



IPSWICH
BOROUGH COUNCIL

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT
YEAR END 31 MARCH 2025

Scope of responsibility

Ipswich Borough Council (IBC) 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, 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 in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs, facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, and which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

IBC's Code of Corporate Governance is consistent with the principles of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government*, and this Statement explains how the Council has complied with the Code and meets the requirements of Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015, which requires all relevant bodies to prepare an Annual Governance Statement.

The purpose of the governance framework

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, culture and values by which the authority is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its community. It enables the authority to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate services and value for money.

The system of internal control is a significant part of that framework and is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level. It cannot eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives and can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on a process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood and potential impact of those risks being realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically. Risk is considered by the Audit Committee twice a year and the committee can call in the Risk Management Strategy for review anytime in a three-year period.

The governance framework

The following aligns with governance good practice and identifies with the seven core principles against which local authorities review their governance arrangements.

This Annual Governance Statement covers the period 1st April 2024 to 31st March 2025.

Evidence supporting the core principles are interchangeable throughout this Statement.

Core Principle 1 - Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law

Standards of conduct and behaviour expected of councillors and officers of Ipswich Borough Council, its partners and the community are defined and communicated through codes of conduct and protocols. These include:

- Councillors' code of conduct
- Employees' code of conduct
- Corporate Values
- An effective performance management system
- Staff performance development review, linked to corporate and service objectives, is undertaken through the HR Performance Management System
- Anti-fraud, Anti-corruption, Anti-bribery policy
- Councillor/Officer protocols
- Audit & Governance Committee
- Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Council's decision-making framework and delegation arrangements to the Executive, committees and senior officers are set out in full in the Council's Constitution. The terms of reference for the two Joint Committees are also set out in the Constitution and are supplemented with a written partnership agreement that sets out the decision making and management framework for the services delivered in partnership with other neighbouring authorities. The Council's Forthcoming Decisions List provides details of the key decisions planned to be made over the next 3 months by the Executive and the Council has in place procedures and processes for consultation and receiving legal and financial advice before taking decisions.

The Council is required to keep its Constitution under review. The Monitoring Officer undertakes reviews as necessary in consultation with the Constitution Working Group and recommends any changes considered appropriate. During 2024/25 the Council's Constitution was reviewed.

The Monitoring Officer is an experienced local government solicitor and the Council's Assistant Director of Governance. The Monitoring Officer for 2024/25 has appointed deputies to discharge the duties in their absence. The function of the monitoring officer is described in the Council's Constitution.

The Monitoring Officer provides advice and training regarding compliance with the principles of Ethical Conduct within the Council and is supported by the Audit & Governance Committee of the Council.

During 2024/25 Councillor conduct issues were dealt with in accordance with the Code of Conduct and where appropriate discussed with an Independent Person.

Responsibility for ensuring that an effective system of internal financial control is maintained and operated by the Section 151 Officer. The systems of internal financial control provide reasonable assurance that assets are safeguarded, that transactions are authorised and properly recorded, and that material errors or irregularities are either prevented or would be detected within a timely period.

As per the 'CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Public Service Organisations' the Section 151 Officer is a member of the Council's senior management team. The postholder signed off all Executive and Council reports with financial implications and met regularly with the Council's Monitoring Officer to discuss any matters of concern. The S151 Officer was able to approach the Chief Executive on any matter and directly liaised with the Portfolio Holder and Leader on financial matters.

The S151 Officer oversees the following processes within the Council:

The governance framework

- Monthly monitoring of income and expenditure against the annual budget
- Business Planning process
- The setting of annual budgets
- The Medium-Term Financial Plan (rolling four years) reflecting the local government finance settlement funding agreement
- Treasury Management including arranging short- and long-term financing
- The monitoring of finances against the Medium-Term Financial Plan
- Setting of financial and performance targets
- Managing risk in key financial service areas
- Clearly defined capital expenditure guidelines
- The capital programme is profiled against milestones and then monitored monthly against the profile throughout the year
- Regular reporting of the Council's financial position to Councillors
- Ensuring procurement policy is correctly applied and in line with best practice
- Production and maintenance of the Council's Capital Strategy.

Ipswich Borough Council has a duty to ensure that it acts in accordance with the law and regulations in the performance of its functions. It has developed policies and procedures for its officers to ensure that, as far as possible, all officers understand their responsibilities both to the Council and to the public. Three key documents are the Finance Rules, the Financial Standing Orders and the Contract Standing Orders, available to all officers via the Council's Intranet, with the latter two available to the public as part of the Constitution, which is published on the Council's website.

National legislation is still paramount, such as the requirement, when constructing a budget, to report on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves (Local Government Act Sections 25-27).

Other documentation includes corporate policies on topics such as Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, Domestic Violence, Data Protection and Anti-Fraud. All policies are subject to internal review to ensure these are adequately maintained. The Council keeps all staff aware of changes in key policies by means of alerting them in regular 'staff news' bulletins, and where appropriate, arranging training for all or key councillors or staff. Major policies are listed in the Council's policy framework.

In 2024/25 the following policies and strategies were reviewed and approved:-

- Tenancy Management Policy
- Leasehold Management Policy
- Housing Estate Management Policy
- Tenant Engagement Policy
- Community Engagement Strategy
- Procurement and Contract Management Strategy
- Housing Strategy
- Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy
- Damp and Mould Policy
- Fire Safety Policy
- Income Management Strategy
- Business Rates Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

Core Principle 2 - Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

The IBC Constitution outlines how the Council operates, how decisions are made and the procedures which are to be followed to ensure that these are efficient, transparent and accountable to local people. The Executive is responsible for most decisions.

The Leader appoints a deputy leader and up to nine councillors to the Executive. Key decisions are required to be published in advance in the Executive's Forthcoming Decisions List and are generally discussed in a meeting open to the public. This list is published monthly.

The governance framework

All decisions must be in line with the Council's overall policies and budget. Any decisions the Executive wishes to take outside the budget or policy framework must be referred to full Council to decide.

The Council's Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee supports and monitors the work of the Executive. A "call-in" procedure allows the Committee to review Executive decisions before they are implemented, presenting challenge and the opportunity for a decision to be reconsidered. In 2024/25 there was one call-in.

During 2024/25, five Area Committees provided opportunities for local people to engage with discussion and decisions affecting their neighbourhoods. The Area Committees also discharge some executive functions in line with their terms of reference. A revised Community Engagement Strategy was agreed in 2024, with a new more flexible model to be implemented during 2025/26.

Portfolio Holder and Council Officer Key Decisions are published on the Council's website.

The Council's website contains information and data on how public money is spent and what the Council does.

The Partnership Framework sets out how partnerships should be assessed and managed to ensure effective and efficient governance systems and controls.

The Council's annual Business Planning process requires the regular review of all the partnerships in place for each service. Each review is expected to consider all governance issues and examine the effectiveness of each partnership. Continuous review and challenge of the applied process will inevitably lead to improvements to governance arrangements.

Processes continue to be strengthened to provide assurance that the systems and controls in operation over the governance of partnerships are effective and efficient in the future. A Partnership Register exists and is updated throughout the year as necessary and annually as part of the Business Planning process.

Ipswich Borough Council has responsibility for conducting, at least annually, a review of the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The review of effectiveness is informed by the work of the Directors/Assistant Directors within the authority who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, the Head of Internal Audit's annual report, and also by comments made by the external auditors and other review agencies and inspectorates.

This review is informed by:

- the work of the Internal Auditors and the Head of Internal Audit's Annual Report
- the work of Directors/Assistant Directors and Heads of Service within Ipswich Borough Council who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment
- the external auditors in their Annual Audit Letter and other reports
- the results of any other external inspection reports.

A Social Media Strategy is in place, together with an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy helping to ensure that all groups in our community have a voice, can be heard and are suitably consulted (examples include Petitions, Area Committees, Equality Impact Assessments, Statement of Community Involvement). The Council publishes a list of forthcoming key Executive Committee decisions on its website with details of who to contact. In addition, Committee reports have a mandatory section for officers/councillors to complete which explains what consultation was undertaken - and the outcome - in relation to the proposed decision to be made.

Core Principle 3 - Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits

The Council's Corporate Strategy – Proud of Ipswich - and its Priorities sit at the top of the Council's Golden Thread and all Council activities are associated with the Strategy's Priorities. The current Corporate Strategy was adopted by Council and came into effect in July 2023.

The Strategy sets out the Council's aspirations and priorities for Ipswich with its vision and objectives translated through service group business planning and service area operational planning. Review

The governance framework

mechanisms are in place to monitor progress via the Corporate Strategy Delivery Plan, including identifying risk at a strategic level by the Corporate Management Team, and service area risk monitoring/review by Directors/Assistant Directors and Heads of Service.

The Corporate Strategy Delivery and achievements against its Priorities and the Council's direct contributions are maintained and monitored through performance management, business planning processes, annual assurance statements for each service grouping and the Corporate Strategy Delivery Plan.

Financial planning is underpinned by business planning, with increased expenditure in any service area being justified to the Corporate Management Team, and where necessary approved by the Executive. Key to the business planning process is a requirement to demonstrate planning for continuous improvement over several financial years. Reviews of every service provided by the Council include quality and cost considerations. During 2024/25 a major project was undertaken to identify service efficiencies, cost savings and increased income opportunities. This resulted in a substantial £19m Corporate Savings Programme (CSP) which was established in September 2024 and progress against this is being monitored on a monthly basis.

Ipswich Borough Council, through its budgetary monitoring and control processes, ensures that financial resources are being used to their best advantage, via regular management reporting to the Corporate Management Team and Councillors.

The Corporate Management Team is tasked with prioritising resources to ensure that the objectives within the Corporate Strategy are supported by the individual business plans, and that improvements are in line with corporate objectives.

Economic, effective and efficient use of resources is subject to thorough service reviews conducted by both Internal and External Audit. Benchmarking and use of comparative techniques is used. The Council continues to benchmark on specific metrics through the Local Government Association (LGInform) with quarterly summary reports provided by the LGA.

Changes in complaints handling have been implemented from 01 April 2024 as a result of two new Complaint Handling Codes being released from the Housing Ombudsman (HO) and Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). These two codes are based on a unified set of principles and share many of the same approaches in key areas such as response times.

The Council's complaint policy and procedure have been implemented to streamline and enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of how complaints are managed across service areas. With the changes this brings about greater focus towards the council's learning from complaints to bring about systemic changes ensuring that the feedback and issues being raised lead to meaningful improvements in policies and practices.

The 2 stage complaints policy and procedure has been introduced, to comply with the Ombudsman complaint handling codes. A Quality Assurance Complaints Officer has been appointed to support with the rollout of the code and to provide quality assurance and oversight across all complaint responses. The Council are committed to providing evidence on how we are meeting the code therefore quarterly reports for our Member Responsible for Complaints (MRC), and the Corporate Management Team are being produced. Annual reporting for Housing Ombudsman/self-assessment is also taking place. To ensure best practise for complaints management across the Council we have launched Complaints champions supported by comprehensive training.

The Council's Risk Management Strategy outlines levels of responsibility for identifying and managing risk. The document is reviewed bi-annually by the Audit & Governance Committee.

The Council has voluntarily taken part in the Local Government Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) pilot which is the replacement (from the Minister of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government) for the current 'Public Services Network' (PSN). This is a framework designed to improve the Council's level of Cybersecurity compliance and resilience.

Core Principle 4 - Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

The Corporate Risk Register is regularly reviewed by the Council's Corporate Management Team. A bi-annual review and refresh of the Corporate Risk Register was also completed by the Business Improvement Team to ensure that the risk register remains robust and relevant to the issues of the organisation. The Corporate Risk Register and Risk Matrix was presented to and approved by the Audit and Governance Committee in December 2024. The Audit and Governance Committee will continue to review this fundamental area of governance in accordance with the Committees terms of reference.

Risk management is a fundamental part of all functions carried out by the Council. A risk management toolkit is also available as guidance for identifying and managing areas of risk which may impact on the Council's objectives.

Audit & Governance Committee, working alongside officers (as detailed in the Constitution) provides independent assurance to the Council that its overall governance arrangements are working effectively and reviews the arrangements that exist to safeguard the Council's money and assets and to provide proper value for money; manage the Council's exposure to risk having regard to its control environment including potential exposure to fraud and corruption and ensure the adequacy of the Council's financial reporting processes.

The Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee continues to review and scrutinise decisions taken by the Executive and reviews the services provided by the Council and its partners. The chair of the committee is appointed from opposition councillors and works in conjunction with all of the councillors on the committee to develop an annual work programme. The committee is well supported by the Director – Resources and Housing, the Democratic Services Manager, and other Senior Officers as necessary. The Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee receives regular reports on Portfolio Holders performance and progress on delivery of the Council's Corporate Strategy priorities.

Suggested topics for the work programme are discussed with the Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee Steering Group (steering group consists of the Chair and Vice-Chair of Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee plus cross-party representation), and relevant officers to prepare a scope of work. Some reviews are carried out by small Task & Finish Groups with outcomes being reported back to the main Committee, whilst other issues are considered by the full Committee. The Strategic Overview and Scrutiny Committee can make recommendations to Executive on the findings of its reviews.

The Executive is responsible for most decisions and makes decisions in line with the Council's overall major Policies framework and Budget. Should the Executive wish to make a decision which is outside the framework or budget, this must be referred to Council.

Each of the Council's Directorate develop annual business plans in consultation with Heads of Service. Plans focus on contributions to the Corporate Strategy, performance, key activities for the coming year, challenges/risks covering changes affecting the service group and service group finance/budget.

Heads of Service develop service plans which set out their key service aims for the coming year together with risk, performance management and finance/budget associated with the delivery of their service.

Through performance reporting, corporate and key service objectives are monitored to ensure that performance targets and indicators are being achieved. Local performance indicators and annual key activities are individually linked to the Corporate Strategy priorities and measured/monitored through the corporate Performance Manager System and the business and service planning processes. All performance indicators are reviewed annually as part of the business planning process.

Internal financial control is based on a framework of management information, financial regulations and administrative procedures, which include the segregation of duties, management supervision and a system of delegation and accountability. Ongoing development and maintenance of the various processes may be the responsibility of other managers within the Council.

The Council's Corporate Strategy feeds into the preparation of budgets and is accompanied by the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), which includes the Capital Strategy and Treasury Management

The governance framework

Strategy. Executive Councillors receive regular updates on performance and budget, e.g. via regular portfolio holder meetings with Directors/Assistant Directors and Heads of Service and formal quarterly budget management reporting to the Executive Committee.

Core Principle 5 - Developing the Authority's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

The Council provides a programme of learning and development for councillors that includes a comprehensive induction programme for new councillors. Development representatives from each political group meet with the officers responsible for Councillor development to progress all development related issues. At this meeting Councillor development needs are identified, and events planned to meet those needs. During 2024/25, training sessions and briefings were held on a wide range of topics, with good feedback received from Councillors on sessions.

Performance reporting is maintained to Portfolio Holders and Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee. This process includes progress against key performance indicators and activity, together with risk management, against the Corporate Strategy priorities during the year.

The role and duties of the head of paid service are discharged by the Chief Executive. The function of the head of paid service is described in the Council's Constitution.

As part of the year-end process a Service Assurance Statement is provided by all the Directors/Assistant Directors, detailing assessment of their services. They are required to give assurance that risks have been identified, sound business arrangements operate in their service areas, and that the service is subject to monitoring and review in order to assess performance. Service Assurance Statements are a key element in all Directors/Assistant Directors Business Plans.

Annual Service Plans identify the service area requirements for workforce planning in the coming year. This covers workforce planning issues and actions proposed to ensure the service is delivered. Regard is paid to service area performance, employee leadership development, potential workforce issues in the coming year together with potential actions to remedy.

Employee engagement is planned and monitored through service plans following the implementation of the Employee Survey Action Plan and employees are involved in the development of service plans, with employee engagement plans developed and tailored to the service.

The Council continues to benchmark on specific metrics through the Local Government Association (LGInform) with quarterly summary reports provided by the LGA. The Business Improvement Team regularly monitor Central Government announcements on proposed new benchmarking measures and can develop the requested reporting to enable informed decision-making.

During 2023 the Local Government Association carried out a peer review. The review team made several recommendations, and the report and Council's action plan were submitted to Executive in March 2024. The recommendations focused on how to improve visioning for Ipswich, communications, community engagement, financial savings requirement, transformation programme, workforce engagement and the value of Area Committees. Many of the recommendations have been fully actioned and the Council continues to focus on the remaining matters as appropriate in the context of preparation for Local Government Reorganisation.

The Regulator of Social Housing has responsibility for ensuring all Social Housing providers are compliant with the Regulatory Consumer Standards. In February 2025 an inspection team from the Regulator visited the Council to assess compliance. The Council is currently in an ongoing dialogue with the Regulator in terms of the evidence provided. Results of the inspection will be published in due course.

Core Principle 6 - Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

Risk management is a fundamental part of all functions carried out by the Council. A risk management toolkit is also available as guidance for identifying and managing areas of risk which may impact on the Council's objectives.

The Council's performance framework is regularly reviewed, and appropriate amendments made. There is a golden thread between the Corporate Strategy, Directors/Assistant Directors business plans and service plans, which are all subject to review and report on the Council's performance against key priorities.

The Council's Corporate Risk Register is reviewed on a monthly basis by the Corporate Management Team as part of the dashboard and any new risks are included in the Register for review and monitoring. In addition, the Register was reviewed by the Audit & Governance Committee and exception reports provided to the Executive during the year if required.

Directors/Assistant Directors and Heads of Service review their service group and service area risks as part of the business and service planning process. This review process also identifies any areas of risk which require monitoring via the Corporate Risk Register.

The committee report template includes a mandatory risk section for officers to complete - identifying risk associated with the decision being recommended, ensuring clarity for councillors and officers.

Performance is managed through a number of measures:

- Corporate Management Team monitor the corporate performance dashboard on a monthly basis. The Dashboard contains three key areas of content, i.e.: Performance, Finance and Corporate Risk. The Business Improvement Team will be reviewing the dashboard of measures presented to CMT to provide better insight to the Council's performance.
- Quarterly and end of year performance indicator reporting to Directors/Assistant Directors via the Council's Performance Manager System.
- Regular performance and Corporate Strategy delivery reporting to all Portfolio Holders and Strategic Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) – The Council has a designated SIRO (the Head of Internal Audit) who has responsibility for the Council's information management (governance) framework and acts as the champion for information risk. The SIRO aims to mirror the model prescribed by central government (Cabinet Office). Following this 'best practice' approach allows for uniformity across the public sector as it strives to meet the competing demands of further transparency and public/private engagement in contrast to increased cybersecurity threats and the need to prevent data "leakage". Information governance has become a core part of the administrative process as the need to protect customer's information, whilst simultaneously operating in a rapidly evolving technological and information sharing age has become critical. By treating information as a business priority and not as an ICT or technical issue, we can ensure that risks are addressed, managed and capitalised upon. Ipswich Borough Council has created an outcome-focussed and holistic strategy for managing and shaping the way it uses its essential information.

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

Information Governance – Information is treated as a priority by the Council which acknowledges that information is of value to enable effective and efficient outcomes for all stakeholders. An Information Governance Framework is in operation.

Data Quality - The importance of data quality is communicated at all levels throughout the organisation, including an understanding provided through available workshops covering business planning and the Council's performance and risk management framework.

The governance framework

Designated Posts – Posts have been established and filled i.e. Data Protection Officer, Senior Information Governance Officer and ICT Cyber Security Manager.

Policies and strategies – All policies and strategies are being reviewed to ensure they align to the Corporate Strategy.

Compliance - The Council is compliant with the Central Government Public Service Network (PSN) information security requirements (this is a mandatory annual process). The Council also acts on advice from the National Cyber Security Centre. Information is shared securely with our partners also using the Government Digital Service. The Council is also compliant with the ePayment Card Industry Standards (PCI) and the NHS – Data Security and Protection Toolkit.

Data Protection Act 2018/UK General Data Protection Regulation - The Council acknowledges that information is a priority, which aids the delivery of its services effectively and efficiently. Moreover, protecting personal data is the overarching responsibility of the Council to meet obligatory legal duties and to fulfil its public service duty to each individual.

Training - Data Protection Act/UK General Data Protection Regulation and Freedom of Information Act training is required for all staff and takes account of all recent changes with information laws alongside specialist training in Cyber Security Awareness training; relevant E-learning courses are mandatory.

Data Breaches - There have been 26 data breaches (including near misses) reported to the Information Governance team this year (21 reported breaches in 2023/24). None of the incidents recorded were classified as high impact and so did not require notification to the Information Commissioners Office, but all were reviewed by the Data Protection Officer and members of the Corporate Management Team. No information security incidents were reported.

Freedom of Information Act (FOI). A management solution using the Council's Customer Relationship Management system is in operation. 706 FOI requests were received by the Council in 2024/25 (812 in 2023/24); 79% were answered within 20 days to the 31 March 2025. There were zero complaints reported to the Information Commissioners Office in the year.

Data Subject Access Requests (DSAR). 55 DSAR requests were received and answered by the Council in 2024/25.

Core Principle 7 - Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting, and audit to deliver effective accountability

Internal Audit Services - Works in accordance with the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards 2016, and the Internal Audit Team operates under a Charter. Internal Audit reviews and appraises the adequacy, reliability and effectiveness of internal control within systems and recommends improvement. It also supports management in developing systems, providing advice on matters pertaining to risk and control and governance. The controls created by management are evaluated to ensure:

- Council objectives are being achieved
- Economic and efficient use of resources
- Compliance with policies, procedures, laws and regulations
- The safeguarding of Council assets; and
- The integrity and reliability of information and data.

The Head of Internal Audit - Is responsible for reviewing and reporting on the adequacy of the organisation's control and governance environment, with a responsibility direct to the Audit and Governance Committee, including the arrangements for achieving value for money in accordance with CIPFA's 'The Role of the Head of Internal Audit in Public Service Organisations', At Ipswich Borough Council this role reports to the Assistant Director of Governance as well as the Chief Executive when necessary, with free and open access across the entire executive and non-executive positions. The Head of Internal Audit and Audit Manager at Ipswich Borough Council are shared with East Suffolk Council via the contracted Audit Partnership arrangements.

The governance framework

The Head of Internal Audit Annual Opinion - Based on the work undertaken by Internal Audit Services throughout the year, in conjunction with previous years' work, current risk assessments, and the Directors/Assistant Directors Assurance Statements, the Head of Internal Audit is able to place reasonable assurance on the systems of internal control in place.

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

A national backstop date of 28 February 2025 was set for the completion of the audit of 2023/24 Accounts, as part of the national approach to address the external audit backlog. A full audit was undertaken on the 2023/24 Accounts. However, there was insufficient time to complete the full set of checks, particularly the verification of some opening balances. The Independent Auditors Report was received on 26 February 2025 and as expected the audit opinion was disclaimed.

Although the 2023/24 Accounts were disclaimed, the full audit undertaken will provide a good confidence that it will be possible to return to an unqualified audit opinion for the 2024/25 Accounts, which is expected before November 2025.

Whistleblowing - A 'Whistleblowing' Policy is in place. The Head of Internal Audit is responsible for the policy and has oversight of the procedures and investigations, including reporting formally upon the status of any Whistleblowing cases to the Audit and Governance Committee. One Whistleblowing case was reported to the Head of Internal Audit in 2024/25. (one reported case in 2023/24). No material findings to report.

Complaints and Compliments - The Council has a complaints and compliments procedure with formal complaints monitored quarterly through the Corporate Management Team. During 2024/25, 491 complaints and 166 compliments were received (compared to 645 complaints and 197 compliments in 2023/24).

Audit & Governance Committee - The Audit & Governance Committee's terms of reference and work programme aim to follow CIPFA best practice. The Committee receives regular updates from the Head of Internal Audit, the Chief Finance Officer and External Audit on the assurance which can be placed against various systems and processes reviewed during the year.

Local Government Transparency Code – The Council aims to comply with this Code by ensuring local people can now see (a link on the Council's Internet page) and access data covering:

1. How money is spent – for example, all spending transactions over £500, all Government Procurement Card spending and contracts valued over £5,000.
2. Use of assets – ensuring that local people are able to scrutinise how well their local authority manages its assets enabling local people the information they need to ask questions about how their authority is managing its housing stock to ensure it is put to best use.
3. Decision making – how decisions are taken and who is taking them, including how much senior staff are paid.
4. Issues important to local people – for example, parking and the amount spent by an authority subsidising trade union activity.

Going Forward

Like all councils we are presented with many Information Governance challenges, both internal and external, with regard to assuring our digital communication aims. The Council acknowledges the changing risks and opportunities around information governance and is actively working on continued compliance with legislation and the Information Commissioners Office guidance.

The Council maintains focus on the following areas:

The governance framework

- Income generation - In the budget delivery plan there are streams of income where increases have been identified and new streams of income also identified.
- Ensuring robust implementation plans for the budget delivery plan are in place.
- That the budget delivery plan items are incorporated into the monthly reporting to CMT via the performance dashboard.

Wholly owned Companies

At 31st March 2025 the Council had five wholly owned Companies – Ipswich Borough Assets Ltd, Ipserv Limited, Ipswich Buses Ltd, Handford Homes Ltd and Ipserv Direct Services Ltd. Ipserv acquired a subsidiary, Stage Event Security Ltd in April 2018 and Handford Homes incorporated a subsidiary, Handford Lettings Ltd in November 2018. In January 2020 Ipswich Borough Assets incorporated a subsidiary, Ipswich Borough Assets Developments Limited. In March 2021, Executive authorised Handford Homes to also trade as Handford Developments, providing non housing development services to the Council. Ipserv incorporated a subsidiary, Ipserv Employers Ltd in January 2022.

Each company has up to date Articles, Reserved Matters, Schemes of Delegation, director skills audits.

The Council's Executive has appointed the Assistant Director of Governance as the Shareholders Representative for each of the five wholly owned company.

In summary the Governance arrangements for each company are:

Ipswich Buses

- Incorporated in 1986
- Seven Directors including two independent of the Council
- Assistant Director of Governance as the Shareholder's Representative
- Clear Articles of Association and Reserved Matters
- Reserved Matters clearly indicating what requires a decision from the Shareholder (via an Executive meeting) or from the Shareholder's Representative
- Business Plan submitted to Shareholder
- Scheme of Delegation
- Audited by Ensors Accountants
- Part of group accounting structure for IBC
- Has a Managing Director
- Has some financial relationships with IBC secured by debenture or other secured loan agreement
- Shares Company Secretary and Finance Director with other Council owned companies
- Intra-group agreements in place for support services.

Ipswich Borough Assets

- Incorporated in 2016
- Four Directors
- Assistant Director of Governance as the Shareholder's Representative
- Clear Articles of Association and Reserved Matters
- Reserved Matters clearly indicating what requires a decision from the Shareholder (via an Executive meeting) or from the Shareholder's Representative
- Business Plan submitted to Shareholder
- Shares Company Secretary and Finance Director with other Council owned companies
- Scheme of Delegation
- Audited by Ensors Accountants
- Part of group accounting structure for IBC
- Has a Managing Director
- Financial relationships with IBC secured through formal loan agreements
- Intra-group agreements in place for support services.
- One subsidiary – Ipswich Borough Assets Developments

Ipserv

- Incorporated in 2017

The governance framework

- Five Directors
- Assistant Director of Governance as the Shareholder's Representative
- Clear Articles of Association and Reserved Matters
- Business Plan submitted to Shareholder
- Shares Company Secretary and Finance Director with other Council owned companies
- Scheme of Delegation
- Audited by Ensors Accountants
- Part of group accounting structure for IBC
- Has a Managing Director
- Intra-group agreements in place for support services
- Two subsidiaries – Stage Event Security and Ipserv Employers

Handford Homes

- Incorporated in July 2017
- Four Directors.
- Assistant Director of Governance as the Shareholder's Representative
- Clear Articles of Association and Reserved Matters
- Business Plan submitted annually to Shareholder
- Shares Company Secretary and Finance Director with other Council owned companies
- Scheme of Delegation
- Audited by Ensors Accountants
- Part of group accounting structure for IBC
- Has a Managing Director
- Development Agreements with IBC for housing and non-housing projects
- Intra-group agreements in place for support services.
- One subsidiary – Handford Lettings

Ipserv Direct Services

- Incorporated in 2018
- Five Directors
- Assistant Director of Governance as the Shareholder's Representative
- Clear Articles of Association and Reserved Matters
- Business Plan submitted to Shareholder
- Shares Company Secretary and Finance Director with other Council owned companies
- Audited by Ensors Accountants
- Part of group accounting structure for IBC
- Has a Managing Director
- Intra-group agreements in place for support services
- Scheme of Delegation.

It should be noted that over the years the Council has registered a number of other companies in order to protect names should they be required in future. These are being reviewed and none are trading.

Arrangements for these companies are kept under constant informal review as the companies develop with proposals to significantly change governance arrangements submitted to the Council's Executive.

Improvements during the year 2024/25

In the period covered by this Annual Governance Assurance Statement, improvements have been made to the Council's arrangements in respect of the following areas, which had been previously identified as areas for improvement or challenges for the Council to overcome:

Issue	Improvement Plan	Progress to date
Achieving Carbon Neutrality for the Council's operations by 2030.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assessment of the key contributing causes and levels of emissions to inform focus areas. Ongoing review of the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan in 2024. Continue to publish Greenhouse Gas Emission statements in line with current protocols and review, implement and monitor reduction actions in accordance with the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progressing requirements for the Greenhouse Gas Report for 2024/25 through Procurement. Assessment of contributing causes feeds into this work. Part time Climate Specific resource looking to be implemented from 01/04/25 and will support on the change strategy and action plan. The Council Climate Action Scorecard was completed, and results expected in May of 2025. This identified meaningful completed climate actions taken towards Net Zero under the headings of Building and Heating, Transport, Planning and Land use, Governance and Finance, Biodiversity, Collaboration and Engagement, and Waste Reduction and Food. Decarbonisation Strategy being written for sign off in second half of 2025. EPC Surveys being completed on properties without one. £40m allocated to be spent on Retrofit and Sustainability measures between 2026 and 2030. Ongoing Planned Maintenance Programmes. Represented at SCCEEB Sustainable Homes Theme: Subgroup meeting (monthly). Support to this priority is given through Air Quality work, maintaining an Air Quality management strategy and action plans as well as ongoing monitoring. Feeding into

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Issue	Improvement Plan	Progress to date
		climate reviews and actions as required.
Ensuring compliance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct an Internal Audit of Compliance. Ensure we meet our legal duties through the Building Safety Act and Social Housing Act. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Building Safety Audit was completed in early 2025 by the Council's internal audit team and a 'good assurance' was achieved. Compliance of the Council's housing stock was subject to significant scrutiny under the 'Safety & Quality' consumer standard by the Regulator of Social Housing during the inspection in February 2025.
Maintaining a financial sustainable Housing Revenue Account.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct an external review of HRA Finance Business Plan. Conduct an external review of opportunity to implement Rent Flexibility and service charging for General needs tenants. Develop outcomes from Hackathon. Implement a value for money log to evidence how much does what we do cost? To demonstrate - cost vs performance. Review of recharge to General Fund to whether it provides value for money. Effective budget monitoring. Robust business cases developed for new expenditure. Maintain rent performance at 2% of debit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External Review of HRA Business Plan conducted by Glenn Smith – recommendations implemented. External review conducted by ARK on plan to introduce Rent Flexibility. Delivery of Corporate Savings Programme initiatives. Rent Performance at 1.6% better than 2% target. Effective monthly Budget Monitoring. Review of budgets in M&C planned for June 25. Business cases are developed for new expenditure and relevant corporate processes are followed and monitored, i.e. the new capital bid process.
Ensuring regulatory compliance with Regulator of Social Housings Consumer Standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuous review of performance against Consumer standards. Deliver against Consumer standards action plan. Develop a Housing Development/Improvement Plan to evidence where improvement is needed. Implement policies and procedures where identified they are needed. Ensure accurate reporting to Regulator inc Tenant Satisfaction measures. Be proactive in responding to additional changes in legislation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continuously reviewed performance against Consumer Standards including delivery of Consumer standards action plan. New strategies policies and procedures introduced. Regulator of Social Housing conducted Consumer Standards inspection in Feb 25.

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Issue	Improvement Plan	Progress to date
	and requirements of Housing Service e.g. Awaabs Law.	
Minimising impact of homelessness and rough sleeping.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and implement a new Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2024 – 2029. Prepare and plan for current end date of RSI funding at end of 2024. Review of Temporary Accommodation. Implement Suffolk wide recommendations from CT report. Develop alternative to Housing Related Support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025 – 2030 approved in January 2025. Ipswich Supported Housing Pathway procured and ready for implementation from April 25. New Temporary accommodation model being implemented from April 25. Plan created for delivery of rough sleeping services for 25/26 within budget.
Improve procurement activity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate delivery of procurement improvement plan based on EELGA's review and recommendations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendations from the EELGA review have been implemented, including the submission of the Procurement Strategy to Executive in September Regular contract monitoring reports at CMT. Contract management training is now being offered to all relevant staff Procurement Team have completed the training programme on the new Procurement Act.
Improve and update financial arrangements to enable the Council to meet the financial challenges in the MTFP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate delivery of savings targets. Coordinate delivery of financial tightening plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Savings Plan built into the approved MTFP in Feb 2025. The savings programme is being reviewed and monitored on a monthly basis both from a financial and service delivery position. Significant elements of the financial tightening plan have been delayed due to capacity issues and focus on the corporate savings programme. However, the Central Purchasing Team has been established and will be resourced in April 2025. Several of the actions within the plan are linked to the establishment of this team and will be implemented during 25/26.

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Issue	Improvement Plan	Progress to date
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A review of procurement cards has been undertaken and recommendations to move to virtual and embedded cards to drive down spend will be implemented in early 25/26.
Improve financial system and processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fully implement Agresso cloud-based system (phase 2 of Agresso project). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successfully implemented in Oct 2024. Tender process completed; contract signed by new supplier 26-Feb-25.
Improve forecasting accuracy of the capital programme to benefit budgetary control and cashflow management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Profile spend of all capital projects and identify key drivers. Embed monitoring of high confidence spend with remaining held as project contingency budget or approval sought to move to a later year or reduce budget. Establish corporate review of carry forwards with default to increasing project contingency unless high confidence of spend. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The 24/25 capital programme was fully profiled, with spend and milestones identified for each capital project. Regular monthly monitoring review implemented and overseen by the Capital Programme Working Group. Review of 24/25 carry forwards considered by Capital Programme Working Group for approval to be added to the 25/26 capital programme.
Complete catchup of audited Statement of Accounts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2022/23 accounts subject to national decision. Audited 2023/24 accounts to be published by 30/09/2024. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 23/24 annual accounts external audit completed by national backstop date of 28/2/25. Annual Accounts have been published on the internet.
Review and update Emergency Preparedness and Business Continuity Management.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Update and provide training where required. Ensure training exercises assess the Emergency Plan arrangements. Review on-call rota for emergency response, adding Ads into the rotation to build resilience. Plan to further review procedures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Updates being made on an ongoing basis. Service area working closely with JEPu to ensure good practice, training for staff members on response and on-call support. On call rota is in place and working well. Updated training provided to CMT members on rota and new Place AD to be added after training. Exercises undertaken by JEPu for training.
Migrate HEARS alarm receiving centre to digital infrastructure in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and procure an appropriate digital call receiving platform. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with TSA to understand next steps. Procurement completed for call-off on equipment.

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Issue	Improvement Plan	Progress to date
line with the national digital switch.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and procure digital alarm equipment compatible with the receiving platform. Roll out alarm changes to all customers, focusing on areas where the switch has been in place. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with phone providers to data share the phone numbers of vulnerable customers to prevent early switch when on analogue devices.
Implications of Simpler Recycling and consultations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse strategy and structure for procurement. Proceed with the procurement. Continued membership of Simpler Recycling Officer Action Group, attending monthly cross LA meetings. Active involvement in consultations and working groups. Review and feedback to stakeholders on key decisions around service implementation and planning for implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food Waste Collections have been modelled at a high level using an external contractor. This has identified the need for 5 routes Dx2L. 6 x Turburg Orus 6 7.5t have been ordered and in Aug 2025 Defra funding has been allocated for 4.5 vehicles with IBC topping up the rest from capital funding. This will allow IBC to utilise one vehicle for trade food waste collections. Procurement of caddies is completed with ISL having been awarded the contract. Caddies are to be delivered from Feb 2026. Simpler Recycling – Dry Mixed is being discussed at Executive in April 2025 for a formal decision on adoption of a collection method being either co-mingled or twin stream. Funding may be required for wheelie bins £1.8m capital across 10 years. Comms workshops have begun with WRAP and Eunomia providing SWP member authorities with support. Year 1 EPR payment received. Commercial Waste changes come in from April 2025. Wastesaver has procured a 3rd party food waste collection service along with in house delivery to ensure compliance and changes are being delivered to customers. Continued membership of Simpler Recycling Officer Action Group, meetings

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Issue	Improvement Plan	Progress to date
		have ramped up to weekly. Cross LA Director Meetings also attended regularly as well as specific working groups forums
Delivering Towns Fund (7 projects)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management of the programme of projects. Regular reporting to CMT and Towns Fund Board. Review and implementation of updated governance arrangements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6 of the 7 projects are currently rated amber in terms of delivery against milestones. Improved financial management is now in place to improve the overall performance and assurance of the programme. Quarterly CMT reports are provided in advantage of monitoring and evaluation meeting. A full internal audit was undertaken of the TF that resulted in a number of actions that are on track to be completed by 31/3/25.
Deliver action plan arising from Peer Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management of individual projects Regular reporting to CMT LGA progress review – Autumn 2024 Report to Executive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Engagement Strategy approved and adopted by Executive. Working on redesigning the Communities team to deliver this with new JDs, tools and working practices. Peer Review team were satisfied with progress when they followed up in Autumn 2024.

The Audit & Governance Committee will review this document in July 2025 and comment upon the effectiveness of the governance framework.

The governance framework

Significant governance issues

On the basis of assurance statements produced by the Heads of Service and the Council's Corporate Risk Register (CRR), we are satisfied that the Corporate Governance arrangements for Ipswich Borough Council are adequate and operating effectively. We always keep matters under review with the intention to improve processes in 2025/26 in the following areas:

Issues/Challenges Identified	Improvement Plan
Compliance with new procurement regulations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ All relevant documents have been updated and minor changes to CSOs have been proposed – improvement will come through review, procurements and applications of lessons learned.
Building Safety Regulator compliance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Recruitment of suitably qualified staff.▪ Implementation of system improvements (e.g., document management) and additions e.g., Quality Management System
Implementation of the new Finance Management System.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Project Team in place to monitor and report on progress.▪ Steering group in place to oversee project and report back to CMT\Exec.▪ Implementation dates defined and agreed with suppliers.▪ Robust project planning, monitoring & having a clear plan of action to rectify delays/setbacks.▪ Identify the project critical Project Team in place to monitor and report on progress.▪ Clear identification of roles & responsibilities.▪ Identification of potential bottlenecks within the implementation & having clear plans of actions to avoid/rectify.
Delivery of the 2025/26 Corporate Savings Programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Robust monitoring & reporting of the net savings being achieved or slippage on the savings target.
Impact of devolution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Positioning Ipswich within the devolution arrangements and robust decision making where required.
Local Government Reorganisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Robust decision making on Full Business case for submission to government.▪ Implementation planning as appropriate.

We propose over the coming year to take steps to address the above matters to further enhance our governance arrangements. We are satisfied that these steps will address the need for improvements that were identified in our review of effectiveness and will monitor their implementation and operation as part of our next annual review.

Signed: Councillor Neil MacDonald
Council Leader on behalf of Ipswich Borough Council

Date:

Signed: Helen Pluck
Chief Executive on behalf of Ipswich Borough Council

Date: