



Annual Governance Statement 2023/2024

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 This statement provides an overview of how the Council's governance arrangements operate, including how they are reviewed annually to ensure they remain effective. Governance comprises the systems and processes, culture, and values by which the Council is directed and controlled, and through which it is accountable to, engages with and leads the community.
- 1.2 Governance is about how the Council ensures it is doing the right things, in the right way, for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner. Good governance leads to effective:
 - leadership and management;
 - performance and risk management;
 - stewardship of public money; and
 - public engagement and outcomes for our citizens and service users.
- 1.3 The Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, and that public money is properly accounted for, and provides value for money. The Council also 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.
- 1.4 The Council operates in a complex and constantly evolving financial, policy and legislative environment. The role, responsibilities and funding models of local government continue to be in a period of rapid transition. The borough continues to progress the delivery of its ambitious Let's Do It Strategy, with staff, residents and stakeholders across the Borough engaged in working towards the realisation of the vision. The Council's Corporate Plan sets out its priority actions for delivering the strategy for the borough.
- 1.5 The introduction of the new Integrated Care System (ICS) arrangements at Greater Manchester level in July 2022 continues to drive the next phase of health and social care integration. The operating model for Bury's health and social care integration – described as the Bury Integrated Care Partnership, is key to enabling further progress towards achievement of the priorities for the borough. These ambitions are for the borough to significantly improve health outcomes, tackle health inequalities and develop a financially and clinically sustainable system.
- 1.6 The changes taking place present both opportunities and challenges. Therefore, the Council must continue to engage in a broad

programme of innovation and reform work so that it can maintain services for residents which are efficient, effective and deliver value for money using available resources. This document explains the governance mechanisms in place to ensure appropriate oversight of this work.

2. Scope of Responsibility

- 2.1 Bury Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards. It is also responsible for ensuring that public money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Council also has a duty under the Local Government Act 1999 to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way its functions are exercised.
- 2.2 In discharging these responsibilities, the Council must put in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and effective exercise of its functions, which includes arrangements for the management of risk. The Council has adopted a Code of Corporate Governance which is consistent with the seven principles of the CIPFA /SOLACE framework “Delivering Good Governance in Local Government”.
- 2.3 The Council Constitution document sets out how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent, and accountable to local people. Some of these processes are required by law, while others are a matter for the Council to choose.

The following link takes you to the Bury Council Constitution.

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=350&MId=3768&Ver=4&Info=1>

The Council’s Constitution is reviewed annually to ensure it remains consistent with the principles of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers (CIPFA/SOLACE) joint framework for delivering good governance in local government. CIPFA issued an update to the Framework in 2016, which has informed the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement (AGS) from 2016/17 onwards. The Finance Regulations were not reviewed during 2023/24 however they will be reviewed in the first half of the 2024/25 financial year.

- 2.4 This Annual Governance Statement explains how the Council operates its governance framework. The AGS also meets the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 regulation 6(1)

which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an Annual Governance Statement (AGS).

- 2.5 The Council's financial management arrangements are consistent with a number of the governance requirements of the CIPFA statement on the role of the Chief Finance Officer in Local Government (2016). The Statement requires that the Chief Finance Officer should report directly to the Chief Executive and be a member of the leadership team, with a status at least equivalent to others. For the 2023/24 financial year The Director of Finance (and designated Section 151 Officer) was a joint appointment across both the Council and Bury Integrated Care Partnership (previously the CCG). They were a member of, and attended, the meetings of the Council Executive Team and the Locality Board which includes Executives from the Council and organisations across the Integrated Care Partnership. During 2023/24 the Council decided to have its own s.151 officer to be more focused on the Council's financial position and sustainability and appointed its s.151 officer for 2024/2025.
- 2.6 All statutory officers have access to the Chief Executive. The Council considers that its management arrangements are appropriate in the context of compliance with the CIPFA Statement.

3. The Purpose of the Governance Framework

- 3.1 The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture, and values by which the Council is directed and controlled, and through which it is accountable to, engages with and leads the community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of the borough's strategic objectives as set out in the Let's Do It strategy – to 2030, and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.
- 3.2 The system of internal control is a significant part of the framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve the Council's aims and objectives and can therefore not provide absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control identifies and prioritises risks; evaluates the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised; and aims to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

4. The Governance Framework

- 4.1 Corporate governance describes how organisations direct and control what they do. The Constitution is updated when appropriate, to ensure it reflects the Council's current governance arrangements.

- 4.2 The information below includes key examples of how the Council has adhered to its governance commitments set out in the Code and includes hyperlinks to sources of further information, which include more detail about how the Council has implemented its commitments. The Council has a broad range of strategies and policies in place, and therefore this is not intended to be an exhaustive list. More detail about particular areas of interest can be found on the Council's website <https://www.bury.gov.uk>.
- 4.3 There are seven core principles of good governance in the public sector, which are set out below (principles 'A' through to 'G'). Each core governance principle has a set of sub-principles beneath it with a description of how we meet those principles. Where applicable, hyperlinks are also provided where you can access more information about key examples of governance in action.

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

A1 - Behaving with Integrity

The Council's 'Let's Do It' strategy sets out the vision for Bury 2030. *Let's* is an acronym for a framework of core operating principles which is intended to drive a common mindset across all partners in Bury to:

- Operate **Locally** through a neighbourhood model which means truly understanding and engaging with local communities;
- Drive **Enterprise**;
- Work **Together** with inclusion at our core; and
- Take a **Strengths**-based approach.

Bury's goal is to achieve faster economic growth than the national average, with lower than national average levels of deprivation. Bury's goals include achieving:

- A better future for the children of the Borough
- A chance to feel more part of the Borough
- More green spaces and environmentally friendly and
- A better quality of life.

To support these ambitions the Council has focused on embedding its values and behaviors across the workforce this year, including through an immersive learning experience, the LET'S Do It Challenge, which has now been attended by over 1,400 staff. and a mandatory management development programme which has had over 300 attendees.

- **Local:** I'm proud to make a difference to people and communities in the neighbourhoods where they live.

- **Enterprise:** I strive to develop and improve; to play my part in delivering great solutions with the people of Bury.
- **Together:** My work is shaped in an inclusive way, with dignity, kindness and respect; developed together by those with lived experience.
- **Strengths:** I'm proud to build on the strengths of Bury people, my colleagues and myself to deliver.

These behaviors' represent how we should do things, how we should treat others, what we should say, and how we should say it.

Additionally, the Council expects all employees and Members to work within and abide by the Code of Conduct for Officers and the Code of Conduct for Members. This code of conduct has been reviewed and considered by standards and Council; an updated code was agreed by Council in March 2024. These codes can be found in the Bury Constitution.

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=350&MId=3768&Ver=4&Info=1>

- (Councillor Code of Conduct – section 31
- Employee Code of Conduct – section 32)

A2 - Demonstrating Strong Commitment to Ethical Values

The Standards Committee champion high standards of ethical governance from elected members and the Council as a whole. The Committee meets throughout the year.

A report is submitted to Annual Council each year regarding the Council Constitution. The report is prepared by the Monitoring Officer and details the work of the Standards Committee and any other governance changes.

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s35565/Constitution%20report.pdf>

A3 - Respecting the Rule of Law

The Council's Director of Law and Governance undertakes the role of Monitoring Officer. The Monitoring Officer ensures that Council decisions are taken in a lawful and fair way, correct procedures are followed, and that all applicable laws and regulations are complied with. The Director of Law is also responsible for reporting any actual or potential breaches of the law or maladministration to the Full Council and/or to the Cabinet, and for ensuring that procedures for recording and reporting key decisions are operating effectively.

The Director of Finance has statutory reporting duties in respect of unlawful and financially imprudent decision making.

The Council ensures that it complies with CIPFA's Statement on the Role of the Chief Finance Officer in Local Government (2016)

Details of the roles of each of these officers are set out in the Council Constitution. Section 11 – Article 8

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=350&MId=3768&Ver=4&Info=1>

Principle B - Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

B1 - Ensuring Openness

All Council and Committee meetings are held in public (other than in limited circumstances where consideration of confidential or exempt information means that the public are excluded), with agenda and reports available on the Council's website. Live-streamed webcasts of Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny, Planning and Licensing committee meetings are available online, as well as in an archive which can be accessed on-demand. <https://councilstream.com/burycouncil>

The Council publishes a forward plan, notices of key decisions to notify the public of the most significant decisions it is due to take, this is available online.

The Council also publishes its:

- Pay Policy Statement to support the Annual Budget
- Constitution
- Council Cabinet and Committee Reports
- Information on payments over £500
- Information on the senior structure and senior roles.

B2 - Engaging Comprehensively with Institutional Stakeholders

The Council has led the development of a ten-year vision for the borough which engages partners across the Borough in delivery – Team Bury. The Strategy defines the vision; outcome measures and delivery plan to achieve a challenging vision for the borough – to achieve: faster economic growth than the national average, with lower than national average levels of deprivation. To direct the Council's contribution to this strategy a Corporate Plan has been produced and quarterly monitoring reports are produced for the Council's Cabinet.

The Council leads wider stakeholder and community involvement in the Borough strategy through:

- The Team Bury Leadership Group, chaired by the Leader of the Council, which engages Chairs / Non-Executives leaders of key Bury Partnerships organisations in long term strategy, ideas and innovations.
- The Team Bury network of the Bury system at Chief Executive level, which aims to represent the wider partners in delivery of the strategy and the work of the Council.
- Engagement of health and care system leaders through the Bury Locality Board, which has a focus on the effective operation of the health and care system in Bury, and the Health and Wellbeing Board which clear remit around tackling health inequalities.

In addition to the above the Council is a constituent District of the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) which exercises several new powers devolved from the Central Government. The GMCA meetings are also held in the public domain and streamed live. The Leader of Bury Council is a constituent member of the GMCA. Members sit on GMCA committees representing Bury including Waste & recycling, Audit, Bee Network, GM Skills ([Agenda for Council on Wednesday, 24th May, 2023, 2.00 pm - Bury Council](#)), scrutiny committee represented by the leader of the Conservative Party, The leader co-chairs the Bee Network committee with the GM Mayor.

There is regular contact with the other nine constituent districts through the meetings of the GMCA. Lead Members and Officers feedback issues to the constituent districts on pertinent matters. Separately the Statutory Regulatory Officers for Finance and Monitoring Officer of each of the districts meet regularly to consider matters of common interest and agree a common approach on shared issues including companies where the Authorities are key shareholders.

The Council has continued to build on its approach to engagement with staff this year through bi-annual all-staff 'pulse surveys' which have provided an opportunity for all employees to provide feedback which has, in turn, supported the development and progression of the Council's Organisational Development priorities. The organisation's internal communications approach has also continued with a clear monthly rhythm of communications in place including emails, staff briefings, poster distribution to major staff sites and standard computer desktop backgrounds and email signatures. – This has been further enhanced on 2023/24 with more in-person engagement opportunities for staff within and across Departments.

B3 - Engaging with Individual Citizens and Service Users Effectively

In order to ensure its message is effectively communicated to its citizens the Council's Communications function proactively prepare appropriate press releases to support activities undertaken by the Council and keep residents informed. The

Councils website has been updated throughout the year; The Council use their social media platform to share key messages with residents.

- <https://x.com/BuryCouncil/status/1402245388317433863>
- <https://www.facebook.com/BuryCouncil/>
- <https://www.instagram.com/burycouncil/?hl=en>

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

C1 - Defining Outcomes

The Let's Do It! Strategy and associated Corporate Plan sets out the immediate and long-term vision for Bury and the work of the Council and its partners. This planning framework seeks to drive and continually measure progress against seven overarching outcomes for the Borough, which are

1. Improved quality of life.
2. Improved early years development.
3. Improved educational attainment.
4. Increased adult skill levels and employability.
5. Inclusive economic growth.
6. Carbon neutrality by 2038.
7. Improved digital connectivity.

The 2023/24 budget supported this strategy.

We will continue to help to deliver these priorities through new ways of working.

C2 - Sustainable Economic, Social and Environmental Benefits

Bury Council declared a Climate emergency in 2019 and set a target to be carbon neutral by 2038. The Council developed and adopted a Climate Action Strategy in 2021 and an Action Plan which was updated in March 2024. The Climate Action Board receives quarterly progress updates facilitating partnership working with all sectors.

<https://www.bury.gov.uk/pests-pollution-and-food-hygiene/pollution/lets-go-green-carbon-neutral-bury/burys-climate-action-strategy-and-action-plan>

The Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan that will guide future development in the Borough. Together with the Places for Everyone (PfE) joint development plan, the Local Plan will form a key part of Bury's overall development plan, and once adopted, this will be the basis for determining future proposals for the next 20 years. The PfE deals with strategic planning matters that are of significance across the Joint Plan area (such as identifying future levels of housing and employment growth), Bury's Local Plan will contain a range of locally-specific

planning policies and identify local sites where development should be built as well as areas where development should be restricted or controlled. The PfE joint development plan was approved in March 2024.

A procurement strategy has been established which sets out our approach to procurement activity. Procurement will support economic development, supply chain resilience, and help deliver real outcomes to the people of Bury through social value. Bury Council will embrace Social Value to ensure that all of the businesses we contract with are supporting our local communities and adding value beyond their contractual requirement. Bury Council will also ensure that we champion Social Value in all that we do. Bury Council is committed to Social Value and supports the Greater Manchester Social Value Framework and Driving Social Value in GM Public Procurement paper.

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

D1 - Determining Interventions

The Constitution defines and documents the roles and responsibilities of Officers and Members and delegation arrangements, protocols for decision making and codes of conduct for Members and staff. The underpinning Scheme of Delegation is subject to appropriate updates. Further specific delegations may be granted, through recommendations in public reports to Committees.

All decisions are formally recorded. In addition, decisions taken under delegated powers are also recorded electronically and are reported via the Council's Electronic Decision Recording System. The Council has a number of meetings which are streamed live, this includes Council, Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny and Regulatory meetings (Planning and Licensing).

D2 - Planning Interventions

The Council plans its activity at a strategic level through its budget and business planning cycle and does so in consultation with internal and external stakeholders to ensure services delivered across different parts of the organisation and partners complement each other and avoid duplication.

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=148&MID=2936>

All Executive Directors prepare a service plan which demonstrates how they will deliver their responsibilities within the Corporate Plan, as well as business as usual activity. Plans were included in the Corporate Plan which was presented to Full Council with the budget for the year. The plans were agreed by Council in February

2023. This, in turn, informs Departmental plans and, ultimately individual objectives through the Employee Review process.

D3 - Optimising Achievement of Intended Outcomes

The Council integrates and balances service priorities, affordability and other resource constraints, supporting it to take into account the full cost of operations over the medium and longer term, including both revenue and capital spend budgets. This includes a medium-term financial plan.

[The Council Budget 23-24 MTFS 2023-26.pdf \(bury.gov.uk\)](#)

The Council has a clear set of Equality Objectives and an Inclusion Strategy which it is continuing to drive. 2023/24 has seen strong focus on workforce inclusion in particular and the commencement of work on a new, four year, set of equality objectives which will be agreed in 2024/25.

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

E1 - Developing the Organisation's Capacity

As the Council continues to face financial pressures, a series of Departmental reviews and restructures have taken / are taking place. Additionally, transformation projects are taking place to review and streamline processes in place to drive improvement in the services provided, by using new technologies, ways of working and new delivery models. Training is provided to develop and support staff whose roles may change as restructures take place.

The Council has active engagement with the Trade Unions and there are regularly convened Corporate and departmental Joint Consultative Committees to discuss restructures and specific service matters. The Trade Unions also play an active role in consultations with staff and feedback comments to the Council.

Staff capacity development is supported through development planning, which is at the core of the Employee Review process. A range of development opportunities are available to all staff, including accredited qualifications supported through the Council's Apprenticeship Strategy which was refreshed this year. There is a specific focus on leadership and management development with a core management development programme in place which has now had circa. 300 participants.

A Members Development Group is in place which oversees Member training and development activity. This includes clear expectations in relation to core training as well as specific development for portfolio holders and Committee Chairs. In response to the LGA Peer Review a strengthened Member Development offer has been created, which includes a clearer and enhanced core programme of support as well

as specific leadership development opportunities for senior Members, largely provided by the LGA.

E2 - Developing the Capability of the Organisation's Leadership and Other Individuals

The Council is committed to a program of leadership development and now has a well-established rhythm of meetings and engagement through the Executive Team (Executive Directors), the Strategic Leadership Group (Departmental Management Teams / Assistant Directors and above) and the Senior Managers' Forum, (Heads of Service and other senior managers). These groups support personal as well as collective organisational development through building relationships across Departments. As noted above, the Council is also continuing to deliver its core management development programme with circa. 300 managers having now benefited from this.

The Council has many policies and procedures relating to HR and these are available on the Council's intranet site and are easily accessible. In 2022/23 a staff handbook was developed, to ensure consistent and high-quality people management across the Council. Underpinning this a comprehensive programme of review is underway across all workforce policies, with 9 policies formally reviewed and agreed this year.

Services are required to have regular team meetings, and one to ones with line managers and these are in addition to the annual performance setting discussions that inform key priorities and outcomes for the year (the Employee Review). There is a fortnightly Executive team briefing, regular weekly staff e-mail communications providing staff broadcasts and wellbeing support. Locally, engagement activity is delivered within Departments and Services aligned to their specific ways of working

Immediately following local elections, new Council Members receive an induction into the work of the Council and their role as local members. The format and content are reviewed annually with members. The induction training is also open for existing members to attend. All Members are provided with training before sitting on any regulatory committee. In addition, the Council provides a mock Council training session for new members and existing Members to attend, the Leader of the Groups support this training.

The Council is committed to promoting the physical and mental health and wellbeing of the workforce through both specific interventions and opportunities and as a central part of the role of all managers. There is a dedicated intranet page with a wide range of support and guidance for staff and their managers as part of the Council's 'Live Better, Feel Better programme' covering a wide range of health and wellbeing topics across including mental, physical and financial wellbeing underpinned by a 24/7 Employee Assistance Programme (phone line and online support) providing a range of support. During the past year the Council has launched its new Occupational Health Provider and transitioned to a new Employee

Assistance Programme. An all-staff roadshow was also held in the Town Hall so staff could engage with the range of wellbeing and benefits available to them.

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

F1 – Managing Risk

The Council operates a risk management framework that aids decision making in pursuit of the organisation's strategic objectives, protects the Council's reputation and other assets and is compliant with statutory and regulatory obligations. The Corporate Risk Register is part of this framework and is an articulation of the key risks impacting the Council. It is used to inform decision making, provide assurance over actions being taken to manage key risks and to inform directorate level risk management planning and mitigation activities. Named risk managers are identified in the Register for its key strategic risks.

The corporate risk register is presented to, and discussed by, the Executive Team throughout the year, and is regularly presented to the Audit Committee.

In addition to this, internal audit report findings on audits are presented to the Audit Committee throughout the year. Other senior officers throughout the organisation report to both the Council's Cabinet and the Locality Board as well as various Overview and Scrutiny Boards.

Reports to Committees also include a section that sets out the risks to any proposals and recommendations. Equality Impact Assessments are undertaken, where required and documented as part of all formal Committee Reports to ensure the Council is acting in accordance with the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty.

All reports presented to Cabinet are signed off by both the Monitoring Officer and the S151 officer (or nominated individual) to ensure appropriate financial and legal oversight is provided on all recommendations. Legal and financial implications are set out in all reports to ensure that the implications of recommendations are fully understood prior to a decision being made.

F2 – Managing Performance

The Council puts in place Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor service delivery whether services are internal or through external providers. An Integrated Monitoring and Corporate Plan report is provided to the Executive team on a monthly basis. This brings together analysis of performance against the Corporate Plan to highlight any challenges so that they can be addressed. The Cabinet receives quarterly reports on our performance against the Corporate Plan.

F3 – Effective Overview and Scrutiny

The Council has three Scrutiny Committees which hold decision makers to account and play a key role in ensuring that public services are delivered in a way residents want - the agenda, reports and minutes are publicly available on the Council website. All scrutiny committees have a forward plan outlining the matters the Committee will scrutinise. Scrutiny Chairs meet regularly as a group to review their plans.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a finance and performance subgroup that carries out deep dives in to performance and finance matters.

F4 – Robust Internal Control

The Council has robust internal control processes in place, which support the achievement of its objectives while managing risks. The Council's approach is set out in detail in both the latest Annual Corporate Risk Management report, and its Internal Audit Plan.

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s34888/Internal%20Audit%20Annual%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%202023.24%20-%2021.3.23.pdf>

The Council has an Audit Committee, in line with CIPFA's 'Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police (2018)', which provides an independent and high-level resource to support good governance and strong public financial management.

The Council maintains clear policies and arrangements in respect of counter fraud and anti-corruption. These are the Anti- Fraud and Anti-Corruption Policy; Whistleblowing Policy; Anti Money Laundering Policy and the Anti Bribery Policy. These policies were last refreshed in 2023.

<https://www.bury.gov.uk/my-neighbourhood/fraud>

F5 – Managing Data

The processing of personal data is essential to many of the services and functions carried out by local authorities. The Council complies with data protection legislation, which includes GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018). This will ensure that such processing is carried out fairly, lawfully, and transparently. <https://www.bury.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/data-protection/data-protection-legislation>

The Council reviews and supplement its policies, and keep its processing activities under review, to ensure they remain consistent with the law, and any compliance advice and codes of practice issued from time to time by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).

The Council ensures that officers handling personal data are trained to an appropriate level in the use and control of personal data. It is made clear that all staff and Members are personally accountable for using the Council's information responsibly and appropriately. All staff must undertake protecting information e-

learning training on an annual basis, and this forms part of the induction process for new staff. Data protection also forms part of the induction program for new Members and is included in the Council's new starters induction pack.

Information Governance is overseen by the Director of Law and Governance who is the Senior Information Risk Officer for the Council (SIRO). The Council's performance on managing data is reported to the Audit Committee on a bi-annual basis.

The Council makes information available to the public via the information access regimes provided for by the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004. Data protection legislation, including the Data Protection Act 2018, provides individuals with various rights. The Council ensures that all valid requests from individuals to exercise those rights are dealt with as quickly as possible, and by no later than the timescales allowed in the legislation.

Information regarding Freedom of Information requests and Environmental Information Regulations can be found online by accessing the following link:

<https://www.bury.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/requesting-information>

F6 – Strong Public Financial Management

The Council's approach to Financial Management ensures that public money is safeguarded at all times, ensuring value for money. Its approach supports both long-term achievement of objectives, and shorter term financial and operational performance.

The Director of Finance (S151 Officer) ensures that appropriate advice is given on all financial matters, proper financial records and accounts are kept and oversees an effective system of internal financial control. The Director of Finance ensures well developed financial management is integrated at all levels of planning and control including management of financial risks, systems and processes. The Constitution (Part 4 Section 6) details the financial regulations which underpin the financial arrangements.

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s39461/Section%206%20Financial%20Regulations.pdf>

The Financial Management Code (FM Code) sets out the standards of financial management expected for local authorities and is designed to support good practice and to assist local authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. The FM Code was launched in 2019, with the first full year of compliance being 2021/22. Information about the financial resilience assessment which the Council has carried out is set out in Section 5 of this AGS document – 'Annual review of effectiveness of the governance framework'.

Section 25 of the Local Government Act 2003 requires that when a local authority is making its budget calculations, the Chief Finance Officer ('CFO') of the authority must report to the Council on the robustness of the estimates made for the purposes of the calculations and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves.

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=126&MId=3223&Ver=4>

[The Council Budget 23-24 MTFS 2023-26.pdf \(bury.gov.uk\)](#)

The Council delivers a range of partnerships which involves working with others, these include: -

- Joint venture arrangement for the development of the Millgate Estate;. A board is in place which is attended by the Bury Council Chief Executive, the Council Leader and the Executive Director of Place. Strategic financial advice and legal support is provided by the S151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer. A Council officer is assigned to provide day to day support to the Joint Venture.
- Joint venture arrangement in place for the development of Prestwich Town Centre. A board is in place which is attended by the Bury Council Chief Executive, the Council Leader and the Executive Director of Place. Strategic financial advice and legal support is provided by the S151 Officer and the Monitoring Officer. A Council officer is assigned to provide day to day support to the Joint Venture.

The Council also has relationships with: -

- Bury MBC Townside Fields, a wholly owned subsidiary set up to develop Townside Fields, including Q park, 3KP, Townside Fields, Premier Inn.
- Townside Fields Management Company, a company in which Bury MBC owns a third of the shareholding.
- Six Town Housing Limited – An Arm's Length Management Organisation (ALMO) to manage the Councils housing stock and provide its own housing provision across the Borough, until 1st February 2024 when Six Town Housing Limited ceased to manage Bury Council's housing stock as its ALMO. Six Town Housing Limited is now a wholly owned subsidiary company of the Council and Private Registered Provider of Social Housing owning and leasing 149 social housing homes which it lets and sublets to its own social housing tenants under the assured tenancy regime governed by the Housing Act 1988.
- Persona – a Local Authority Trading Company established to provide a range of adult social care services.

It is a requirement of the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting that 'Where an authority is in a group relationship with other entities and undertakes significant

activities through the group, the review of the effectiveness of the system of internal control should include its group activities’.

Arrangements are in place for the Council and the group companies to work together in setting priorities and overseeing and reporting on performance. The internal audit service also carry out audits of these organisations as part of the requirement to fulfil statutory S151 duties.

There was an opportunity to raise any concerns during the year through Partnership meetings between the Chief Executives of the Council and the ALMO (Six town Housing). Following a review of social housing provision in the Council and new regulatory requirements introduced the Council decided to terminate this arrangements and transfer housing back to its direct management.

CIPFA’s Prudential Code of Practice and Treasury Management Code of Practice sets out the risk framework through which the Council manages its balance sheet and makes capital investment decisions. Alongside the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) guidance on minimum revenue provision, and the guidance on borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLb) which seeks to limit borrowing solely for yield, the Council has a strong regulatory framework that it adheres to. There is a Capital Board which is chaired by the S151 Officer, and the Capital Strategy and capital approval process detail the approach to decision making on capital investments, and the Treasury Management Strategy details the approach for debt management and cash investing, both of which contribute to strong, ongoing financial management of the Council’s balance sheet.

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=126&MId=3223&Ver=4>

[The Council Budget 23-24 MTFS 2023-26.pdf \(bury.gov.uk\)](#)

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

G1 – Implementing Good Practice in Transparency

The Council follows the Local Government Transparency Code 2015, which includes requirements and recommendations for local authorities to publish certain types of data.

The Council’s website is set out in a clear and easily accessible way, using infographics and plain language. Information on expenditure, performance and decision making is sited together in one place and can be accessed quickly and easily from the homepage. <https://www.bury.gov.uk/>

G2 – Implementing Good Practices in Reporting

The Council produces a detailed, annual Corporate Performance Delivery Report, which charts the Boroughs progress towards its vision and priorities. The Executive have oversight of performance, finance and workforce matters, regular finance reports are brought to this meeting.

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/documents/s35746/Bury%20Corporate%20Plan%20Performance%20and%20Delivery%20Report%20Quarter%20Four%20End%20of%20Year%202022-23.pdf>

G3 Assurance and Accountability

The Council welcomes peer challenge, internal and external review and audit, and inspections from regulatory bodies and gives thorough consideration to arising recommendations.

Business Growth and Infrastructure

The Councils two leveling up funded projects in Radcliffe and Bury Town Centre were subject to a national UK wide audit and review commissioned by the Department for Leveling up and Communities and Housing and delivered by Arup Limited. The review identified no concerns and highlighted best practice in Bury which will be recommended for implementation on other projects elsewhere in the country.

A Regeneration Board, including the formation of the Housing Growth Subgroup, has been established to oversee and provide clear focus on process and governance of regeneration projects within the Borough, and coordinating the Affordable Housing Programme, the Brownfield Land Programme, the Accelerated Land Disposal Programme, Northern Gateway initiative and the Education Capital Programme, to maximise land use, inward investment and delivery of housing and regeneration ambitions.

Children and Young People

As part of Ofsted's formal monitoring arrangements, 3 monitoring visits were completed during this period. Monitoring visits are thematic in nature, but always consider the impact of leaders which includes workforce, performance management, quality assurance and management oversight.

In March 2023 a monitoring visit was undertaken focusing on early permanence, including a focus on pre-proceedings, recent entries into care and children with plans for adoption, special guardianship or long-term fostering.

Inspectors concluded that steady progress has been made since the last inspection in 2021 where it was recognised that senior leaders "have continued to develop the quality of social work practice and strengthen management oversight, to support timelier permanence for children. There is a renewed focus on securing earlier

permanence for children, including through the introduction of a new strategy and framework for practice and the implementation of a new permanence policy.” However, it was noted that there is still more to do to reduce drift and delay and despite improvements, social work practice remains inconsistent.

In August 2023, Ofsted carried out a monitoring visit focusing on child exploitation, in particular children at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation, children who are missing from home or care and children at risk of radicalisation.

Inspectors found that “the local authority has continued to make steady progress on its improvement journey. Senior leaders have strengthened arrangements for children who are at risk from exploitation, which have become more strategically aligned to the regional model of practice. Governance arrangements have been enhanced.”

“There are effective strategic and operational relationships in Bury, which underpin the work to identify and protect vulnerable children. Children benefit from well-trained and effective practitioners, who offer support to children and their families based on strong professional relationships and strength-based practice. There is also a strong commitment to developing contextual safety within different communities.”

“Despite improvements, social work practice remains variable. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of what needs to improve to ensure children are receiving a consistently good service. The improvement plan has a consistent focus on delivering improved outcomes for children. Political commitment and financial investment continue to support the strengthening of services for children in Bury and it is anticipated that it will do so throughout 2024/25.”

In November, Ofsted carried out their fifth monitoring visit, which focused on care leavers, in particular looking at pathway planning, employment, education and training, support into adulthood including for vulnerable groups and health and emotional well-being.

Inspectors found that there has not been the same level of progress in this area as they have seen on previous monitoring visits, which has resulted in outcomes for care-experienced young people being too inconsistent.

“Progress has been hindered by a lack of management capacity at both service manager and assistant director level to implement the improvement plans. A performance culture is not embedded and although leaders have commissioned external moderation to provide additional oversight of frontline practice, there has been a reduced line of sight and a small number of care-experienced young people have not been receiving the support that they are entitled to. Senior leaders recognise there is more to do and at a greater pace to ensure that care-experienced young people in Bury receive a consistently good service.”

In July 2023, the DfE carried out a 6-monthly review as part of the arrangements under the Improvement Notice issued to the Council in December 2021. The review was led by Bury’s DfE Adviser and DfE Senior Case Lead. The review recognised

the work that has been undertaken by the Council and this was presenting an improving picture of Bury's Children's Services, although there remains much to do. The key points that were highlighted as critical to ongoing improvement were workforce (recruitment and retention), maintaining corporate support, safeguarding (impact of learning across the partnership) and communication.

In other external scrutiny, in May 2023 there was a review of our care leavers service carried out by the DfE National Adviser for Care Leavers, Mark Riddell MBE. The review focused on leadership, culture and attitude and in particular the corporate governance approach, the development and relationships with internal and external partners and the partnership offer, the local offer and the new statutory duties around the extended PA offer of support for all care leavers up to 25yrs old. The review acknowledged ambitious, aspiration leadership and management with passionate, tenacious staff who want to make a difference to the lives of care leavers. However, it identified less of a buy-in from some key partner agencies. There were a number of recommendations put forward and these have been incorporated into the Council's Corporate Parenting Plan. There will be a follow-up visit in July 2024.

In February 2024, there was Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspection of local area arrangements for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Ofsted and CQC inspectors looked at how the local area is working together to improve outcomes for our children with SEND and their families; this included a focus on EHC plans, partnership strategies including communication, pathways, transitions, waiting times and alternative provision.

Inspectors identified widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, which the local area partnership must address urgently. Six priority actions were set out in the report along with 3 areas for improvement. As a result of the overall outcome, the local area was required to co-produce a Priority Action Plan (referred to locally as our Priority Impact Plan) and this was approved by Ofsted and CQC in June 2024 and has been published on our local offer. A SEND Improvement and Assurance Board (SIAB) has been established with an independent chair appointed.

We continue to work with other local authorities as part of the DfE funded Sector Led Improvement Programme (SLIP). In the last 12 months, this has included continuing work with Hertfordshire around our Family Safeguarding model of practice, delivery of a focused social care management programme from Cheshire West and Chester and Staffordshire in relation to supporting families. Feedback is always shared with the senior leadership to ensure that our improvement and transformation plans are shaped by the learning that has been identified.

We continue to work with Department for Education in relation to Project Safety Valve.

Corporate Core

The Council is in regular liaison with key Government bodies and is also fully engaged with the Local Government Association (LGA), Greater Manchester Combined Authority and specialist region wide initiatives such as the Greater Manchester Growth Hub, along with peer groups such as S151 officers and monitoring officers

A corporate peer challenge of the Council was undertaken in December 2023 by the Local Government Association. This visit was intended to assess progress since the last full CPC in 2018, and in particular to validate actions taken through the Finance Improvement Plan to deliver a balanced Medium Term Financial Strategy in for Full Council in February 2024.

The Peer Review Team were able to comment on a much-improved Council to the one they visited in 2021. Their overall observations were that they found:

- A Council that had “really stepped-up” in its place leadership role.
- A clear vision for inclusive growth and reducing inequalities which was widely known and understood.
- Evidence of delivery of some ambitious regeneration schemes with the Council “as a strong partner” who fosters collaboration.
- A Leader and Chief Executive who are “highly regarded” both locally and in Greater Manchester more broadly and with the NHS GM Integrated Commission Board (ICB).
- A hard working, dedicated team with a strong work ethic, “where people care very deeply about what they do”.
- A respectful nature to politics which has helped move the Council forward.
- Strategic positioning within the NHS GM ICB and good operational performance in Adults and Health.
- Good examples of teams working together at a neighbourhood level which they described as “innovative and brave”.

Overall they concluded that “People can see how Bury as a place is changing and are really positive about the difference this represents”.

The Peer Review Team were able to see how the Let’s Do It! vision and values were shaping the culture and influencing the governance structure within the Council and wider Team Bury partnership. It was, however, also observed that the Council has an unnecessary habit of “talking itself down” and continually referencing historical difficulties which the Team felt the Council has now moved past.

Improvements were noted in the Council’s approach to quality and inclusion, with recognition of the contribution of “a strong and committed working group”. It was observed that there remains more work to do, however, particularly in terms of workforce representation, the action on which is an outstanding recommendation from the 2023/24 Corporate Plan.

It was recommended that the governance structure of the Council should be organised around key priorities, to better inform the allocation of resources. Within

this, planning for the next municipal year to ensure that the Overview & Scrutiny and Audit Committees work programmes are aligned to corporate plan priorities is an important next step in further strengthening governance and culture. On the basis of risk, particular attention is required to Housing Services and the quality of social services in children's service, adult care and SEND.

Corporate Core – Legal Services

The Legal Services team hold the Lexcel Quality Mark. The team are subject to an annual audit undertaken by the Law Society, the service is inspected annually and continues to hold this accreditation.

Corporate Core - Finance

A financial improvement panel was set up in 2023 to provide support and identify actions required to support the setting and delivery of a balanced budget and manage the medium term financial budget gap forecast and drive improvements in the finance service itself. A finance improvement action plan was produced and progress made with regard to implementation, including the setting of the 2024/25 revenue budget and capital programme and agreement to recruit and appoint a new s151 officer to take own and take forward the finance improvement agenda and related actions, with the post no longer being shared with the NHS and therefore be fully focused on the council's current financial position and longer-term financial sustainability. Whilst the new postholder was not in place before the end of the financial year, interim s151 arrangements were put in place to enable progress to be made on implementing a temporary finance structure to address capacity issues and begin the development of a business case looking at the opportunities likely to be afforded through upgrading the Unit 4 finance system.

The statement of accounts for 2022/2023 have been completed and published on the Council website, one of the issues identified was Reinforced Aerated Autoclaved Concrete (RAAC) identified in the Bury Market, with the impact on the valuation of the market being assessed and for review by the External Auditors.

The statement of accounts for 2023/24 have been completed and published on the Council website. These have yet to be audited by the External Auditors with the likelihood that there will be insufficient time to complete the audit by the statutory backstop date of February 2025. The backstop date was introduced by Government to address the increasing backlog of audits nationally. The impact, as with many councils, is that the External Auditors will issue a modified opinion, usually referred to as a disclaimed opinion. This will enable a reset to the system with the intention of returning to the normal accounts production, and auditing of those accounts, timelines in future years.

Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) set out the standards for internal audit and have been adopted by the Council. This process includes the development of an Emergent Audit Plan designed to invite comment from management and the Audit Committee.

The Council monitors the implementation of internal and external audit recommendations. Assurance reports are presented to Audit Committee and Mazars (the Council's external auditors), summarising the Council's performance in implementing recommendations effectively and within agreed timescales. Information regarding Audit Committee meetings can be found at:

<https://councildecisions.bury.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=133&Year=0>

Corporate Core – Health and Safety

Following three RIDDOR reportable incidents in 2022/23 within the Operations Department the Council commissioned an external review of health and safety arrangements, with a particular focus on the Operations Department which is the area of greatest risk in the Council. This review was commissioned in the context of an ongoing improvement journey in relation to Health and Safety in the Authority which began in 2021/22 in the context of an internal audit which provided 'limited assurance'. The review has been completed and a report was shared with the Council's Health and Safety Joint Consultative Committee.

The report highlighted the progress made over recent years in strengthening health and safety arrangements. However, it also pointed to the impact of financial pressures in this area which has, in particular, lessened the volume of, strategic and reassurance work undertaken. A number of operational gaps were also identified.

The report made 31 recommendations to be addressed by the Council. Work has been undertaken throughout 2023/24 to address the recommendations that were made and will continue in 2024/25. Strategically, three key areas for action were highlighted through the review:

- To develop a new multi-year Health & Safety Strategy: A Health and Safety Strategy for 2024-27 has been developed, which clearly sets out the Council's approach to health and safety management, its priorities for the next three years and a number of KPIs to monitor performance. This is due to be considered by the Health and Safety Joint Consultative Committee in July 2024.
- To strengthen the risk assessment process: The Council's risk assessment process has been reviewed and new guidance, a revised risk assessment needs checker (which summarises the risk profile of services) and risk assessment template have been developed and launched. A central storage location has been developed in Teams for all services to use to ensure full corporate visibility of risk assessments and enable strengthened quality assurance.
- To strengthen assurance of training compliance: The Health and Safety Team has worked closely with colleagues in the Operations Department to compile a comprehensive position statement, by employee, on all required health and safety training to strengthen corporate assurance and oversight. The HR Team are now working to upload this information into iTrent to allow effective

recording and reporting, and OD colleagues are supporting Operations managers to develop a training plan, procure training providers and arrange delivery to ensure a clear cycle of delivery in line with safety requirements. Once this is in place for the Operations Department, this work will be rolled out across the Council, beginning with Housing Services.

Adult Social Services Department

Adult Social Services department are readying itself for assessment by the CQC following the introduction of a new duty for the CQC in the recent Health and Care Act. A comprehensive performance framework has been delivered and now reports quarterly to Cabinet.

A new governance system has been implemented to monitor and improve performance, finance, quality and workforce issues, meeting monthly, driving improvement and providing assurance.

A transformation programme has been resourced to deliver improvement and innovation in a range of service areas, including our learning disability services and our financial assessment and support services.

The safeguarding board has developed a new strategic plan and has refreshed its learning and development plan in response to recent increased demand.

5. Annual review of effectiveness of the governance framework

- 5.1 The Council has a legal responsibility to conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of its governance framework, including the systems of internal control. After conducting this review, the Council has assurance that its governance arrangements and systems of control are robust.
- 5.2 The effectiveness of governance arrangements is monitored and evaluated throughout the year, with activity undertaken including:
- **Executive Team** - Responsibility for governance and internal control lies with the Chief Executive and the Executive Team, which meets on a weekly basis to steer the organisation's activity.
 - **Scrutiny and challenge by Council and its Committees** - The Council has four bodies responsible for monitoring and reviewing the Council's governance:
 - 1) **The Cabinet** - Proposes the budget and policy framework to Council and makes decisions on resources and priorities relating to the budget and policy framework
 - 2) **Audit Committee** - Approves the Council's Annual Accounts, oversees External Audit activity and oversees the effectiveness of the Council's Governance, risk management and internal control arrangements
 - 3) **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** - Considers the implications of financial decisions and changes to corporate, partnership and

city region governance arrangements

- 4) **Health Scrutiny committee** - To review the policies and performance of the Council and external organisations in relation to the following areas:

- Adult social care (including adult safeguarding Health and wellbeing board)
- Housing
- Public health
- Adults and Communities budget and policy framework
- Statutory health scrutiny powers including the review and scrutiny of any matter relating to the planning provision and operation of health services for children and young people, including transitional health care services, affecting the area and to make reports and recommendations on these matters

- 5) **Childrens scrutiny committee** - To review the policies and performance of the Council and external organisations in relation to the following areas:

- Education and Schools
- Children and Young People Support and Safeguarding Services
- Children and Young People Specialist Services
- To scrutinise individual Cabinet decisions relating to the above areas.
- To monitor the Council's performance in the above areas.
- To scrutinise statutory inspection reports and oversee the implementation of any recommendations arising from such reports.
- Transitional arrangements between children and adult services
- Statutory education scrutiny powers

- 6) **Standards Committee** - Promotes high standards of ethical conduct, advising on the revision of the Codes of Corporate Governance and Conduct for Members.

- **Consideration of evidence sources to identify the Council's key governance challenges looking ahead to 2024/2025 (see Action Plan at Section 7) - These sources include:**

- Regular meetings of statutory officers take place, which include Chief Executive, S151 officer and the Monitoring Officer
- Consideration of risks identified in the Corporate Risk Register
- Emergent challenges identified by the work of Internal Audit

- **Head of Audit and Risk Management Annual Opinion 2023/24** - In terms of the year to March 2024, the Head of Audit and Risk Management can provide 'moderate' assurance that the Council's governance, risk and control framework was generally sound and operated reasonably consistently in the year. The full opinion detail is set out in the Annual Audit Opinion 2023/24 report to Audit Committee.

This report will be taken to Audit Committee in July 2024.

- **External Auditor's Review of the Effectiveness of Governance Arrangements** - The Council's external auditor is Mazars. They submit progress reports and their Annual Audit Letter to Audit Committee.
- **CIPFA Financial Management Code 2019 (FM Code)** - The authority has not carried out an assessment to note the level of compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management code. This will be undertaken in 2024/2025. The code is not a set of rules to be followed but a set of principles in a format that matches the financial management cycle and supports governance in local authorities. A series of financial management standards set out the professional standards needed if a local authority is to meet the minimum standards of financial management acceptable to meet fiduciary duties to taxpayers, customers and lenders. The Financial Management Code (FM Code) is designed to support good practice in financial management and to assist local authorities in demonstrating their financial sustainability. A number of areas were identified where improvements were required, and these are currently being addressed through a Financial Improvement Plan which is monitored through the Financial Improvement Board.
- The Chief Finance Officer has examined the major assumptions used within the budget calculations and associated risks. The Medium-Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy have been updated to reflect the 2024/25 budget position. The 2024/25 budget was approved by Council on 21 February 2024 and balanced with the use of £15m reserves. The Finance Improvement Board is supporting the Council to identify savings to meet the MTFP budget gap and remove requirement to use reserves to meet future years budgets.
- **Annual Report to Annual Council** - this report is submitted regarding the Council Constitution. The report also covers the work of the Standards Committee and any other Governance changes.
- **Commercial Governance** – The Council has a Regeneration Board that has oversight and assurance for governance relating to its regeneration and commercial projects (Levelling up projects) and housing development projects

6. **Strategic oversight of actions to address the Council's governance challenges in 2022/23**

This section provides a concise high-level summary of strategic actions taken to address the Council's governance challenges for the 2023/24 financial year, and the arrangements for oversight of delivery.

Challenges were challenges set out in the 2022/23 Annual Governance Statement as set out below

Additionally, the Corporate Plan for 2023/24 set out a number of objectives which were to be achieved throughout 2023/24. Progress against these objectives is reported quarterly, with an annual summary provided in the Corporate Plan Performance Delivery Report. Where applicable, reports and information are also presented to the appropriate Committee.

22/23 Challenges

- **Establishment of a Corporate Governance Board which will be responsible for the budget setting process, production of the AGS and information governance matters**

A corporate governance group has now been established, and a terms of reference was established in February 2024. It has since been established that this group has a broader remit which includes risk, tracking of operational and cabinet decision making, and the tracking of audit recommendations to ensure that they are being implemented in a timely manner.

- **Review of governance structures**

A review was carried out which mapped governance arrangements across the Authority. The work considered the committee arrangements, corporate Boards, Greater Manchester Combined Authority Boards and Bury's commercial business boards. New arrangements were established to ensure appropriate governance was in place for the return of the Housing stock back to the Council. Arrangements included the establishment of a Housing Advisory Board and revised Board arrangements for Six Town Housing Limited. As a part of this work the partnership arrangements across Team Bury were considered. This will be subject to a further review as a part of the Let's do it strategy refresh.

- **Review and update Financial Regulations**

Reviewed and to be considered by audit committee prior to agreement by Council.

- **Review Performance Indicators utilised throughout the Council, and ensure they are still relevant.**

All indicators were reviewed as part of the development of the Corporate Plan for 2024/25. A new set of key performance indicators was included in the Corporate Plan report approved by Cabinet in April 2024 [Corporate Plan 2024-25 V2.pdf \(bury.gov.uk\)](#). These indicators are kept under continuous review as they are used to monitor activity and therefore some may need to be changed in reaction to events. Indicators are also varied depending on feedback from the Directorate Management Teams who have a wider range of operational performance indicators and use the Corporate Performance Report as a way of escalating good performance and issues of concern.

- **Embed the revised policies of Adult Care Service**

Revised policies were rolled out to staff and are available on a dedicated Adult Social Care site, this was completed in June 2024 and reinforced in team meetings and at the Social CORK Conference chaired by the Director of Adult Social Care. The policies are being followed and the website receives approximately 4000 hits per month evidencing these are being considered in social work practice. Policy implementation is reviewed as part of case work sampling and case file audit and is reported to the departmental quality assurance committee and supported by the work of the Principal Social Worker.

- **Consider findings of LGA Peer review of Highways and implement any required actions**

The Highways review was completed in June 2022, three areas for consideration were identified 1. Planning & Performance, 2. Enablers, 3. Delivery. All key areas for consideration have been addressed and have been tracked via an Action plan.

- **Consider findings of Children and Young People Finance Peer review and implement any required actions**

The recommendations arising from the review, in combination with the zero based budgeting process undertaken in the summer of 2023, resulted in the revised 2024/25 budget for Children's Services. The budget substantially increased overall, particularly areas where demand left budgets had previously been set at a level substantially beneath existing demand, with Children's Services demand and the cost of meeting that demand being one of the most challenging pressures for councils with social care responsibilities.

- **Implement Internal audit recommendations, particularly those reports which provided limited / moderate assurance.**

Internal Audit revised the follow up process to include a second follow up of fundamental and significant recommendations which had not been addressed at the time of first follow up.

Any recommendations not addressed at second follow up are reported to Corporate Governance Group who take oversight of the recommendations and identify support which can be given for recommendations to be addressed.

Any recommendations not addressed at second follow up – the Executive Director / Director is required to attend Audit Committee to explain why recommendations not addressed and to assure Audit Committee what action is being undertaken to mitigate the recommendations.

- **Consider the findings of the Strategic Housing Review and the future management and maintenance of council housing in the Borough and implement any required actions.**

The Strategic Housing review was completed. Updates were provided to Cabinet in October 2023 and January 2024 to feedback on the review and provide the recommendation to Cabinet that Six Town Housing stock was returned to direct management by the Council on the 1st of February 2024. This work was undertaken following a Test of Opinion with tenants and a TUPE transfer consultation with staff impacted by the proposals. An Improvement Plan was agreed as part of the October Cabinet report [Strategic Housing Review Part A.pdf \(bury.gov.uk\)](#) which is now being tracked by the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Housing Subgroup and the newly established Housing Advisory Board.

- **Develop transformation plan to respond to legislative and regulatory changes effecting Social Housing and deliver step change improvements to customer services and satisfaction.**

As noted above an Improvement Plan was approved by Cabinet in October. This is being monitored through the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Housing Sub Group and the newly established Housing Advisory Board which includes independent members and tenant representatives. Responsibility for this plan sits with the Executive Director (Strategy and Transformation) and the Director of Housing (post currently vacant).

- **Prepare for the inspection of social housing by the regulator**

and the introduction of the Social Housing Regulation Bill.

Work has been undertaken to prepare for the potential inspection. Introductory meetings have been held with the Regulator to introduce the new management team now that social housing is part of the Council. In addition, training sessions have been delivered by Campbell Tickell, an external housing consultant, to all Elected Members and to the members of the Housing Advisory Board to increase awareness of the new regulatory standards and what will be expected of the local authority. In August 2024 Bury Council commissioned a “mock inspection” to be conducted by December 2024 in order to review our readiness for external inspection. Recommendations from this work will be included in the overall Improvement Plan.

- **Review and refresh anti-fraud and corruption policy.**

All anti-fraud and corruption policies were revised and refreshed and approved by Audit Committee

- **Develop the risk management strategy and operational risk registers.**

Progress has been made with the development of operational risk registers and the Risk Manager continues to advise and develop these with service departments.

The Risk Management Strategy review was not completed in 23/24, and it is expected that the review will be completed in 2024/25.

7. Action Plan: Governance Challenges for 2024/25 Onwards

The review of governance arrangements has identified 7 main areas where the Council will need to focus its efforts during 2024/25, to address changing circumstances and challenges identified. These are set out in the section below. Completion or substantial progress against these objectives is due by the end of the financial year, in March 2025.

1. Adult Social Care - Policy review, and policy and strategy development to be guided by national and regional learning and best practice associated with preparedness for CQC inspections.
2. Continued transformation of Adult Social Care in the borough in the face of increasing demand and significant financial challenge
3. Joint Adult Social care and Childrens Services on preparation for adulthood for those likely to be eligible for adult care under the Care

Act.

4. Refresh the Highways Asset Management Plan
5. Prepare for the inspection of social housing by the regulator following the introduction of the Social Housing Regulation Act.
6. Develop the risk management strategy
7. Develop and provide staff training on anticipated Procurement Act changes, due to be implemented Spring 2025.

These are in addition to the Corporate priorities set out below:-

- **Sustainable inclusive growth**
 - The completion of enabling works for the new Radcliffe Hub with work on building foundations now well underway.
 - Completion of the land assembly needed to facilitate delivery of the Bury Market and Flexihall developments.
 - Significant progress with the Council's housing delivery pipeline to address housing need in the borough.
- **Improving Children's Lives**
 - Continued positive progress with the Ofsted improvement journey with improvements in re-referral reductions and responsiveness in the context of continued growth in demand.
 - Good progress with the agreed Quarter One milestones for SEND improvement following the partnership inspection and subsequent judgement. Corresponding progress in the delivering of Project Safety Valve milestones to pay down the Dedicated Schools Grant, and a continuation of strong performance around Education Care and Health Plan (EHCP) timeliness with 97% of EHCPs completed within 20 weeks
 - Significant progress against the programme plan to ensure the opening of the new high school in Radcliffe in September 2024.
- **Tackling Inequalities**
 - Significant progress in health and care including: agreement to an investment plan for Health Visiting in Bury by the Northern Care Alliance; recovery of NHS health check performance to pre-covid levels and an award of funding to support 536 long-term sick or disabled people to start, stay, and succeed in work through integrated work and health support over an 18month programme (WorkWell).
 - Progress with the Redbank Pavilion 3G pitch and a successful grant application for a further pitch in Top Park

- in Ramsbottom.
- Ongoing work to re-integrate housing service back into the Council and demonstrable improvement in building safety and regulatory compliance and new governance and tenant engagement structures in place.
- On track progress with the allocation of Housing Support Funds (HSF) and the objective of full utilisation and work progressing around the Council's wider Anti-Poverty Strategy

8. Conclusion

The governance arrangements as described above have been applied throughout the year, and up to the date of the approval of the Annual Accounts, providing an effective framework for identifying governance issues and taking mitigating action. Over the coming year the Council will continue the operation of its governance framework and take steps to carry out the actions for the improvement identified in the review of effectiveness to further strengthen its governance arrangements.

Signed on behalf of Bury Council:

Leader of the Council

Chief Executive

27 February 2025

27 February 2025