ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

2025/2026

Appendix A

Annual Report of the Audit & Governance Committee 2025/26

Foreword by Councillor Eleanor Connolly

I am pleased to introduce the annual report of the Audit & Governance Committee, summarising the contribution the Committee made during the 2025/26 municipal year to the achievement of good governance, effective internal control, and strong financial management within the Council.

The councillors and the two independent persons of the Committee brought a balanced, independent, and objective approach to business of the Committee and I sincerely thank them for the contributions they made.

The Committee provided robust challenge and review of the Council's arrangements for risk, governance, and audit, across four 'core' and six 'non-core' meetings, and has:

- Reviewed and approved the Council's statutory accounts;
- Overseen the production of the Annual Governance Statement;
- Overseen and approved the annual evolution of four key policies: Whistleblowing; Anti-Fraud and Corruption; Declaration of Interests, Gifts and Hospitality; and Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) and Investigatory Powers Act (IPA) Policies.
- Overseen and approved the annual evolution of Financial Regulations;
- Received and reviewed the annual Counter Fraud update report;
- Received and reviewed assurance reports on the key aspects of the Council's internal control arrangements, including risk management, information governance, health and safety, treasury management, procurement, providing robust challenge to BCP Council arrangements and to suggest areas where improvements can be made; and
- Provided oversight of the Council's internal audit function, receiving the annual report and opinion and regular quarterly Internal Audit Plan progress reports, including the implementation of recommendations in line with the Committee approved Audit Charter.

Given the national backstop arrangements, the Committee acknowledged that the external auditor's disclaimer opinion issued for the Statement of Accounts for 2024/25 was the best outcome BCP Council could expect, this position being common across upper tier Councils. This highlights the continued good work of the Council's Finance team and the effective relationship with the external auditor.

Given historic concerns surrounding the creation and operation of BCP FuturePlaces, a now closed wholly owned company focused on regeneration, the Committee commissioned a wide-ranging investigation from the Council's Chief Internal Auditor. The Committee considered this investigation report over three dedicated meetings. The report provided factual insight over matters the Committee wanted clarity over; recommendations were also made in the context of governance improvements and lessons learnt. A final meeting in July 2026, to conclude the investigation, considered the recommendations, which are to be taken to full Council.

I believe the Committee worked hard with officers to understand and strengthen governance arrangements across the Council, and to ensure that risks were appropriately managed and mitigated.

The Committee took a flexible and agile approach, adapting to emerging issues and concerns raised by councillors with us. Six 'non-core' meetings were held where 'deeper dive' reports, presentations, training and briefings were received to provide greater insight and assurance on these often-complex matters.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Samantha Acton and Lindy Jansen van-Vuuren, independent persons, who served diligently on the Committee for the length of their tenure which ended on 31/3/2026.

Cllr Eleanor Connolly
Chair – 2025/26

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This annual report to the Council meeting demonstrates the importance the Council places on good governance arrangements and takes into account suggested best practice in regards content and style.

1.2 The Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) describes the overall aim of good governance as:

'to ensure that resources are directed in accordance with agreed policy and according to priorities, that there is sound and inclusive decision making and that there is clear accountability for the use of those resources in order to achieve desired outcomes for service users and communities'

CIPFA/Solace Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework 2016 Edition (incorporating May 2025 addendum) (the Good Governance Framework)

1.3 Good governance is ultimately the responsibility of Council as the governing body of BCP Council. This report provides assurance as to the way in which the Audit & Governance Committee has discharged its role to support the Council in this responsibility. In addition, the report underpins the Annual Governance Statement, which is approved by the Committee.

1.4 This report demonstrates how the Committee has:

- Fulfilled its terms of reference;
- Complied with national guidance relating to audit committees; and
- Contributed to strengthening risk management, internal control and governance arrangements in BCP Council.

2. THE AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE INFORMATION

Role of Audit & Governance Committee

2.1 The Committee is appointed by Council to support the discharge of its functions in relation to good governance by providing a high-level focus on audit, assurance and reporting.

2.2 CIPFA defines the purpose of an audit committee as follows:

1. Audit committees are a key component of an authority's governance framework. Their function is to provide an independent and high-level resource to support good governance and strong public financial management.

2. The purpose of an audit committee is to provide to those charged with governance independent assurance on the adequacy of the risk management framework, the internal control environment and the integrity of the financial reporting and annual governance processes.

Audit Committees – Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police (2022)

2.3 The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Audit & Governance Committee should be reviewed annually against current regulations, the CIPFA position statement and guidance for audit committees and best practice in comparable authorities. A&G Committee will review the ToR in November 2026 during the proposed self-assessment process and which is included in the Forward Plan of the Committee.

2.4 The Committee's approved Terms of Reference for 2025/26, which were detailed on the BCP website, can be summarised as providing independent assurance to Council in relation to the:

- Effectiveness of the Council's governance arrangements, risk management framework and internal control environment;
- Overseeing the work of Internal and External Audit;
- Reviewing and approving the Annual Statement of Accounts and the Annual Governance Statement and monitoring the Council's compliance with its Code of Corporate Governance; and
- Reviewing the adequacy of certain policies and procedures to ensure compliance with statutory and other guidance.

The complete Terms of Reference for the Committee are shown at Appendix A1 of this report.

Membership and attendance

2.5 The Committee was chaired during the 2025/26 municipal year by Councillor Eleanor Connolly, and the vice chair was Councillor Marcus Andrews. The Committee comprised nine councillors (inclusive of the Chair and Vice) and two independent persons.

2.6 The Committee met formally on ten occasions during 2025/26. All meetings were quorate and face to face in line with government requirements for all Committee meetings. Attendance at the meetings is recorded below:

Committee member	Number of meetings possible to attend	Number of meetings attended in person (able to vote)	Number of meetings viewed on MS Teams(not able to vote)	Apologies sent & formal substitute appointed who attended in person (able to vote)	Apologies sent & no substitute appointed
Councillor					
Eleanor Connolly (Chair)	10	10	0	0	0
Marcus Andrews (Vice Chair)	10	10	0	0	0
Sara Armstrong	10	9	0	1 (Bull)	0
John Beesley	10	7	1	2 (Toby Slade)	0
Judes Butt	3	3	0	0	0
Stephen Bartlett	7	3	0	0	4
Margaret Phipps	10	6	0	2 (Dedman)	2
Vikki Slade	10	5	1	4 (Trent, Nanovo, Walters, Pankhurst)	0
Michael Tarling	10	8	0	2 (Pankhurst, Nanovo)	0
Clare Weight	8	7	0	1 (Nanovo)	0
Tony Trent	2	1	0	0	1
Independent persons (non-voting)					
Lindy Jansen-vanVuuren	10	1	7	n/a	2
Samantha Acton	10	7	0	n/a	3

There was also one specific briefing meeting delivered by the Head of Audit & Management Assurance, held virtually on MS teams, where the financial position of BCP FuturePlaces was outlined. This briefing was a 'deeper dive' of the summary financial position presented in public meetings.

2.7 Following various political changes through the year and subsequent review of political balance on the Committee, Councillor Judes Butt, after attending the first three meetings, was replaced by Councillor Stephen Bartlett and Councillor Clare Weight, after attending the first eight meetings, was replaced by Councillor Tony Trent.

2.8 Various other councillors attended Committee meetings from time to time, often for specific agenda items. Councillor Mike Cox, Portfolio Holder for Finance, attended most meetings in person or virtually.

2.9 In addition to the Committee members, the Chief Executive, Director of Finance, Head of Audit & Management Assurance (the Chief Internal Auditor), Director of Law and Governance, representatives from the External Auditors (Grant Thornton) and other officers including the Insurance & Risk Manager and Democratic Support officers, as appropriate, attended Committee meetings.

Independence of the Committee

2.10 As a Council appointed Committee, Audit & Governance Committee is appointed in accordance with the requirements for political balance and proportionality but, in line with CIPFA guidance and best practice, strives for political neutrality.

2.11 Samantha Acton and Lindy Jansen-vanVuuren served as non-voting Independent persons to the Committee, having been appointed by Council following an openly advertised selection process in October 2023. The introduction of independent persons to the Committee enhanced the independence of the Committee as it discharges its functions. In addition, the professional audit and business experience and knowledge of the independent persons gave depth and insight to the robust challenge the Committee provided in considering the assurances received.

2.12 Both independent persons decided to end their tenure at the 31 March 2026 having served on the Committee for their two-year term. Two new independent persons have been appointed, pending Council approval.

Knowledge and Skills of the Committee Members

2.13 Councillors bring with them a wide range of knowledge and skills from their working life and elected representative roles to the work of the Committee. The skills and knowledge of the Committee are further complemented by those of the Independent Members, who have brought with them a wealth of knowledge and experience in both business and audit settings, and they apply this knowledge, skill and experience to BCP Council.

2.14 The Committee also participated in 'deeper-dive' sessions including, for example, How the Internal Audit Plan is derived, Procurement arrangements (including changes resulting from the Procurement Act 2023) and the governance and risk management associated with the Council's use of Artificial Intelligence (see table at 3.2).

2.15 Grant Thornton, the Council's External Auditor, routinely provided sector updates and presented some in depth briefings including refresher training on the roles and responsibilities of Audit Committees.

2.16 The BCP Council Audit & Governance Committee MS Team continues to be used where Committee members can communicate with each other or officers to discuss matters, to seek training or to simply ask a question. Officers also share relevant sector briefings using this MS Team.

2.17 Looking forward, the Committee will continue to participate in further training and development opportunities over the 2026/27 municipal year. The Committee have requested a training session on the statement of accounts prior to its next review. The chair has once again invited members of the Committee, or indeed any councillors, to make her aware of any governance, risk or internal control matters where greater understanding or acquisition of skills may benefit individuals or the Committee in discharging its responsibilities. Such requests will be incorporated into the Forward Plan for a report, presentation or training session to be received in the non-core meetings of the Committee.

Operation of the Committee

2.19 The Committee met on ten formal occasions during the 2025/26 municipal year with meeting dates structured around the receipt of annual assurance reports, external and internal audit reporting cycles, and the statutory requirements for production of the Accounts and Annual Governance Statement. This frequency of meetings ensures the Committee can fulfil its responsibilities in an efficient and effective way and has been compared against the CIPFA recommended practice and arrangements in other local authorities.

2.20 The Committee meeting on ten occasions during the municipal year is towards the more frequent end of other local authorities' comparison. The most common other local authority frequency was quarterly, which tallies with the 'core' meetings of the BCP Council Audit & Governance Committee.

2.21 Live streamed webcasts of each meeting allowed members of the public and press to access meetings remotely. Members of the public were free to make statements or ask questions related to the agenda items at Committee meetings in line with the Constitution. All Committee meetings during 2025/26 heard questions and or statements from members of the public. In the case of questions, a response generally prepared by an officer was provided to the chair who gave the answer on public record.

2.22 The Committee is supported by several officers who attend regularly and bring expertise in relation to corporate governance, internal audit, finance, legal compliance, risk and resilience and information governance.

2.23 The chair and vice chair of the Committee have a briefing with appropriate officers prior to each Committee meeting to ensure the meeting runs as smoothly as possible in terms of who is presenting, and who else is likely to wish to speak.

Self-assessment against best practice

2.24 A self-assessment was undertaken against good practice set out in the CIPFA Audit Committees: Practice Guidance for Local Authorities and Police (2022). This has been done in the first instance by officers, reviewed by the Chair, but a whole-Committee review of these assessments will be undertaken during 2026/27; this will also include a self-evaluation of impact and effectiveness as recommended by the guidance.

2.25 The detailed results of the self-assessment are attached in Appendix A2 and summarised below:

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Good Practice area	Does not comply / Significant improvement	Partially complies and extent of improvement needed		Fully complies – No further improvement
		Moderate improvement	Minor improvement	
Audit committee purpose and governance	0	0	2	8
Functions of the committee	0	0	3	8
Membership and support	1	2	2	4
Effectiveness of the committee	2	1	1	6
Total	3	3	8	26

It shows a high level of alignment with good practice, with 34 out of 40 sub-questions rated as fully complies or with only minor improvement required. There were 3 sub-questions where it was judged the Committee either did not comply or required significant improvement; these were in relation to undertaking this self-assessment, an action plan and formal identification of member training.

External Audit feedback

2.26 External Audit commented on the operation of the Audit & Governance Committee in their Annual Report. In relation to the FuturePlaces investigation, whilst they noted that this was not standard practice for an Audit & Governance Committee, they supported the implementation of the recommendations identified in the review.

2.27 They also raised the following points for consideration by the Council:

- Ensuring that the Audit and Governance Committee prioritise core assurance business as per the terms of reference and evaluate if their role should include scoping and commissioning lessons learnt reviews – *this is done through maintaining the four 'core' meetings throughout the year, ensuring core items are given full consideration*
- Reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of the Committee annually, in line with CIPFA good practice guidance – *this is being done via the self-assessments (see 2.24 & 2.25)*

3. COMMITTEE BUSINESS - THE WORK & ACTIVITY OF THE COMMITTEE

3.1 The key functions of the Committee are aligned to key statutory and regulatory deadlines. Consequently, the Committee in 2025/26 has received:

- Some reports in arrears, for the 2024/25 financial year;
- Some update reports in real or close to real time for the 2025/26 financial year; and
- Some reports in advance to implement policies and procedure for the 2026/27 financial year.

3.2 The table below summarises the reports received by the Committee during the 2025/26 municipal year.

Terms of Reference area	Reports received by the committee to enable oversight and discharge of responsibilities
Governance, Risk & Control	• Annual Governance Statement 2024/25 and Action Plan • Annual Review of Local Code of Governance Update • Chief Internal Auditor's Annual Opinion 2024/25 • Annual Breaches of Financial Regulations and Procurement Decision Records Report 2024/25 • Annual Review of Declarations of Interests, Gifts & Hospitality by Officers 2024/25 • Annual Use of Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act and Investigatory Powers Act 2024/25 • Annual Report of Internal Audit Counter Fraud Work and Whistleblowing Referrals 2024/25 • Risk Management – Corporate Risk Register quarterly updates • Risk Management Policy
Internal Audit	• Internal Audit Plan 2025/26 Queries & Approval • Chief Internal Auditor's Annual Opinion 2024/25 • Quarterly Internal Audit Plan Updates (2025/26) • Internal Audit Plan Coverage Presentation (2025/26) • Assurance Framework, Audit Charter & Internal Audit Plan 2026/27
External Audit	• Audit Plan 2024/25 • Audit Plan 2025/26 • Audit Findings Report & Statement of Accounts 2024/25 • Auditors Annual Report (Value for Money arrangements report) 2024/25 • Audit Progress & Sector updates
Treasury Management	• Treasury Management Outturn 2024/25 • Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 • Treasury Management Quarterly Monitoring Updates 2025/26 • Review of business cases for increased prudential borrowing: Poole Museum, Building Maintenance & Construction Teams, Two Riversmeet Studios,
Accountability arrangements	• Audit & Governance Committee Annual Report 2024/25
Other functions	• Information Governance Update 2024/25 • Procurement and Contract Management – Delivery Plan Progress Report (six monthly progress report) • Emergency Planning & Business Continuity annual update • Health & Safety annual update • Fire Safety annual update • Annual evolution of Council Policies for 2026/27: i. Whistleblowing ii. Anti-Fraud and Corruption iii. Declaration of Interests, Gifts & Hospitality iv. Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) and Investigatory Powers Act (IPA) • Financial Regulations - annual evolution for 2026/27 • Appointment of new Independent Persons
Discretionary and/or requested functions	• Review of the Council's Constitution - a separate working group met during the year to review the Constitution. Proposals will be brought to A&G Committee and Council during 2026/27. • Investigation of BCP FuturePlaces Limited (based on agreed scope) • Governance and processes of Regeneration projects (with a focus on Carters Quay)

	• Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman complaint review • Presentation – Artificial Intelligence – Governance and Risk Management

3.3 The core functions of the Committee, as suggested and identified by CIPFA best practice, is summarised in the following sections.

The Statement of Accounts (SoA) and Annual Governance Statement (AGS)

3.4 Council has delegated to the Committee the authority to approve the Council's pre-audited and audited Statement of Accounts, which includes the Annual Governance Statement, on behalf of the Council. Note - As per self-assessment, this needs to be made explicit in the Committee's Terms of Reference.

3.5 The Committee considered and approved the draft 2024/25 AGS in July 2025 following receipt of the Chief Internal Auditor's Opinion, subject to any comments received during the during the formal period of public consultation.

3.6 The Committee approved the audited Statement of Accounts for 2024/25 in February 2026. Due to the national challenges where a prior year's audit (2022/23) was subject to backstop-related disclaimed audit opinion, the external auditor was unable to form a full opinion on the financial statements. This position is common across the vast majority of local authorities, and all upper tier local authorities (as BCP Council is).

3.8 The audit for the 2025/26 year has commenced and Grant Thornton and BCP Council are working collaboratively to re-install more timely audit reporting in line with the national agenda.

External Audit

3.9 Grant Thornton LLP remain BCP Council's external auditor, having been re-appointed through Public Sector Audit Appointments Limited during 2023/24. They have been the incumbent auditor since BCP Council came into being on 1 April 2019, will remain the Council's appointed auditor until (at least) the completion of the 2027/28 accounting year audit.

3.10 The Committee plays a significant role in overseeing the Council's relationship with its external auditor and takes an active role in reviewing the external audit plan, progress reports and the annual report which sets out the findings of the value for money opinion, which reviews the Council's arrangements for securing economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

3.11 In November 2025 the Committee received the external auditor's annual report, where the auditor is required to report their commentary under specific criteria, namely financial sustainability, governance and improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness. They are required to report on any significant weaknesses they identify.

3.12 The 2024/25 Annual Report identified the following weaknesses:

Criteria		2023/24 Assessment of arrangements	2024/25 Risk assessment		2024/25 Assessment of arrangements
Financial sustainability	R	Three significant weaknesses in arrangements identified, one retained from 2022/23 and two identified in 2023/24. One improvement recommendation retained from 2022/23.	Three risks of significant weakness identified in relation to: DSG deficit, cashflow and the level of reserves.	R	We have reviewed the previous significant weaknesses and key recommendations and updated our assessment and concluded that, as the weaknesses are all founded on the increasing DSG deficit, its impact on cashflow and the lack of reserves to manage this deficit, it was more appropriate to combine these into a single significant weakness and key recommendation.
Governance	A	No significant weaknesses identified; three improvement recommendations, two retained from 2022/23 and one raised in 2023/24.	No risks of significant weakness identified.	A	No significant weaknesses in arrangements identified, but four improvement recommendations made to support the Council in improving arrangements for treasury management, officer complaints, lessons learnt reporting and Council-owned companies.
Improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness	R	Two significant weakness in arrangements identified, one key recommendations raised in 2023/24 and one key recommendation retained from 2022/23.	Two risks of significant weakness identified in relation to: statutory direction on the Council's SEND service and the 'inadequate' rating for children's services from Ofsted.	R	One significant weaknesses in arrangements remains for the statutory direction in relation to SEND (special education needs and disabilities) service and a key recommendation made. The Council has significantly improved its Ofsted rating to 'Good', so our previous key recommendation has been addressed.

Overall, two key recommendations and four improvement recommendations were made. The Council provided the External Auditor with management responses to all the recommendations, including responsible officer and due date for implementation.

The Committee particularly noted the following key commentary surrounding the Council's governance arrangements:

Governance

The Council had arrangements in place to identify and manage risks. Budget setting and monitoring arrangements were appropriate. Treasury management reporting could be enhanced by including comparisons to previous periods on the level of short-term borrowing, and we raise an improvement recommendation on page 25. In September 2024 the non-statutory Best Value Notice was lifted following completion of the required actions.

In 2024/25 we established that the Council had a range of policies, codes of conduct and a protocol for councillor/officer relations in place. We raise an improvement recommendation to expand the Constitution to ensure it is consistent with the Joint Negotiating Committee's guidance, and for the Council to strengthen its governance of Council-owned companies. See pages 26 and 27.

The Council's Audit and Governance Committee has scoped and commissioned a lessons learnt review of BCP Future Places Ltd. An initial report has been issued, but a full report with recommendations has not been issued. We recommend the Council should develop an action plan in response to this review, once Internal Audit have completed their investigations.

The Council's latest Procurement and Contract Management Strategy was approved by Cabinet in September 2024 and included the requirements of the 2023 Procurement Act.

3.13 During the year, the Committee also received regular reports and sector updates.

3.14 The Chair of A&G Committee has ongoing engagement with the External Auditor, and the Committee looks forward to continuing to work with the External Auditors, considering the responses of management to audit recommendations and ensuring that appropriate actions are agreed and implemented.

Internal Audit

3.15 The Committee works closely with the internal audit function, both overseeing the independence and effectiveness of the service and receiving assurance from the Head of Audit & Management (HAMA) assurance as to the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's internal control environment.

3.17 From 1 April 2025, Internal Audit were required to conform to the new Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS), the Application Note for the GIAS in the UK Public Sector and CIPFA's Code of Practice for the Governance of Internal Audit the UK Local Government, which replace the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. The Committee noted the Internal Audit service had prepared for this change and that, via self-assessment, 'generally conformed' with the requirements, with an action plan in place to address any remaining areas for improvement.

3.19 The previous external assurance received from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) was received in June 2021, and as per the GIAS requirements, the next external assessment will be carried out during 2026/27 as part of a 5 year rolling cycle.

3.20 The Committee reviewed and agreed the Internal Audit Charter. The Mandate and the Audit Charter continues to ensure the independence of the Internal Audit team.

3.21 The Committee reviewed the strategic annual risk based audit plan for 2026/27 including the allocation of resource to respective Council service areas. Following challenge from the Committee, positive discussions around information provided to the Committee to support their understanding of the plan were held, resulting in additional information being presented, which will continue moving forward.

3.22 The Internal Audit team undertake quarterly detailed operational audit scoping and planning which is now presented to the Committee in more detail. Local government sector challenges and significant levels of organisational change created uncertainty, complexity and increasing risk. Quarterly planning ensures audit plans are flexible and adaptive to new and emerging risks in this environment.

3.23 The Committee received and considered regular reports from the HAMA throughout the year providing updates on progress against the 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan, together with information relating to the wider work of the Internal Audit section.

3.24 The Committee was advised of the outcomes of every internal audit review, with greater depth and follow up provided in relation to reviews resulting in 'partial' or 'minimal' assurance. Of the 77 reports issued during the year, there were seven 'partial' assurance, and, reassuringly, no 'minimal' assurance review outcomes.

3.25 The Committee also received assurance that management responded positively by agreeing all recommendations made and these were followed up by the Internal Audit team to ensure they were implemented in the agreed timeframes.

3.26 The Committee received reports from the HAMA where any high priority recommendations were not implemented by the agreed target date or where medium priority recommendations were overdue by over two years. The Committee had the power to 'call-in' officers to explain delays in implementing recommendations. Whilst the Committee did not exercise this power during 2025/26, detailed explanations were sought on all recommendations over a year old (2023 and 2024). Where recommendations were not implemented by the target date, the explanations provided were reasonable and a revised target date was agreed.

3.27 The Committee was satisfied that the work undertaken to support the overall opinion of the HAMA was conducted in accordance with established methodology that promoted quality and conformance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing and the GIAS.

3.28 The HAMA's overall Annual Audit Opinion concluded the Council has an adequate and effective framework of internal control, risk management and governance, although the detailed reporting through the year identified areas of weakness and where improvements can be made.

Risk Management

3.29 The Committee oversees the Council's risk management arrangements and strategy, which is currently being revised in line with feedback from the Corporate Management Board, the Committee and the Cabinet. The revised approach moves to an 'enterprise risk management model'. One key feature of this approach is to align enterprise risk ownership to a named senior officer in the Council.

3.30 The Committee reviewed the progress made by the Council in identifying and addressing corporate risks. This included consideration of the Corporate Risk Register at all core meetings.

3.31 During 2025/26 a number of officers (risk owners) were asked to attend the Committee meeting so the Committee could assess the adequacy and effectiveness of risk management.

Corporate Governance

3.32 The Committee considered and approved a refreshed Code of Corporate Governance. The Code reflects the core principles and requirements of the CIPFA/SOLACE 'Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework'.

3.33 The draft and final Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25 was approved showing how the Council complied with the Code of Corporate Governance and highlighting areas where improvements were required.

3.34 The Committee established a Constitution Review Working Group of five of its Councillors. The 2025/26 members of the Working Group were Councillor Connolly (Chair) and Councillors Andrews, Armstrong, Beesley and Phipps.

3.35 Since its establishment in July 2020, the Working Group has continued to meet a required to consider requests for change. The Group received advice from various officers including the Monitoring Officer and Head of Democratic Services. From time to time, as required, Officers and Councillors with specialist responsibility were invited to have an involvement.

3.36 Working Group recommendations that were agreed by Council have been implemented and incorporated into a revised and updated version of the Constitution and published on the Council's web site.

4. LOOKING FORWARD

4.1 The Committee has approved an initial Forward Plan for the 2026/27 municipal year setting out the regular update reports and annual assurance reports it will receive. This draft Forward Plan will be reviewed quarterly and will be amended or added to as required.

4.2 The Committee will remain flexible in its approach, to accommodate additional items within its remit as they emerge. As in the last municipal year, the Committee will request and consider reports in relation to relevant matters which come to our attention during the year.

4.3 The Committee will provide the usual level of robust challenge to corporate governance and audit practice and procedure across the authority to ensure that BCP Council arrangements are up to date and fit for purpose, communicated, embedded and routinely complied with.

4.4 In addition to the routine business the Committee have requested assurance reports in the 2026/27 municipal year in relation to the below, but more may be added during the year if required:

- Governance and processes of Regeneration Projects (with focus on the Carter's Quay development)
- FuturePlaces (this took place 16 July 2026)
- Council Owned Companies Shareholder Governance
- Risk Management – Children's Services deeper dive
- Procurement and Contract Management – processes for SMEs
- Governance of 'invest to save' decisions
- Artificial Intelligence – governance and risk update
- Governance of the Lower Gardens