

Annual Governance Statement 2026

Executive Summary

The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) provides an account of the processes and systems which give assurance for the effectiveness of the Council's discharge of its responsibilities. It covers the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

A narrative is given recording both key processes and in year developments against each of the seven principles on which the Statement is based.

During 2025/26, the Council continued to strengthen its governance framework through a programme of practical improvement activity and regular corporate oversight. Key actions during the year included progression of constitutional updates, including review of procedure rules, continued development of the whistleblowing framework to improve awareness and accessibility, and maintenance of audit and reporting arrangements. Governance and performance information continued to be monitored through established committee and quarterly reporting routes, supporting transparency, timely escalation of issues and clearer accountability for delivery.

The year also saw important governance activity focused on longer-term planning and community outcomes. This included publication of the Stronger Together Communities Strategy, development of a longer-term vision for Bracknell Forest, and work on three-year service planning to better align service priorities with the medium-term financial strategy.

Alongside continued oversight of risk, internal control, information governance and service performance, these actions demonstrate an embedded approach to governance improvement, linking decision-making, planning and assurance to the Council's wider strategic objectives.

Overall, the Statement provides good assurance that the Council's system of internal control is fit for purpose.

An update on the previous year's Annual Governance Statement Actions is included as **(Appendix A)**.

Work underway or planned to address any governance issues for 2025/26 is set out in an Action Plan **(Appendix B)**. The findings from the recent Corporate Peer Review have also informed this Statement. Relevant recommendations arising from the review have been reflected in the governance action plan at **Appendix B**.

1. Scope of Responsibility

- 1.1 Bracknell Forest Borough Council ("The Council") is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards and that public money is safeguarded, 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.

- 1.2 In discharging this overall responsibility, the Council is responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of its affairs and facilitating the effective exercise of its functions, including arrangements for the management of risk.
- 1.3 This Statement explains how the Council has complied with the code and also meets the requirements of regulation 6 (1) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 in relation to the preparation of a statement on internal control.

2 The Council’s Governance Framework

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

Diagram 1 Overview of Bracknell Forest Council Governance Framework



3. The CIPFA Governance Assurance Framework Principles

The CIPFA/SOLACE Framework 2016 - Delivering Good Governance in Local Government suggests that this Annual Governance Statement should include a brief description of the key elements of the governance framework that the Council has in place.

- 3.1 There are seven principles and sub-principles of Corporate Governance incorporated within the CIPFA/SOLACE framework and as set out in Diagram 2 below.

Diagram 2. -The seven CIPFA Principles of Good Governance

- 3.2 Each element of the governance framework is considered in this Statement within the context of the seven CIPFA Principles of Good Governance.

4. Key Roles in preparation of the Annual Governance Statement



Key roles	Responsibilities
Elected representatives	Overall responsibility for the governance of the local authority and for the fulfilment of accountabilities to the public and stakeholders. Approval of the governance arrangements of the authority, either directly or through delegations, including the Constitution and local code of governance. In a local authority the AGS must be approved by a body charged with governance (full council) or delegated to an appropriate committee, such as an audit committee. The AGS must then be signed

	by a leading member alongside the chief executive. Following publication, elected representatives have oversight of and accountability for agreed actions to improve governance.
Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service), chief financial and monitoring officer	Statutory officers with specific governance responsibilities. Typically, the annual review and preparation of the AGS is overseen by one of them. The chief executive must sign the AGS.
Other senior management	Responsible with the statutory officers to put in place the appropriate arrangements for governance and providing assurance on its effectiveness in their service areas.
Other officers with governance roles	Co-ordination of the annual review and drafting of the AGS in support of the statutory officers and other governance leadership responsibilities.
Head of internal audit	Provides an annual conclusion on governance, risk management and internal control as part of internal audit standards, which informs the review. Charter and safeguards agreed, such as alternative processes to gain assurance.

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

During 2025/26, the Council has maintained a strong ethical framework supported by its Constitution, Codes of Conduct, and Standards regime.

- The Standards framework continues to be reported corporately, with annual reporting covering complaints and governance issues across the period April 2025–March 2026.
- The Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy reinforces a zero-tolerance approach, requiring all employees to act with integrity and transparency

Overall, ethical governance arrangements remain embedded, with ongoing monitoring through Standards reporting and governance oversight.

Examples of corresponding framework

- Councillor Code of Conduct
- Councillor Training Programme
- Whistleblowing procedure
- Anti Bribery Policy
- Member/Officer protocol
- HR Procedures
- Protocol for Members in dealing with Planning matters
- Information management strategy

B. Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

The Council has continued to demonstrate openness and engagement with stakeholders throughout 2025/26, with the Quarterly Service Reports evidencing sustained work across all four quarters to involve residents, partners, members and community organisations in shaping priorities and service delivery.

- Quarterly reporting records significant community engagement activity, including delivery of Bracknell Forest Pride, Culture and Community Day, White Ribbon activity, seasonal events and ongoing support to community associations managing council community centres, with regular site visits and quarterly network meetings.
- Partnership working has continued to mature during the year, including approval of the Stronger Together Communities Strategy 2026–2036, stakeholder workshops through the Thriving Communities programme, and continued work with Berkshire partners through the Civilian Military Partnership and Armed Forces Covenant activity.
- The Council has also maintained transparent public reporting through committee processes and quarterly performance monitoring, supported by continued publication of equality information and other governance-related reporting.

Taken together, these arrangements support accountability, strengthen the Council's understanding of local need, and help ensure that strategic decisions and service plans are informed by resident, partner and member feedback across the year.

Examples of corresponding framework

- Transparent decision making in line with statutory and constitutional provisions
- Executive Decisions on Forward Plan
- Exempt status of reports subject to Monitoring Officer scrutiny
- Public participation scheme
- Pay policy statement
- Development of Contracts Register
- Contracts over £5000 on Data share

C. *Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social and environmental benefits*

The Council continues to align governance to delivery of sustainable outcomes, with the Quarterly Service Reports demonstrating that strategic priorities have been translated into practical interventions across community wellbeing, climate action, service accessibility and place-based development during 2025/26.

- Climate governance continued to strengthen during the year, including formal adoption and implementation of the 2025–30 Climate Change Strategy, delivery of staff training modules, support for household retrofit activity, work on scope 3 emissions, and community climate action initiatives.
- Community and neighbourhood outcomes were supported through visible delivery of civic and engagement activity, development of stronger partnership arrangements, and continued investment in facilities and hubs intended to support inclusion, cohesion and local participation.
- The Council also continued to progress housing, education and community infrastructure objectives through ongoing developments, SEND capacity expansion, and place-shaping activity linked to long-term borough planning.
- VISION 2050 provides a clear long-term strategic framework for the borough, supporting sustainable outcomes and helping to align decision-making, planning and investment with Bracknell Forest's future ambitions.

Governance, performance and financial planning frameworks provide the mechanism for monitoring these outcomes, enabling the Council to track delivery over time and respond where pressures or delays emerge.

Examples of corresponding framework

- Council Plan 2023-27
- Corresponding Service Plans
- Quarterly Service reports and Quarterly Council Plan Overview reports
- Partnership working (e.g. Community Safety partnership, Cambium Partnership, Joint Waste Board, Public Protection Partnership)

D. *Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes*

The Council continues to use performance evidence, project monitoring and strategic planning to determine interventions necessary to optimise outcomes, with the QSR cycle providing regular challenge, escalation and corrective action through the year.

- The Council has continued to strengthen medium-term service and financial planning, including development of longer-term service plans and use of quarterly monitoring to identify delivery risks, amber-rated actions and areas requiring management attention.
- Operational interventions during the year included continued updating of business continuity plans by the Joint Emergency Planning Unit, lessons learned from emergency incidents, changes to digital systems and customer processes, and targeted action where projects or funding streams required recovery activity.
- The year also saw use of partnership and project governance to move forward specific initiatives, including community hub design and planning, community centre feasibility work, and action to address underperformance or delivery risk in selected programmes.

These examples demonstrate a proactive approach to intervention, with governance arrangements supporting timely identification of issues, informed decision-making and follow-through on corrective action.

Examples of corresponding framework

- Council Plan
- Service Plans
- Quarterly Service reports and Quarterly Council Plan Overview reports
- Outbreak Control Plan

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

The Council has continued to invest in organisational capacity and leadership capability during 2025/26, with the QSRs showing both formal development activity and practical service-level changes to maintain resilience and support improvement.

- Retention of Charter+ accreditation for councillor learning and development provides strong assurance that member development remains embedded and aligned to effective governance and leadership.
- Service reports also record practical action to maintain workforce capacity, including targeted recruitment in key services, organisational change where required, improved staffing arrangements in customer-facing services, and continued management oversight of workforce pressures.
- Capability has also been supported through digital modernisation, staff training in key corporate priorities such as climate change, and management structures that continue to align strategic direction with operational delivery.

Capacity development therefore remains a key enabler of effective governance, helping the Council sustain delivery while responding to organisational change, demand pressures and emerging priorities

Examples of corresponding framework

- Induction programmes for Officers & Members
- Member Development Programme
- Behaviours
- Role profiles

F. Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial Management

The Council has maintained effective performance, risk and control arrangements throughout 2025/26, with quarterly monitoring providing evidence of both strong core compliance and active management of areas where performance or delivery required improvement.

- Financial monitoring remained robust, with continued corporate oversight of budget positions and recognition within the year's governance evidence of improved financial control against the previous year's pressures.
- Governance-related service indicators reported through the Communities QSR remained generally strong across the year. Subject Access Request performance improved from 83% in Q1 to 87% in Q2 and remained largely within statutory timeframes, while Freedom of Information compliance remained above target, moving from 92% in Q1 to 90% in Q2 and 91% by Q4.
- Corporate complaint handling also remained above target, with performance reported at 94% in Q1 and 91% in Q2, and year-end reporting showing continued improvement activity. Ombudsman-related indicators remained monitored through the year as part of the broader assurance framework.
- Quarterly reporting also included specific oversight of audits, risks and ICO decision notices, demonstrating that governance reporting is not limited to finance alone but extends to information governance, service risk and regulatory compliance.
- Internal audit activity, corporate risk management and committee oversight continue to provide assurance over the effectiveness of the control environment.

Overall, these arrangements support a robust system of internal control, with regular reporting enabling prompt visibility of trends, exceptions and areas requiring management action.

Examples of corresponding framework

- Financial Regulations
- Annual Budget setting process
- S151 Officer role
- 2021/22 Audit programme
- Head of Audit and Risk Management's annual opinion
- The Strategic Risk Management Group (SRMG)
- Risk Management Strategy
- Strategic Risk register

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

The Council continues to demonstrate effective accountability through a combination of formal committee oversight, quarterly performance reporting, audit activity and publication of key governance documents.

- Governance & Audit Committee continues to provide independent assurance over governance, risk and financial reporting, supported by annual reporting on standards, internal audit and the Annual Governance Statement action plan.
- The Quarterly Service Report regime provides a regular and structured line of sight from service delivery to strategic oversight, incorporating performance indicators, delivery milestones, risks, workforce information and budget monitoring.
- The Council's reporting arrangements are also strengthened by transparent follow-up on governance actions, including constitutional updates, whistleblowing review, service planning developments and other improvements identified through the AGS process.

Examples of corresponding framework

- Council Scheme of Delegation, Procedural rules, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations as set out in constitution.
- Governance and Audit Committee terms of reference
- Executive Forward Plan
- Council Plan overview reports
- Scrutiny arrangements
- Information Governance Framework

APPENDIX A**2025 Annual Governance Statement Action Plan Update**

	Item	Proposed action	Owner	Implementation deadline	Update
1	Whistleblowing review	Review/redraft to improve awareness and accessibility	Borough Solicitor	December 25	Updated policy agreed by Governance & Audit Committee in March 2026
2	Constitutional updates	1. Review remote meeting procedure rules 2. Review Council and Committee Procedure rules	Borough Solicitor and AD Democratic & Registration Services	March 26	1. Deferred pending government announcement on whether new statutory rules would be introduced. 2. Currently in train to progress to Council meeting on 25 November 2026
3	Communities Strategy	Publish 10 year Communities Strategy	AD Communities and Policy	March 26	Endorsed by Council at its meeting of 22 April 2026
4	Bracknell Forest vision	Co-produce and publish a long-term Vision for Bracknell Forest to 2050 that aligns with the council's objectives, addresses future challenges, and leverages local strengths.	CMT	March 26	Approved by Council at its meeting in September 2025
5	Service Planning	Develop 3-year service Plans to inform the development of the council's medium term financial strategy 2026-29.	AD Communities and Policy	March 26	All directorates reviewed and updated their service plans in preparation for the 2026/27 financial year. Reported to Cabinet in May 2026

APPENDIX B**2026 Annual Governance Statement Action Plan**

	Item	Proposed action	Corresponding Principle	Owner	Deadline
1	Constitutional review	Complete review of Council and Committee Procedure Rules	A	Borough Solicitor and AD Democratic and Registration Services	December 2026
2.	Election Readiness	Ensure resources in place for effective delivery of 2027 local elections	C/E	AD Democratic & Registration Services	May 2027
3.	Develop Member Induction and Development strategy	Update Member Development Programme prior to 2027 local elections	E	AD Democratic & Registration Services	April 2027
4.	Transition Planning for Potential Change of Administration/ Political balance	Develop protocols to support effective transition in the event of a new administration emerging from 2027 local elections [details to be worked up]	E	Borough Solicitor/AD Democratic & Registration Services	April 2027
5	Required actions from the Public Office (Accountability) Bill	Update Codes and Protocols to include explicit reference to duty of candour and provision of training on ethical conduct	A	Borough Solicitor and AD HR & OD	December 2027

Signed:

Councillor Helen Purnell



Susan Halliwell


Leader of the Council
July 2026
Chief Executive
July 2026