

WESTMORLAND AND FURNESS COUNCIL

ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2024/25

2024/25 Annual Governance Statement – Action Plan for 2025/26

The following table highlights significant governance issues as identified by the Council as part of the Action Plan for 2025/26.

Ref	Action Required	Responsible Officer	Target Date
Principle A – Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values and respective the rule of law			
A1	Good Governance to be embedded across all Directorates monitored and progress regularly reported and assessed. Development of an assessment tool.	Corporate Management Team	March 2026
A2	Continue to improve and embed good decision making.	Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer and CMT	March 2026
A3	Continue to comply with the Transparency Legislation/ Transparency code.	Corporate Management Team	March 2026
A4	Respect for the Councils processes and systems of Governance including financial, legal and professional advice is required to be understood and respected by the Corporate Management Team as the Officer Leadership cohort of the Council. In the event of any areas of conflict Escalation Processes will be agreed with the Chief Executive.	Golden Triangle	September 2025
A5	Work will be undertaken on the clarity and improved understanding of professional responsibilities and accountabilities including the separate roles of the three corporate statutory roles and wider CMT colleagues to strengthen the Council's overall governance position.	Golden Triangle	September 2025
A6	Prioritise the Deprivation of Liberty safeguard assessments	Director of Adult Services	March 2026

Ref	Action Required	Responsible Officer	Target Date
A7	Consult and propose changes to the Nomination and Appointment of LA Governors for maintained schools.	Assistant Director Education & Inclusion	March 2026
Principle B – Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement			
B1	Develop a register of strategic / key partnerships which includes key information in terms of key objectives, any funding provided to or from the partnership, who attends from the Council, meeting frequency, consideration of any potential financial or other risks for the Council and exit strategy.	Assistant Chief Executive	November 2025
B2	As a new Council we have identified a need to review existing Company / Partnership and Trust Governance, e.g. Barrow Forward Limited.	CMT (Lead Director) / Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer	November 2025
Principle C – Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable, economic, social and environmental benefits			
C1	Continue to develop Strategies, Policies and Procedures for Westmorland and Furness Council to replace those of the previous legacy councils.	Senior Management Team members in their capacity as policy owners	March 2026
C2	Ongoing review of workforce capacity to ensure we have sufficient support (ICT/ Customer and Digital, HR and OD, Commissioning and Procurement and Legal Services) to help it realise the Council's Change programme alongside business as usual delivery demands.	Corporate Management Team (CMT)	By September 2025
C3	Monitor progress on the delivery of the Procurement Strategy Implementation Plan, implementation of the changes required by the Procurement Act 2023, updating the contracts register and improving the pipeline to support forward planning.	Assistant Director – Commissioning and Procurement	March 2026
C4	Monitor progress on the delivery of the Commissioning Strategy Implementation Plan across different service areas.	Assistant Director – Commissioning and Procurement	March 2026
C5	Improvements to procurement and contract arrangements	Assistant Director – Commissioning and	March 2026

Ref	Action Required	Responsible Officer	Target Date
	<p>Ensure the Council complies with its own contract procurement rules relating to the use of waivers</p> <p>Have sufficient capacity and capability in its procurement and contract management function to support model of procurement and contract management agreed.</p> <p>Implement a system to monitor real time contract performance of its key contracts</p> <p>Include cost and performance validation in the monitoring of contracts, including Sproc.net</p>	Procurement	
C6	Develop an Engagement Strategy to provide valuable advice and guidance to ensure that high quality co-ordinated approach is taken to consultation.	Assistant Chief Executive	September 2025
C7	Put in place a contract with Barrow Forward Ltd, monitor operational performance of Barrow Forward Limited to ensure it meets business plan objectives, secure appropriate back office support and reduce the financial subsidy.	Assistant Director Community Infrastructure	December 2025
Principle D – Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes			
D1	Service plans of varying levels created across the Council, some more detailed than others.	Corporate Management Team	September 2025
D2	<p>Improvement of Performance management by:</p> <p>Identifying what benchmarking of services the Council currently uses, what regional, national, and statistical neighbours comparators are used and what needs to be developed to support our approach to demonstrating value of money.</p> <p>Address data quality and data governance issues.</p>	Assistant Chief Executive	June 2025

Ref	Action Required	Responsible Officer	Target Date
	Develop and integrated approach to performance, finance and risk reporting		
D3	The Council will ensure its new People Plan is fully costed to build assumptions into the MTFP to reflect future skills requirements.	Assistant Director – OD / HR Assistant Director of Finance	30 September 2025
D4	Publish social value key performance indicators for 2024/25.	Assistant Director – Commissioning and Procurement	30 June 2025
Principle E – Developing the entity’s capacity and capability including the capacity of its leadership and the individuals within it			
E1	<p>The Council needs to enhance capacity to deliver its capital programme in future years.</p> <p>Responding effectively to the findings of the Annual Audit Report highlights the need to strengthen senior capacity within the team. The scale and complexity of the Capital Programme now require an additional senior manager to support its continued effective development, delivery, and governance.</p> <p>The scale and complexity of the programme has increased substantially, placing sustained pressure on the existing team. While this is being carefully managed, current resourcing levels limit the ability to maintain momentum and respond effectively to emerging priorities.</p> <p>Filling existing vacancies within the Capital Programme remains challenging due to strong competition from large local employers, who are often able to offer more attractive commercial terms. This has significantly limited the success of traditional recruitment methods. In response, a specialist construction agency agreement is being developed with HAYS to support the recruitment of key roles. However, this approach carries higher associated costs, which may impact the overall capital available for scheme delivery. It also introduces the potential for variations in remuneration, which will need to be managed carefully to support team cohesion.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the prevalence of agency support, the current and proposed resource levels are unlikely to be sufficient to accommodate further programme</p>	Assistant Director - Corporate Assets, Fleet & Capital Programme	March 2026

Ref	Action Required	Responsible Officer	Target Date
	expansion beyond the 2025–2030 Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP), including new schemes and strategic programmes or elements thereof such as Team Barrow—necessitating organisational leadership support to grow the team and safeguard the Capital Programme’s success in delivery.		
E3	The Council should Operate the internal financial controls and month-end and close-down procedures as designed, to prevent, detect and correct misstatements or omissions in the financial records.	Assistant Director of Finance	April 2025 Accounts to be published by 30 June 2025
Principle F – Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management			
F1	Embed the new Scrutiny Executive protocol and Scrutiny development plan and ensure scrutiny makes the most impact and fulfils its ‘critical friend’ role.	Cabinet All Scrutiny Chairs and Members CMT, SLT, Officers	31 March 2026
F2	<p>Improve risk management arrangements as outlined in the Grant Thornton Annual Audit and VFM report for 2023/24. This would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separating out risk, cause and impact; • Integrating strategic risks and scores into relevant committee report • Formatting the risk registers including the SRR and DRRs to include risk proximity and separating out risk, cause and impact. • Improving the work on risk appetite by assigning risk types and agreeing appetites for each and translating these into the risk registers. • Integrating corporate risks, their references and their scores into all report writing for committee papers giving members risk assurance and helping them to understand the impact of their decision making on risk and include risk considerations in committee paper sign-off. 	Assistant Director of Finance Senior Risk Officer (SRO)	September 2025

Ref	Action Required	Responsible Officer	Target Date
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopting the CIPFA 2014 code of practice on managing the risk of fraud and corruption and integrate fraud and anti-corruption risks as part of risk management improvement Ensuring risks identified in the annual budget report are sufficiently detailed with mitigation and are consistent with the SRR revised format Ensuring the pension risk register includes assurances target dates and dates last updated. 		<p>-Meeting with DSM's re DRR's 17.06.25</p> <p>-Q1 SRR to be developed by 01.08.25</p> <p>-Meeting re committee papers June 25.</p> <p>-CMT to advise on risk appetite. TBC</p>
F3	Improve controls relating to the main accounting systems to ensure that all bank reconciliations should be completed, balanced, undertaken on a timely basis and subject to independent review.	Assistant Director of Finance	30 June 2025
F4	Improve internal control relating to the accounts receivable system to ensure that income is posted on a timely basis and supports effective debt recovery.	Assistant Director of Finance	30 September 2025
F5	Develop an Internal Audit Manual for the Westmorland and Furness Council Internal Audit Service.	Group Audit Manager (Head of Internal Audit)	30 September 2025
F6	Monitor progress on delivering the roadmap set out in the Data & Intelligence Strategy.	Assistant Chief Executive	Ongoing
F7	Undertake the additional work required to improve the Council Information Asset Register and Information Records Management.	<p>SIRO, Chief Legal and Monitoring Officer, Data Protection Officer</p> <p>Members and Officers</p> <p>Assistant Chief Executive</p>	Ongoing

Ref	Action Required	Responsible Officer	Target Date
		and All Assistant Directors	
F8	Undertaking a self-assessment against the CIPFA Financial Management Code and develop an action plan to address and improve areas identified.	Assistant Director of Finance	September 2025
F9	Use the transformation programme (priority programme) to develop and achieve sustainable savings	Corporate Management Team	Ongoing
Principle G – Implementing good practices in transparency, reporting and audit, to deliver effective accountability			
G1	Further work is required to further strengthen the availability and timeliness of publishing contracts and spend data on the Council website.	AD – Commissioning and Procurement AD Customer & Digital	30 September 2025
Ongoing impact of Local Government Reorganisation			
LGR1	The Council needs to prioritise the harmonisation of the legacy financial systems.	Assistant Director of Finance Assistant Director of ICT	March 2026 for legacy ledgers
LGR2	Update the DSG Management Plan to address the end of the national Delivering Better Value programme to address the cumulative deficit at 31 March 2025 and in-year pressures on the high needs block in 2024/25 and projected to continue. Monitor the delivery of the Council's Dedicated Schools Grant management Plan in terms of controlling the High Needs Block.	Director of Children's Services	Ongoing
LGR3	There appears to be a trend for overall schools balances to be in deficit going from a net surplus) in 2023/24 to a net deficit in 2024/2025. Implement appropriate controls and monitoring arrangements to have oversight and support school actions to address school deficits	Director of Children's Services	Ongoing