

# Warwickshire County Council

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## **Annual Governance Statement** 2025/26

Produced for year ended 31 March 2026

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# 1. Purpose

Welcome to Warwickshire County Council's Annual Governance Statement for the period April 2025 to March 2026.

The **Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015** require the County Council to conduct an annual review of the effectiveness of our system of internal control and to prepare and publish an AGS. This review is informed by three lines of defence:

- Directors and managers who provide assurance on performance, service delivery, risk management and compliance with the seven principles of good governance within their services.
- Review by those services who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the governance environment, including for finance, risk, human resources, legal and information technology.
- Independent oversight provided through our internal audit team, external auditors, other inspections, and independent reviews.

The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) is a statutory document that details how Warwickshire County Council ensures robust governance and effective stewardship of resources. It identifies areas for improvement in processes and accountability that form the basis of a plan for the coming year.

It aims to provide a robust and transparent evaluation of how the Council's governance has performed in 2025/26, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of our arrangements and providing a tool for identifying improvements to guide our annual action plan, in line with the 'delivering excellence' and 'fit for the future' aspirations set out in the new Council Plan, Recalibrating Warwickshire.

	
Cllr George Finch, Leader of the Council	Monica Fogarty, Chief Executive

## 2. How the Statement works

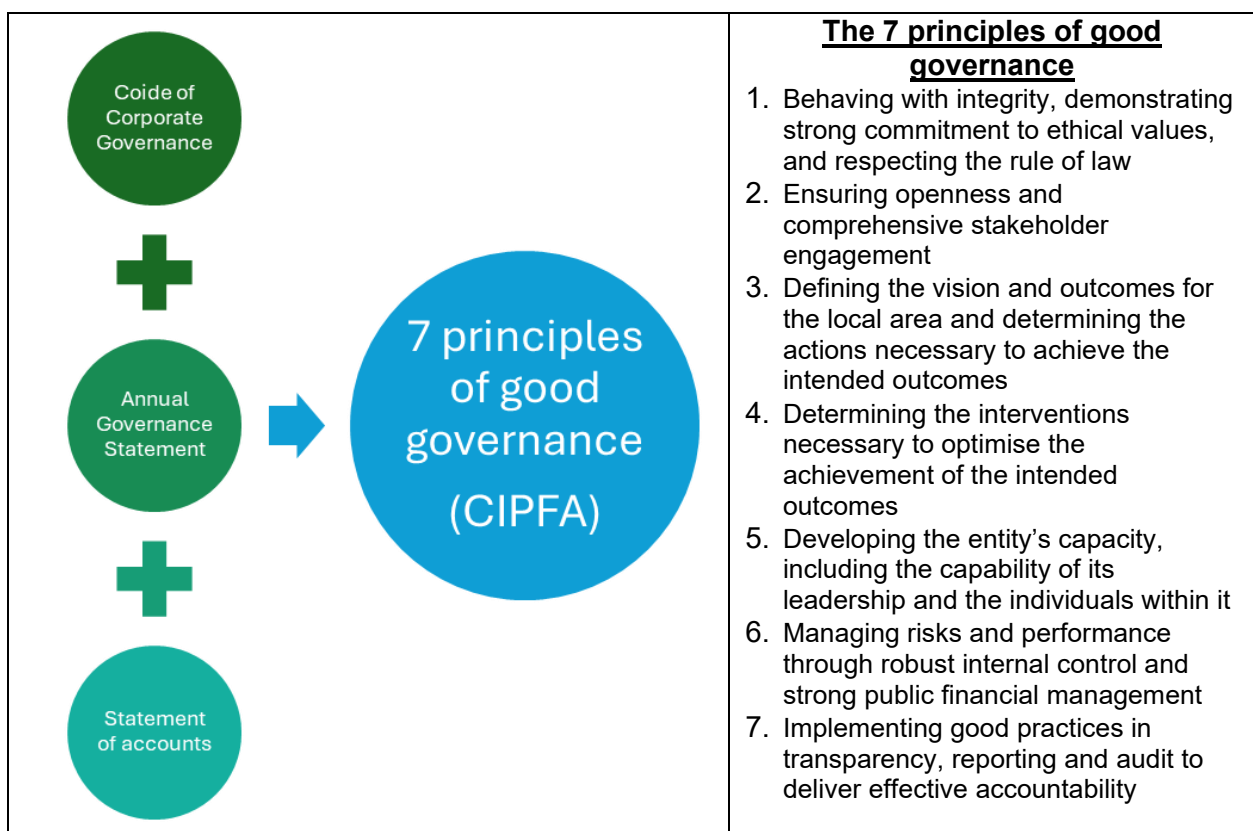
The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) looks back over the year 2025/26 and forms part of the assurance that our governance arrangements are robust.

The AGS follows the current guidance and best practice described in the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice: Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016) and the 2025 Addendum.

It accompanies our annual Statement of Accounts and the Council’s Code of Corporate Governance, which together set out the frameworks, systems and processes that provide governance assurance and the financial position for 2025/26.

The AGS sets out the level of assurance framed against each of the seven principles of good governance. Our approach to governance is evidenced through the Constitution and our Code of Corporate Governance. These principles and the governance arrangements that they inform are intended to make sure that we do the right things for our communities, in the right way, and in a timely, open and accountable manner.

The action plan for 2026/27 then addresses any gaps or areas for improvement identified as part of the assurance ratings.



**Code of Governance** - The Council's Code of Corporate Governance is updated in line with the election cycle and is currently being refreshed. The AGS provides assurance that we are adhering to these principles and that our processes are working in practice to help deliver our Council Plan priorities.

We monitor external factors for their impact on the Council's governance arrangements and adapt our risk and management arrangements as appropriate.

**CIPFA Financial Management Code of Practice** - Our Code of Corporate Governance was enhanced by adopting the CIPFA Financial Management Code when first issued in 2021/22 and compliance with the Code is reviewed on an annual basis as part of the AGS process.

The annual refresh of the CIPFA Financial Management Code Self-Assessment is reported to the Audit and Standards Committee in March each year. The conclusions of the self-assessment are consistent with the External Auditor's Value for Money rating of "green" in all three categories: financial sustainability, governance, and improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

Further, the Council received Internal Audit ratings of Substantial Assurance for audits in both Accounts Receivable and Suspense Accounts for the year of this AGS. This confirms the robustness of the Council's financial governance and illustrates strong financial performance and oversight.

### 3. The Approach

The Annual Governance Statement is prepared in accordance with CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government: Framework (2016) and the May 2025 Addendum and accompanies our Statement of Accounts. The AGS is published alongside the annual Statement of Accounts. It complements our Code of Corporate Governance, Council Plan, Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), and key frameworks for risk, performance and assurance.

This year's Annual Governance Statement has been produced with engagement from across the Council including:

- **Heads of Services & Coordination Group** - comprising Heads of Service for Corporate Policy & Strategy, Risk Management, Legal and Governance, Business Intelligence, Change Programmes, Internal Audit, Finance, Commercial and Procurement – co-ordinating the update of the statement and sourcing evidence from across the Council.
- **Executive and Director Assurance Statements** – Signed by each Executive Director and Director to provide assurance of known risks and controls within every Service, including the operation of key control frameworks and responses to external inspection.
- **Evaluation Panel** – Director representatives from each Directorate to assess and evaluate the accuracy and robustness of the Annual Governance Statement.
- **Statutory Officers** – review and assessment of the AGS by the Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer, Directorate nominees and Corporate Board.
- **Audit & Standards Committee**- review and consideration of the draft and final versions of the AGS in June and November 2026 respectively.
- **External Auditor** - Before final approval and publication, the AGS is reviewed by the Council's external auditor under the relevant Code of Audit Practice, to consider consistency with their knowledge of the Authority and conformance with the governance framework. The External Auditor is Grant Thornton.
- **Public consultation** – Following agreement of the draft by Audit & Standards Committee, the AGS will be published alongside the Statement of Accounts for public comment.
- **Full Council** – The final AGS will be endorsed by Cabinet and presented to Council for approval in December 2026.

This approach has ensured that the development process, content and findings of our AGS are both co-produced and owned by all necessary stakeholders.

## 4. Assessment of Effectiveness

The assessment of effectiveness for the period April 2025 to March 2026 is summarised in the table below using the 7 principles of good governance.

An assessment of assurance is made against each principle and informed by the LGA's self-assessment tool. The assessment has found no significant concerns, and improvement actions are included in the action plan for 2026/27. The table highlights the key elements that provide this assurance, with further detail provided in **Appendix 1**.

Principle	Evidence of assurance
<b>Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Code of Corporate Governance</li> <li>• Elections, democracy and constitution (reviewed annually)</li> <li>• Member Code of Conduct</li> <li>• Council Regulatory Committee, Overview and Scrutiny Committees</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Summary:</b> The County Council elections in May 2025 were delivered lawfully and safely. Appropriate levels of induction and learning for new Members were delivered. Member Code of Conduct training was successfully delivered, and all member bodies, including the Regulatory Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSCs), continued to meet.</p>
<b>Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stakeholder engagement &amp; consultation</li> <li>• Customer service</li> <li>• Complaints procedure</li> <li>• Customer feedback system</li> <li>• Overview and Scrutiny activity</li> <li>• Joint Committees and Boards</li> <li>• Regular review of complaints procedures</li> <li>• Voice of Warwickshire residents' panel</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Summary:</b> Well established systems for public and stakeholder engagement are in place and continue to operate effectively.</p>
<b>Defining the vision and outcomes for the local area and determining the actions necessary to achieve the intended outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council Plan priorities</li> <li>• Strategy Framework</li> <li>• Council Delivery Plan</li> <li>• Performance Management Framework</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Summary</b> – The Administration has developed a new Council Plan to cover the period 2026-30. Details can be found here - <a href="https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/councilplan">https://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/councilplan</a>.</p>

<b>Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External service inspections</li> <li>• External and internal audit reports</li> <li>• Quarterly Integrated Performance Management reports to Cabinet and OSCs</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Summary</b> - A number of service inspections were conducted in 2025/26, all resulting in action plans that have informed the Council Delivery Plan for 2026-28. Quarterly reporting of risk, performance and finance remains well established, with access to performance data available to all members via dashboards.</p>
<b>Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff engagement</li> <li>• Organisational development</li> <li>• Annual Health &amp; Safety Report Our People Strategy and annual report</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Summary</b> - Staff engagement, organisational development and health and safety have all strengthened through improved engagement scores, workforce planning, leadership development and a more proactive safety culture, with further enhancements planned for wellbeing, reporting and frontline engagement.</p>
<b>Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic Risk Management Framework</li> <li>• Performance management framework and reporting Self-assessment against Cipfa financial management code</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Summary</b> – During 2025/26, the Strategic Risk Management Framework and the associated appetite statements were refreshed and a new risk management system was introduced. These were approved by Cabinet in December 2025.</p>
<b>Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit to deliver effective accountability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Statement of accounts</li> <li>• External &amp; internal audits</li> <li>• Ombudsman decisions</li> <li>• Review of procurement arrangements</li> <li>• Review of Information Governance and Cyber Security</li> <li>• Assurance statements</li> <li>• Documented timelines for sign-off of decision reports</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Summary:</b> Well-established processes and assurance are in place, with no significant change from the 2024/25 position. The Council was rated triple green by its External Auditors in their examination of value for money arrangements across the three</p>

	key areas of financial sustainability; economy, efficiency and effectiveness; and governance.
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## 5. Forward look on governance and 2026-27 Action Plan

The Council Plan, *Recalibrating Warwickshire 2026-30*, was approved by Council in May 2026 and sets out the direction for the County Council over the medium term.

The Council Delivery Plan will be considered by Cabinet in June 2026, setting out the key deliverables for the financial years 2026/27 and 2027/28.

Together these documents set the direction and focus for the Council and the subsequent governance requirements - three key elements are highlighted below:

- Recalibrating Warwickshire 2026-30** – Following a period of development and engagement in early 2026, the new Council Plan was approved by Council in May 2026. This plan sets out the drivers, ambition, mission and strategic challenges for the Council over the next four years. Strategic objectives will be translated into key deliverables for 2026/27 and 2027/28 through the Council Delivery Plan and progress will be tracked through the updated Performance Management Framework which was agreed by Cabinet in April 2026.
- Local Government Reorganisation** - The Council will continue to make the necessary preparations to meet the requirements and timescales of the Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution agendas set by Government in December 2024. The Council submitted its proposal in November 2025 and awaits a decision by Government, expected to be received in July 2026. It is anticipated that this will result in a Structural Change Order which will require elections in May 2027 to a Shadow Authority or two Shadow Authorities that will vest as the new council(s) in April 2028. A full implementation programme will be established between the Council and the five District and Borough Councils.
- Service and financial pressures** - The Council will continue to look at ways to improve efficiency and effectiveness in high demand, high-cost services such as Home to School Transport and Social Care. Whilst the Government has confirmed that 90% of cumulative SEND deficits as at 31 March 2026 will be funded through the High Needs Stability Grant (subject to Department for Education approval of a local SEND reform plan due for submission in July 2026), Government is still to confirm the extent to which High Needs Stability Grant will cover deficits from 2026/27 and 2027/28 before the statutory override ceases and the Department for Education takes the costs of local SEND provision onto its books. The Council must therefore maintain a strong focus on finding efficiencies in delivery that safeguard children and services but are financially viable, which the value for money programme is designed to enable.

## 6. Action Plan 2026/27

Our planned actions address these pressures and will ensure governance remains fit for purpose. Actions are aligned with the Council Delivery Plan and seek to enhance, rather than replicate, the deliverables in that plan.

The AGS Action Plan for 2026/27 is set out below.

ACTION	DATE	ACTION OWNER
Ensure robust governance arrangements are put in place for the 'safe and legal' implementation of the LGR outcome.	April 2028	Sarah Duxbury
1. Implement the action plans for external inspections undertaken 2025/26: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Adults Reablement</li> <li>b. Adult Social Care CQC</li> <li>c. Children's Services ILAC</li> <li>d. Fire &amp; Rescue</li> <li>e. Special Educational Needs &amp; Disabilities</li> <li>f. Youth Justice</li> </ul>	March 2027	Sharon Shaw Ben Brook Johnny Kyriacou
2. Approve the refreshed Council Plan, Council Delivery Plan and Performance Management Framework	June 2026	Corporate Board
Produce a detailed and effective Area SEND Reform Plan.	July 2026	Johnny Kyriacou
3. Effectively implement and embed the Council's Value for Money Programme	March 2027	Purnima Kandula
4. Produce a new Customer, Digital & Data strategy	July 2026	Craig Cusack
5. Implement the findings of the internal risk audit, notably the need to create a robust risk culture	March 2027	Gereint Stoneman
Through the value for money programme, deliver efficiencies across Council services by focusing on continuous improvement in delivery, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. A robust review of major scheme delivery, lessons learned from prior schemes and strong delivery gateway decision making</li> <li>b. Consideration of the Council's approach to contractual risk – balancing delivery drivers with robust legal drafting but ensuring risk is held where it is best able to be mitigated</li> <li>c. Delivering the Education Capital Programme efficiently, on time and to budget.</li> <li>d. Addressing resource constraints in planning and development where possible to mitigate risk to time and cost of schemes arising from planning challenges</li> </ul>	March 2027	Purnima Kandula Sarah Duxbury

6. Continue implementing recommendations from an independent Pension Fund Governance Review, and incorporate further actions to deliver the new requirements arising from the 2026 Pension Schemes Bill.	March 2027	Chris Norton
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## **Appendix 1 – Supporting evidence of assurance**

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

*Upholds democratic legitimacy, lawful decision-making, and ethical governance*

#### **Elections, Local Democracy and Constitution**

##### **Elections and local democracy**

The County Council elections were held on 1 May 2025. The elections were managed effectively and in accordance with established governance, regulatory and statutory requirements, with delivery managed by the District and Borough Council elections teams in the usual way. Regular contact was maintained with the District and Borough Councils, and the Electoral Commission participated in our routine liaison meetings.

The political make-up of the Council changed following the May 2025 elections, with a shift from a significant Conservative majority to “no overall control”, meaning no one political group has a majority. A significant proportion of members elected are also in office for the first time. To assist members with their new roles, a focused approach to training and development has been taken. Alongside a two-day induction conference held mainly in person, there has been an ongoing and detailed programme of further development concentrating on key legal requirements and governance principles, areas of Council focus and delivery, and committee-specific training.

At the Annual Meeting in May 2025, the Reform UK Group Leader was voted in as Leader of the Council and Reform UK formed a minority administration as the largest party. There was an early change of Leader, with consequent changes to Cabinet and other committee appointments. These changes were made effectively and efficiently, with minimal impact on the Council’s decision-making arrangements.

A move to no overall control can raise challenges in terms of governance and decision-making. However, the Council invested time and resource prior to elections ensuring it understood how those challenges might manifest and ensuring all appropriate training and guidance was available to members and officers to enable business to continue smoothly. Officers ensure appropriate briefings to the Administration in advance of decision making, and the Council’s Leaders’ Liaison Group meets regularly with the Chief Executive. A rise in call-in of decisions made by the Executive was anticipated and Democratic Services work with officers to ensure decisions are programmed in sufficient time to allow time for any call-ins. The Council’s approach to urgent decisions is considered robust and is reported on at the Council’s Annual Meeting.

##### **Scrutiny**

The Council’s scrutiny arrangements remain robust, transparent and aligned with recognised best practice. All four Overview and Scrutiny Committees are now chaired by Members of the

opposition groups, consistent with the principles advocated by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS).

This year, Members have exercised their right to call in Executive decisions on four occasions. Each call-in was managed in accordance with the Council's Constitution and with reference to the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's (CfGS) recognised best-practice principles. The matters called in for scrutiny related to:

- the introduction of a Corporate Flag Policy;
- proposals for development at Wheat Street/Leicester Road, Nuneaton;
- the Annual On-Street Pay and Display Charge Review; and
- the Annual Education Sufficiency Update.

In each case, the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertook detailed examination of the decision-making process, the evidence presented, and the rationale underpinning the Executive's proposals. Following deliberation, the Committees concluded that, for the call-ins relating to the Flag Policy and the Wheat Street/Leicester Road development, there were no recommendations that they wished to refer back to Cabinet, and the original Executive decisions were therefore upheld. However, in respect of the Annual On-Street Pay and Display Charge Review and the Annual Education Sufficiency Update, the Committees identified areas where further clarification and consideration of impact was appropriate. Consequently, formal recommendations were issued to the decision-makers: the Portfolio Holder and Cabinet respectively. These recommendations were subsequently considered as part of the Council's decision-making process, demonstrating the constructive contribution of Scrutiny in shaping policy and ensuring transparency, accountability and continuous improvement in governance.

Throughout the year, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function has continued to provide rigorous and transparent oversight of Executive decision making and service performance. Overview and Scrutiny Committees have held Portfolio Holders and external stakeholders, including key health partners, to account through structured questioning and dedicated member-led challenge sessions. Committees have also maintained robust performance and risk oversight through regular consideration of quarterly and year end performance reports, using the findings to inform ongoing monitoring and forward work programming. In addition to performance management, scrutiny agendas have remained focused on significant policy transformation and strategic updates from the Council and partner organisations. Further detail on the full scope, impact, and outcomes of scrutiny activity during the year is set out in the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report.

Alongside formal committee work, elected Members have actively contributed to a range of cross-party working groups that provide additional oversight of complex or high-impact areas of Council activity. These have included groups focused on Climate Change, SEND and Inclusion, the Warwickshire Investment Fund and Warwickshire Property & Development Group, and the ongoing development and delivery of the Bus Service Improvement Plan. This cross-cutting engagement supports wider corporate governance by ensuring that Members are fully engaged in shaping long-term strategy, assessing risk, and scrutinising progress against key corporate priorities.

## Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

*Ensures voices of residents, users, and partners inform decision-making and service design*

### Review of Customer service, customer feedback and complaints.

#### Customer Service Centre

Performance in the Customer Service Centre is reviewed every month and quarter. These reviews help managers understand trends, spot any pressures, and check how well the service is performing against agreed measures.

In 2025/26 the Council identified that it was not making full use of the detailed data available from its telephony system. Historically, reporting focused primarily on high level call volumes and wait times, which meant opportunities for further insight were sometimes missed. Improvements have been made to how telephony data is collected, interpreted and presented. This includes better data extraction, more detailed reporting, and giving managers access to more accurate, real-time information. These changes now provide a clearer and more detailed picture of customer demand, staff productivity and call handling patterns. This supports more informed decision-making and strengthens the Council's overall performance framework.

#### Customer feedback system

The Council launched a new system in January 2024 for recording and managing comments, compliments and complaints as part of the new customer platform. This includes a clear and consistently applied Customer Complaints Policy, supported by the statutory procedures for Adults' and Children's Social Care complaints. This system provides BI data dashboards which are available for Directors to interrogate and clearer outcomes capture.

Customer Feedback and Complaints Annual Reports for 2024/25 were shared with each Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June and July 2025. Alongside the main summary, each report included detailed individual reports for the respective Directorates covered by the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Work is being undertaken to help strengthen current processes as follows:

- implementation of real time data via BI dashboards for Directors' oversight. Allowing for early warning on spikes and emerging trends;
- increased quality of response and progress. Updated templates; clearer Stage 1 letters; stronger consent and advocate alerts in all areas; and
- increased staff capability via ongoing training on complaint handling, classification (complaint vs service request), and policy exclusions; targeted coaching to improve timeliness.

#### Ombudsman complaints

In 2025/26, the Ombudsman dealt with 69 complaints in relation to the Council. Of these 16 were investigated and 14 were upheld. This means that they upheld 88% of the complaints they investigated about WCC which compares to an average of **89%** in similar authorities.

This represents 2.2 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents, compared to an average of 5.2 upheld decisions per 100,000 residents for similar authorities. The Council has complied with 100% of the LGCSO recommendations, which were reported to the Cabinet in September 2025. A full breakdown of LGCSO decisions and recommendations can be viewed on the LGCSO's interactive map: [Warwickshire County Council - Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman](#)

## Member complaints

The Council has seen an increase in complaints and correspondence received about Councillor behaviour and decisions compared to last year. Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, there were 58 member code of conduct complaints. 12 of these complaints were by other councillors. These matters are dealt with by the Monitoring Officer and Deputy Monitoring Officer in accordance with the Council's procedure set out at [Complaints about councillors: Making a complaint - Warwickshire County Council](#).

Most complaints are closed at the filter stage without an investigation because they do not relate to a councillor's official capacity, are resolved informally, or because the matter does not justify the cost of an investigation. In a small number of cases, the complaint is withdrawn.

Key themes arising from the complaints are:

- Social media use
- Statements or behaviour in public meetings and/or events
- Disclosure of confidential information
- Intimidating and inappropriate language/bullying
- Failure to follow due process
- Disrespectful behaviour
- Lack of response to enquiries

Number of Member Code of Conduct Complaints since 2020	
2020/21	10
2021/22	4
2022/23	4
2023/24	312 *
2024/25	9
* Please note that 308 of these complaints related to comments made by three elected members at the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 25 January 2024	

## Children and Families

In Children and Families, feedback is captured through the Children in Care Council, IMPACT group (SEND Young People), a variety of engagement opportunities, the Children and Families Feedback Form, and the dedicated Voice, Influence and Change Team, which ensures the Council consistently hears and acts on the voices of the people we work with to help shape services.

Feedback is used to inform quality assurance processes and workforce training and is shared with key stakeholders through staff meetings and training/development events, Corporate Parenting Panel, Performance Board and Senior Leadership Team meetings.

## Adult Social Care customer feedback

Social Care and Support gathers feedback from people who draw on support through a range of accessible channels, including online surveys, mobile app submissions, and printed forms with pre-paid return envelopes. These tools invite people and carers to reflect on their experiences using a set of strengths-based "statements" aligned to Care Act outcomes, alongside open questions about what is working well and what could be improved. The

feedback received consistently highlights that people feel listened to, treated with dignity and respect, involved in planning their care, and supported to live as independently as possible. Themes drawn from this rich insight inform quality assurance activity, shaping practice improvements and reinforcing a culture of learning and continuous improvement across the service.

### **Highways and Transport**

Warwickshire County Council participates in the National Highways and Transport Survey (NHTS) which focuses explicitly on public perception and customer satisfaction. The Council's results are shared with the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration and scrutiny and are also used in service planning as a source of data for areas of improvement. Overall, the 2025 NHTS results show that Warwickshire continues to perform strongly when benchmarked against peer County Councils, with several areas demonstrating significant year on year improvement and high relative rankings.

The Overview and Scrutiny report can be found at [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 25/02/2026 14:00](#)

## **Stakeholder Engagement & Consultations**

The Council's Consultation and Engagement Framework sets out the organisational objectives and standards for consultation and engagement to ensure that residents' and stakeholders' voices help inform strategies and policies, service changes and commissioning. The residents' panel, "the Voice of Warwickshire", with members broadly representative of Warwickshire's population, also contributes to engagement activities that inform strategy and policy development throughout the year.

During 2025-26, key engagements have included:

- the Parade, Royal Leamington Spa Public Realm Concept Masterplan;
- the Future of Local Government in Warwickshire;
- Warwickshire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and
- engagement to support needs assessments, service commissioning and service delivery, including Healthy Lifestyles Services, Wellbeing for Warwickshire (mental health) Services, youth smoking and vaping, Direct Payments, and the All Age Autism Strategy.

Consultations have included:

- Budget 2026/27;
- Warwickshire's Nature Recovery Strategy; and
- changes to the Home to School / College Transport Policy.

We engaged with the Voice of Warwickshire panel on the Future of Local Government in Warwickshire. The focus has then been on reviewing panel membership, recruitment, developing a work programme for 2026/27 and designing the first engagement activity. We have successfully refreshed panel membership retaining around 450 of the existing membership and enrolling around 550 new members.

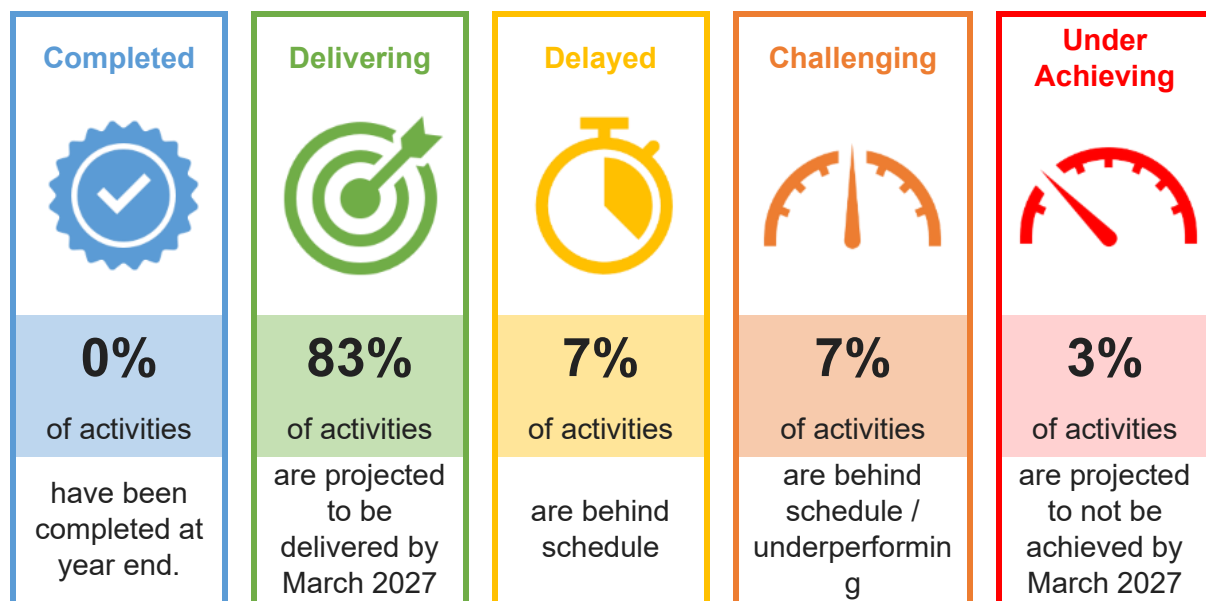
# Defining the vision and outcomes for the local area and determining the actions necessary to achieve the intended outcomes

*Providing clear strategic direction for the area and ensuring plans and decisions are aligned to deliver tangible benefits for local communities*

## Review of Council Plan Priorities.

Delivery of the **Council Plan** outcomes and priorities are tracked through the **Council Delivery Plan**, business plans, programmes and project governance arrangements. The Council's staff appraisal system also links Council objectives and priorities to individuals' personal objectives to further strengthen the assurance that activity is aligned to the Council Plan priorities. Progress is reported on a quarterly basis to Cabinet, Overview & Scrutiny Committees, Corporate Board and Directorate Leadership Teams as part of the integrated performance report, with the year-end reported in June.

For the Council Delivery Plan 2025-27, there are 58 Council Delivery Plan (CDP) deliverables. Of the remaining activity within the CDP, there has been improved delivery progress, with 83% of activity delivering to plan this quarter compared to 78% at Quarter 3. Just 3% remains underachieving, and all are subject to mitigation efforts.



## Strategy Framework

Our Strategy Framework sets out the expected standards and approach to developing, managing and reviewing strategies in Warwickshire County Council. Our strategies play a vital role in helping to both address and translate the challenges and priorities within the Council Plan. The management of strategies includes decision gateways, quarterly updating of the centrally held Strategy Dashboard ([link](#)), quarterly reporting through the Integrated

Performance Framework to Corporate Board and Cabinet as well as support for strategy owners on the governance and approval processes.

## **Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes**

*Provides the structures, decision pathways, and policy frameworks through which interventions are chosen and directed*

### **External Inspections**

#### **Children's Services**

The Council has been leading the way nationally as a pathfinder for the Department for Education's Families First for Children programme. This initiative has driven a major shift in children's social care practice, the most significant in a generation, resulting in a substantial internal restructure between December 2024 and March 2025. As part of this the Council has been reviewing its approach to supporting families in need and establishing new ways of working with a range of partners in health, the police and education.

In June 2025 the Council's Children's Services were inspected by Ofsted. The inspection, conducted during a period of significant transformation including the transition of delivery in line with the Families First for Children programme, rated the experience and progress of care leavers as "Good", while other areas were judged as "Requires improvement to be Good", with this forming the overall rating.

When inspected, Warwickshire was still in the early stage of implementation and Ofsted acknowledged the Council's proactive approach and the foundations laid for future success. The inspection highlighted areas for improvement as well as acknowledging some strengths. An Improvement Plan is in place to address the findings of the Ofsted inspection and will be reviewed and reported regularly to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. [Warwickshire Ofsted Report 2025](#).

#### **Children's Homes**

Since 2023 the Council has opened and been operating five Ofsted registered children's homes. Since April 2024 all five homes have been inspected by Ofsted, with two being inspected in 2025/26 (one in July 2025 and one in September 2025). All homes inspected have received overall ratings of good. [WCC's Ofsted Reports](#)

#### **Social Care & Support**

In October 2025 the Care Quality Commission (CQC) assessed the delivery of Warwickshire County Council's adult social care duties under the Care Act 2014. CQC assesses all Local Authorities with responsibility for adult social care across nine quality statements mapped across 4 overall themes. The overall themes are: Theme 1: Working with people; Theme 2: Providing support; Theme 3: How the local authority ensures safety within the system; Theme 4: Leadership.

Overall, the Council received a rating of 'Good' (ratings are 'Inadequate, Requires Improvement, Good, Outstanding') reflecting strong, consistent performance across key aspects of our Care Act duties and adult social care delivery. The Council performed particularly strongly in the assessment area of 'Learning, Improvement & Innovation' (under the Leadership Theme) where it achieved a rating of "Outstanding" and was assessed as "Good" in the other eight areas of assessment.

Amongst the conclusions included, the report stated that:

“People who used services and their unpaid carers generally felt happy with the care and support they received from Warwickshire County Council” and that “they received care and support which suited their needs, goals and preferences”.

“The Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF) reported 99.43% of people who received short-term support no longer needed ongoing care, which was significantly better than the England average of 79.39%. This showed how effective Warwickshire’s reablement and recovery-focused services were in promoting independence and reducing long-term reliance on care. Satisfaction levels were also high, with 88.31% of people saying they were satisfied with their care and support, compared to the national average of 62.72%. Review activity was strong, with 84% of people receiving long-term support having had a review in the past year. These figures highlighted effective prevention, timely reviews, and positive outcomes for people. “

Areas for development included improving consistency in provider engagement during reviews, particularly in supported living settings.

The full assessment can be found here - [Warwickshire County Council: local authority assessment](#)

In addition to the above Local Authority CQC Assurance Assessment, in 2025/26 the Council’s Reablement Service was inspected by the CQC. CQC formed a strongly positive view of Warwickshire Reablement, highlighting a person-centred, outcomes-focused service with a clear ethos of helping people achieve as much independence as possible. Inspectors noted robust assessment and regular reviews that supported positive risk-taking, safe transitions between services and consistently good outcomes, underpinned by skilled, well-trained staff and effective recruitment and supervision. They also recognised strong recording and multi-professional working, timely access to equipment, and a commitment to innovation and assistive technology to boost confidence and independence. Overall, CQC saw a well-led service with strong quality oversight, a learning culture and excellent feedback from people and families, who described staff as kind, caring and highly recommended. The inspection concluded that the service was providing safe, effective and person-centred support, and the overall outcome was positive, an Outstanding judgement, with no enforcement action required.

The full inspection outcome can be found here - [Warwickshire Reablement Service](#)

### **Youth Justice**

Inspectors from His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) undertook an inspection of Youth Justice Work with Children and Victims in October 2025. Overall, Warwickshire Youth Justice Service has been rated as “Good”, and some areas were assessed as being “Outstanding”. The inspection highlights the service’s strong and effective practice with children, which is contributing to positive outcomes across the county. Inspectors praised the team’s deep commitment to continually developing and improving their practice.

The inspection identified the need to further strengthen consistency and oversight for victims as one area for improvement. All suggestions arising from the inspection have been implemented.

The results of the inspection can be considered [here](#).

## **Legal Services**

In July 2025 Warwickshire Legal Services (WLS) was inspected as part of the Law Society's Lexcel accreditation process.

Lexcel is the Law Society's legal practice quality mark for client care, compliance and practice management.

It sets the standard for:

- client care;
- risk management;
- people management;
- structure and strategy;
- financial management;
- information management; and
- file and case management.

Warwickshire Legal Services was reaccredited with LEXCEL 6.1, the latest version of the professional legal practice accreditation. It is the 26th year that the service has achieved this endorsement of excellence.

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

*Building organisational strength by ensuring leaders and staff have the skills, knowledge, and support needed to perform effectively*

### **Review of staff engagement (to be updated July 2026)**

The 2025 staff survey saw an increased response rate of 58% and an increased engagement score of 80%, with notable strengths in commitment, inclusion, pride in working for the Council, and line manager visibility. While wellbeing and work-life balance saw small declines, overall results remained above local authority benchmarks.

Priorities for 2025/26 focussed on recognition, agile working, and leadership, supported by year-round communication of feedback actions, deeper analysis of workforce data, and targeted engagement with community-based colleagues. Engagement is an important process undertaken with our staff and as such formed part of the Strategic Workforce Assessment which was presented to Staff and Pensions Committee in September 2025.

## **Organisational development**

During 2025/26, Our People Strategy priorities focused on strategic workforce planning, employee offer, talent acquisition and development, leadership, creating a great culture and performance. Key achievements included the refresh of leadership and management development programmes, the launch of a comprehensive managers' hub, and expanded workforce dashboards to support data led decision-making.

The renewed approach to reducing unplanned absence has seen an improvement in attendance figures across the Council. Through a focused drive sickness has reduced from 10.76 days per FTE to 10.47 days per FTE which is estimated to save £195k in productivity costs. Workforce services continues to work with managers, Occupational Health partners, EAP and benefit providers to ensure we identify new methods to further improve our employee's wellness whilst working in Warwickshire.

Strategic workforce planning was embedded across the organisation, alongside targeted development activity to support talent pipelines, apprenticeships and succession planning. Organisational Development activity also aligned with wider People Strategy priorities to enhance engagement, wellbeing, attendance management and the overall employee experience.

## **Annual Health and Safety Report**

Health and Safety is a key workforce activity and, as such, formed part of the Strategic Workforce Assessment presented to Staff and Pensions Committee in September 2025.

The Council continued to strengthen its commitment to creating a safer workplace and build a proactive, inclusive safety culture with strong accountability. Key achievements during the year have included accredited health and safety leadership training for all Directors, expanded de-escalation training for frontline colleagues, clearer quarterly reporting to support proactive decision-making, refreshed risk registers and the continued 'Don't Slip Up' campaign, which has helped reduce slips, trips and falls.

The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations (RIDDOR) analysis identifies 23 reportable incidents across the financial year 2025/26. 24 were reported in 2024/25, suggesting that the downward trend may be continuing into 2026/27. The pattern of incidents continues to be shaped mainly by Fractures (other than to fingers, thumbs and toes), and over-seven-day incapacities, indicating that the overall level of harm remains centred on more serious outcomes rather than high-volume minor events.

Incidents are also spread across a range of services and teams rather than concentrated in one single area, reinforcing the need for strong reporting discipline, local risk controls and consistent preventative practice across the organisation. There were no work-related deaths in service reported during the year to the Health and Safety Team. Health and safety training compliance courses total 130; however, the current training systems cannot provide the percentage of mandatory training completed. The service is working with the training team to address this limitation in 2026/27.

While reported accidents and incidents increased from 1,327 to 1,686, reflecting improved transparency and a maturing safety culture, the Council is now entering the delivery phase of a new digital health and safety reporting system. The contract is at the final stages of award, with implementation scheduled to commence during 2026, providing a step change in real-time reporting, data quality and management oversight. Looking ahead, priorities focus on improving mental health and reducing stress-related absence, empowering health and safety steering groups, expanding health surveillance and engaging frontline colleagues through structured focus groups.

# Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

*Ensures risks are identified, mitigated, and managed in support of performance and delivery.*

## Review of Risk Management Arrangements.

The Strategic Risk Management Framework and associated Risk appetite statements were updated and approved by Cabinet in December 2025 having also been considered by Audit & Standards Committee. The framework is published and accessed by staff on the Council's intranet.

In line with the Framework, live risk registers are operated at Strategic (Appendix C), Directorate and service levels.

During the year the risk management approach has been further refined to embed quarterly reporting at Directorate Leadership Teams, Corporate Board, Cabinet and all Overview & Scrutiny Committees.

As part of this refinement, significant work was undertaken to migrate the risk registers onto a corporate system (Verto), and guidance, support and training has been provided to all Directorate Leadership teams, risk owners and controllers.

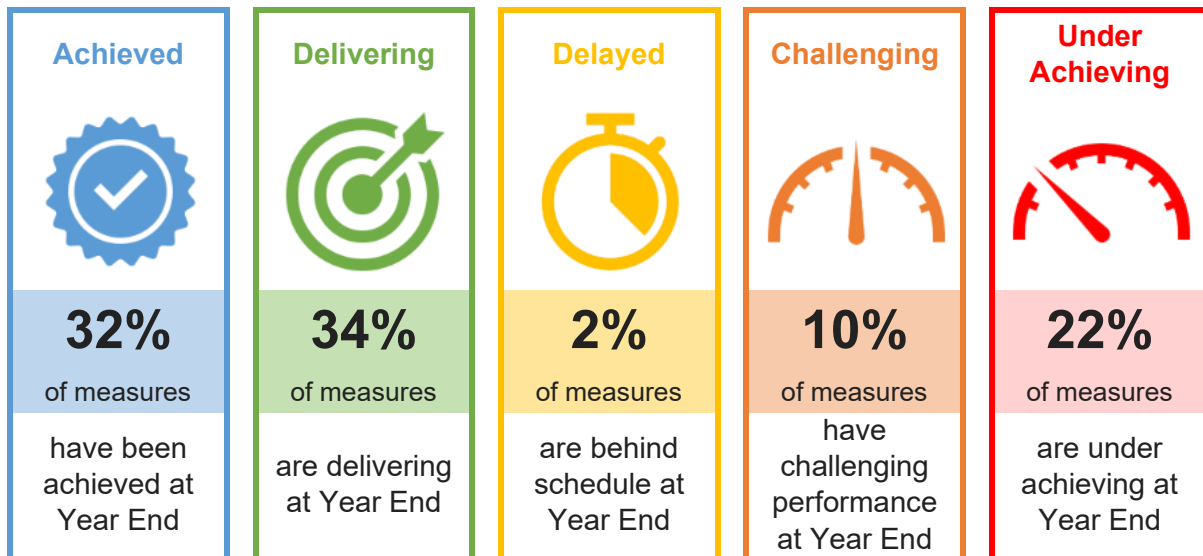
A review of the risk management framework was also undertaken by Internal Audit in January 2026 with a resulting 'substantial' assurance rating.

## Review of Performance Management

Our approach to performance management is contained within our Business Planning and Performance Management Framework. The Council assesses the progress of its Council Plan through the review and reporting of Key Business Measures (KBMs). Progress is reviewed quarterly to inform actions and interventions and is reported to Cabinet, Corporate Board, Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Directorate Leadership Teams. Operational performance information is monitored and managed at local service level.

Detailed performance information is available to all WCC personnel on our [Performance Portal](#) and the public can access via our [WCC Performance Dashboard](#).

The performance for the 88 Key Business Measures, at the Year End is as shown below:



Twenty-eight of the Key Business Measures have had challenging performance or are underachieving at Year End. There have been several areas that continued to be challenging across the year, including:

- Cost of Home to School Transport, demand for which continues to grow, particularly in relation to SEND students. A consultation and review are underway to make improvements while maintaining statutory duty.
- Achieving required delivery of savings across directorates.
- Completion of Educational Health Care Plans within statutory timescales of 20 weeks has proved difficult to achieve and a process review has been completed. Initial results are encouraging with 85% of new requests being actioned within 20 weeks.
- High levels of sickness for our 12-month rolling measure. Many initiatives have been implemented to manage sickness effectively resulting in an improvement in our monthly sickness measure.

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

*Supports financial transparency, assurance, scrutiny, and public accountability*

### Statement of Accounts and External Auditor Opinion for 2025/2026

An annual Statement of Accounts is produced and published each year alongside the Annual Governance Statement, as required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015. External auditors rated the areas of financial sustainability, governance, improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness, and the pension fund, all of which were given a green rating.

The Dedicated Schools' Grant deficit was noted as a significant financial challenge but was mitigated by Central Government's Statutory Override.

## Internal Audit – Annual Opinion 2025/2026 (To be updated in July 2026)

Based on the results of work undertaken in 2024/25, the Internal Auditor concluded that the Council's governance, control and risk management arrangements provided **Substantial Assurance** that significant risks facing the Authority are addressed.

In line with the theme of recognising ongoing challenges, the Internal Auditor also noted that “there is a high level of change and risks around financial sustainability, in particular a lack of clarity in terms of national policy regarding how Dedicated Schools Grant Deficits are to be managed. The county council remains financially strong, but the level of resilience is lower than in previous years.”

Therefore, whilst it is positive that the Council's assessment remains at Substantial Assurance, the Council is keeping a close eye on risk and drivers for change to ensure that performance can continue to be maintained.

## CIPFA Financial Management Code assessment

The assessment against the CIPFA Financial Management Code is considered by the external auditors in reaching their judgement on their Value for Money assessment, reported as part of the 2024/25 Auditor's Annual Report to the Audit and Standards Committee on 25 November 2025. The Auditor's annual assessment of value for money arrangements rated the Council as “green” in all three categories of financial sustainability, governance and improving economy, and efficiency and effectiveness. The Council's self-assessment is consistent with these ratings given the evidence of positive action being taken proactively where opportunities to improve performance are identified. The outcome of the most recent self-assessment against the CIPFA Financial Management Code was reported to the Audit and Standards Committee in March 2026, reporting on this self-assessment can be found [here](#).

## Capital Governance arrangements

Capital Governance arrangements were reviewed and refreshed as part of drafting the 2026-31 Capital Strategy and 2026/27 Capital Budget Resolution which was approved by full council on 17 February 2026. This included introducing further governance arrangements around emerging issues, namely developer led s.278 capital projects and prioritisation of forward funding arrangements.

## Review of Information Governance and Cyber Security

### Information Governance and data protection

Information Governance covers both Information Rights and Information Compliance alongside Records Management and Data Governance. Information Rights covers requests where individuals ask questions of the Council under Freedom of Information or Environmental Information legislation or seek copies of data that the Council holds about them under Data Protection Legislation, as well as requests from other public sector bodies such as the Police and Government. Information Compliance includes the Council's data governance strategy and policies, compliance with data legislation and robust management of the Council's records and customer data.

Over the past year, we have continued to roll out the Data Governance System (DGS), bringing together the Council's data governance activity in one place. It helps data owners and

users understand what data they hold, why they hold it, and how long it should be retained. The DGS serves as the Council's Record of Processing Activities (RoPA), information asset register, and repository for Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs).

Over the next 12–18 months, we will complete the rollout of the RoPA and information asset register to support preparation for LGR. We have also strengthened our focus on DPIAs, including AI impact assessments, which can now be managed through the DGS. Training has increased on DPIAs, data ownership, and good data management practices (including retention and data cleansing), alongside support for services using the system.

Processes around DPIAs in procurement have been enhanced, requiring DPO approval to proceed without one. This has led to more DPIAs being completed and at earlier stages in the procurement process. While this has increased workload, the DGS has made completion of DPIAs easier and faster, improving overall data governance and compliance.

Advice and guidance on new information and data sharing agreements have also been strengthened as the organisation works increasingly closely with partners in Health, Warwickshire Police and Government departments.

Records management processes and procedures continue to be improved with a current focus on the timely disposal of records to remain compliant and reduce storage costs to the organisation and ensuring that data migrated between existing education and social care systems and the system currently being introduced is correct and treated appropriately. Disposal and therefore storage costs, paper and digital, will be affected by the legal hold under the Inquiries Act 2005, which requires the non-disposal/deletion of any information relevant to the National Grooming Gangs Inquiry. The legal hold covers the time-period April 1996 to April 2029 at the latest and will affect Social Care, Education, Public Health, HR and Community Safety records amongst other areas of the business.

In terms of Information Rights, volume of demand continues to be a pressure with requests increasing by more than 20% year on year. Plans are in place to manage demand, improve efficiency of response and reduce the backlog through targeted use of digital solutions and additional resource capacity.

### **Cyber security**

The Council continues to repel a large number (over 670 million annually) of unauthorised activities at the Firewall level (these tend to be automated attempts by devices and programmes across the internet). This figure is consistent with data from previous years.

The Council's anti-virus protection layer has identified and contained on average 2,200 attacks that were able to penetrate the firewall, which is consistent with previous years' data. The Council typically receives approximately two million emails per month and the email filters approximately 47,500 of these emails as being suspicious and approximately 50 emails per month were identified by individual employees as potentially being a risk, which were subsequently quarantined and cleaned by the service desk team, with no virus infections identified.

Our Public Services Network Code of Connection was approved. This is the first year that approval was granted without any caveats or the need for additional remedial work. This included an external penetration test from external sources. This showed marked progress in the work recently completed on our defences, processes, procedures and network improvements.

The recent global challenges have led to stricter cyber rules being put in place including in relation to accessing WCC systems from outside the UK and enhanced communication with staff about threats such as phishing and other scam activities.

A programme of work to reduce the number of unsupported applications and processes is underway. To date 9 have been completed, 12 are in progress and 23 are yet to be started.

ICT rely on a regular risk appraisal, captured in the ICT risk register. Currently there are 29 issues that have been open for more than a year, of which 10 are classified as High Risk. This is a moderate level of risk, with several areas mitigated.

## Appendix 2 – Progress of 2024/25 Action Plan

The following actions were undertaken in 2025/26 to further strengthen the governance framework.

Any outstanding actions will be incorporated into the 2026/27 action plan

AGS Action	Status
1. Implement the elements of the Council's Level 2 devolution deal	Complete
2. Effectively deliver the 2025 County Council Elections and the effective induction of new Councillors	Complete
3. Ensuring strong governance of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme	Complete
4. Implementing recommendations from independent Pension Fund Governance Review	Ongoing in 2026/27
5. Maintaining a balanced budget and MTFs and managing continued increases in costs and demand	Complete
6. Prepare for external inspection of key services	Complete
7. Refreshed Governance Stocktake	Complete
8. Develop learning on governance and decision making aimed at committee report writers	Complete
9. Build on the capital financial management framework project	Complete
10. Delivery of the Children and Young People change programme - SEND	Complete
11. Continued focus on ethical standards in adopting digital tools to assist the delivery of Council services to supplement existing guidance to staff on artificial intelligence.	Complete

## Appendix 3 – Summary of Strategic Risks – Q4 2025/26

Risk	Owner	Residual Score	Target Score	Risk Appetite
Slow economic growth and increased inequalities across communities	Mark Ryder	12	12	Open
Mismatch between demand & resources	Rob Powell	16	12	Open
Being unable to keep the vulnerable children & adults of Warwickshire safe	Becky Hale / John Coleman	10	10	Minimalist
Lack of movement towards Sustainable Futures	Mark Ryder	15	10	Open
Business continuity	Mark Ryder	8	6	Cautious
Insufficient skilled & experienced workforce	Rob Powell	20	20	Cautious
Cyber attack	Rob Powell	20	20	Open
A safe environment may not be sustained	Monica Fogarty	12	8	Cautious
Failure of Governance arrangements	Rob Powell	9	9	Cautious
Dedicated Schools Grant	Rob Powell / John Coleman	9	9	Minimalist