

Annual Governance Statement 2024/2025

The Council's Annual Governance Statement (AGS) follows the Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting in the UK 2024/25 and comprises the following sections:

- Scope of responsibility
- The purpose of the governance framework
- The governance framework
- Review of effectiveness
- Update on the significant governance issues that were declared last year
- Significant governance issues for the year-end 2025

Scope of responsibility

Belfast City Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and is used economically, efficiently and effectively. The Council also has a duty under Part 12 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 to make arrangements for continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of strategic effectiveness, service quality, service availability, fairness, sustainability, efficiency and innovation.

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, which includes arrangements for the management of risk.

The Council has prepared an Annual Governance Statement, which is consistent with the principles of the new CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016 edition)*. This statement explains how the Council has complied with the code and meets the requirements of regulation 4 of the Local Government (Accounts and Audit) Regulations (Northern Ireland 2015) in relation to the publication of an annual governance statement.

The purpose of the governance framework

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and the activities through which it accounts to, engages with and leads its communities. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether those objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate 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 an ongoing process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of the Council's policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically.

The governance framework continues to be in place at Belfast City Council for the year ending 31st March 2025 and up to the date of approval of the Annual Governance Statement

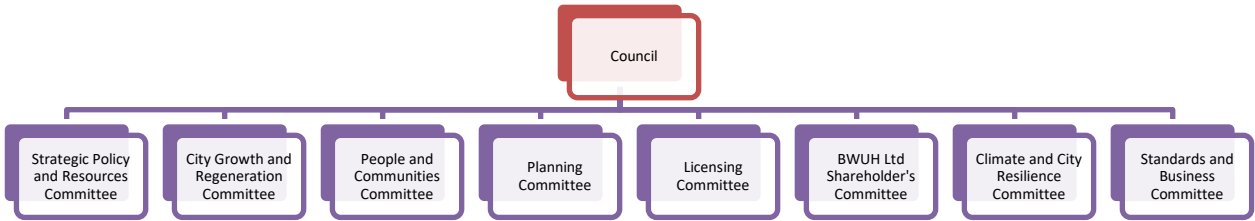
and statement of accounts. The following section sets out the key elements of the governance framework.

The governance framework

Following the expiration of the Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Provisions Relating to Local Authority Meetings) (No. 2) Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 members were required to be physically present at Council and Committee meetings from 7th March 2024 in order to take part in debates and to vote on any issues which may be raised. The Local Government (Remote Meetings) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 were approved by the NI Assembly and became operational from 25 June 2024 which required councils to put in place standing orders governing remote attendance at meetings of council. Belfast City Council approved the Supplement to the Standing Orders, Remote Meetings Protocol and Procedure Rules, on 2nd September 2024. The first remote meeting under the new legislation was Strategic Resources and Policy committee on 20 September 2024.

As working groups and workshops are not decision-making bodies and are not subject to the same legislation, these continue to be held as hybrid meetings.

Our committee structure, which is based on the full council and eight standing committees is illustrated and described below.



Through the work of committees, our Members oversee the work of the council. All committee decisions need to be ratified by the full council except where committees have been granted delegated authority to make decisions.

The full council, which consists of all 60 elected representatives, is the overarching decision-making body.

The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for setting the strategic direction of the Council through the development of its corporate plan and other key corporate and cross cutting strategies and policies. It will also ensure effective use of resources and value for money for ratepayers and oversee the Council’s relationship with a number of key agencies and partners.

The City Growth and Regeneration Committee is responsible for the development and implementation of strategies, policies, programmes and projects directed to the

regeneration and growth of the city in the context of the outcomes agreed in the community and corporate plans and other corporate strategy.

The People and Communities Committee is responsible for the development and implementation of strategies, policies, programmes and projects aimed at improving life at a local level in the context of the outcomes agreed in the community and corporate plans and other corporate strategy.

The Planning Committee is responsible for all the Council's planning functions, except those matters, which are delegated to officers or reserved to full Council.

The Licensing Committee is responsible for the consideration of all matters pertaining to policy and legislation in relation to licensing issues.

The Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd Shareholders' Committee is responsible for making the decisions required by the Shareholders' Agreement and ensure that the company complies with the contract for the operation of the venues.

The Climate and City Resilience Committee is responsible for political oversight of the resilience strategy for Belfast, liaising with Belfast Resilience and Sustainability Board who are responsible for monitoring and delivery with the support of Belfast Climate Commission, supporting a targeted approach through existing structures to those issues which pose the greatest risk to the city, its economy and its people. This includes considering the potential implications of climate change for the city of Belfast and for making recommendations to the Council on Belfast City Council's approach to addressing the climate crisis and Council's role and responsibilities at city level.

The terms of reference of the Standards and Business Committee are to: promote, sustain and safeguard the conduct of Councillors within the Council; promote a collaborative working relationship between senior officers and Members; ensure the probity of all the council's proceedings; and review and improve processes in relation to bringing business before the Council, including review of all Notices of Motion, any review of Standing Orders and the Council's Scheme of Delegation.

In addition to the Committees listed in the diagrams above there are 19 Working Groups established which include the Audit & Risk Panel and four Area Working Groups. In addition, there is a Party Leaders' Consultative Forum.

The Audit & Risk Panel provides an independent assurance on the adequacy of the Council's risk management framework and associated control environment. It provides an independent scrutiny of the Council's financial and non-financial performance, which is relied upon by the Council, to the extent that it exposes it to risk and weakens the control environment. The Panel reports to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The Audit & Risk Panel met four times during 2024/25.

The Council's Code of Governance is based on the seven core principles set out in the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework (2016 edition). How we meet these seven core principles is reviewed and updated annually. A summary of the key elements of our governance framework are set out in the following table:

Our seven principles of good governance

A: Behaving with integrity

- Shared values communicated via corporate plan, community plan and key strategies
- Codes of conduct for Members and staff
- PDP / appraisal process for Members & staff
- Gifts and hospitality and conflicts of interest policies and registers in place
- Fraud and Raising Concerns policies
- Good Relations Unit
- Equality and Diversity Framework
- Council constitution, standing orders & scheme of delegation
- Expert professional advice
- Partners and contractors required to comply with relevant policies
- Achieving Through People Framework
- Standards and Business Committee
- Accessibility Statement for the updated website
- Social Value Procurement Policy

B: Ensuring openness

- Council / committee meetings open to the public and agendas / minutes on website
- Belfast Agenda developed via extensive consultation and engagement.
- Corporate plan and annual improvement plan are subject to consultation before agreement
- Statement of Community Involvement for production of the Local Development Plan
- Ongoing consultation and engagement with staff and trade unions
- Corporate communications
- Annual financial report published on the BCC website
- Equality Screening Outcome reports available through the BCC website
- Formal Partnership arrangements with GLL, Active Belfast, arc21, BWUH Ltd, Visit Belfast, Innovation City Belfast
- "Your Say" consultation hub
- Working with Belfast Region City Deal partners

C: Defining outcomes

- Belfast Agenda outlines long term economic, social and environmental benefits and is refreshed every 4 years
- Belfast Region City Deal Investment Plan
- Cultural Strategy
- Corporate plan outlines the annual contribution to the Belfast Agenda
- City Centre Regeneration & Investment strategy
- Physical Investment Programme
- Grant funding processes
- Equality Impact Assessments

D: Optimising the achievement of outcomes

- Corporate plan aligned to delivery of Belfast Agenda
- Adoption of the Belfast Local Development Plan (LDP) - Plan Strategy
- Key partner in the Belfast Region City Deal
- Consultation and engagement processes
- Strategic financial management and reporting framework in place.
- Performance management framework
- Regular reports on progress of our performance improvement plan to CMT and SP&R
- Risk management strategy & framework

E: Developing capacity & capability

- People Strategy
- Achieving Through People Framework
- Benchmarking activity
- Efficiency programme
- Regular performance monitoring of the delivery of improvement objectives
- Learning and development policy
- Health and wellbeing strategy
- Appraisal scheme in place for Chief Officers, Operational Directors / Heads of Service and Senior Managers
- PDPs for officers and Members
- Member capacity building / training
- Continuing Development Programme for members
- Party group briefings

F: Finance, performance and risk management

- Annual Rate Setting process
- Financial Strategy
- Compliance with CIPFA Financial Management Code
- Performance management framework
- Treasury Management Strategy
- Capital Strategy
- Risk management strategy
- Corporate risk management framework
- Regular reporting of finance, risk and performance
- Audit and Risk Panel
- Internal audit function / annual internal audit strategy and plan in place
- Recommendations Monitor process
- Data protection policy and procedures
- Corporate Fraud Risk Assessment
- Increased data security controls

G: Transparency, reporting & effective accountability

- BCC website regularly updated
- Publication of key reports including the annual financial report; annual governance statement and; performance improvement report
- Committee support framework to approve papers prior to submission to Members
- AGRS (internal audit) annual assurance statement within the annual governance statement
- Internal Audit effectiveness annually reviewed against relevant internal audit standards, with an independent external review every five years
- Internal / external audit recommendations followed up as part of recommendations monitoring process every six months
- Key governance arrangements in place for the Council's Accountable Body role for the Belfast Region City Deal

The Chief Executive is the Council's designated Chief Financial Officer under the Local Government Finance Act (Northern Ireland) 2011, responsible for the proper administration of the Council's financial affairs.

The Council's financial management arrangements conform to the governance requirements of the CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Chief Financial Officer in Local Government (2016).

We have re-assessed our compliance with the principles of the CIPFA Financial Management Code and work ongoing to improve compliance in three areas:

- Governance - the City Solicitor and Director of Legal Services is leading on the update of the Council's Scheme of Delegation and Financial Regulations.
- Integrated Planning – a cross departmental working team is reviewing the current financial and corporate planning processes so that Corporate, Departmental and Service Plans will be aligned with approved estimates for the start of the 2026/27 financial year.
- Investment Planning – the new 8-10 year capital programme should be integrated with the annual rate setting process.

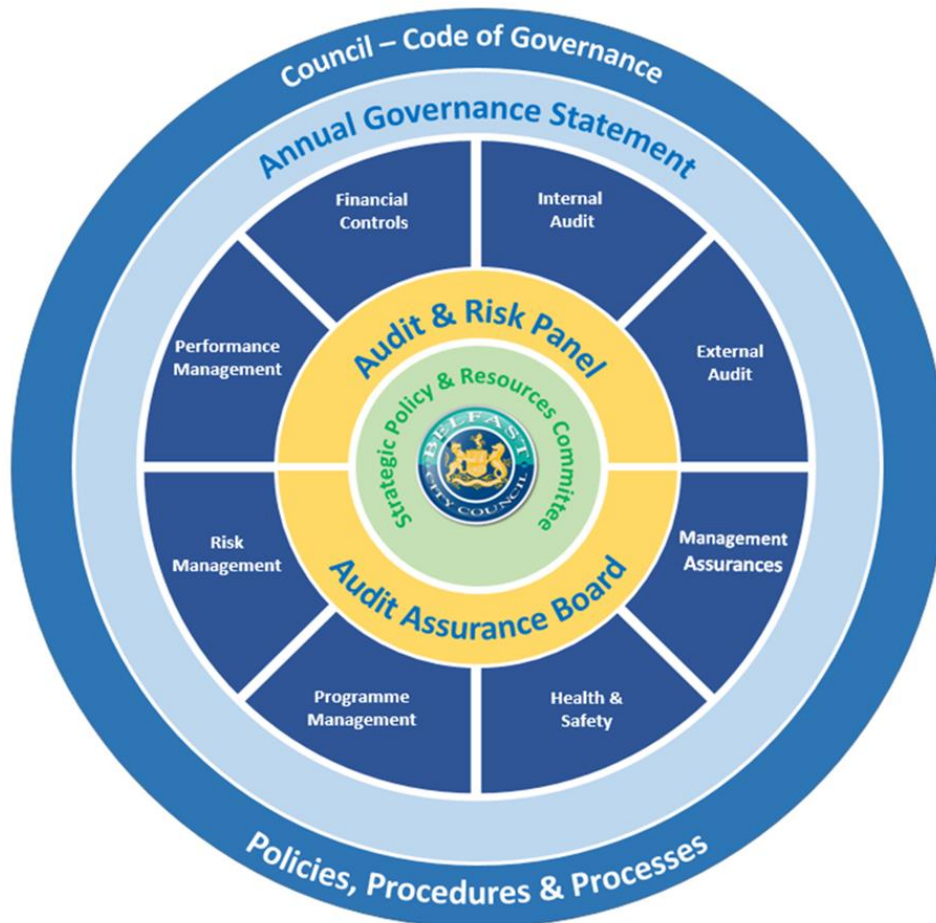
The continuing development of the Council's approach to Medium Term Financial Planning will support performance by better alignment of corporate and service plans with financial plans. Planning beyond the annual budget will enable Members and senior management to protect the financial sustainability of the Council by linking vision and strategy to outcomes.

Having considered all the principles of the CIPFA Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption (2014), subject to the implementation of the Corporate Fraud Risk Action Plans, the Council has adopted a response that is appropriate for its fraud and corruption risks and commits to maintain its vigilance to tackle fraud.

The Council's arrangements conform to the requirements of the new CIPFA Code of Practice for the Governance of Internal Audit in UK Local Government (2025) which apply from 1st April 2025.

The CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit (2019) outlines the five principles that set out the organisation's responsibilities to ensure the Head of Internal Audit (HIA) can operate effectively and perform their core duties. The Statement also sets out the core responsibilities of the HIA along with the personal skills and professional standards expected of the HIA. The Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS), and the supporting operational arrangements in place, conform to the five principles set out in the CIPFA Statement. This is demonstrated through a self-assessment exercise undertaken by the Head of AGRS. While the principles state that the HIA should not be responsible for preparing the annual governance report, the arrangements within the council, involve AGRS co-coordinating the preparation of the Annual Governance Statement which is then reviewed and agreed by the Corporate Management Team, Audit Assurance Board and Audit and Risk Panel, before being reviewed by Strategic Policy and Resources committee and signed by the Chair of Strategic Policy & Resources and the Chief Executive.

The Council reported one breach of personal data to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) during 2024/25. After further investigation, it was confirmed that there was no personal data breach, and no further action was taken by the ICO.



Review of Effectiveness

The following diagram illustrates the Assurance Framework in place that provides information on compliance with the various elements of the Council's Governance Framework, including performance reports, health and safety reports, finance reports, external audit reports, internal audit reports and risk management reports.

Continued effort has been put into developing and implementing the key elements of an assurance framework within the Council with the key elements being:

- a process whereby senior managers are required to sign annual assurance statements;
- a process whereby members of CMT are required to sign quarterly assurance statements;
- embedding risk management and developing the arrangements for oversight of the management of these risks;
- business planning and related performance reporting arrangements;
- an Audit and Risk Panel;
- a professional internal audit function, which has been reviewed for effectiveness against the relevant professional standards; and
- a Health & Safety Assurance Board.

The various in year and year-end reports arising from the Assurance Framework are reviewed and approved by the Audit and Risk Panel and Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

In addition, the review of the effectiveness of the Governance Framework is also informed by:

- the annual review and update of the Code of Governance;
- comments or recommendations made by the external auditors during their annual audit; and
- the Head of Audit Governance and Risk Services (AGRS) annual assurance statement for the period ending 2024/25, which gives an opinion on the Council's risk and control environment.

A Statement by the Head of Internal Audit

As Head of Audit, Governance and Risk Services (AGRS), on the basis of work carried out, I can provide a reasonable assurance regarding the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's framework of governance, risk management and control.

We developed our audit plan in consultation with management to ensure that our audit work was focussed on the areas where assurance was most valuable. Member and management agreement of this plan combined with delivery of the majority of this plan signifies members and managers recognition of the importance of receiving independent assurance over the council's risk, control and governance frameworks and provided me with sufficient evidence to support my assurance statement.

My opinion is based on completion of audits in the audit plan for 24/25; programme and project assurance and advisory work undertaken for a number of fundamental corporate IT projects; other advisory work and; quarterly assurance statements from senior management on compliance with risk management and internal control systems.

Specifically, my opinion is based on the following:

Evidence from areas subject to detailed internal audit during 2024/2025, in that AGRS has been able to provide positive statements of assurance with the majority of audits falling into the 'some improvement needed' category - the 2nd tier of assurance in the 4-tier model.

Provision of assurance and advisory work for major programmes and projects including the new accounting system which went live on 1 May 2024.

The results of the recommendations monitor exercise completed in February 2025.

The work that was undertaken to support management in their quarterly review and update on the management of the corporate risks that could potentially impact on delivery of our corporate plan and priorities.

The work that was undertaken to complete the review of the Corporate Fraud Risk Assessments and to support management in the development of associated fraud risk mitigation plans.

Quarterly assurances from senior management on the management of key risks and maintenance of internal control systems.

The evidence set out in the review of the Council's Code of Governance and Annual Governance Statement regarding the range of key assurance and governance arrangements that the Council has in place to direct / oversee its activities.

However, some weaknesses and areas for improvement have been identified through audit work. These have been reported in detail to the Council's Audit Assurance Board and Audit and Risk Panel during 2024/25 through quarterly progress reports. In addition, I have highlighted, where appropriate, where further action is required to implement agreed audit actions. The key issues I would highlight in this statement are as follows:

AGRS was able to provide positive statements of assurance in the majority of audits completed in 2024/25, however one area resulted in 'major improvement' assurance level, relating to Communications, Marketing and External Affairs. It is important that the action plan for this audit is implemented in as timely a manner as possible.

The Asset Management gap analysis reported to the Panel in December 2024, set out improvement actions that should enable the Council to manage its substantial asset base in a way that should ensure the maximum contribution to delivery of corporate objectives. It is important that an agreed approach to improving asset management is developed and implemented.

The most recent recommendations monitor exercise completed in February 2025, showed a reduction in the implementation rate for audit actions. An analysis into the reasons for this reduction is underway and it is important that appropriate action is taken to ensure that there is a robust control environment to support delivery of services, programmes and priorities.

Departmental risk management processes were reintroduced during 2024/25, with each Director agreeing the risk management framework that was appropriate for their department. Departmental risk management frameworks take account of risk management processes for health and safety, programmes and projects, fraud etc. I underline the importance of Directors ensuring that these risk management frameworks are implemented effectively.

Looking ahead, I highlight the importance of the ongoing development of the council's approach to medium term financial planning and adequate and effective programme management and performance management processes to support the delivery of the new corporate plan and priorities for 2025-28.

Limitations – the most recent External Quality Assessment (EQA) of AGRS found strong evidence that AGRS is viewed as making a positive contribution to the continuous improvement of governance, risk management and internal control in the Council and conforms to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. One of the recommendations for improvement arising from the EQA was that my annual assurance report should highlight the limitations that result from AGRS' role in supporting the Council's risk management arrangements. In this regard I highlight that AGRS is responsible for assisting the Director in establishing, maintaining and supporting the implementation of the council's Risk Management Strategy. This places limitations on AGRS' ability to assess the overall effectiveness of the Council's risk management arrangements. To manage these limitations and to preserve the independence and objectivity of AGRS a number of safeguards have been put in place including resource planning to manage boundaries between our advisory and assurance work; self-assessments against best practice and periodic external assurance reviews of the councils' arrangements for risk management.

Public Sector Internal Audit Standards

I can confirm that the AGRS Service has conformed to Public Sector Internal Audit Standards during 2024/25. A quality assurance and improvement programme is in place including internal review of work, annual assessment against professional standards, quarterly progress and performance reporting to the Assurance Board and Audit & Risk Panel. An external quality assessment of AGRS took place in 2022 and this confirmed the Service's compliance with professional standards.

Looking ahead, as of 1st April 2025 the new Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) and the Application Note for the Public Sector come into effect and replace the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). I have completed an initial assessment of AGRS conformance with the new GIAS and I can confirm that AGRS conforms with these standards.

Update on the Significant Governance Issues that were declared last year

Four issues were declared last year and two continue to be declared as issues in this year's statement regarding Digital Information Security and the Brexit Implementation Programme for Port Health. The issues relating to Financial Planning and the Black Mountain Shared Space Non-Compliance Issue are no longer considered to be significant governance issues for the year-end 2025 and an update on the work that was completed last year to manage these issues is set out below.

Financial Planning

The 5-step strategy was stood down for 2024/25 however, during the year, regular monitoring and reporting on actual spend against budget spend, as well as forecast spend against annual budget was carried out. This provided the council with assurance that the financial position of the Council was secure.

Contract savings achieved during the 24/25 financial year were incorporated into the 25/26 rate setting process, and although the increase in the district rate was above inflation, this was to allow for additional growth in services and capital spend and not because of a shortfall in the budget position.

This no longer remains a significant issue for 2025/26.

Black Mountain Shared Space Non-Compliance Issue

In 2024-25, the Director of Property and Projects have strengthened and ensured that adequate management and control systems are in place to ensure full compliance with all European Union grant funding conditions to prevent any reoccurrence of losses from fines. The Director has agreed additional management step and controls to be built in for above threshold capital projects funded by the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) or any other European funding source, such as:

- procurement strategy must include a section on the requirement to advertise in the Official Journal of the European Union as necessary;
- prior to commencement of procurement, written approval of the procurement strategy must be secured from the funding body as well as the Project Board;
- the Programme Delivery Manager must confirm to the Portfolio Office that the funding body has approved the procurement strategy prior to requesting the commencement of the procurement exercise, both for construction professionals and contractors; and

- the Portfolio Office to ensure this confirmation has been received before publishing any procurement exercise.

Furthermore, the Council has received SEUPB funding for both Belfast Local Community PEACE Action Plan and PEACEPLUS Reconnected Belfast which will deliver infrastructure projects and investments to local community activities. The Director will ensure that these projects will comply with the set funding terms and conditions, and lessons learned on the above governance issue will be considered.

Significant Governance Issues for the year-end 2025

The significant governance issues for the year-end 2025 were identified through review of the risks in the Corporate Risk Register and review of the Directors' Annual Assurance Statements.

The most significant issues for the Council are listed below and relate to two issues which have been carried forward from last year:

1. Digital Information Security / Digital Strategy
2. Brexit Implementation Programme for Port Health

More information on these significant governance issues is provided on the following pages.

1. Digital Information Security / Digital Strategy

Digital information security continues to be a significant governance issue and is overseen through the Council's risk management processes by the Council's Corporate Management Team. Digital Services has implemented the following controls to manage and have better visibility of the growing threats in this area:

- Completion of penetration tests and vulnerability scans.
- Completion of Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard attestation.
- Ongoing delivery of a Security Awareness programme through regular five-minute online training modules on a range of issues that pose a cyber risk for our network.
- Unannounced phishing tests.
- Public Key Infrastructure to enhance network access control.
- Always-On Virtual Private Network to ensure all homeworking access is managed through our security infrastructure.
- Mobile device management using Microsoft Intune being rolled out for all new mobile phones.
- Completion of firewall upgrades.
- Draft Ransomware incident response playbook.
- Cloud services access report reviewed by Security Oversight Group.
- Completion of separate cyber security desktop exercises for response to a ransomware incident for Digital Services, critical services and the Corporate Management Team.

The Digital information Security programme will continue to focus on priority areas that are most important to enhance the council's cyber security controls, including:

- Cyber security incident response.
- Identity management.
- Cloud strategy.
- Maturity assessment priorities.

Additional actions to be undertaken to further mitigate this key corporate risk in 2025/26 include:

- Carry out a new Cyber Security desktop Exercise.
- Ongoing Ransomware Playbook development.
- Managed Security Operations Centre procurement.
- Carry out NCSC Cyber Assessment Framework self and external assessments.

An internal audit highlighted issues with the management of the corporate risk on the strategic approach to the use of data, including future ownership of this risk. A Data and Analytics Board chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive / Strategic Director of Corporate Services has been established and has focussed on:

- The development technical infrastructure to support a corporate approach to Data & Analytics.
- Preparing a pipeline of data and analytics use cases.
- Developing an AI policy.
- Developing an Outline Business Case for the implementation of a corporate approach to the implementation of an Electronic and Document Records Management system.

Our new Digital Strategy with the vision to make the best use of digital and data to deliver excellent public services and inclusive growth in the Belfast City Region is supported through the delivery of a digital programme of work. The main objectives of the Digital Strategy relate to Digital Public Services; Information as an Asset; Digital City Innovation and Digital Capability.

ICT capability is an intrinsic pillar of the overall operating model of the Council, and it is important that we have the right skills within Digital Services and across the Council. Attracting new talent is proving problematic across the service but particularly in specialist areas such as Cyber Security and Application Development. In 24-25 Digital Services:

- Established a workforce planning group to review and determine future skills and development needs across the service.
- Focused on successfully recruiting external staff into entry level posts with a view to developing staff with the right skills required for the service.
- Successfully recruited 18 posts including our first apprentice post.

Additional actions are still required due to the high number of vacancies that still exist in the service. The following actions are planned to be carried out to mitigate this risk in 25-26 include:

- Carrying out a salary benchmark of the roles in Digital Services.
- Procuring managed Security Operations Centre services to enhance the cyber security team.
- Keeping a strong focus on recruitment and retention of staff.

2. Brexit Implementation Programme for Port Health

Engagement has continued at strategic and operational levels with partners including Food Standards Agency (FSA), Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) across all key strands of work to implement the changes, processes, systems and facilities required for delivery of the Council's Port Health statutory functions, including delivery of the Windsor Framework. This has included:

- Funding model: The Council has continued to advocate for a longer-term funding model for the provision of Port Health services. A further one-year funding arrangement is planned for

2025/26 however we are aware that a further four-year funding package is under consideration. It remains unclear when or if this will be confirmed. There is also no confirmation from Government whether fees and charges for checks / inspections will form part of the longer-term funding model.

- New Sanitary and Phytosanitary Inspection (SPS) inspection facility at Belfast Port: The Council has participated in the DEFRA SPS Facilities Board and Steering Groups which leads on construction and Go Live planning for operationalisation of the new inspection facilities in July 2025. The Council has developed its own Go Live plan in consultation with partners for transition to the new facility. This will be further developed as Standard Operating Procedures; risk assessments and detailed timelines are confirmed by DEFRA.
- IT systems: The Council has worked closely with DAERA and other Councils to enhance the DAERA IT systems provided to Council to streamline the process for recording of checks and inspections, and to move towards a more efficient one system approach which will be required when these services are co-located on the new inspection facility site. This work will continue in 2025/26.
- Staffing: A number of recruitment exercises have been completed in 2024/25 which has reduced the number of vacancies within the teams. However, challenges remain in securing sufficient Environmental Health Officers and a small number of vacant posts remain. Going forward, there remains uncertainty over future trade volumes which may be impacted further by introduction of latter phases of the Windsor Framework arrangements, and this may impact future resourcing requirements for the service. It is anticipated that further review will be required in the future to confirm the longer-term staffing requirements and structures.

In 2025/26, this remains a significant governance issue for the Council due to lack of clarity regarding future funding models, trade volumes and resourcing requirements particularly in the context of the announcement in May 2025 relating to the UK and EU discussions regarding a future sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) agreement. The move to a new inspection facility in summer of 2025 also poses risks to the Councils service delivery as it relies on effective staff resourcing, traffic management and operations management by the operator (DAERA), together with efficient service delivery by users (including Belfast City Council's Port Health service).

In each of these areas the Council will continue to engage with partners to:

- Advocate for a longer-term funding model.
- Ensure plans for transition to the new inspection facility are robust and effectively implemented in Summer 2025.
- Transition to the newly developed IT systems to improve joint working.
- Undertake recruitment campaigns to fill priority vacant posts.
- Following the announcement in May 2025 arising from UK and EU discussions, as more information becomes known, assess the impact of the future SPS agreement on Port Health arrangements.

Signed:

Chair Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Signed:

Chief Executive Officer