Minutes of the Meeting of the AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at the Council Chamber, Epsom Town Hall on 16 July 2026

PRESENT -

Councillor Steve Bridger (Chair); Councillor Phil Neale (Vice-Chair); Councillors Chris Ames, Tony Froud, Steven McCormick, Alex Coley (as nominated substitute for Councillor James Lawrence) and Robert Leach (as nominated substitute for Councillor Christine Cleveland)

Absent: Councillor Christine Cleveland, Councillor James Lawrence and Councillor Darren Talbot

Officers present: Iona Bond (Deputy Head of Southern Internal Audit Partnership), Andrew Bircher (Assistant Director of Corporate Services), Will Mace (Corporate Governance & Strategy Manager), Phoebe Batchelor (Democratic Services Officer) and Angela Guest (Democratic Services Officer), Iona Bond (Southern Internal Audit Partnership) and Deborah Davies (Legal Representative)

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1 QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There was one statement from a member of the public which was read out by the Democratic Services Officer.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Coley declared a non-pecuniary interest for items 5 and 7 as listed on the agenda in that he had a code of conduct complaint against him.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

A suggested amendment to Minute 62a) was proposed and voted on. The Minutes were amended as agreed and signed by the Chair.

Following consideration, it was resolved that:

(1) Additional wording be added to Minute 62a which read as: ‘The Principal Solicitor also went on to say that the author of the restricted appendix would have stated reasons for why they believed it should be restricted but could not say why the public interest assessment was not included in the report. Both the Principal Solicitor and the Chair undertook to find out and respond back to the councillor after the meeting.’

4 POINT OF ORDER

a) A Member raised a point of order under appendix 4.4, paragraph 9, to the Constitution. It related to Item 10 on the agenda – Internal Audit Annual Conclusion and 2025/26 Plan – which had an exempt appendix attached. He stated that the appendix gave no reason for its exemption and did not state that public interest had been considered. He used an example of Strategy and Resources Committee where a paragraph about public interest was included on the agenda.

b) The Legal Representative agreed that there should be a public interest statement and that it was good practice to also indicate if the exempt information would be released at a later date. The Assistant Director of Corporate Services explained that the report did contain the Local Government Act paragraph to which the exemption related and apologised for the omission of the public interest statement. The Chair stated that he would withdraw the exempt appendix from the agenda. The Legal Representative stated that if an officer was present that could confirm that the public interest had been considered then the document could still be discussed to which the Assistant Director of Corporate Services reported that there were very few officers in the Council that could make the exempt decision and they were not in attendance.

Following consideration, the Chair resolved:

(1) To remove the exempt appendix from the agenda and therefore the Committee would not discuss this tonight.

5 PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT: 2025-2026 END OF YEAR REPORT

The Committee received a report that provided an overview of the council's performance at the end of the financial year with respect to its ongoing annual plan 2024/25 actions, key performance indicators, corporate risks, and annual governance statement actions.

There were a number of detailed member questions about the risk register items to which a response would be sought after the meeting. The questions can be found in the appendix to these minutes.

The following matters were considered:

a) Officers **at Committee:** The Assistant Director for Corporate Services explained that officers present at a committee may not be service experts so councillors' questions may not receive an answer at committee. He therefore urged councillors where possible to provide questions in advance of the meeting to ensure an answer could be given at the meeting. A Member disagreed and stated that officers should be in attendance to answer questions and wanted assurance that his questions would receive an answer and also wanted those responses to be made public. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services stated that as issues covered the whole council it was not proportionate or

reasonable to expect all heads of service to be here to answer questions which may or may not materialise. He also stated that Democratic Services had a good record of capturing questions to be responded to.

b) **Risk DST10 - failing to respond to complaints effectively**: A Member pointed out that this was a red risk at 12, and the response was tolerate. The risk had not changed. In the ombudsman report later in the agenda it stated that this council was the second worst, for complaints per 100,000 capita in Surrey. Going forward, the Members stated it would be useful to understand how this will be mitigated given we are second in Surrey for upheld complaints per 100,000 capita.

c) **PCN Response Rates:** A Member asked what was being done to prevent the 37% drop in response rates due to staff being deployed to end of year tasks and asked why this was treated as an unexpected reason for slippage instead of a predictable staffing bottleneck. He asked what cross-training or temporary resourcing measures were planned to prevent this drop in Q4 next year. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services responded that this part of the Council not only deals with penalty charge notice appeals but with a lot of other things such as parking permits and garden waste renewals etcetera which happen at a particular time of the year. So, it's not unexpected. The question to ask is should we resource for that time of the year to increase capacity but with our financial pressures, we chose not to do that. What we do is to prioritise those things which have to happen, like car park renewals. He also pointed out that even at the 10 working days this considerably better than what the statutory requirement was. So, the council were far more than its statutory obligation in terms of still dealing with these tasks in the way it does. As soon as end of year period is over, anything that is a backlog will be cleared.

d) **HC9 and HC13 – homelessness budget overspend:** A member asked why the residual score of 16 for the homelessness budget overspend was the same as the inherent risk score despite a long list of controls. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services explained that the risk remained unchanged at 16 as it was a reflection of the homelessness rising numbers over the past 2-3 years, the additional activities and staff mitigation measures but despite that the numbers were not getting better. If they were, then there would be a lower residual risk.

Another Member spoke about the work that had been done to try to reduce numbers of homelessness including strategies and action plan which apart from modular homes was either green or blue yet the numbers and costs were rising exponentially. He went on to say that the financial outturn allocation of funding for temporary accommodation was significantly short of the money spent last year and therefore questioned whether a balanced budget was set in February.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved to (4 for, 1 against and 2 abstentions):

(1) Note and comment on the performance and risk information located at Appendix 1.

6 LOCAL GOVERNMENT & SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN ANNUAL REVIEW LETTER AND INFORMATION COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE UPDATES

The Committee received a report that provided the annual review of complaints received and decisions made by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) between April 2025 and March 2026 inclusive, including details of two complaints upheld by the LGO. The report also provided an update on data breaches and the way the council handles data complaints as a result of updated legislation.

The following matters were considered:

a) **Upheld Complaints:** A Member had previously mentioned the high number of upheld complaints per 100,000 people in Surrey and whilst it was recognised that the numbers were low he asked if it was known why this council's score was higher than the other 11 councils in Surrey. Another Member reiterated the same question emphasising the 'per capita' and was there systemic weaknesses in stage one and stage two complaints processes failing to resolve resident issues and therefore forcing them to escalate to the LGO. He spoke of the rising numbers over the last few years and asked what concrete service improvement plan has been put in place to reverse this trajectory before the transition to a new unitary authority. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services explained that when you look at the details of those upheld there was no cause for concern or systemic failure. There had been a query about whether one of them should have been included and the other one was only partly upheld. The council did very well with stage one and stage two complaints and had a good working relationship with the Ombudsman.

It was stated by a Member that when dealing with such small numbers there needed to be a viability threshold and thought the council number of upheld complaints was so small that they would not cross a viability threshold.

b) **Information Commissioner Office (ICO) Complaints:** A Member stated that under the new Data Usage and Access Act the public's right to go straight to the ICO had been removed making the council legally responsible for handling and resolving date protection complaints internally in the first instance. Given that he asked, if this legal change would place a significant administrative burden on the council and how would the council guarantee a transparent, objective, and unbiased internal investigation process for residents complaining about the council's own data handling. Also, had the financial and operational impacts of this new internal complaints process been quantified and was there a clear timeline on when these metrics will be reported alongside the standard corporate complaints.

The Assistant Director for Corporate Services directed the committee to section six of the report that dealt with this change in the law. He also explained that new complaints would go to the Business Support Team, that the complaints policy had been updated and there would still be a stage one and stage two process. It was also stated that how this was reported into the new council was a conversation still to be had.

Following consideration, it was resolved to (5 for and 2 abstentions):

(1) Note the report.

7 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2025-2026

The Committee received the Annual Governance Statement ("Statement") as an important document which provided assurance concerning the Council's governance arrangements, both financial and non-financial. It is prepared on an annual basis for inclusion in the Statement of Accounts.

The following matters were considered:

a) **Seven Best Value Themes:** A Member questioned about the Seven Best Value Themes in the appendix to the report. In Section 2 (Leadership), whilst he had previously raised that there was nothing in the 'where we can improve' column he also considered that the items listed in 'what's working well' column was more to do with middle management and not the senior leadership team. In Section 1 (Continuous Improvement) and Section 6 (Service Delivery) he highlighted the slippage in the delivery of the ICT Strategy and that the council seemed not to have the skills to deliver much of the programme and that this should be captured under Section 6 as this affects service delivery.

The Member continued to Section 7 (Partnerships and Community Engagement) and thanked officers for including the Community Governance Review (CGR). He stated that an item on charter trustees was due to be discussed at full council and that within the report it explained that charter trustees could have precepting powers and raise council tax just as a parish council would have done under CRG. The response to CGR was overwhelming as residents did not want a raise in Council Tax. There had been no consultation on chartered trusts which the member could not accept and asked that it be added to the log as an area for improvement. Also in Section 7 the Member stated that as the council were in litigation with the Rainbow Leisure Centre then there should be an item reflected in the 'where we can improve' to say that the council could improve how it works with partners.

Councillor Coley proposed a motion that Section 7 (Partnerships and Community Engagement) include consultation on any precepting powers. This was seconded by Councillor McCormick. The Motion was carried (4 for, 1 against and 1 abstention).

Councillor Coley also proposed a motion that Section 6 (Service Delivery) should include a reference to the slippage of the ICT Strategy. This was seconded by Councillor Ames. The Motion was carried (3 for, 1 against and 2 abstentions).

b) **Vesting Day:** A Member pointed out that vesting day dates in the report were given as 31 March 2027 and 1 April 2027. This needed to be corrected.

c) **AGS Action Plan:** A member highlighted the various dates given and date changes for the appeals related to the Local Plan and queried the RAG status as 'on track'. The Corporate Governance & Strategy Manager undertook to amend this.

d) **Best Value Theme 3(Governance):** A Member asked if there was monthly monitoring to ensure the backlog of 20 overdue audits was being undertaken to ensure these were cleared by vesting day. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services explained that as one audit could generate 10 or more actions this was not for undue concern. He also went on to explain that timescales are agreed between officers and auditors. There has been agreement that not all management actions need to be completed by vesting day and will carry over to the new council.

e) **Service and Economic Pressures:** With reference to a statement in the report from the Head of paid Service a Member asked if Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was delayed or cancelled would the council would be facing a Section 114 and be effectively bankrupt in the medium term and if local temporary accommodation demands were unsustainable what stopgap measures were being implemented to prevent those liabilities from severely impacting on the new council. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services explained that whilst the council was in a good financial position it had used reserves in the past to balance the budget. This would not be a good thing to do year on year and if LGR wasn't happening then the council would need to consider transformation programmes. LGR was an efficiency saving in itself despite the cost of implementing it.

f) **Member Training:** A Member asked why the 2023/24 councillor training review and enhancement programme due at end of October 2025 was entirely cancelled given that elected members will remain in office until the end of March 2027 and the programme was meant to enhance member capability during the most complex constitutional transition. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services stated that the council was a member of the Local Government Association (LGA) and any councillor wanting training had free access to a considerable amount of training through the LGA, however a fuller response would be sought for the member.

g) Core CIPFA Governance Principles – Item G – A member pointed out that the council did not have a process for publishing significant delegated officer decisions, not just urgent decisions, which left a significant gap in the council's transparency and should be included in item G of this item. The Legal Adviser stated that the law only requires that a written record be made available to the public and did not require publishing on the council's website. Another Member pointed out that the council do not make the public aware that they can view decisions and there is no process in place for them to do that. He agreed that as an improvement to transparency it should be included in item G of the statement.

Councillor Coley proposed the following wording, seconded by Councillor Ames, to be included in Item G of the Core CIPFA governance principal: 'We recognise the urgent need to deliver the resolution made at full council on 12 March 2026, regarding reporting of urgent decisions.' A vote was taken and the proposal was carried.

Following consideration, it was resolved to:

(1) Approve the 2025-26 draft Annual Governance Statement as set out at Appendix 1, including agreed amendments as set out below, prior to it being signed by the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee.

- **Section 7 (Partnerships and Community Engagement) include consultation on any precepting powers.**

- **Section 6 (Service Delivery) should include a reference to the slippage of the ICT Strategy**

- **Ensure all vesting day dates were correct.**

- **Include the following text in Item G of the Core CIPFA governance principal: 'We recognise the urgent need to deliver the resolution made at full council on 12 March 2026, regarding reporting of urgent decisions.'**

(2) Nominate and authorise the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of Audit and Scrutiny Committee, to make any required amendments to the Annual Governance Statement prior to its submission with the Statement of Accounts.

8 USE OF URGENT DECISIONS ANNUAL REPORT

The Committee received a report in accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation to officers, that set out urgent decisions taken by officers in consultation with committee Chairs for the period 3 June 2025 to 10 June 2026. This report also included an Appendix 2, which sets out the process followed by Urgent Decision 158.

The following matters were considered:

a) **Criteria for Urgent Decisions:** A Member raised the issue of reasons given for taking an urgent decision which he said were conflicting and were applied incorrectly to urgent decisions 157 and 159. He quoted the two reasons used for taking urgent decisions was not being able to convene a quorate committee or that a decision was needed prior to the next committee meeting and requested clarification. Another Member cited examples where other committees had convened a quorate meeting at short notice. The Democratic Services Officer explained the process for licensing sub-committees in setting meetings and that whilst it may appear to be done quickly, much time went into organising them. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services stated he was unsure If the urgent decisions cited could be changed retrospectively but going forward the reason used could be amended.

b) **Proposals for Scheme of Delegations:** Councillor McCormick proposed two new recommendations. 1) that 'Any urgent decision that commits the Council to a financial liability, capital spend or loss of revenue exceeding £50k must require an extraordinary public or unrestricted committee meeting rather than being signed off via a single officer and chair in private.' 2) The second recommendation was for mandatory online publishing of urgent decisions and to mandate that all urgent decision forms were redacted only where legally necessary for commercial sensitivity, must be published on the Council's public website within five working days of being signed, eliminating the lag in notifying backbench members and the public.

Several Members spoke against the proposals made and Councillor Coley spoke of the motion put to full Council and the work already being undertaken. Councillor McCormick withdrew his recommendations.

c) **Process around Urgent Decision 158**: A Member asked several questions around the lack of written documentation of the urgent decision either in the form of a published urgent decision form or in the form of internal meeting notes of the Strategic Leadership Team and asked for confirmation that this was the case and if so, was it the way a council should behave. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services declined to answer repeated questions on the basis that the answer had already been given more than once, but did state that the Chief Executive authorised the exemption of Urgent Decision 158 and had agreed that going forward, her approval for exempt papers would be evidenced, although there was no requirement to do so. The Legal Advisor stated that there would not normally be written evidence of a decision for exemption but that in making the decision exempt it would need to fall under the legal categories for exemption and the public interest taken into account.

A Member stated that it was the Deputy Chief Executive that made this decision in the absence of the Chief Executive and asked what the time

limit was for retrospectively deciding that an urgent decision was exempt. The Assistant Director clarified that the Chief Executive was present at the Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) meetings where this urgent decision was discussed and was aware of the sensitive nature of it. There was no written record of that decision being decided at SLT and there was not a requirement for there to be so. The Legal Advisor responded that at the time of making a decision one would consider whether it was exempt decision or not. However, a public paper could be made exempt at any time due to circumstances changing. There was nothing in law that says what a reasonable period of time is. In response to a further question the Legal Advisor confirmed that a leaked exempt paper remained exempt despite it being leaked to the public. A few councillors criticised the whole process used for this urgent decision to be taken by an officer and that a quorate extra ordinary committee meeting could have been arranged and claimed deliberate engineering of time in order not to take this decision to committee.

A Member asked questions around the specifics of Urgent Decision 158 and exactly what was authorised. The Chair encouraged the member to email his questions as they were outside the scope of this committee and there were no officers present to answer them. The Member requested that responses to committee member question be made public.

Cllr Coley proposed a motion that a change be made to the Constitution which would read 'When an issue of significance arises, which will change the Council's Constitution or require expenditure above £50,000, the first action should be to call and schedule a Committee Meeting'. The motion was carried. The Legal Advisor confirmed that this would need to be a committee recommendation to the Standards and Constitution Committee or the Member could put a motion to full Council without the committee's consent.

Cllr Ames proposed a second recommendation to read: 'This Committee notes that the process followed for urgent decision 158 did not follow the correct procedure and was not justified according to the information provided to this Committee. Cllr Coley seconded the proposal. This was carried.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

(1) Note the urgent decisions taken by officers, in consultation with relevant committee Chairs, recorded using urgent decision forms from 3 June 2025 to 10 June 2026, and the process followed for Urgent Decision 158.

The Committee also resolved to (4 for and 2 against):

(2) Recommend to Standards and Constitution Committee that the following is added to the Urgent Decision Process, 'When an issue of significance arises, which will change the Council's Constitution or

require expenditure above £50,000, the first action should be to call and schedule a Committee Meeting.'

(3) Note that UD158 did not follow the correct stated procedure and was not justified according to the information given to this Committee.

Cllr Ames declared an interest in that he was a member of the Standards and Constitution Committee.

Cllr Leach and Cllr Froud left the room for four minutes during the debate on this item.

At 10.16pm the Committee adjourned and reconvened at 10.22pm

9 GUILLOTINE

a) Under Standing Order FCR 9 the Committee made a unanimous decision to continue with the Internal Audit Annual Conclusion report and to carry the two remaining items on the agenda over to the next meeting. These being the External Audit Transparency Report and the Work Programme.

10 INTERNAL AUDIT ANNUAL CONCLUSION AND 2025-26 PLAN

The Committee received a report that set out the Council's approach to improving transparency and lessons learned from prior year external audit findings.

It was noted that the exempt appendix to this report had been withdrawn as agreed earlier in the meeting.

The following matters were considered:

a) **Parks budget and Playgrounds:** A Member asked how the council could prove achievement of best value or that children's play areas were financially stable when playground maintenance could not be separated from the general parks budget. He also asked how it was allowed that high value public/private assets remained uninsured on the building policy. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services explained the auditor process and stated that he had assurance from the Head of Service that the Playground Inspection Maintenance Policy and the Training Policy had been updated and ratified by the Environment Committee on 25 January 2026. He also explained that the Playground Strategy as recommended by Audit would not be progressed due to Local Government Reorganisation as it would not be completed in time available.

Following consideration, it was resolved to (6 for and 1 against):

(1) Note the report.

11 EXTERNAL AUDIT TRANSPARENCY REPORT

Under Standing Order FCR 9 this item was carried over to the next meeting.

12 WORK PROGRAMME - JULY 2026

Under Standing Order FCR 9 this item was carried over to the next meeting.

13 APPENDIX TO MINUTES - QUESTIONS & RESPONSES

The meeting began at 7.30 pm and ended at 10.36 pm

The foregoing report is hereby confirmed as the Minutes of the Meeting to which it relates.

Signed:---------- **Date: ----------**

COUNCILLOR STEVE BRIDGER (CHAIR)

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Listed below are a set of detailed Member questions and actions asked at Committee and needed a detailed response following the meeting:

AGENDA ITEM 4 – PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT (Minute 5/26)

1. **Risk PR3**: A Member reported that this risk had come to fruition three times now and had cost the council dearly. He stated that the remedy was not sufficient and wanted to know what actions would be put in place to prevent this happening again. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services explained that this was a backward looking report and the issue to which the councillor referred had not happened to the extent it has at the time of writing the report. He undertook to ensure that PR3 be updated but could not guarantee that it would not happen again and that was why it was a risk.
   Another Members stated that the residual risk was rated 12 for PR3, with the approach listed as 'treat' yet the commentary said no change to the risk profile and listed challenging economic consequences. He asked, if the approach was to treat the property portfolio risk, why had the residual score remained unchanged at 12 and what active treatment or sustainability measures had actually been deployed this quarter to prevent rent defaults from commercial tenants. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services would include this with previous questions and ensure the risk was updated.

   Response:- An updated risk commentary will be provided in the Quarter 1 2026/27 Performance and Risk report which will address this point. It should also be noted by members that the risk is applicable to the whole of the Council's property portfolio and not just the one property referenced by members in the meeting.

2. **Risk HR11:** A Member asked how it could be that HR11 is about lack of leadership and skills to deliver strategic objectives and is an amber risk, but then in a later audit report on the agenda where there is an item on leadership, the Council has said that there's nothing to improve. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services explained that it's always possible that a risk may come to pass. The fact that it isn't an issue the council is having to deal with now is fortunate, but it still doesn't negate the fact that if there were to be change in leadership or people leave for example, there could be a risk posed to the Council. Would also add that the pull of LGR on leadership resource is significant, although currently managed.

   Response:- An updated risk commentary will be provided in the Quarter 1 2026/27 Performance and Risk report which will address this point.

3. **Risk PR14 - not delivering a value for money result regarding the future of the current Town Hall site**. A Member asked if the member working group was still meeting and if they had decided or recommended anything since April when this risk was last updated.

   Response: The future of the current Town Hall site was reported to 11 November 2025 Strategy & Resources Committee (Agenda Item 7: EEBC 2025-2027 Strategic Priorities 3 & 4). Due to LGR, it was agreed that the Town Hall would remain in operational use and pursing a Joint Venture

development of the site at this time, would not be a prudent approach. In view of this decision, the member working group's term had expired.

4. **Risk AP24/5.17 – modular homes programme:** There were several questions to this risk:

   a. What was the realistic vesting date for the three properties and why was this land risk not foreseen earlier

   Response:- Due to the passage of time, we are having to go back out to tender for Modular Homes. We are hopeful that the project will complete in 2027, but we shall have to advise further once the procurement process is complete. We did not expect the challenge to access, as we believed and as we were able to prove, that we had access rights.

   b. Since all the sites were deemed unviable, what alternative rapid delivery housing options were being actively pursued to mitigate the absolute lack of affordable housing. The Chair stated that a response would be sought after the meeting.

   Response:- We are progressing an innovative and cost-effective solution using land that we have. If this is successful, the East Surrey Council may consider an expansion of the scheme.

5. **Risk AP24/5.3 ICT Strategy and cybersecurity:** There were several questions to this risk.

   a. Why has the cybersecurity response plan review slipped to September 2026

   Response:- AGS24/5.2 explains that the review has been re-phased to align with Surrey-wide LGR planning and the development of future operating models.

   b. what interim controls were in place to manage risk vulnerability?

   Response:- AGS24/5.2 and IT6 both confirm that existing cyber security, incident response, business continuity and disaster recovery controls remain in place.

   c. How much of the delay in executing the 2024-25 ICT roadmap was due to the upcoming local government reorganisation?

   Response:- AP24/5.3 explains that roadmap activity has been impacted by LGR-related priorities and has been re-prioritised to align with future authority requirements.

   d. Were the council spending resources on hardware and software that may become redundant under the new unitary authority estate?

Response:- AP24/5.3 and IT6 both state that investment and procurement decisions are being reviewed against future authority requirements to minimise duplication and avoid unnecessary expenditure.

6. **Annual Governance Statement Actions:** A Member pointed out a discrepancy between the main committee report and the appendix details on actions that are closed, slipped or complete and asked for all future reports to undergo tighter quality assurance. The Corporate Governance & Strategy Manager noted the question and would provide a response after the meeting.

   Response:- This is acknowledged.

7. **OS20 and OS30 – retiring risks:** A Member asked why the council proposed to downgrade or retire these risks because of a transition to a unitary authority and how will the council ensure that these operational pressures are transparently handed over to the shadow authority without a drop in oversight. The Corporate Governance & Strategy Manager noted the question and would provide a response after the meeting.

   Response:- OS20 (commercialisation) has been deescalated and now sits on the divisional/service level risk register. These risk registers will be available for the new East Surrey authority to review. After review at Quarter 1 OS30 will remain on the Environment Committee Risk Register.

8. **HC9 and HC13 – homelessness budget overspend:** This item received some response at committee but either needs to be expanded upon or pick up on what was not included in the verbal response.

   A member asked why the residual score of 16 for the homelessness budget overspend was the same as the inherent risk score despite a long list of controls. He asked about the effectiveness of internal controls in mitigating the risk. He stated that the council could not rely on unexpected windfall treasury yields or late lease completions so wanted to know what structural accommodation. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services explained that the risk remained unchanged at 16 as it reflected the homelessness rising numbers over the past 2-3 years, the additional activities and staff mitigation measures but despite that the numbers were not getting better. If they were, then there would be a lower residual risk. The second part to the question would need a more detailed response after the meeting.

   Another Member spoke about the work that had been done to try to reduce numbers of homelessness including strategies and action plan which apart from modular homes was either green or blue yet the numbers and costs were rising exponentially. He went on to say that the financial outturn allocation of funding for temporary accommodation was significantly short of the money spent last year and therefore questioned whether a balanced budget was set in February.

   Response:- The Council has invested £750k in Housing, including preventative officers to reduce demand for Temporary Accommodation (TA). Whilst TA pressures remain a national issue and are not unique to EEBC,

wider structural challenges continue to drive increases in demand and cost across the sector. Current controls, together with the Council's corporate contingency budget, help manage immediate financial pressures; however, longer-term sustainability will depend on addressing these underlying structural issues. Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) may provide opportunities to explore alternative service delivery models and more sustainable approaches to managing TA demand and costs. The position will continue to be closely monitored throughout the year and reported to Members. We are aware there is a high level of interest in this area, so officers are presenting a report to October Community and Wellbeing Committee as well as a briefing to the Chair and Vice-Chair of Community & Wellbeing, and Strategy & Resources and an update to Audit & Scrutiny Committee this Autumn.

AGENDA ITEM 7 – AGS (Minute 7/26)
See minutes for any actions needed – there was one promise of further information recorded:

1. **Member Training:** A Member asked why the 2023/24 councillor training review and enhancement programme due at end of October 2025 was entirely cancelled given that elected members will remain in office until the end of March 2027 and the programme was meant to enhance member capability during the most complex constitutional transition. The Assistant Director for Corporate Services stated that the council was a member of the Local Government Association (LGA) and any councillor wanting training had free access to a considerable amount of training through the LGA, however a fuller response would be sought for the member.

   Response:- This was a Corporate Peer Challenge recommendation, but when it was discussed at the Group Leaders meeting there was no appetite to progress this, so it was closed.

AGENDA ITEM 8 - USE OF URGENT DECISIONS ANNUAL REPORT (Minutes 8/26)
See minutes for any actions needed – one unanswered question recorded:

1. A Member asked questions around the specifics of urgent decision 158 and exactly what was authorised. The Chair encouraged the member to email his questions as they were outside the scope of this committee and there were no officers present to answer them. The Member requested that responses to committee member question be made public.

   Response:- Any answers provided to written questions submitted after the meeting will be made public other than those that are categorised as 'exempt' under Annex 4.4 - Access to Information Procedure Rules of the Council's Operating Framework.