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Minutes of the Meeting of the AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at the Council Chamber, Epsom Town Hall on 29 September 2026

PRESENT:
Councillor Steve Bridger (Chair); Councillor Phil Neale (Vice-Chair); Councillors Chris Ames, Christine Cleveland, James Lawrence, Steven McCormick and Darren Talbot

Absent:
Councillor Tony Froud

Officers present:
Jackie King (Chief Executive), Phoebe Batchelor (Democratic Services Officer) and Angela Guest (Democratic Services Officer)

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14 QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC
There were no public questions or statements submitted.

15 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
There were none.

16 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Cllr Ames requested an amendment to the second sentence of Minute 8c to include the wording that "***The Assistant Director for Corporate Services declined to answer these questions***" but stated 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 Chair said he would discuss the wording with officers outside of the meeting for inclusion in the Minutes.

17 CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING - QUARTER 1

The Committee received a report that represented the capital monitoring position at quarter 1 for the current financial year 2026/27.

The following matters were considered:

There were several pre-submitted Member questions that received a response prior to the meeting – these can be found in appendix 1 to the Minutes. There were also Member questions asked at the meeting that

required further clarification and responses post meeting. These can be found in appendix 2 to the Minutes

a) A member raised a query about why Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) was given as the reason for the community and wellbeing centres being deferred, when the decision was made at Strategy and Resources Committee in July and therefore was nothing to do with LGR. The Chief Executive, who was at that meeting, agreed with the councillor.

b) A Member noted that the report and appendix were not consistent with the Bourne Hall update given with one saying it was complete and the other that it was 90%. He also went on to say that he expected more explanation as to why individual schemes had slipped a long way behind, namely Bourne Hall heating and Epsom Playhouse boiler and air conditioning. The Chief Executive agreed that the report and appendix should be consistent and went on to explain that there were several unexpected factors come to light when starting a project for example issues with flooring and asbestos. She would also need to check if Bourne Hall had been completed and would ensure that the report married with the reports to Strategy and Resources.

Following consideration, it was resolved to:

(1) Receive the capital monitoring position at quarter 1, as set out in the report. (unanimous)

(2) Note the progress of capital projects as set out in Appendix 1. (4 for and 3 against)

Councillor Lawrence declared an interest in that he sat on the Strategy and Resources Committee in July 2026.

18 REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING - QUARTER 1

The Committee received the forecast revenue outturn position for the current financial year 2026/27, as at Quarter 1 (30 June).

The following matters were considered:

There were several pre-submitted Member questions that received a response prior to the meeting – these can be found in appendix 1 to the Minutes. There were also Member questions asked at the meeting that required further clarification and responses post meeting. These can be found in appendix 2 to the Minutes

Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation

a) A Member asked what the predicted full cost for temporary accommodation and what it was expected to go up to by the end of the

year. The Chief Executive stated that it was thought the council was expecting around £3M for this year and the latest forecast was that the net variance was expected to be around £250k.

b) A Member stated that at no point was it recognised that the council's policies on social and affordable housing and its approach to planning were to blame. Blame was clearly attributed to external factors including the implementation of the Renters Right Act in May, which he thought was inappropriate when there was a long-term trend of increasing numbers approaching as homeless, making applications and being accepted. The Chief Executive acknowledged that issues were complex and responses were not straightforward. Whilst the council had invested in preventative measures, this was a national problem and Epsom and Ewell suffered more than most as it no longer owned any housing stock, which meant heavy reliance on the private sector. She stated that a briefing was to be provided to the Community and Wellbeing Committee for discussion and believed that it would go to Strategy and Resources and to this committee following that. She reported that six new (5-6 bedroomed) temporary accommodation properties had been leased that day, coupled with the full utilisation of LAHF 3 funding, which was estimated would save the council at least £100k per annum.

Following consideration, it was unanimously resolved to:

(1) Receive the revenue budget monitoring report, which set out a projected balanced outturn position for 2026/27;

(2) Agree that the updated Quarter 2 position will be reported back to Audit and Scrutiny Committee in November.

19 PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT - SEPTEMBER 2026

The appendix to this report provided an overview of the council's performance with respect to its ongoing annual plan actions from 2024-25, key performance indicators, corporate risks, committee risks, and annual governance statement actions.

The following matters were considered:

There were several pre-submitted Member questions that received a response prior to the meeting – these can be found in appendix 1 to the Minutes. There were also a Member question asked at the meeting that required further response post meeting. This can be found in appendix 2 to the Minutes

a) **Fairview Road modular units:** A Member asked why progress on this was now to be monitored monthly at a chairs meeting rather than corporate performance reporting where it constitutionally belonged.

The Chief Executive explained that when this priority was put on as a corporate priority it was to deliver a programme of modular homes. Now that programme had shrunk to the three homes being provided at Fairview Road it had gone onto 'business as usual' rather than a large programme and would be monitored through service delivery plans. However, there was no reason it could not stay on the performance and risk report. The Councillor confirmed that this was his wish.

b) **ICT Strategy:** A Member said that officers had admitted that assumptions underpinning the approved January 2025 ICT strategy ha**d** changed due to LGR but stated there was not a confirmed date to bring an updated strategy to Strategy and Resources Committee due to other commitments. Therefore, what legal or constitutional authority were officers continuing to spend capital and reprofile multi-year IT investments without an up-to-date member approved strategy in place? The Chief Executive explained that spending taking place at the moment was still in line with the original approved strategy but that much of it was not continuing. She would speak with the Head of IT and Finance around the need to bring it back for a refocused reduced budget to deliver the things being delivered and release those that we're not.

Following consideration, it was unanimously resolved to:

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

20 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SOCIAL CARE OMBUDSMAN (LGO) AND INFORMATION COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE (ICO) UPDATES

The Committee received a report that contained information on recent council complaint decisions from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), as well as an update on data breaches.

The following matters were considered:

a) **Venue Complaint:** In relation to a Member concern raised about the property complaint within the report the Chief Executive explained that this was not completely the fault of the property team but equally a venue management issue. The problem led from property issues of ventilation and lighting but then had a knock-on effect to the venue management of bookings.

Following consideration, it was unanimously resolved to:

(1) Note the report.

21 EXTERNAL AUDIT TRANSPARENCY REPORT

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

The following matters were considered:

There were several pre-submitted Member questions that received a response prior to the meeting – these can be found in appendix 1 to the Minutes.

a) A Member stated that the report being considered by the Committee bore little relation to what happened in as far as what could be demonstrated by documentary evidence. He gave several quotes from various documents including the external auditors' findings report and the LGA Peer Review, and whilst there were many issues raised by the external auditors, he asked for an explanation as to why the external auditors comment about being informed at an earlier stage of the changes to the constitution was not mentioned in the report tonight. He also did not understand how having regular meetings between S151 officer and auditors was going to solve any of the problems raised.

The Chief Executive stated that she was unsure of what else could be added in way of a response because this item had been raised at many committee meetings where consistent answers had been given to questions raised by Members. She had had conversations with the external auditors and the corporate peer challenge team. Emails had been provided to members to support the responses from officers. This was not a widespread governance issue and the 2024/25 value for money audit report from the external auditors was satisfactory. If external auditors had felt there was a widespread governance issue, they would not have issued that opinion. Officers did take on board that the external auditors should have been advised earlier of constitutional changes, but could not go back in time, so it would be addressed going forward. She went on to explain that meetings between the S151 officer and the external also included her now, whereas previously they did not, and she could make sure that everything she was aware of was being disclosed.

Following consideration, it was resolved to (4 for, 1 against and 1 abstention)

(1) Note the report.

22 WORK PROGRAMME

This report presented the Committee with its rolling annual Work Programme. Due to the running time of the July 2026 Audit and Scrutiny Committee meeting and Standing Order 9 (see page 5 of Appendix 5 of the Constitution), this report was not reviewed by the Committee and carried forward to this meeting. Any updates since the July meeting were in Paragraph 2.13 of the report.

The following matters were considered:

There were several pre-submitted Member questions that received a response prior to the meeting – these can be found in appendix 1 to the Minutes.

a) A Member stated that he was unhappy with the response provided to the pre-submitted question on the issue of Members being able to propose scrutiny items for the agenda and being told it would be subject to capacity and resources. The Chief Executive said that the unfortunate reality was that with only six months to go until vesting day, was that most staff were either working on LGR or statutory services or were supporting those that were. There was no extra capacity. Having said that, officers were not vetoing anything but there needed to be a reality check on when things might be deliverable and expectation of timeframes. As each week went by, less could be delivered. There also needed to be a discussion about the point of doing it. For example, with LGR looming, would it be something the new authority would pick up.

b) **Scrutiny Item for Agenda – Hook Road Arena** – There was some discussion about a proposed agenda item provided to the Scrutiny Officer regarding Hook Road Arena that seemed to have been lost. The Chief Executive explained that she would find out how far officers had got with working on this request. Councillor Lawrence proposed that the Committee "scrutinise the performance of the completion of the work commissioned by unanimous resolution at the special meeting (Hook Road Arena), of the Strategy and Resources Committee on 17th June 2025". He further suggested that once agreed, and dependent on resourcing, that a conversation take place with Councillor Coley regarding specifics for the report which would come to this Committee. He also pointed out that this was confirmed as a strategic priority at the full Council meeting in July. The motion was seconded by Councillor McCormick.

Following consideration, it was unanimously resolved:

(1) Note and agree the ongoing Work Programme as presented in Section 2.

(2) To add an agenda item for the next available meeting to scrutinise the completion of the Hook Road Arena works.

23 APPENDICES TO MINUTES - MEMBER QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES

Appendix 1: Questions raised in advance of the Meeting by a Member with responses provided at the meeting.

Appendix 2: Supplementary Member questions raised at the Meeting with responses.

The meeting began at 7.30 pm and ended at 9.00 pm

COUNCILLOR STEVE BRIDGER (CHAIR)

APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONS RAISED IN ADVANCE OF AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING ON 29TH SEPTEMBER BY CLLR STEVEN MCCORMICK.

A. Questions in respect of Item 4 on the agenda, the Q1 Capital Report:

1. Capital Delivery & Programme Credibility

- "Table 3.3 shows that by the end of Q1, the Council had delivered only £688k—just over 11%—of its £6m capital programme, with over £2.48m already admitted as slipping or underspent. At what point do we stop calling this 'reprofiling' and acknowledge it as systemic delivery failure? What assurances can the S151 Officer give that this authority has the project management capacity to deliver even half of its commitments before reorganisation?"

- "In July 2026, Strategy & Resources agreed to carry forward £2.62m from 2025/26. Barely two months later, almost the exact same sum (£2.488m) is slipping into 2027/28 and beyond. Why are schemes being carried forward at year-end when officers knew, or ought to have known, that works were nowhere near shovel-ready?"

Due to the size and complexity of capital projects it is common for the expenditure to span more than one financial year. The progress of schemes is influenced by many factors, often outside of the Council's control. It is not a requirement for capital schemes to be complete ahead of vesting day.

2. Housing Crisis & Temporary Accommodation (Fairview Road & Bourne Hall Lodge)

- "With local families facing severe cost-of-living pressures and temporary accommodation costs straining borough revenue budgets, how can the administration defend spending just **£2,013** on the Fairview Road modular units to date, against a £411k budget originally allocated back in 2024/25?"

- "Planning permission was secured nearly two years ago in November 2024. We are now told procurement will not even begin until October 2026, with completion 'To Be Advised'. What was the exact nature and cost of the legal challenge, when was it resolved, and why did it take until Q1 2026/27 to get a Project Manager on board?"

- "Bourne Hall Lodge had £340k earmarked from S106 affordable housing funds in January 2023. Nearly four years on, zero pounds have been spent on construction, only a consultant has just been recruited, and completion has slipped to August 2027. How much extra revenue has this Council spent placing families in expensive nightly-paid bed & breakfast accommodation because these two projects have stalled?"

It is not possible to quantify a direct causal link between the delay to specific schemes and temporary accommodation expenditure because placement costs are driven by a range of factors including homelessness demand, household composition and availability of accommodation.

We are proceeding with all projects as quickly as is practically possible and in full compliance with the Council's governance and Contract Standing Orders.

In relation Bourne Hall Lodge Refurbishment, it is with Procurement waiting to be tendered and the listed building application is with Planning.

3. Internal Dysfunction: Uppermill Pond Bank Replacement

- "Appendix 1 notes that the Uppermill Pond bank replacement cannot proceed because the Council's own Tree Officer refused to agree to the removal of trees required by the scheme design, driving the estimate to £299k and halting the project for this entire financial year. Why was the Tree Officer not consulted during the preliminary survey and design phase before £15,640 was spent? Why is one Council officer able to veto a funded capital flood-risk scheme without corporate resolution?"

We have been consulting with the tree officer throughout these works, currently writing specification to go out to tender for the works to commence before Christmas weather permitting. There may be some Value engineering measures once tenders come back as funding is tight. Tree removal works to start in October.

Revised officer response following meeting: We have been liaising with the tree officer throughout these works, currently writing specification to go out to tender for the works to commence in January 2027 weather permitting. There may be some value engineering measures once tenders come back as funding is tight. Tree removal works to start in October.

4. Climate Commitments vs. "LGR Paralysis"

- "The replacement windows and solar panels at the Wellbeing Centre (£120,000 total) have been completely shelved, with Appendix 1 citing 'uncertainty created by Local Government Reorganisation'. Is it now official administration policy to abandon our climate and energy-efficiency targets under the excuse of LGR? If high-yield solar panels that reduce operational running costs are halted, why are we proceeding with millions in administrative and IT virtualisation projects during the exact same transition period?"

As reported the investment was paused given uncertainty over future direction for LGR. Do not recognise the comment about Epsom and Ewell spending millions on administration and IT virtualisation – not sure where that comes from.

5. Epsom Playhouse & Shadow Authority Governance

- "Tenders for the Playhouse boiler and air conditioning have come in over the £510k budget, and the report states that 'authorisation for additional spend is required from EEBC and the shadow authority,' delaying completion to late 2027. What is the tender cost overrun figure? Are the residents and theatre-goers facing service disruptions or winter closures due to failing plant, and has the shadow authority given any indication that it will veto this expenditure?"

This is going to November committee for approval, all planned for next August.

6. Bourne Hall Complex Financial Exposure

- "Across four separate capital lines, we have nearly £2m budgeted for Bourne Hall (Dome roof £470k, Heating/Ventilation £1m, Lodge £340k, Lift controls £120k). On the £1m heating and ventilation line, design work is in its infancy, asbestos surveys are pending, and officers are contemplating whether the entire complex must be shut down. Have we factored the lost commercial, community, and library income of a building closure into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy?"

Any future business case brought forward will include assessment of revenue implications, including potential loss of income from any closure period. This is going to November committee for approval, cannot plan start dates until committee decision made.

7. Section 106 & Developer Infrastructure (CIL) Hoarding

- "Paragraph 7.1 shows the Council holding £10.12m in CIL cash, with **£6.52m completely unallocated**. Residents across Epsom and Ewell see strained medical infrastructure, congested roads, and deteriorating community assets. Why is this money sitting in the bank earning interest rather than being put into community infrastructure on the ground?"

The table in paragraph 7.1 shows CIL funds committed up to 30 June 2026. In July a further £3.7 million of CIL funded schemes were approved by Strategy and Resources Committee. It's worth noting that funds can only be spent on eligible schemes.

- "Paragraph 7.2 reveals **£281k** in outstanding CIL invoices, of which £207k relates to 2024/25 or earlier. Why has £207k of developer debt been allowed to remain uncollected for over two years? What enforcement or legal recovery action is the Council taking against these defaulting developers?"

It is not unusual for a charging authority to have outstanding CIL invoices. There are two consented schemes that have commenced (but subsequently stalled) that make up most of this outstanding debt. Officers are closely monitoring these sites. The other

balances are held against the properties as a land charge and will eventually be recovered.

8. Treasury Yield vs. Inflation

- "Paragraph 10.3 confirms that Q1 investment income fell short of target (£202k achieved vs £218.7k profiled). Paragraph 11.5 notes that inflation is significantly escalating contractor prices. If construction inflation continues to outpace our treasury yield, does the S151 Officer agree that holding millions in unspent capital receipts and CIL cash is eroding the Council's real-terms purchasing power month on month?"

Capital receipts and CIL balances are available to fund the approved capital programme. The challenge is delivering the capital programme, not funding, due to capacity and other related constraints / challenges.

B. Questions for item 5 on the A&S agenda regarding the Q1 Revenue report.

1. Financial Sleight of Hand & Contingency Depletion

- "The recommendation asks the committee to receive a report projecting a 'balanced outturn position'. Isn't this an accounting fiction? If we strip away the one-off £250k raided from the Corporate Contingency fund, isn't the Council actually running an operational deficit three months into the financial year?"
- Section 4.1 shows that corporate contingency has been completely wiped out by £250k in Quarter 1 to subsidise homelessness. With the entire buffer consumed before winter, what financial cushion remains if inflation bites or energy and contract costs spike in Q3 and Q4?"

  The Corporate Items budget forms part of the Council's approved General Fund budget for 2026/27 and was established to provide resources to address in-year budget pressures where they arise. It is not a reserve item. A variance within one service area does not indicate an overall deficit position for the Council. The current forecast across the whole council budget remains a balanced outturn position.

  The pressure within Temporary Accommodation reflects national and local factors affecting homelessness demand and accommodation costs. Nevertheless, the Council has sufficient flexibility within its approved base budget to manage in-year service variances through corporate budget provisions and does not currently anticipate the need to draw on reserves for this pressure.

2. The Nightly Paid Housing Black Hole

- "Appendix 1 notes that Full Council pumped **£750,000 of growth** into nightly paid accommodation in February, and added another **£128,500** from inflation reserves. How can an extra £878,500 of taxpayer cash be pumped into this service, only for it to blow through that ceiling and post an additional £250,000 deficit in the very first quarter?"

  The Council did not allocate £128,500 from reserves but transferred resources from its normal inflationary budget provision which it builds and approves each year as part of the annual budget-setting process for inflationary pressures. The additional pressure reflects continuing increases in Temporary Accommodation demand and costs, which are being experienced by local authorities nationally. The Council continues to invest in preventative measures to manage demand and reduce reliance on nightly paid accommodation.

- "The budget was constructed on an assumption of maintaining an average of 100 households in nightly paid accommodation. The graph shows we were already well above 110 at the start of the year and hit nearly 130 by June. Was this budget intentionally built on unrealistic, wishful thinking to present a balanced budget in February?"

- "Appendix 1 warns that numbers will rise even further with the onset of winter. If the overspend is £250k in Q1 during the mildest months of the year, what is the S151 Officer's realistic year-end forecast for the homelessness deficit: £500k? £1m?"

The assumption of approximately 100 households was based on the best information available during budget preparation. However, the financial impact is influenced not only by the number of households but also by the cost of accommodation, which has increased significantly. Therefore, overall expenditure is determined by both demand levels and unit costs so should be looked at together. The £250,000 reported in Quarter 1 represents the latest forecast as at year end based on current information available to the Council. Forecasts will continue to be reviewed and updated through the regular budget monitoring process.

3. Accountability for Housing Supply & Strategy

- "Appendix 1 explicitly admits that **'no new affordable housing was delivered during the past year'**. Does the Chair of Community & Wellbeing accept that this total delivery failure by the administration is the root cause of our revenue budget crisis?"

  The lack of newly delivered affordable housing is indeed a significant factor in the high cost of temporary accommodation. However, the reason for this is due to multiple factors and due to minimal development over many years. The limited number of appropriate sites, the cost of construction, the appetite and ability of Registered Providers to develop and viability are all ongoing factors which are negatively impacting on the development of affordable housing. In addition, national planning policy since 2010, which has allowed permitted development without the requirement to provide affordable housing, and increased the threshold to 15 units before requiring affordable housing has all contributed to a scarce supply of affordable housing for borough residents.

- "Linking this to our Capital Programme, we hold £1.38m in earmarked S106 Affordable Housing contributions and have delivered just £2k on the Fairview Road modular homes and zero on Bourne Hall Lodge. How can the administration justify hoarding housing funds and letting modular homes stall in procurement, while paying millions to private nightly paid accommodation providers?"

  The unexpected challenge to the development of this scheme is the only reason for the stalling of the scheme and has been the cause of huge frustration. Fortunately, this issue has now been resolved, and the tendering process has recommenced.

- "Officers blame the implementation of the Renters' Rights Act in May for landlord evictions. Looking at the trend line in Appendix 1, homelessness applications and nightly placements have risen consistently since mid-2023. Why are officers blaming recent national legislation rather than addressing multi-year strategic inaction within the borough?"

  The rise in homelessness approaches, applications and acceptances is due to multiple reasons, including family/friend evictions and fleeing violence. However, the main reason consistently in EEBC, in common with most Councils, is the ending of assured shorthold tenancies (so called ‘no fault evictions’). The statistics demonstrate that as expected there was a spike in approaches for this reason in the months preceding the implementation of the Act, further exacerbating the overall rise in approaches. In the medium to long-term the RRA is anticipated to have a positive impact, which is already being seen as the number of approaches for landlord evictions dramatically decreased in Q2. However, it is important to emphasise that where a duty is accepted it is likely

that the Council will accommodate that household for several years due to the lack of move on options.

4. Reserves & Medium-Term Solvency

- "Table 7.1 shows uncommitted reserves available for general use plummeting from £4.86m to barely £3.05m by 31 March 2027—a loss of £1.81m in a single year. With our General Fund buffer frozen at just £1.55m, how many more quarters of unbudgeted housing demand can this council absorb before reaching Section 114 territory?"

  The Council does not currently expect to use reserves to fund Temporary Accommodation pressures, as it expects to manage any variances through approved corporate items budget provisions, a general fund base budget not reserve, and other in-year resources. Any material change to this position will be reported through future budget monitoring reports.

- "Paragraph 2.1 notes we are already drawing £763k down from earmarked reserves to plug planned maintenance and collection fund deficits in 2026/27. If reserve depletion continues at this trajectory, what reserves will be left to hand over when Local Government Reorganisation takes effect?"

  The Council continues to maintain a healthy level of reserves and financial flexibility. The Quarter 1 report includes the latest forecast reserve position, including the projected balance at the point of local government reorganisation.

5. Staffing, Restructuring & Efficacy

- "The service review outlines several newly created posts: a realigned rent deposit officer, a new hospital discharge officer, and increased resources for register triage. What is the annual salary overhead of these additional staff, and what specific quantitative KPIs have been set to prove they are actively reducing net temporary accommodation spend rather than merely adding to our baseline establishment costs?"

  Annual overhead c£45000. KPIs – continued increase in homelessness prevention, reduction in NP placements, increase in PRS placements, reduced number and complexity of hospital discharge cases.

C. Questions relating to item 6 on the A&S agenda – performance and risk report.

1. Housing Demand & Nightly Paid Accommodation (KPI Red & Risk HC9 / HC13)

- **Current Position:** Households in nightly paid accommodation stand at 127 against a target in the 70s, with a 40.9% increase in homelessness applications (186 received in Q1). The residual risk for budget overspend (HC9) remains at maximum critical (16 - Impact 4, Likelihood 4).

- **Scrutiny Questions and Response:**

1. *Budgetary Impact:* Given that temporary accommodation is cited as an ongoing structural risk that could threaten the balanced budget in future years (page 28), what is the current projected budget variance/overspend for nightly accommodation in 2026/27, and how much unbudgeted spend has been incurred in Q1?

There is a revenue report on the agenda which addresses the current budget position

2. *Mitigation Effectiveness:* Despite an array of controls listed (Fraud team, Homelessness Action Plan, Additional Government Funding), the residual risk score remains identical to the inherent risk score (16). Are these controls actually having any dampening effect on cost, or are we entirely reliant on central government top-ups?

Yes, these controls are having a positive impact. Referrals to the Fraud team at both the homelessness application and housing register application stage realised reduced notional and cashable costs of £258,000 for 2025/26.

- *Completion of the homelessness action plan and more recently the housing service review has highlighted the areas where resources can be utilised most effectively, for example on prevention-based activity and move on from temporary accommodation. Although TA placements are high, the percentage increase is far lower than the percentage increase in homelessness applications and approaches more generally, which demonstrates the effectiveness of the housing team's approach. For example, homelessness applications have risen by 41% for Q1 2026/27 compared with Q1 2025/26. The percentage of early prevention and relieved homelessness cases has risen by 83% during the same period. However, the number of TA placements remained the same.*

3. *Modular Housing De-scoping:* Action AP24/5.17 (carried over from 2024/25) has been downscaled to just 3 homes and delayed until August 2026 due to land tribunal issues. Why is this item being recommended for removal from

corporate reporting into "business as usual" right when delivery has stalled and the procurement process is only just restarting?

Progress on this will now be reported through service delivery plan and via the Community and Wellbeing Committee (monthly Chairs meetings).

2. ICT Strategy Slippage, Legacy Systems & Cyber Risks (AP24/5.3, IT6, AGS Actions)

- **Current Position:** The ICT Strategy 2024/25 roadmap is off-track, effectively "on hold" due to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Residual cyber risk (IT6) remains High at 12 (Impact 4, Likelihood 3), and two key IT Annual Governance Statement (AGS) actions dating back to 2023/24 and 2024/25 remain off track pending Cabinet Office feedback and Surrey-wide consolidation.

- **Scrutiny Questions:**

1. *Technical Vulnerability:* With the 2023/24 IT Health Check remediation and PSN compliance actions still unresolved after more than two years, what active vulnerabilities exist while we await the Cabinet Office and the new East Surrey authority operating model?

The premise that the IT Health Check remediation remains unresolved does not reflect the current position. The majority of remediation activity has been completed, with remaining work focused on ongoing improvement, validation and security monitoring.

- *The Council continues to operate established cyber security controls, including vulnerability management, security monitoring and infrastructure renewal. Discussions with the Cabinet Office regarding PSN assurance remain ongoing and will be aligned with emerging East Surrey arrangements. Planning for the next IT Health Check is also underway.*
- *For security reasons, it would not be appropriate to disclose specific vulnerabilities or technical remediation measures in a public forum.*

2. *Paused Deliverables:* While pause on capital investment to prevent "unnecessary expenditure" ahead of LGR makes financial sense, where does that leave our operational continuity? Which specific systems remain on out-of-support legacy infrastructure, and what additional failure risks does this introduce in 2026/27?

- *There has not been a blanket pause on ICT investment. Essential spending required to maintain security, resilience and service continuity continues, while longer-term investments are being reviewed in the context of Local Government Reorganisation.*
- *A limited number of legacy or extended-support components remain in use, as is common in many organisations, but these are known, monitored and actively managed. For security reasons, it would not be appropriate to publish details of individual systems.*

- *Any issue that presents an unacceptable risk will be addressed through the Council's normal governance and investment processes and will not be deferred solely because of LGR*

3. *Governance & Approvals:* When exactly will the report be presented to Strategy & Resources Committee to officially agree to mothball or revise the ICT Strategy roadmap?

- *The current Strategy was approved by Strategy & Resources Committee on 28 January 2025. Since then, both Local Government Reorganisation and the decision not to proceed with the East Street relocation have changed some of the assumptions underpinning the roadmap.*
- *Work necessary to maintain security, resilience and operational continuity continues.*
- *Any material changes to the Strategy, its funding or future roadmap will be reported to Strategy & Resources Committee through the Council's normal governance arrangements. At the moment there is not a confirmed date for this given the pressure of other commitments*

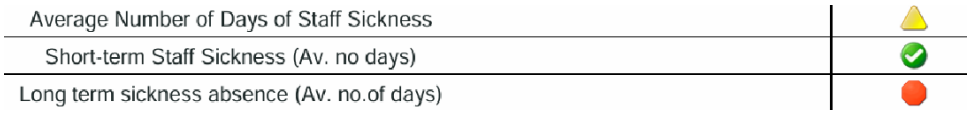
3. Sickness Absence & Workforce Capacity (KPI Amber/Red & Risk E03, HC24)

- **Current Position:** Average staff sickness is 13.35 days per FTE against a target of 10 days, driven heavily by long-term sickness (9.6 days per FTE / 2,575 days lost). Shortages are openly cited as degrading performance in refuse/garden waste (LGV driver shortage), planning enforcement backlogs (PD2), and "other" planning application turnarounds.

- **Scrutiny Questions:**

1. *Target RAG Mismatch:* In the KPI summary table (page 7), Average Sickness and Long-term Sickness are marked as Green/OK, yet the narrative and charts (pages 19–20) show overall sickness at 13.35 days against a target of 10 days, and long-term sickness at 9.6 days against a target of 6 days. Why are indicators that are ~35–60% above target shown as Green/Achieved?

- *We are unsure whether this question is correct. In the published papers at Epsom and Ewell Democracy the summary table shows the following, which matches the graphs below.*



2. *Driver & Officer Recruitment:* Refuse complaints spiked in June due to HGV driver shortages, and enforcement cases are backlogged due to vacancies. Are current pay scales and market supplements sufficient to retain and recruit critical operational staff ahead of Vesting Day, or is uncertainty around LGR exacerbating turnover?

   - *The market supplement introduced for refuse and recycling drivers this summer made our overall pay package much more competitive within Surrey. It sought to:*
   - *Retain existing drivers by reducing the incentive to leave for higher-paying jobs elsewhere.*
   - *Attract new drivers by making Epsom & Ewell a more competitive employer within Surrey.*
   - *However, although our workforce has become more stable in recent months, there is still a national shortage of LGV drivers. Since the pandemic, the number of qualified LGV drivers, particularly those interested in refuse and recycling work, has remained much lower than pre-Covid.*
   - *This issue was highlighted recently in Local Authority Plant & Vehicles magazine, where a contributor from a North West council noted that collection services require trained drivers and loaders at a time when the waste sector continues to face skills and labour shortages.*
   - *It seems unlikely that LGR is a significant factor. Collection staff generally recognise that waste and recycling services will continue regardless of future changes to council structures, and job security does not appear to be a major concern.*
   - *We therefore need to continue focusing on attracting and retaining refuse and recycling staff, helped by now offering one of the most competitive pay packages we have had.*

3. *Occupational Health:* Given that 72% of all lost working days are attributed to long-term sickness, what targeted interventions and occupational health reviews are being conducted to support employees back into the workplace?

   - *Long-term sickness (LTS) absence remains above target; however, progress continues to be made. During the reporting period, 22 LTS cases were identified, with 15 employees supported back to work and 7 cases remaining open and actively managed.*
   - *7 of the 22 cases relate to Waste Services, with the remainder across other service areas, indicating that LTS is an organisation-wide issue and should be considered alongside other workforce capacity pressures.*
   - *Reducing LTS remains a priority, with managers and HR regularly reviewing cases and using interventions such as phased returns, workplace adjustments and structured return-to-work plans to support safe and sustainable returns.*

4. Planning Enforcement, Appeals & Income Deficits (PD2, PD19, HC23)

- **Current Position:** Planning enforcement risk (PD2) has escalated to High (residual 9) due to staff vacancies, an ongoing backlog, and multiple non-compliance prosecutions. Q1 planning fee income is at only 80% of forecast (down to 57% in May), and private hire licensing fee income has dropped after an operator relocated their licence.

- **Scrutiny Questions:**

1. *Enforcement Capacity & Backlog:* How many uninvestigated enforcement breaches are currently outstanding, and will the single starter recruited in August 2026 be sufficient to eliminate the historic case backlog?

    - *As of 23 September, there are 238 outstanding cases, down from a 12-month peak of 290 cases. The single starter in August 2026 would not be sufficient on their own to eliminate the historic backlog. However, there is currently resilience and capacity within Development Management (due to a slight downturn in submission of planning applications) and we have 1.8 FTE enforcement officers working at reducing the backlog. This is currently working effectively.*

2. *Income Shortfall Contingency:* Planning fee income is relying on two large strategic applications (Downs Farm and Ewell East Station) in Q2 to "return fee income to the black". If these applications are delayed past Vesting Day, what is the mitigation strategy for the resulting revenue deficit?

    - *The applicants for these two applications have kept Officers abreast of the likely submission date, as part of the respective Planning Performance Agreements and there is very low likelihood of both applications not being submitted in the 4-6 weeks. Notwithstanding, there is continued promotion of the fast track and pre application processes. There has been increased income generation as a result if fees and charges introduced for application searches and Land Charges searches.*
    - *Other Surrey planning departments have indicated similar short-term downturns in fee revenue. This is likely due to several factors, including awaiting the recently introduced National Planning Policy Framework and Biodiversity Net Gain changes and clarification with the Council's emerging Local Plan as well as broader economic factors.*

3. *Enforcement Appeal Defeat:* The commentary for planning appeals notes that an enforcement notice for a new dwelling was quashed with "several key takeaways for improvement". Was there an award of costs against the Council in this case, and what governance procedural failure led to the notice being quashed?

- *The Inspector found that we did not sufficiently articulate the planning unit (the area in which the breach had occurred) or the specifics of the breach, with respect to whether it was a breach of a condition and its relationship to 4 or 10 year immunity.*
- *The lesson learned is that we should pay greater attention to these aspects when drafting notices, however, the issues for this site and case were complex. There was no award of costs against the Council.*

5. Transition to East Surrey Authority (LGR Governance & Vesting Day)

- **Current Position:** Multiple strategic decisions are being delayed or transferred to the future East Surrey Council, including the Town Hall redevelopment (PR14), ICT strategies, and Community Safety Partnership priorities (HC38).

- **Scrutiny Questions:**

1. *Section 24 Direction Compliance:* It is noted that internal controls have been established for the S151 Officer regarding Section 24 expenditure controls. Have any contracts or capital commitments required formal consent from the shadow authority during Q1?

    - *Apart from one EEPIC related decision there were no contracts or capital commitments during Q1 that required SA approval. Apart from one, all these decisions were undertaken under general consent to ensure councils like ours continue business as usual.*

2. *Accountability Gap:* By retiring risks like the Shadow Authority Election (LS9) and deferring site master planning for the Town Hall site to the successor authority, are we ensuring sufficient local democratic oversight during this interim year, or is scrutiny being bypassed during the transition?

    - *Risk LS9 regards a specific past event/action which has now passed; therefore, it is no longer pertinent to the council's Corporate Risk Register. As the commentary states, plans are in place should any further elections be required.*
    - *Regarding the future of the Town Hall site, democratic oversight will be maintained through the governance processes and elected councillors of East Surrey Council.*

D. Questions on item 8 on the A&S agenda regarding the External Transparency report.

1. Institutional Memory and the "Departed Officers" Shield

- "In response to questions 3.1.3 and 3.1.5 regarding why Grant Thornton was kept in the dark and what challenge they issued, the report repeatedly states that because the officers involved have left, the Council cannot provide the information. Does the Council maintain no audit trail, formal correspondence, handover memos, or contemporaneous meeting notes? Is the official position of this administration that statutory governance failures simply evaporate the moment an officer leaves the payroll?"
- "Statutory officers—namely the Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer—hold personal and statutory duties under the Local Government Acts. Were the decisions to alter governance arrangements and the decision not to inform the external auditors documented in writing, and who authorized those decisions at the time?"

2. Discovery via the CPC Report vs. Active Concealment

- "Paragraph 3.1.2 admits that GT only found out about these governance changes when reviewing the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge report. Why was a external watchdog left to discover significant constitutional and governance changes second-hand through an external peer review rather than via formal, direct notification from Council leadership?"
- "Paragraph 2.9 confirms that the LGA Peer Review explicitly identified the 'need for a more transparent approach' at Epsom & Ewell. Was GT's finding of a significant weakness merely about a delayed calendar invite, or did GT share the LGA's wider concern that the administration was actively circumventing transparent scrutiny?"

3. The S151 Officer's Defense vs. Auditor Sanction

- "Paragraph 2.4 highlights that the S151 Officer defended the Council by pointing out that the 2023/24 accounts received an unqualified opinion. Does the Section 151 Officer accept that an unqualified financial opinion does not exonerate the Council from a formal statutory finding of 'significant weakness' in value-for-money and governance arrangements?"
- "Paragraph 3.1.14 suggests the remedy is 'regular catch-ups outside of the normal audit timetable'. Why does the Council require special informal catch-ups to share fundamental governance and constitutional changes that should be published openly on public agendas as a matter of routine?"

4. Corporate Culture & Section 7 Omissions

- "Section 7 of this report asserts that 'None' of the Council's Key Priorities are engaged. On the Capital and Revenue monitoring reports tabled tonight, officers cited 'Effective Council' as being engaged. How can a report addressing an external auditor's finding of a significant governance weakness be deemed completely irrelevant to running an 'Effective Council'?"
- "Section 7.6 claims there are zero Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) implications. With a new unitary or shadow authority scrutinising the governance integrity, culture, and transparency of merging constituent districts, does the leadership genuinely believe that an external audit finding of significant governance weakness carries no risk into the LGR process?"

In relation to the points raised above we would like to stress that there was no covert effort to withhold information from the auditors. However, it was acknowledged that the matter was not communicated as promptly as it should have been. Processes have since been strengthened, including regular engagement between senior officers and the external auditors, to ensure relevant governance matters are discussed and reported appropriately. We have stated this point many times at this committee through the current and previous Chairs of A&S. We have also provided the external auditors with the opportunity to comment on our progress at A&S Committee meetings, and the

auditors have confirmed that the issue was addressed. This positive step has been formally recognised by the auditors and reflected in the 2024/25 VfM audit report, where it is no longer listed as a weakness under the governance section.

In relation to the point regarding the 2023/24 unqualified opinion, this reflected the auditors' overall opinion on controls and a positive assessment which needed reminding because a weakness identified in one area does not imply weak controls across the whole Council.

E. Questions in respect of item 9 on the A&S agenda, the work programme:

1. Erosion of Scrutiny and "LGR Cover"

- "Paragraph 2.5 asks councillors to volunteer reports they 'do not wish or need to see' to 'ease workload pressure in the light of LGR'. In paragraphs 2.10 through 2.13, we see the Code of Corporate Governance review removed, the February Risk and Performance report scrapped, and the Internal Audit Quality Assessment cancelled. Is LGR being used as a convenient excuse to dismantle routine checks and balances right when public assets, budgets, and contracts are at their most vulnerable?"

  No, the cited reports' timings have been proposed to be adjusted for the following reasons:

  • Code of Corporate Governance: This report has not been removed, it has been proposed to move it to March 2027. The reason for this is that the Annual Governance Statement must be brought forward from July 2027 to March 2027 due to Local Government Reorganisation. Given this reduces the time between the original November committee meeting and the March meeting, and the reports are complimentary and will require similar preparation work, there is a logic in presenting these together in a single report together in March 2027, as the final update before Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is dissolved, and the report will serve as a single record of these key governance documents for the new East Surrey Council.

  • Performance and Risk Report – February 2027: This report was proposed to be removed as there is little time between the February and March 2027 meetings, and typically this report is updated up to its public publication date, which in the case of the March meeting would likely run into February. Therefore, the commentaries in the report could be quite similar in a February and March meeting reports, and removing the February report would give the committee more flexibility in their agenda, given the need to carry over of items July to September. However, this is a proposal which the Committee can review and make a decision on.

  • Internal Audit Quality Assessment: This is no longer required as it was conducted for this year and future plans with regard to who carries out internal audit for East Surrey are under review.

- "Paragraph 2.4 states that non-business-as-usual scrutiny requests are 'subject to the council being able to resource the request'. Under Annex 4.6 of our Constitution, Overview and Scrutiny is an independent, member-led statutory function. Since when do unelected officers determine what an opposition-led Audit & Scrutiny committee has permission to scrutinise based on internal capacity?"

  The Committee remains responsible for determining its work programme. However, the practical timing and delivery of any additional work will need to take account of available officer resources and statutory priorities.

2. The March 2027 Agenda Trap & Meeting Guillotine

- "The introduction admits that this very report had to be carried forward because the July meeting timed out under Standing Order 9. Yet if we look at the agenda scheduled for 18 March 2027, officers have scheduled **11 formal reports and 4 placeholders**—including the Annual Governance Statement, Treasury Management, Complaints, RIPA, and the Annual Audit Conclusion. Is it realistic to expect this committee to

forensically examine 15 items in a single evening, or is this deliberately designed to force a guillotine so controversial items go unexamined into vesting day?"

The proposed agenda for March 2027 includes 9 formal reports and 3 Placeholders. The Internal Audit Annual Conclusion and Annual Governance Statement have had to be brought forward from July 2027 due to Local Government Organisation. Three internal audit reports have been removed due to Local Government Reorganisation, as they are only relevant if Epsom and Ewell Borough Council would continue to operate in 2027/28. The RIPA report has also been proposed to be removed, as the Council has not carried out any surveillance governed by this policy. These proposals and rationales do not track with a deliberate design to force a guillotine to avoid scrutiny, and the Committee can debate and agree it's future work programme at the September meeting as is usual practice. The committee has regularly had long agendas and managed to cover all the business in the past.

- "If the February 2027 Performance and Risk report has been cancelled to 'wait for March', how will this committee have any timely visibility over whether Q3 and Q4 temporary accommodation overspends or capital project failures are spiralling out of control?"

  The reason for this proposal is provided above, and the Committee can consider whether having this information at both meetings is the most effective use of the committee's time, and whether direct reporting and accountability to the full council and the relevant policy committees regarding these matters mitigates any risks of Audit and Scrutiny Committee not being presented with this information at both its February and March 2027 meetings.

3. Audit Accountability Blackout in September

- "Grant Thornton's External Audit Findings and the SIAP Internal Audit Progress Report were both due at this meeting, but both have been pushed back to November. Considering that external auditors flagged a significant governance weakness in 2023/24, why are we sitting in September 2026 with no external auditor presence and no internal audit progress report on the table?"

  The significant governance weakness found by Grant Thorton in the 2023/24 report has subsequently been closed by Grant Thornton. It is not considered necessary for GT to be at this meeting, and will be attending the November meeting.

  Internal Audit have advised that given the shortened audit plan for 2026/27, with an annual conclusion required in March 2027, that they do not expect to see any significant updates to the audit plan between July and September meetings as most audits will be being finalised or in the fieldwork stage.

- "Paragraph 2.8.2 notes that the 'Priority Projects Update' placeholder was removed because updates are reported to individual committees. When our Capital Budget Monitoring shows over £2.48m in capital slippage and multiple failed project timelines across departments, why is Audit & Scrutiny being denied a single, cross-cutting corporate report to track deliverability?"

  Audit and Scrutiny has the capital programme reports and access to reports taken to committees. This has been how things have been reported for over a year – if a member of the committee feels there is a gap that needs to be filled they can request an item is added to the workplan.

4. Disconnect on Corporate Value

- "Under Section 7.1, officers have once again marked Council's Key Priorities as 'N/A'. Why does the Strategic Leadership Team continue to classify the annual work programme of the Council's statutory audit and scrutiny committee as contributing nothing to an 'Effective Council'?"

  As this report does not include any decisions to make regarding the council's key priorities, which would be the remit of Full Council and / or the relevant policy committee, this has been marked as N/A.

APPENDIX 2

AUDIT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 29 September 2026

MEMBER QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESPONSE and ACTIONS NEEDED

CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING - QUARTER 1

1. The response provided on Upper Mill Bond Pond stated that tree removal works would start in October and tender works were planned to commence before Christmas. However, in appendix 1 of the formal committee report it states, "realistically, this project will not be started this financial year until all issues risks are investigated". These appeared to contradict each other and If works were starting before Christmas, why did the formal report show a £264,000 underspend slippage this year? The Chief Executive responded that this was a technical question that would need clarification following the meeting.

Response: Appendix 1 reflected the position at 30 June 2026. Subsequent investigations enabled the programme to be revised, with completion now targeted for March 2027. The £264,000 variance reflected the Quarter 1 forecast and will be updated in Quarter 2 to show the revised expenditure profile.

2. A Member stated that the response to the first question did not answer the questions raised. He asked, what assurances could be given that there was project management capacity to deliver even half of the council's commitments before reorganisation. The Chief Executive responded that it was not just project management capacity that influenced the delivery of schemes, but several factors. She stated that most of the pre-submitted questions were only received late yesterday, so a detailed response was not possible for all the questions. However, further clarity would be provided on each individual project and a fuller response provided.

Response: Quarter 2 monitoring will provide an update on the position as at 30 September 2026 for each of the capital schemes. This will also update the delivery position.

3. Regarding the officer response to the comment made in question 4 regarding IT Virtualisation spend the Councillor confirmed that the reference he used was on page 2 of the appendix 1 to the report. The ICT programme of works for £424,497, where the manager's comment explicitly states expenditure focuses on, virtualisation and platform replacement and end user refresh to maintain operational resilience. Further clarification would be provided following the meeting.

Response:
As part of normal ICT lifecycle management, technology platforms are periodically reviewed to ensure they remain fit for purpose, fully supported and able to meet the Council's operational requirements. The current review is intended to ensure continued resilience, supportability and alignment with likely future service requirements across East Surrey.

4. Further to question 5 response (Epsom Playhouse) the councillor asked what was the exact tender price received, what was the cash shortfall, and if the shadow authority exercises its Section 24 expenditure controls to refuse consent, does the Council have a fallback plan to prevent boiler failure and venue closure over the

winter of 2026-27? The Chief Executive would seek further response to this question.

Response:

Various tenders were received which ranged between £675k to £1.01m compared to the budget of £510k. Should the existing boiler fail over the winter period, there is a proposal for a hired boiler heating system by an approved contractor.

If the Shadow authority, as part of the Section 24 process, refuses consent, the scheme will have to change to replacing boilers and air conditioning individually, this will not conform to our climate change action plan but is a cheaper scheme and could be carried out within the existing budget. It will mean a complete redesign, new specification and longer time to deliver as it will be effectively a complete new project.

5. A Member stated that regarding the temporary accommodation and Fairview Road legal costs, officers stated that the expected challenge was the only reason for the stalling of the Fairview Road modular homes. Therefore, for the public record, what was the total legal and consultant cost incurred defending or resolving that challenge? What was the date of settlement and why did procurement wait until November 2026 if planning consent was secured back in November 2024? The Chief Executive would seek further response to this question.

Response and action:

"*Planning permission for 3 modular family units was granted on 7 November 2024 and the procurement process duly started. Access complications delayed the project by 18 months but it is now proceeding at pace. The original procurement exercise is now 'out of time' and we were initially led to believe that due to LGR, the project would need East Surrey Shadow Executive approval. It as now been confirmed that Shadow Executive approval is not required, and we are expecting to restart the procurement process by the end of October 2026. The original budget was £435,000 in 2024/25 of which £10,025 was spent. The remaining underspend of £424,975 was carried over into 2025/26 of which £13,039 was spent leaving £411,036 for 2026/27 i.e. a total spend of £23,064 prior to 2026/27.*"

The Qtr2 target completion date has been amended from mid 2027 to March 2027.

6. A Member noted that the report and appendix were not consistent with the Bourne Hall update given with one saying it was complete and the other that it was 90%. He also went on to say that he expected more explanation as to why individual schemes had slipped a long way behind, namely Bourne Hall heating and Epsom Playhouse boiler and air conditioning. The Chief Executive agreed that the report and appendix should be consistent and went on to explain that there were a number of unexpected factors come to light when starting a project for example issues with flooring and asbestos. She would also need to check if Bourne Hall had been completed and would ensure that the report married with the reports to Strategy and Resources.

Response: Additional detailed commentary covering slippage has been provided in Appendix 1 for Qtr2 which will be presented at November committee meeting.

Bourne Hall Heating and ventilation has a target completion date of 2028, initial consultants have provided two proposals being one to undertake works in occupation,

the other whilst the building is shut. There is a much higher cost of taking on works in occupation and it will take considerably longer due to operational requirements of the building. Further funding is required in order to proceed to the next stages should this option be chosen.

Epsom Playhouse Boiler and air conditioning has a target completion date of October 2027, works to take place August and September when the building will be shut. Further funding has also to be approved.

Bourne Hall roofing was completed in September 2026, not all works have been completely invoiced and therefore the underspend of £50,000 is a forecast. Further details will be provided as part of Qtr2 capital monitoring report.

REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING - QUARTER 1

7. A Member asked a question on the contingency exhaustion versus winter headwinds. The response to his pre-submitted question stated that the £250k corporate items budget forms part of the approved general fund base to manage in-year variances. Therefore, did the S151 officer confirm that this £250k corporate buffer was now 100% committed in covering the Q1 homelessness overspends and if further pressures emerge in subsequent quarters what specific unallocated contingency remains in the base budget before the council is forced to draw on general fund reserves? The Chief Executive would seek a response from the S151 officer.

Response: The corporate items budget is fully committed against the Quarter 1 forecast overspend. If further pressures arise, these will be assessed through subsequent budget monitoring reports against any available in-year mitigations and contingencies. Based on the current forecast, there is no expectation that General Fund reserves will need to be used.

8. With reference to the response to the pre-submitted question 2, a Member asked for monthly application numbers for July, August and September 2026 and confirm whether total households in nightly paid accommodation were now trending down or whether they remained near the June peak of 127.

Response: The trend of households continues to rise and at 02/10 was 145. One of the main drivers is the chronic shortage of move on options, which is demonstrated by there having been just 1 in-borough temporary accommodation vacancy, and then only a studio, during Q2. In addition, there have been only 29 social housing re-lets for the first six months (Q1&2) also mainly studio and 1-beds. In contrast there has been a surge in homelessness applications. There has been a 39.41% increase in homelessness applications in Q1& Q2 when compared with same quarters in 2025/26, with a total of 382 applications received in Q1 & Q2. The total of successful interventions during the same period, (Q1&2) was 325.

PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT - SEPTEMBER 2026

9. Planning Enforcement and Financial Exposure: A Member stated that with 238 planning enforcement cases outstanding, and 1.8 FT officers allocated to tackle

them did the Chair accept that planning enforcement across the borough had broken down into a reactive service that cannot protect green belt and residential amenity before vesting day? He acknowledged that the number of planning enforcement cases was increasing and that there was issue with recruiting and maintaining enforcement officers but wanted some clarity on how it was planned to deal with that, and how it was planned to deal with the numbers. The Chair stated he would seek a response to that question.

Response: Planning enforcement is a non statutory service and because it deals with unlawful development, is reactive by its very nature. However, officers do not agree with the statement that “planning enforcement across the borough had broken down into a reactive service that cannot protect green belt and residential amenity”. Officers are working proactively to reduce overall numbers and this is reflected in a 15% reduction in overall numbers between July and September 2026. There is no reason that this would not continue a downward trend.

Section 171B of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 indicates a 10 year time limit for enforcement action to be taken and the length of time that is being taken to finalise a case should and would not be viewed as being unable to “protect Green Belt and residential amenity.