

Annual Governance Statement for the Financial Year 2025/26

Scope:	Welwyn Hatfield conducts a review of its system of internal control, and prepares and publishes an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) in each financial year.
Effective Date:	June 2026
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Statement Owned by:	Gavin Ramtohal, Assistant Director (Legal and Governance)
Statute:	<i>i) Local Government Act 1972;</i> <i>ii) Local Government Act 1999</i> <i>iii) Localist Act 2011</i> <i>iv) Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014</i> <i>v) Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015</i>
Related Policies & documents	Welwyn Hatfield Constitution Local Code of Governance – Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council

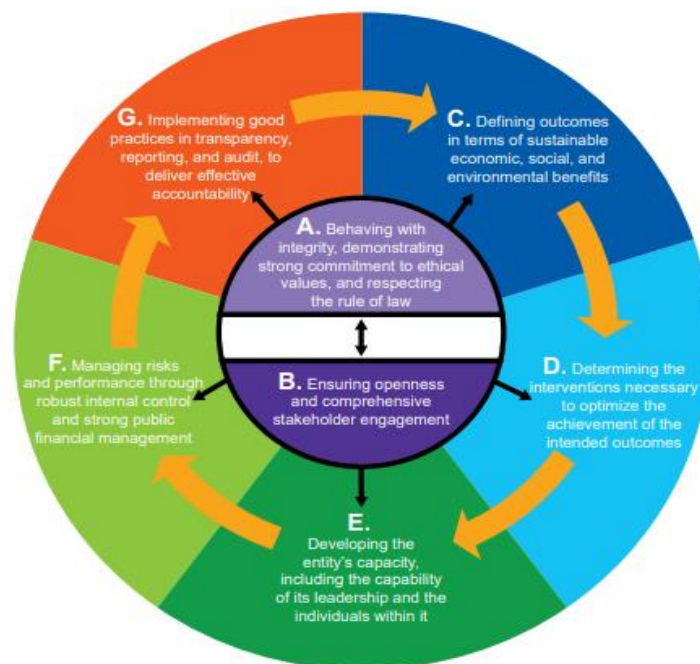
1 Scope

- 1.1 Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (The Council) is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for. The Council has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 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.
- 1.2 The Council is responsible for ensuring arrangements are in place for the good governance of its affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of its functions including risk management.
- 1.3 The Council has adopted a Local Code of Governance which is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework Delivering Good Governance in Local Government 2016.
- 1.4 This statement explains how the Council has complied with the Code and how it meets the requirements of Regulation 6 of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 in relation to the review of the Council's internal control system and publication of a statement on internal control.

2 The Purpose of the Governance Framework

- 2.1 The governance framework, which has been in place for the financial year 2025/26, is made up of procedures and values which the Council is directed by, and how it engages with the community.
- 2.2 The governance framework is designed to reflect the principles set out in the Council's adopted [Local Code of Governance](#). The principles are shown below in **diagram 1**:

Diagram 1



3 The Council's Governance Arrangements

3.1 The Council operates a Leader and Cabinet style of political management. For the 2025/26 municipal year, the Cabinet was made up of seven Executive Members from the joint administration and the Leader of the Council. Each Executive Member of the Cabinet looks after a portfolio of services, working closely with the respective directors and heads of service.

3.2 The Cabinet for 2025/26 financial year is shown in the below table:

Position	Councillor	Areas of responsibility
Leader of the Council, Executive Member Planning	Councillor Rose Grewal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning Policy • Estates Management Scheme • Development Management • GIS • Regeneration • Building Control • Resilience (Emergency Planning) • Performance Reporting • Business Plan
Deputy Leader of the Council, Executive Member Environment	Councillor Sandreni Bonfante	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environment Services • Landscape and Ecology • Environmental Health • Parking and Playground • Neighbourhood and Enforcement • Street Wardens • Community Safety Partnership • CCTV
Executive Member Transformation and Climate Change	Councillor Max Holloway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Change • Safeguarding • Transformation
Executive Member Governance	Councillor Kieran Thorpe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elections • ICT Services • Governance Services • Digital and website • HR • Equality and Diversity • Member Development • Hackney Carriages • Licensing • Legal Services • Risk Management
Executive Member Housing	Councillor Gemma Moore	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planned Maintenance (Housing) • Repairs • Housing Options • Housing Development • Housing Allocations

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private Sector Housing • Independent Living • Income and Home Ownership • Quality Assurance • Building Services • Compliance
Executive Member Finances	Councillor Astrid Scott	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finance • Revenue and Benefits • Procurement • Internal Audit and Fraud
Executive Member Community and Leisure	Councillor Jane Quinton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Grant • GLL (Youth and sports Partnership) • Campus West • The Hive • Mill Green Museum and Roman Baths • Customer and Cemeteries • Comms • Marketing • Community Outreach

- 3.3 The [Constitution](#) sets out how the Council functions, how decisions are made and the procedures that are followed to ensure these are efficient, transparent, and accountable to the local community.
- 3.4 The Council's Committee structure is set out in **diagram 2**.
- 3.5 The Cabinet is supported by the Chief Executive and Executive Directors. The Council's Management Structure is set out below in **diagram 3**.
- 3.6 Cabinet members can take decisions using [Executive Member Decision Notices](#) (EMDN) which speed up the decision-making process where appropriate. EMDNs are published on the Council website and are subject to call-in.
- 3.7 The Senior Leadership Team is led by the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service), supported by Directors, the Monitoring Officer and the Human Resources & Organisational Development Manager.
- 3.8 Key performance indicators (KPI) are published on the Member Hub, and updates on progress and performance are provided to Cabinet Panels and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as appropriate.

Diagram 2

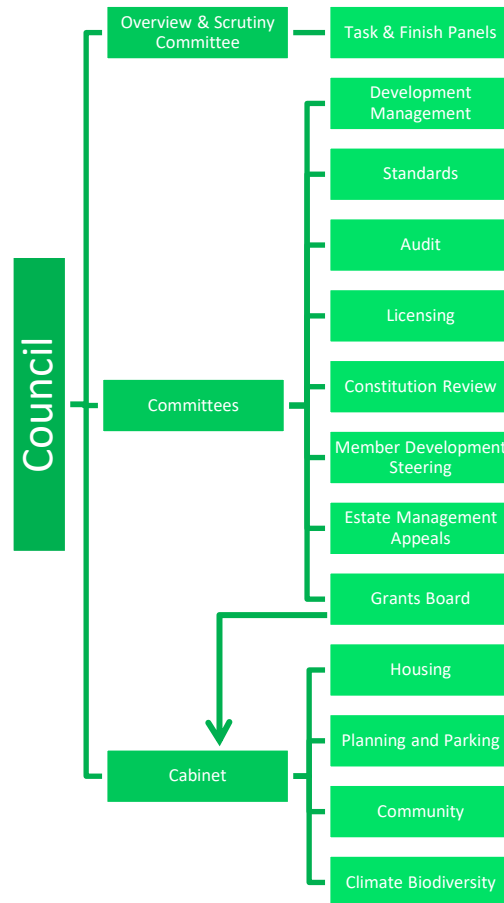
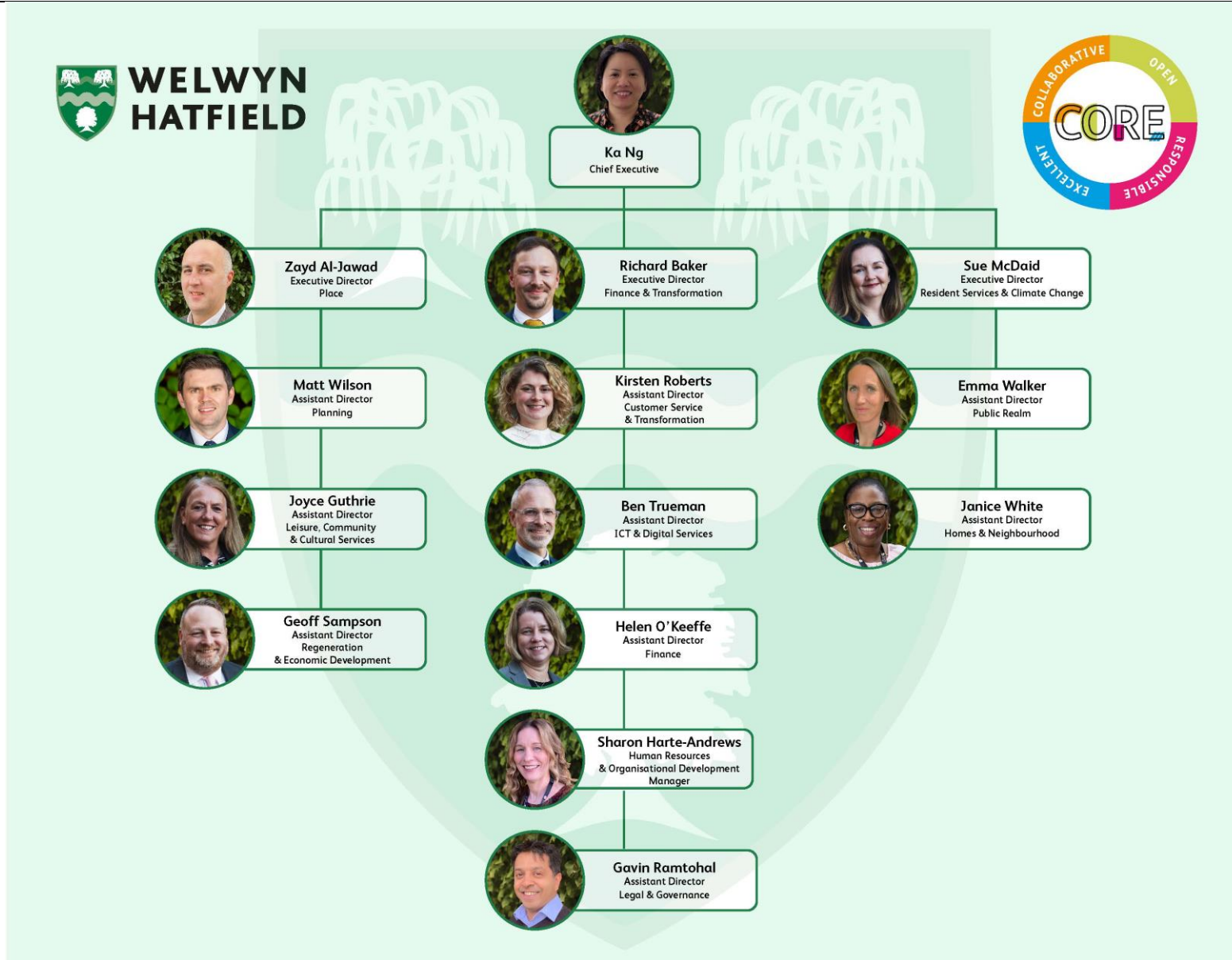


Diagram 3



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- 3.9 Internal governance arrangements are monitored by the Corporate Governance Group. The Corporate Governance Group is chaired by the Chief Executive and its membership includes the Monitoring Officer, the Deputy Monitoring Officer, the Section 151 Officer, the Deputy Section 151 Officer, Executive Directors, Human Resources and Organisational Development Manager, the Chair of the Operational Health and Safety Board, Shared Internal Audit Service, Shared Anti-fraud Service and representatives from Governance Services, including the Data Protection Officer. Key internal corporate groups report to the Group.
- 3.10 The Constitution Review Group considers the effectiveness of the Council arrangements set out in the constitution. The Constitution Review Group is chaired by the Leader of the Council and made up of councillors from all political groups. Some minor changes may be made by the Monitoring Officer using their delegated powers; or if the changes are more substantial, then changes will be taken to Full Council for approval.
- 3.11 The Forward Plan is published monthly to provide residents and members with notice of key decisions due to be taken.
- 3.12 Risk reports are reviewed periodically by the Audit Committee.

4 Review of Effectiveness

- 4.1 The Council is required to prepare an AGS to report publicly on the extent to which it complies with the principles of good governance. The following paragraphs set out the Council's assessment of the key elements of the governance framework for 2025/26 using the CIPFA/SoLACE Delivering Good Governance framework to guide this review.

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

- 4.2 The Council's political and managerial leadership take the lead in a culture that encourages openness, support and respect.
- 4.3 The [Constitution](#) sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures that are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to the local community. The Constitution is available on the Council's website.
- 4.4 The Constitution sets out how decisions are to be lawfully made. The Constitution contains the following key sections:
- Part 3 – Responsibilities for Functions
 - Part 4 – Rules of Procedures

These documents set the framework for the conduct of the business of the Council, including delegated powers, financial regulations, and contract procedure rules.

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- 4.5 In relation to behaviour, the Constitution sets out the following key elements:
- The Code of Conduct for Members
 - The Officers Code of Conduct
 - The Protocol on Member/Officer Relations
- 4.6 The Council adopted the Local Government Association Model Councillor Code of Conduct (the Model Code), which was published in December 2020. All elected Members undertake that they will observe the Code of Conduct and receive training on it.
- 4.7 The Standards Committee is responsible for promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct by Members and Co-Opted Members and for advising and assisting Town and Parish Councils and their Councillors to maintain high standards of conduct within those councils. The Committee hears and determines complaints about Members and Co-Opted Members referred to it by the Monitoring Officer. The Monitoring Officer carries overall responsibility for legal compliance with the Code. Breaches of these rules are dealt with under the Arrangements for dealing with complaints about the Code of Conduct for Councillors.
- 4.8 The Standards Committee is also responsible for arranging training for Members and Co-Opted Members on matters relating to the Members' Code of Conduct.
- 4.9 Members are required to register their interests in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and to register any changes to their interests within 28 days. In the circumstances set out within the Act and the Members Code of Conduct, Members are required to declare their interests at meetings.
- 4.10 The Employee Code of Conduct sets out the requirements of staff to abide by. Each employee is required to comply with the Employee Code of Conduct with further guidance available from senior managers. Breaches of these rules are dealt with under the Council's disciplinary procedures. Where the employee code of conduct is required to be updated, staff are required to sign the new code of conduct.
- 4.11 The [Whistleblowing Policy](#) contains an external and internal whistleblowing number and email address. The policy covers any malpractice or wrongdoing by any employee, contractor, supplier, consultant or partner of the Council in their work for the Council. A separate Whistleblowing Procedure is held internally to guide staff on how to handle a whistleblowing report.
- 4.12 The Council maintains an [Anti-Fraud & Corruption Policy](#) as well as an [Anti-Bribery Policy](#) and [Anti-Money Laundering Policy](#). These policies are regularly reviewed and approved by committees where necessary.
- Supporting principle B: Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement.**
- 4.13 The Council welcomes public participation in meetings as set out in the Council's Procedure Rules.
- 4.14 A schedule of council meetings is available on the Council's website.

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- 4.15 The Council uses Cabinet Panels to provide pre-decision scrutiny and engagement on key functions of the Council, such as parking, parking, housing and community services. These panels are political proportional, and membership is appointed by Cabinet. Members of the public are able to attend, and submit questions in line with the Constitution
- 4.16 The Council complies with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004 requirements. Information requests received by the Council are processed by Governance Services. The Council's approach is outlined in the [Information Request Policy](#).
- 4.17 In 2025, 936 Freedom of Information and Environmental Information Regulation requests were processed by the team; the average response time to requests was 12 working days and 95% of all requests were responded to within 20 working days. The Council publishes quarterly and annual performance statistics on the website, provides an annual report to Corporate Governance Group, and a weekly update to the Senior Leadership Team.
- 4.18 The Council complies with the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA) requirements when handling residents, partners, and customers' data, and maintains procedures to ensure compliance. The Council's approach to Data Protection is overseen by the [Data Protection](#) Officer. Annual Mandatory training for staff is provided via the Council's Learning Management System. Policies and procedures have been produced to support council staff on securely managing the data they handle, including the [Data Protection Policy](#). Data Protection and Information Governance training for Members is provided.
- 4.19 In 2025, 177 subject access requests and requests for personal information from third parties, such as the police, where a valid data protection exemption exists were received. The Council averagely responded with 7 calendar days and 99% of requests were responded to within the statutory deadline. Data Protection information relating to performance indicators, statistics and activity is provided to and reviewed by the Corporate Governance Group annually, and provided to the Senior Leadership Team
- 4.20 The Member Information Hub keeps all councillors informed on a wide range of issues so they can better serve their constituents. Supporting documents and guidance is uploaded to the Members Hub.
- 4.21 The Council facilities a Member Development Programme for members to receive training on areas identified by the Member Development Steering Group. All training sessions provided internally are uploaded to the Council's Learning Management System, MyLearn, for Councillors to access outside of the training session.
- 4.22 Residents can engage with the Council by email, telephone and digital platforms, including by the [have your say](#) webpage. Citizens can engage with their ward councillors at their monthly surgeries and via the preferred contact details highlighted on the [Council's website](#). Councillors' register of interests, terms of office, and committee membership are published on this webpage.
- 4.23 As a social housing landlord, the council is required to meet the requirements of the Consumer Standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing in accordance with 4.2 the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. A key part of the consumer standards is ensuring tenants and leaseholders have the opportunity to shape and influence the services delivered. One way in

which the council does this is through the Residents Panel. This panel is comprised of Council tenants and leaseholders, and provides independent scrutiny of housing services, reviews of performance information, reviews of and participation in housing policy formulation, and provides recommendations to strengthen service quality and customer experience. Members of the Residents' Panel also participate in the Cabinet Housing Panel, enabling resident priorities and feedback to influence pre-decision scrutiny.

- 4.24 The Council announced the [Transformation Strategy 2026-2028](#) in January 2026. The Strategy focuses on 6 key themes: Technology & Automation, Data & Performance, Culture & Workforce, Customer Experience & Channel Shift, Project Management & Service Improvement, and preparing for change, transition & ready for reorganisation.
- 4.25 Council meetings are accessible by webcasting, as well as in person, with meetings available to view on the council website for up to six months after the meeting has taken place.
- 4.26 The Council ensures that the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council website is [accessible](#) and continues to routinely improve accessibility. The Council tests the website for accessibility using SiteMorse weekly. The Council outlines its approach to website accessibility in the [accessibility statement](#).
- 4.27 An [Annual report](#) is published to inform stakeholders and service users of the previous year's achievements and outcomes.
- 4.28 The Council commit to ensuring any weaknesses in Internal and External Audit Reports are addressed.

Supporting principle C: Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable, economic, social and environmental benefits.

- 4.29 The Council recognises the long-term impact of its decisions and adopts a [Business plan](#) and an annual budget to support outcomes. Individual service areas develop their own service plans.
- 4.30 The Council will engage with other bodies on matters that may have a sustainable economic, social or environmental benefit to the borough such as Hertfordshire County Council, and East & North Hertfordshire Health Trust.
- 4.31 The Council agreed a new [Corporate Plan](#) for 2024-2026, which helped outline the council's vision and Corporate Plan going forward.
- 4.32 The [Medium-Term Financial Strategy and Financial Governance Framework](#) set out the Council's financial forecasts, risks, challenges and strategies for the period 2026/27–2029/30. This is reviewed annually and supports the Council's overall direction and provides details of financial strategies to deliver objectives. It is a crucial component of the council's strategic planning framework.
- 4.33 In January 2025 the then Cabinet adopted a [Transition to Net Zero Strategy](#), which was developed by the Climate Change Sub-group to progress towards net zero commitments at the Council by 2030 and the borough by 2050.

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- 4.34 The Council has approved a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 30 year business plan for 2026 – 2056. This will take effect from 1st April 2026 and will be subject to review in January 2027. The HRA provides an overview of the financial planning that supports the management of around 9,000 homes operated by the Council’s HRA (and around 1,500 leasehold properties).
- 4.35 The Council has a clear, published [Procurement and Commercial Improvement Strategy 2026-2028](#).

Supporting principle D: Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes.

- 4.36 Cabinet Members meet regularly with the Senior Leadership Team to discuss the strategic direction, plans and progress of the Council. Corporate targets are individually owned by the Council’s services teams and are performance managed. These are monitored and exception reported through quarterly meetings of an internal performance clinic attended by senior Members and officers.
- 4.37 Performance clinics also include a summary of financial and budgetary performance data for both capital and revenue spending. They review complaints data for all services, local public relations and media activity involving the Council. Performance information, audit, risk and finance information is used to identify any areas of concern and plan required interventions.
- 4.38 Key Decisions are monitored on a regular basis and are open to scrutiny. The Council’s [Forward Plan](#) provides the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) with proposed and recently made executive decisions for scrutiny. In June 2025, the OSC Members held a workshop and identified a number of areas for scrutiny as part of the Committee’s work programme for the year. All Members are also able to view Executive Member Decision Notices and Officer Delegated Decisions are published online. These arrangements are flexible enough to enable Members to intervene by way of the call-in procedure or the calling of extraordinary meetings at any point in the year.
- 4.39 Performance management systems set the objectives for the year for services and individual members of staff. The outcomes of these are regularly reviewed. The Council has a planned and agreed annual cycle of meetings.
- 4.40 Both the Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer have statutory powers of intervention and are members of the Senior Leadership Team.

Supporting principle E: Developing the organisation’s capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it.

- 4.41 The Head of Paid Service is responsible for the organisation of the Council’s staff.
- 4.42 Benchmarking exercises are undertaken comparing performance with other authorities. Reviews of structures are undertaken when required.
- 4.43 The Council considers collaborative working with other authorities and bodies to increase capacity and improve efficiency.

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- 4.44 Induction training on a range of topics for new members is provided after their appointment to the Council. Members have been able to utilise virtual training opportunities. This programme is overseen by the Member Development Steering Group.

Supporting principle F: Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management.

- 4.45 The Council has a Risk Management Policy and Strategy embedding risk management processes and procedures of the Council. Risk registers are maintained at both strategic and operational levels.
- 4.46 The Strategic and Operational Risk Registers are maintained on a corporate risk management system and are reviewed once every quarter to ensure that they reflect the risks facing the Council and ensure mitigation measures are in place. Strategic and operational risk information is taken to performance clinics, SLT and Audit Committee.
- 4.47 The Council has a robust budget setting process with the budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy agreed annually by the Council. A Budget Task and Finish Group is set up annually to scrutinise the budget proposals. Regular budget update reports are provided to the relevant committees. Treasury Management, Investment, and Capital Strategies are updated annually and approved by Full Council.
- 4.48 All Council expenditure is governed by Financial Regulations contained in [part 4h of the Constitution](#) which set out the rules and procedures for managing budgets and assuring appropriate stewardship of funds.
- 4.49 The Council's External auditors are required to produce an Annual Audit letter which is presented to the [Audit Committee](#) which contains the audit of the Council's financial statements; and an assessment of the Council's arrangements to achieve value for money in its use of resources.
- 4.50 The terms of reference for the [Audit Committee](#) can be found in Part 3a of the Constitution. To effectively discharge these responsibilities, the Committee may require any officer to attend meetings to receive explanations on any matter it is considering.
- 4.51 Internal audit services have been provided by the Hertfordshire [Shared Internal Audit Service](#) (SIAS). SIAS has undertaken a work programme approved by the Audit Committee and has compiled an annual report on the overall adequacy of the Council's internal control environment and highlights any issues which are judged to be relevant to the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement.
- 4.52 The Council has an [Anti-fraud and Anti-Corruption policy](#) in place that sets out its arrangements for dealing with fraud and corruption. The council's anti-fraud functions are undertaken by the [Shared Anti-fraud Service](#).
- 4.53 The Senior Leadership Team review key performance indicators monthly. These include management actions for indicators outside of the set target range.
- 4.54 Cabinet review key performance indicators quarterly. These include management actions for indicators outside of the set target range.

Supporting principle G: Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability.

- 4.55 The Council is committed to openness and publishes information [online](#) in accordance with the Local Government Transparency Code. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 also requires the council to adopt a Publication Scheme. Information is regularly published in line with the Council's publication schedule.
- 4.56 Committee reports are considered in open session (Part 1) with a minimal number of reports considered in closed session (Part 2), subject to the provisions of Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972. The report template contains sections for relevant implications such as legal and financial and must contain explanations of the reason behind decisions. Decision making framework and access to information are included in the Constitution.
- 4.57 All Committee agendas and background papers are published using Modern.Gov five clear days prior to the meeting.
- 4.58 Minutes are published within 10 days.
- 4.59 Cabinet decisions are taken in public apart from those containing Part 2 information.
- 4.60 [Executive and Officer Decision Notices](#) are published on the website.
- 4.61 [The member allowance scheme, register of interests, and the makeup of the Council](#) are published on the website.
- 4.62 The Council's accounts are published in accordance with the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, along with the statutory public inspection notice.
- 4.63 The Council complies with the reporting and transparency requirements of the Procurement Act 2023.
- 4.64 Reports are regularly produced for managers and Members on the Council's performance in responding to certain requests, such as those made under FOIA/EIR.
- 4.65 The Corporate Governance Group meets regularly and monitors Council compliance with the Governance Framework, including areas for improvement, as part of the AGS process.
- 4.66 A Policy and Procedure Register containing a record of all policies held across the organisation is routinely monitored by senior officers to ensure policies are kept up to date. A majority of policies that impact staff are available on the Council's intranet and a selection of policies that impact stakeholders are available on the [website](#).
- 4.67 A [whistleblowing policy](#) is available on the website, and an internal whistleblowing procedure is available on the intranet to inform staff how their information will be handled and confidentiality maintained.
- 4.68 Recommendations for corrective action made by external and internal audit are acted upon by the Council. An annual work plan is agreed with the External and Internal Auditors to test

the Council's response to major legislation and the soundness of its financial and governance processes.

5 Review and Assurance Mechanisms

Internal Audit - Annual Audit Coverage

- 5.1 The work of the SIAS assists the statutory officers in discharging their duties effectively, including providing updates on internal audits. An annual report is presented to the Audit Committee which includes an opinion on the overall adequacy, reliability, efficiency, compliancy and effectiveness of the Council's internal control environment, recommending improvements where necessary.

Internal Audit - 2025/26 Audit Report

- 5.2 The Client Audit Manager's Annual Internal Audit Report and Assurance Statement was reported to the Audit Committee in June 2025. The SIAS 2025-26 Internal Audit Plan Report is planned to be presented to the Audit Committee in June 2026.

The Council's External Auditors

- 5.3 External auditors provide an external review function through the audit of the annual accounts, assessment of value for money, and certification of grant claims. The Annual Audit and Inspection Letter is circulated to all Members and formally reported to the Audit Committee.

External reviews

- 5.4 The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman resolve complaints in the public sector and provides annual statistic on performance. No public interest reports were published.

Financial Management and Code

- 5.5 Strong financial management is an essential part of ensuring public sector finances are sustainable, and CIPFA launched a Financial Management Code to support this.
- 5.6 The Council's financial management arrangements are consistent with the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government.

Management Assurance Statement

- 5.7 Each Executive Director and all Assistant Directors are required to complete and submit a declaration of compliance, in the form of a Management Assurance Statement, at the end of each financial year to help inform the AGS.

6 Issues Identified in the previous years' progress

- 6.1 In the 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement the Council identified fi actions on which to make progress. The paragraphs below provide an update on those actions, and other governance issues that have occurred in 2025/26.

Action	Lead Officer(s)
Financial Sustainability	Executive Director (Finance and Transformation)
Local Government Reorganisation	Chief Executive
Damp and Mould	Executive Director (Resident and Climate Change)
Housing Repairs	Executive Director (Resident and Climate Change)
Voids	Executive Director (Resident and Climate Change)

Financial Sustainability

- 6.2 In the 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement (AGS), the Council raised that ongoing financial pressures (benefits subsidy, rising costs on the Housing Revenue Account and other matters) and medium-term funding uncertainty created a need to focus on medium term financial sustainability. The below actions have been implemented to account for this.
- 6.3 The Council updated its medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) in October 2025 and commenced its budget setting process.
- 6.4 Within the MTFS, a number of service pressures were included such as those on homelessness and benefits subsidy, to ensure that the savings target was set an appropriate level to meet these rising demands.
- 6.5 The budget proposals, which are a balanced budget for 2026/27, were approved by Full Council in February 2026. The new MTFS sets a savings target of £1.9m over the next three financial years. This is a significantly improved position from previous years, helped by the certainty provided by increased government funding and an indicative three year grant settlement.
- 6.6 Pressures have risen on the HRA as anticipated, and borrowing repayment now stands at 33 years (pre rent convergence announcements). In January 2026, the government announced rent convergence would apply from 2027, and this has led to an improved position with borrowing returning to within the 30 year business plan window.
- 6.7 Whilst the Council will need to continue to deliver savings, the risks around financial sustainability have now substantially reduced. This will continue to be actively monitored, as

service pressures, changes to grants, changes to legislation and other external factors can swiftly make material changes to the council's financial outlook.

Local Government Reorganisation

- 6.8 In the 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement (AGS), the Council raised that Local Government Reorganisation would impact staff recruitment and retention, decision-making such as the duration of contracts, and service provision following a transition to the new authority. The below updates reflect the present state of this raised governance issue.
- 6.9 The Council has worked in collaboration with other Hertfordshire local authorities to coordinate our response.
- 6.10 The Council has engaged in consultation with the local community to seek their views.
- 6.11 The Council has submitted a joint proposal to national government in conjunction with the rest of the Hertfordshire Local Authorities.
- 6.12 National government has engaged in statutory consultation with Hertfordshire residents in relation to the joint proposals submitted by Hertfordshire local authorities to national government.
- 6.13 Staff are routinely updated via quarterly staff briefings, routine email updates, and a LGR specific email has been set up for staff to raise questions to.
- 6.14 The Council has reviewed the Commercial and Procurement Strategy, which sets out the approach to contracts during the LGR. An entry has been included on the risk register in relation to contracts and how they will be affected by LGR.

Damp and Mould

- 6.15 In the 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement (AGS), the Council raised that the introduction of Awaab's law created new statutory deadlines relating to damp and mould that required an improvement plan to be created. The below actions have been implemented to account for this.
- 6.16 The Damp and Mould Improvement plan was implemented.
- 6.17 The Council revised the Damp and Mould Policy in 2025 to reflect Awaab's Law.
- 6.18 In October 2025, the Council implemented processes and procedures to tighten timescales in Phase 1 of Awaab's Law for investigating and remedying reported emergency and significant hazards including damp and mould cases.
- 6.19 In addition, the Council are commissioning additional contractors to assist with specialist damp and mould surveys and remedial works.

Housing Repairs

- 6.20 In the 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement (AGS), the Council raised that the new statutory housing repair deadlines would require significant resources and good management to ensure compliance. The below actions have been implemented to account for this.
- 6.21 The Council updated the Repairs and Maintenance policy.
- 6.22 The Council have commissioned dedicated legal support to assist with disrepair cases
- 6.23 The Council have commissioned additional contractors to increase capacity to assist with component replacements such as roofs, doors, windows, kitchens and bathrooms.
- 6.24 The Council have commissioned Savills to undertake remaining stock condition surveys and an investment plan.
- 6.25 The Council continue to seek to improve the repairs process and experience for tenants and will be developing an improvement plan for repairs.

Voids

- 6.26 In the 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement (AGS), the Council raised that void performance had not met set targets due to a number of factors, including more substantive works being undertaken when a property becomes void. The below actions have been implemented to account for this.
- 6.27 The Council has reviewed relevant processes, and an improvement plan was implemented to improve contractor voids performance.
- 6.28 An additional contractor was commissioned for voids refurbishments to increase capacity and turnaround times.
- 6.29 The Council monitors voids performances on a weekly and monthly basis. The actions taken have improved void performances, however it has been noted by officers that older cases may obscure this improvement in the statistics.
- 6.30 Officers estimate that void performances should return to standard levels by Q2 of 2026/27.

7 Issues identified in the reporting year & Action Plan 2025/26

- 7.1 The Corporate Governance Group have considered the actions required to respond and action any key areas identified for action over the next 12 months. These are set out below:

Action identified	Context and actions planned	Designated responsible officer
<p>Housing Repairs</p>	<p>The Council receive and process over 30,000 housing repair requests submitted by Council tenants every year. A portion of these reported cases can be easily resolved, however there are cases of structural or major works that may require several months or longer to resolve.</p> <p>A portion of these reported cases can lead to corporate complaints and Housing Ombudsman cases, which can increase reputational and/or financial risks.</p> <p>In some cases, the disrepair case becomes a legal process with prescribed processes and strict timescales to follow so must be managed closely.</p> <p>It is important to keep tenants updated with progress. Customer feedback is that sometimes the communication they receive about repairs and updates about dates of the works need improvement</p> <p>Improvement to timely communications and repair response times continues to be our focus.</p>	<p>Executive Director (Resident and Climate Change)</p>

	<p>The council will continue to monitor the performance of the repairs contractors</p> <p>We will be commissioning a legal services company to assist the Council when access to council homes cannot be achieved for routine checks and repairs</p>	
Awaab's Law & Damp and mould	<p>In October 2025, Awaab's Law was introduced. This created an obligation for social landlords to investigate and fix damp and mould (and other hazards) that present a significant risk of harm to tenants within set timescales.</p> <p>Following the introduction of Awaab's law, Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council conducted a review of existing policies and procedures. Officers confirmed that the first phase of implementing the obligations set by the legislation was a success. However, officers clarified that there remained a potential risk in not meeting these obligations.</p> <p>Officers highlighted that the preparation and implementation of processes and procedures is an area of high priority for the implementation of phase 2 and 3 of Awaab's Law, which will be implemented in 2026 and 2027.</p>	Executive Director (Resident and Climate Change)
Consumer Standards	<p>During 2024-25, the Housing Ombudsman investigated 5 complaints, escalated to them by residents (council tenants/leaseholders). No</p>	Assistant Director (Customer Services and Transformation)

	<p>Complaint Handling Failure Orders were received or cases of severe maladministration identified; however, it was noted the Council's overall maladministration rate was around 10% higher (86%) than the national maladministration rate for a landlord of a similar size and type. During the same period, the council complied with 100% of orders made.</p> <p>During 2025-26, the Council has seen a significant increase in the number of cases referred to and investigated by the Housing Ombudsman. This in line with national trends. At the end of Q3, the Council received 7 determinations, with evidence submitted for a further 19 cases. Most cases relate to responsive repairs.</p> <p>Whilst an increase in cases can be a sign of a larger issue with a service, the Council has also continued to raise the profile of the Housing Ombudsman through Residents' Panel, the Council's Tenant & Leaseholder newsletter, Community Edit and in complaint responses. The Housing Ombudsman has additionally been widely publishing the complaints process to tenants, increasing public awareness of the process.</p> <p>Housing Ombudsman determinations continue to identify patterns of maladministration, relating to communication, record keeping and complaints handling in some instances.</p>	
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	<p>A Complaints Improvement Plan has been implemented with the objective to reduce overall maladministration and create a positive complaint handling culture.</p> <p>Improvements have focused on improving response times, reporting of lessons learned and reporting to the Senior Management Team and Service Managers.</p> <p>Following an audit of how the Council manages Ombudsman cases, a process note has been drafted to make clearer the roles and responsibilities of staff involved in gathering evidence and undertaking case reviews.</p> <p>The Council has updated the complaints policy and complaints system, Jadu following the 2024 Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment submission and a compliance check by the Housing Ombudsman. This exercise will be repeated once feedback is received on the 2025 self-assessment.</p> <p>The Council's Improvement Plan is being reviewed and updated with a new set of actions to be implemented. This will incorporate the recommendations from a review conducted by the Residents' Panel into how the council approaches complaint handling. Actions include reviewing and updating all templates to improve communication. Further staff training on complaints is additionally being reviewed.</p>	
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	<p>Any feedback from the Housing Ombudsman's compliance review of the self-assessment will be considered alongside any updates in their guidance.</p>	
<p>SAFS Failure to Prevent Fraud Action Plan</p>	<p>The Council works in association with the Shared Anti-Fraud Services to detect, prevent, and enforce against fraud. In order to achieve this objective, a Failure to prevent fraud gap analysis work plan has been conducted.</p> <p>The Gap analysis has identified the following areas for action from the Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy and associated policies/procedures will be updated. • SAFS will assist the council with developing an I-Learn module for anti-fraud, bribery and corruption which will include input on ECCTA. This will communicate the council's position. • The Council will review whether CFIAS membership should be obtained to access the Internal Threat Data Base. 	<p>Executive Director (Finance and Transformation)</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council and SAFS will identify key risk areas and record these in the operational risk register with controls. • The Council will Implement the e-learning module created by SAFS. • Working with SAFS, explore the potential use of the AI Fraud Risk Assessment tool provided by the Cabinet Office. <p>The actions highlighted in the Gap Analysis will be reviewed and implemented in 2026/27</p>	
<p>Local Government Reorganisation</p>	<p>Following the English Devolution White Paper in December 2024, all the authorities in two-tier areas in England have been asked to reorganise in order to create new unitary authorities. This reorganisation may impact staff recruitment and retention, decision-making such as contracts, and service provision during the transition to the new authority.</p> <p>The Council has engaged in stakeholder consultation to seek views of the local community and submitted a</p>	<p>Chief Executive</p>

	<p>proposal of 4 unitary authorities to national government. The Council has engaged in statutory consultation with hertfordshire residents in relation to the joint proposal submitted by hertfordshire local authorities to national government.</p> <p>The Council is presently waiting for further feedback from national government and confirmation of how the new unitary authorities will be structured.</p>	
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8 Monitoring

Date effective:	June 2026
Brief summary of outcomes:	<p>The Council has provided assurance that governance processes are compliant with the values set out in the Local Code of Governance.</p> <p>In section 6, the Council provided an updated on the governance issues raised in 2024/25 Annual Governance Statement.</p> <p>In the 2026/27 Annual Governance Statement, the Council will review its handling of the raised governance issues in section 7 of the 2025/26 Annual Governance Statement.</p>
Staff consultation (teams):	Corporate Governance Group Senior Leadership Team
Author:	Kyle Houston, Governance Policy Officer

Signed

Chief Executive

Leader of the Council