

**REPORT TO PEOPLE SELECT
COMMITTEE**

11 MAY 2026

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF
CORPORATE SERVICES**

Corporate Services Performance Report 2025/26

Summary

This report provides People Select Committee with an overview of the performance and operating position of the Corporate Services Directorate during 2025/26. Its purpose is to support effective scrutiny by the committee by setting out whether the Council's core corporate services functions remain sound; sets out where pressures are emerging; and describes what this means for resilience

This report covers those functions within the Corporate Services Directorate. It excludes Xentrall which is reported separately through its governance arrangements.

Recommendations

1. Members are recommended to note the report and provide feedback and scrutiny challenge on the contents.

Overview

1. Members will recognise that Corporate Services is an essential part of the Council's overall corporate control system. The work of the directorate underpins lawful decision making, democratic accountability, workforce, governance, procurement and assurance, legal compliance, information governance, communications, programme oversight and the corporate systems that enable frontline services to operate effectively.
2. Looking back at the overall position for 2025/26 the corporate control environment remains fundamentally sound and effective. However, it is operating under increasing pressure in a number of demand driven areas, particularly those linked to our frontline services Children's Services and workforce capacity.
3. Core governance processes remain stable. Democratic and constitutional processes have been delivered to time throughout the year, procurement governance remains controlled and transparent, and statutory information governance compliance remains high. Internal audit provides a positive overall assurance rating with no evidence of systemic control failure.

4. At the same time, demand on these core services has increased, this can be seen particularly at some of the key statutory interfaces we have with our residents. For example Data Subject Access Requests have increased by over 92% largely linked to Children's Services related cases. Legal Services has experienced pressure in care related work, while maintaining strong performance in all other areas.
5. Workforce indicators show tightening resilience. Members will note that mental health related absence (across the council) has continued to rise and directorate turnover stands at 8.1% year to date.
6. These pressures reflect services that are continuing to function effectively, but within a challenging resource position. The key issue for Members is therefore sustainability and capacity over the medium term to longer term.

Corporate Governance and Democratic Functions

7. The Council's democratic and corporate governance infrastructure remains robust. All Democratic Services indicators are delivered at 100% compliance, including publication of agendas, Cabinet decision records, public questions, Member questions and motions within statutory and constitutional timescales. Voter registration levels remain in the period remained high.
8. Procurement governance remains disciplined and improvements of the robustness of decision making has been made through the utilisation of a procurement governance group to provide additional check and challenge to decision making.
9. Statutory transparency requirements continue to be met. Freedom of Information compliance remains high.

Performance Across Corporate Services

10. Across the Directorate, performance remains consistent with a system that is functioning effectively.
11. Democratic services, electoral services, procurement governance and policy oversight are all being delivered in line with expectations. Social value delivered through procurement activity now exceeds £7 million cumulatively, recognising that some values are reported after the end of the accounting period.
12. Council Plan and Service Plan priorities supported by Corporate Services remain On Track, with programme governance arrangements operating as intended.
13. There is no evidence unmanaged risk at a corporate level.

Workforce and Capacity

14. Workforce indicators provide the clearest signal of emerging pressure.
15. Sickness within Corporate Services remains below the Council average of 8 days per full time equivalent, providing short term operational assurance. However, sickness is cumulative across the year, and mental health related absence has risen continuing a clear upward trend.

16. Directorate turnover stands at 8.1% year to date, compared with a Council average of 6.7%, suggesting pressure on retention in specialist and assurance critical roles.
17. Learning and development indicators remain positive. Compliance with mandatory training for data protection and cyber security remains high. However, completion of information governance training remains an identified issue council wide and continues to require targeted management focus.
18. Overall, the Directorate continues to deliver, but workforce resilience is a clear concern and requires active management.

Legal and Governance Pressures

19. Legal Services continues to support high risk statutory activity across safeguarding, care proceedings, education, prosecutions, contracts and governance.
20. Performance pressure is concentrated in Children's Social Care related care proceedings. Year to date, 38% of care proceedings were issued within the two week target timescale. Performance varies between quarters rather than showing consistent deterioration.
21. The causes of delay are clear and consistent: evidential readiness and quality, amendments required prior to filing, prioritisation of urgent safeguarding cases, and limited specialist legal capacity.
22. Performance elsewhere in Legal Services remains strong. For example all prosecution cases are issued to time once ready to proceed.
23. This demonstrates that Legal Services is prioritising statutory risk appropriately. The challenge sits primarily at the interface with Children's Services demand.
24. Investment has been made available for this area in the budget for 2026/27

Information Governance and Complaints

25. Information governance and complaints data provide a clear indicator of demand driven pressure. Common themes council wide include communication and information sharing. Data Subject Access Requests increased sharply, showing increases of over, representing a 92% increase. The majority of requests relate to Children's Services cases and are complex and resource intensive.
26. Freedom of Information compliance remains strong.
27. These trends reflect increased statutory demand and complexity. The key risks relate to capacity, timeliness and the ability to translate learning from complaints and DSARs into service improvement.

Communications

28. The Communications function continues to provide effective support to organisational engagement and reputation.

29. The My Council newsletter reaches tens of thousands of residents, and social media audiences remain substantial, including over 40,000 Facebook followers, around 12,500 on LinkedIn, and more than 7,000 on Instagram.
30. Engagement levels fluctuate across the year, reflecting external factors and campaign activity rather than decline. Work has been undertaken to refresh the Communications approach and planning to improve consistency and alignment with Council Plan priorities.
31. No governance or compliance concerns are identified in this area.

Policy Development, Public Affairs and Programme Management Office

32. Policy Development and Public Affairs, including the Programme Management Office, supports delivery of the Council Plan and provides governance oversight of major programmes.
33. Programme governance arrangements are established and functioning, supporting risk management, delivery tracking and benefits realisation. All reported priorities remain On Track.
34. The emerging challenge relates to delivery capacity, particularly where corporate programmes intersect with areas already experiencing service pressure.

Risk and Improvement Priorities

35. The evidence across the Directorate points to a consistent and targeted set of priorities:
 - managing demand pressures particularly in legal services linked to Children's Services.
 - strengthening workforce resilience and retention.
 - embedding learning from complaints and DSARs; and
 - maintaining stability across core corporate systems.

Next Steps for 2026/27

36. Looking ahead, the key challenge is sustainability. The Directorate will need to maintain strong corporate controls while operating within tightening resources, managing continued demand growth and supporting workforce resilience. The trajectory remains manageable but will require continued management attention and clear prioritisation.
37. Members can take assurance that Corporate Services continues to operate effectively as a key component of the Council's corporate control framework. Statutory and governance responsibilities are being met, and there is no evidence of systemic failures. The pressures identified are real but concentrated. They are driven primarily by Children's Services demand and workforce capacity. Corporate Services remains stable and effective as a key element of the Council's corporate assurance framework. However, increasing demand and workforce pressures mean that capacity, resilience and targeted improvement must remain active management priorities to sustain this position over the medium term.

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