted in instances where Contract Procedure Rules were not met. Lack of control of spending on contracts.	<p>A significant review on how the Council uses agency staff for recruitment took place on 8 March 2024, due to no control on contract spend for agency staff. There were also instances where agency staff had been used by different service areas resulting in agencies being paid for multiple contracts exceeding thresholds in the contract procedure rules.</p> <p>Following the review Opus Agency was appointed for all recruitment to be implemented in April 2025. Training was delivered to managers on Opus Agency and guidance has been put in place.</p>

AGS Action	Issues/Challenges Identified	Context as at 31/3/2025
Review of ESC's Housing Stock to ensure meeting the Decent Home Standard	<p>A significant number of homes do not meet the Decent Homes Standard. There is an investment plan required to address the backlog and to ensure homes do not become non-decent in future.</p> <p>The key challenges in implementing the plan will be to ensure that there are sufficient contract management and contracting resources to deliver the works.</p>	<p>Following a meeting with RSH in May, officers met with Informal Cabinet and it was agreed that ESC will report these matters formally to the RSH as part of the self-referral process as required by the RSH. The formal notice will be issued and will be supported by an improvement plan which will set out the actions taken and improvement plan to remediate all concerns with category 1 hazards remediated as a critical priority. The revised anticipated timeline for ESC seeking the Regulatory Notice to be lifted is now being revised to the end of the calendar year.</p> <p>Working with colleagues in Finance, a fully costed, investment plan is being prepared which will set out the approach to addressing non decency in the existing stock and ensuring homes do not fall into non-decency going forward.</p> <p>In addition, a Compliance Management System will be implemented that will ensure that all reported health and safety hazards are tracked from the initial report through to successful remediation and any necessary aftercare in adherence to Awaab's Law which comes into Law in October 2025.</p>
Establishment of East Suffolk Citizens Panel	<p>New panel of residents to engage on key areas of the Council's work</p>	<p>Report to CLT and informal Cabinet to seek support for the concept.</p>
Emergency Planning – review all Service Business Continuity Plans to ensure they are fit for purpose in the event of IT loss	<p>Ensure plans are up to date and responses sufficient in the event of a major incident.</p>	<p>Meetings will be scheduled with all teams to discuss risk and action plans with a review of all business continuity plans focusing on IT loss, due to be completed September 2026. The Joint Emergency Partnership Unit will work with ESC on the development of these plans.</p>

AGS Action	Issues/Challenges Identified	Context as at 31/3/2025
Local Government Review – submit a ‘Case for Change’ Proposal for Local Government Reorganisation in Suffolk by 26 September 2025	<p>The Government invited all Councils in the Devolution Priority Programme Areas to submit a full proposal for local government reorganisation on 6 February 2025. Interim proposals were submitted in March.</p>	<p>Suffolk’s Borough and District Councils are working together to put together a proposal for multiple unitary councils in Suffolk. Suffolk County Council is putting together the case for a single unitary for Suffolk. KPMG have been appointed to provide expert and programme management support. Once the case for change is submitted, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government will make a decision on the preferred model.</p>
Devolution – Contribute to the establishment of a Norfolk and Suffolk Mayoral County Combined Authority (MCCA) for implementation in May 2026	<p>Suffolk is part of the Devolution Priority Programme working towards mayoral election and establishment of the MCCA in May 2026.</p>	<p>Councils in Suffolk are working together to implement the MCCA for Norfolk and Suffolk. Suffolk County Council are leading this work and will be constituent members of the inaugural MCCA, being replaced by Unitary Councils once they are established in April 2028. The Strategic Director for Housing and Economic Development sits on the Suffolk Devolution Steering Group and will lead East Suffolk’s contribution to the establishment of the MCCA working with officers and Members across the Council.</p>
Full compliance with CIPFA guidance changes in 2025/26	<p>Ensure that Council is fully compliant with guidance within the CIPFA addendum entitled ‘Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework’ issued in May 2025.</p>	<p>Work will take place before the publication of the AGS for 2025/26 in line with revised CIPFA guidance issued in 2025.</p>

Completed Actions:

AGS Action (Completed)	Issues/Challenges Identified	Progress as at 2024/25
Subsidy Control Compliance and Reporting	Need to ensure ESC wide compliance with new post-January 2023 UK Subsidy Control (formerly State Aid) regime.	External training was provided by Birkett's Solicitors to Corporate Leadership Team and other key officers on 10 January 2024. This training provided a high-level awareness of the new Subsidy Control Regime. A new Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities programme-wide subsidy scheme for Freeports was confirmed in April 2024.
Budget and Financial Challenges	To strengthen the budget strategy and ensuring a sustainable MTFS to address forecast budget gaps.	In 2024/25 the frequency of budget discussions with Corporate Leadership Team and Members increased and commenced earlier in the process. A new approach was taken to the whole budget sessions with administration. There was greater focus on the priorities of the Strategic Direction. Finance held additional training sessions with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to support the Committee's knowledge and understanding of the budget build process.
Strengthen approach to development and management of Capital Programme, Asset Management and Major Programmes	Ensure appropriate governance relating to major programmes and projects, development and funding of the Capital Programmes for the Council and the Housing Revenue Account.	In May 2024, the terms of reference for the Strategic Property Group were reviewed and updated to strengthen the objectives and effectiveness of the group. A Corporate Programme Project Board was established in March 2025. During the year governance of key projects have been reviewed and strengthen where considered necessary.

AGS Action (Completed)	Issues/Challenges Identified	Progress as at 2024/25
Introduction of Border Target Operating Model (BTOM) for Port Health Services	Uncertainty due to introduction and what new target operating system will look like in future.	A report was approved at Cabinet on 5 September 2023 and Full Council on 27 September 2023 relating to staffing, funding and operational requirements which has been approved. In 2024 recruitment took place to expand the service to meet additional inspection requirements and recruitment for official veterinary surgeons is ongoing. The BTOM has been released and is in place income is being received.
Lack of access of data sharing from Department of Work and Pensions (DWP)	Challenges to obtain permission to use data for the LIFT (Low Income Family Tracker) system fully.	Approach and two years funding for LIFT has now been agreed at Suffolk level through the Collaborative Communities Board. This includes funding for the LIFT licence and staffing to deliver campaigns and support. Full access has now been agreed with DWP to personal data.
Coastal Partnership East (CPE) – awarding of Contracts	Potential concerns identified in the process of awarding a small number of contracts within the Coastal Partnership team in the years before 2023/24.	<p>An Internal Audit report identified deficiencies in relation to CPE's contracting arrangements in 2022/23. An agreed action plan, to address Internal Audit's recommendations was implemented and the matter was reported to Audit and Governance Committee on 8 July 2024 and Full Council on 25 September 2024.</p> <p>Following detailed work by the CPE Team, Finance, Legal and Procurement it was concluded based on the evidence reviewed that there was substantive compliance with the Contract and Finance Procedure Rules in the awarding of most of the CPE contracts.</p>
Emergency Planning – review all Service Business Continuity Plans to ensure they are fit for purpose	Ensure plans are up to date and responses sufficient in the event of a major incident.	<p>Business Continuity Plans are in place to deal with major incidents.</p> <p>An awareness presentation was delivered to the Senior Leadership Forum in Quarter 4 of 2024/25.</p>

AGS Action (Completed)	Issues/Challenges Identified	Progress as at 2024/25
Fire Safety (in housing stock)	The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2003 Notification of Fire Safety Deficiencies (NOD) issued by Suffolk Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) Since August 2021 four Notifications of Fire Safety Deficiencies (NOD) for St Peter's Court, Amy Court, Wesley House and Harry Chamberlain Court were received, which had	The Enforcement Notice served with respect to St Peters Court ceased to be in effect once the building was fully decanted in October 2024. The NOD's have now been removed. Email confirmation was received from SF&RS on 16/4/2025 following specific interventions and works being completed to reduce level of risk. Amy Court was deemed broadly compliant on 11/3/25; Wesley House was deemed Broadly Compliant on 11/09/23; Harry Chamberlain Court was deemed Broadly Compliant on 13/05/24; and St. Marys Flats deemed Broadly Compliant on 11/03/25.
Disclosure/ information sharing relating to taxi licensing	Data governance around Asset Management records and processes.	A new Asset Management Strategy was put in place in 2024/25 to cover how the Council manages its assets, a framework for assessing assets for acquisition, development and disposal and policies on each class of asset.
Deben Meadows Development, Melton	Potential Land Contamination Issues and possible legal action and claims from householders.	This matter was concluded in March 2024 following the Council engaging specialist consultants to review all the works undertaken.
Develop and implement Cyber 360 Action Plan	Ensure that threat of cyber incidents are effectively dealt with throughout the Council.	Following completion of the National Cyber Security Centre self-assessment and subsequent LGA 360 review to test our approach to cyber security, an action plan has been put in place to be delivered in 2024/25. Action plan developed and taken to CLT and will be ongoing due to the nature of cyber security.

AGS Action (Completed)	Issues/Challenges Identified	Progress as at 2024/25
Backlog of External Audit reviews	External assurance on the Council's Financial Statements, Financial health, governance arrangements and Value for Money is not being provided on a timely basis to stakeholders.	<p>The backlog of External Audit Reviews have been completed in 2024/25. A disclaimed opinion has been received and reported to Audit and Governance Committee for 2021/22, 2022/23 and 2023/24. This is due to external audit not carrying out a full audit to meet the statutory backstop dates. The backstop dates are the result of the national backlog in the local audit system and the action taken by MHCLG to address this.</p> <p>The external auditors also produced a Value for Money report covering two financial years, 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2023, and a separate report for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.</p>
Recovery of funding claim related to the Lowestoft Flood Barrier Project	Deliverability of the project due to a funding gap which has led to the closure of the project in January 2024.	Delays with payment of funding from the Environment Agency posed a risk to the Council's reserves in 2024/25, however the outstanding claim with the Council was received on 31 March 2025.
Improvement of quality and timeliness of management of commercial rents	Need to ensure accurate data in relation to the Council's assets in order to facilitate timely management action such as rent reviews.	<p>Significant work has been undertaken to ensure that the Asset Register is consistent with data held on the Council's Uniform system. Uniform has been populated with accurate and current lease information for all the Council's leased assets. Guidance notes for key procedures have been implemented.</p> <p>A project took place to roll out a new asset maintenance system, called Shire which provides a real time view of the maintenance and upkeep of the Council's assets.</p>

AGS Action (Completed)	Issues/Challenges Identified	Progress as at 2024/25
Implementation of New Contract Procedure Rules	Refresh of Constitution and to meet requirement of new Contract Procedure Rules.	New Contract Procedure Rules were approved by Full Council in July 2024. The rules are supported by a detailed guidance document which supports effective procurement by setting out detailed responsibilities, actions and minimum requirements for officers to undertake compliant procurement activities on behalf of the Council.
Introduce and ensure compliance with Procurement Regulations 2024	To ensure meeting the new Procurement Regulations 2024.	Procurement Regulations 2024 went live on 24 February 2025. Work took place to update internal processes, procedures and guidance. Training and briefings were delivered to CLT and relevant staff and included an Introduction to Procurement Act 2023 and How to Evaluate Tenders under the Procurement Act 2023.
Approve new Procurement Strategy	Refresh of Procurement Strategy including alignment to Our Direction 2028	The Council's Procurement Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 9 July 2024. An Action Plan has been drafted and will be put in place for delivery until 2028.
Put in place delivery and monitoring arrangements to achieve the ambitions set out in Our Direction 2028	Review and update processes to deliver Our Direction 2028	New service planning approach was developed in 2023/24. Outcome of this together with Cabinet prioritisations exercise informed the action plan. New Key Performance Indicator dashboards for the Strategic Plan were published in 2024. Regular reports are taken to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
Increase frequency of reporting Corporate Risk Report to Audit and Governance Committee	To increase frequency reporting of the Council's corporate risk report	Corporate Risk Report reported twice yearly to the Audit and Governance Committee, commenced in 2024/25.

Forward look on governance

An opportunity to identify where governance needs to change or develop to meet the future needs of the authority.

In the following tables 'Change to Governance' includes, for example, the establishment of new arrangements or legislation

Change to governance	Detail of change	Context
Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)	A move from a two-tier authority structure to a unitary structure by 2028.	<p>Government published an invitation to submit proposals for LGR in Suffolk on 6 February 2025. Initial proposals were submitted in March 2025 – a single unitary (submitted by Suffolk County Council) and multiple unitaries (2 or 3 – submitted by the District and Borough Councils collectively in Suffolk). Full business cases are to be submitted by September 2025.</p> <p>Suffolk District and Borough Councils are working together supported by KPMG. Service design workshops are being carried out between April and June 2025 and a Project Steering Group meets weekly. Community engagement and consultation will take place between mid-May and August 2025.</p> <p>LGR will present additional pressures on teams – in particular during the implementation stage. In order to manage this, CLT and Cabinet will be developing a series of annual plans leading up to 2028 which will ensure that the council has sufficient resources to deliver strategic priorities, LGR and business as usual activity.</p>
East Suffolk Services Limited (ESSL) – options under LGR	A review of options for the Council's company under the new unitary structure from 2028	Grant Thornton appointed to carry out an appraisal of three possible options. Due for delivery in May 2025

Change to governance	Detail of change	Context
Devolution	Lead for the Suffolk District and Boroughs regarding input / influence and support to the set-up of the Norfolk and Suffolk MCCA	<p>The English Devolution White Paper and the Devolution Priority Programme has seen Norfolk and Suffolk at the forefront of the development of the new Mayoral County Combined Authorities (MCCA). A consultation has been held by Central Government culminating on 13 April 2025. The results are awaited. The intention is for the Mayoral election and formation of the MCCA to take place in May 2026.</p> <p>Suffolk County Council are leading (in partnership with Norfolk County Council). Input from the Districts and Boroughs is essential to ensure it drives the best possible outcomes for the residents of Suffolk.</p>
Marmot Place programme	Two-year programme of work with the UCL Institute for Health Equity to establish East Suffolk as a Marmot Place	<p>Collection of data to inform a programme of work between June 2025 and June 2027.</p> <p>Secure involvement of internal colleagues and partners, including via the Community Partnership Board as the Steering Group</p>
New arrangements for ESC's newly formed Coastal Team following the dissolution of Coastal Partnership East	The new Coastal Management Team is commencing work on resetting its vision, objectives and resourcing needs. It will be considering appropriate governance arrangements and how best to align with other services to enable the team to deliver its objectives and meet with corporate priorities.	The partnership was dissolved on 31 March 2025 and the three respective partner authorities have since operated independently (subject to some sharing of staff and involvement in distinct programmes). This also times with a new Head of Energy Planning and Coastal Management starting in post.
NHS and Health Reform	Changes to the health system have a significant knock-on effect to local government and the services provided.	<p>Changes to the Department for Health and Social Care and the abolition of NHS England will see major changes to health policy in the UK.</p> <p>Cuts to Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) will mean changes in the local delivery of health services.</p>

Change to governance	Detail of change	Context
Housing targets and planning Reform – Planning and Infrastructure Bill	<p>Current uncertainty about the detail of the new planning system which Local Plan preparation is dependent on</p>	<p>A new standard method for housing need was introduced in December 2024. For East Suffolk this is 1,644 dwellings per year, an increase of 82% from the previous 905 dwellings per year. The Council adopted an interim timetable for work on an East Suffolk Local Plan to begin in 2025, with adoption in 2029.</p> <p>Reforms to the plan-making system are being introduced by Government, planned for 2025. This will involve National Development Management Policies, a 30-month Local Plan preparation timeframe, process changes such as introduction of Gateway stages, templates for certain elements of plan preparation, and Local Plans and their preparation to be more digital (including data standards). Secondary legislation, policy and guidance are needed, and it is anticipated consultation on elements will take place before being introduced.</p> <p>The Planning and Infrastructure Bill sets out the legislative basis for Spatial Development Strategies, which will be prepared by the new Mayoral Combined Authority in Suffolk and Norfolk, when established. This is a new level of strategic planning which will address strategic issues, informing local Plans. There is uncertainty as to how this will relate to the next round of Local Plans which begin preparation prior to an SDS being in place, and what any transitional measures may be. Local Government Reorganisation also presents uncertainties and risks as a new Local Plan would not be adopted until after reorganisation. Aligned working with other Suffolk authorities on our next Local Plans is likely to assist.</p>
Renters Reform Act	<p>New legislation to improve the quality of private sector rented accommodation.</p>	<p>The Renters Rights Bill, will be new legislation to improve the quality of the PRS and also ensure that tenants have more protection from eviction.</p> <p>The Council will have new duties to enforce and issues appropriate financial penalties. MHCLG have indicated that 'New Burdens Funding' will be provided due to the significant increase in workload. Dates are still to be confirmed.</p>