Organisational Stabilisation, Staffing and Governance Improvement

For Staffing Committee meeting 7th October 2026

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with an overview of the Council's current organisational position following a period of significant staffing turnover, employment-related issues, insufficient staffing capacity and inconsistent administrative arrangements.

The report:

- identifies the principal organisational issues currently affecting the Council;
- outlines the action already taken to stabilise the organisation;
- explains the current workload and the reasons for the significant backlog of work;
- sets out the staffing changes now being implemented;
- identifies key governance, staffing and operational risks;
- proposes a programme of further improvement; and
- seeks Council's support for the measures required to establish a stable, professional and sustainable organisation.

The intention is not to attribute blame for historic difficulties, but to ensure that the Council understands the current position and agrees a structured approach to resolving outstanding matters and preventing similar issues arising in the future.

2. Recommendations

Council is recommended to:

- Note the significant organisational and administrative pressures currently being experienced by the Council.
- Note the actions already taken to stabilise the Council, including the appointment of an experienced locum Town Clerk/RFO, the engagement of two temporary administrative assistants and the completion of a staffing review.
- Support the implementation of the revised staffing structure and recruitment to the four new positions identified through the staffing review.
- Agree that the Council's historic administrative backlog should be addressed through a prioritised programme based on statutory requirements, legal and financial risk, governance requirements and operational importance.
- Agree that appropriate professional training and development should be provided to officers, including support for relevant local government qualifications such as CiLCA where appropriate.
- Agree that the Council should review and strengthen its Member/Officer Protocol and associated arrangements governing communication, roles, responsibilities and professional conduct.
- Agree that clear arrangements should be established for the handling of Member correspondence, requests for information and operational queries in order to ensure that officer resources are used effectively and proportionately.
- Agree that the Council should review its arrangements for the publication of information, including Council-related social media and online content, to ensure that confidentiality, data protection and other governance requirements are appropriately protected.

- Agree that appropriate HR, financial, administrative, document management and governance procedures should be reviewed and documented where deficiencies have been identified.
- Agree that Members and officers should receive appropriate training on their respective roles, responsibilities, the Member/Officer Protocol and relevant governance arrangements.
- Agree that progress against the organisational improvement programme should be reported regularly to Council.
- Recognise that the current workload is exceptionally high due to the combination of normal Council business and the need to address historic outstanding work, and that officers should be supported to prioritise work according to risk and available capacity.

3. Background

The Council has experienced significant staffing and organisational challenges over a number of years.

These have included:

- high levels of staff turnover;
- vacancies and periods of insufficient staffing, mainly due to sickness absence;
- loss of corporate knowledge and continuity;
- insufficient training and professional development;
- limited management and supervisory capacity;
- inconsistent administrative processes;
- outstanding, incorrect and incomplete work;
- historic records and documentation requiring review;
- employment-related matters, including grievances and settlements; and
- insufficient organisational capacity to undertake both routine Council business and the necessary improvement work.

The cumulative effect has been a significant organisational backlog.

It is important that Members recognise that the Council is currently dealing with two workloads simultaneously:

- the normal and ongoing workload associated with running the Council; and
- a substantial programme of historic work required to bring records, processes, administration, events, financials and governance arrangements up to an appropriate standard.

This has placed considerable pressure on the locum Clerk/RFO.

4. Current Staffing Position

The Council has taken immediate steps to increase capacity and provide greater stability.

An experienced locum Town Clerk/RFO is currently in post. This has provided additional professional expertise, management capacity and continuity at a critical time.

The Council has also appointed two temporary administrative assistants to provide additional administrative support.

These temporary arrangements have been necessary to provide sufficient capacity while the Council undertakes a more fundamental review of its staffing requirements.

A staffing review has now been completed. The review has identified the need for a revised staffing structure and the Council is progressing recruitment to four new permanent positions.

This is an important step towards creating a properly resourced and sustainable organisation. However, the purpose of the staffing review is not simply to increase the number of employees. The objective is to ensure that the Council has the appropriate combination of:

- capacity;
- skills;
- professional knowledge;
- management capability;
- administrative support;
- financial expertise;
- HR capability; and
- governance knowledge.

5. Historic Work and Current Workload

The workload currently being experienced by the Council is substantially greater than normal. In addition to routine Council business, officers are required to review and address matters which have accumulated over previous years.

Examples include:

- reviewing historic documentation;
- completing outstanding administrative tasks;
- correcting incomplete or inaccurate records;
- reviewing policies and procedures;
- establishing appropriate filing and document management arrangements;
- reviewing financial and administrative processes;
- addressing outstanding HR matters;
- identifying incomplete projects and actions;
- establishing appropriate registers and records;
- reviewing contractual arrangements;
- ensuring appropriate governance processes are in place; and
- establishing systems to prevent the recurrence of historic problems.
- The proper set up of the accounting software and financial administration.
- Plus a lot more.

Some matters can be resolved relatively quickly, while others require investigation, consultation, professional advice or formal Council decisions.

It would not be appropriate or realistic to expect every historic issue to be resolved immediately. The Council therefore needs to accept that the locum Clerk/RFO has adopted a risk-based and prioritised approach.

Statutory deadlines, legal and financial risks, employment matters, governance requirements and issues affecting the delivery of current services take priority.

6. Staffing and Employee Relations

The Council has experienced a number of employment-related issues over recent years, including grievances and settlements.

Individual employment matters are confidential and should continue to be managed appropriately. However, the frequency of such matters, combined with staff turnover and the historic lack of consistent training and support, demonstrates the need for stronger HR arrangements.

Going forward, the Council should ensure that staff have:

- clear job descriptions (now in place);
- appropriate induction;
- clear lines of management and accountability;
- regular supervision;
- access to training;
- appropriate professional support;
- clear performance expectations;
- appropriate opportunities for development; and
- a safe and professional working environment.

The Council now has access to appropriate external HR advice where specialist HR advice is required.

The objective should be to establish a positive working environment which supports staff retention and reduces the likelihood of avoidable employment disputes.

7. Member and Officer Relationships

Effective Council governance requires a clear distinction between the democratic role of Members and the operational and professional role of officers.

Members provide democratic leadership, determine Council priorities and make decisions within the Council's powers.

Officers provide professional advice and undertake the day-to-day administration and implementation of Council decisions.

The Local Government Association's current good practice guidance identifies clear roles, mutual respect, professional communication and visible leadership as fundamental to effective Member/officer relationships. It also recommends clear arrangements for communication, appropriate routes for Member enquiries and expectations concerning tone, responsiveness and official communications.

The Council should therefore review its Member/Officer Protocol and ensure that it clearly establishes:

- the respective roles of Members and officers;
- confirming that the Clerk is responsibility for managing officer;
- confirming that the Clerk reports to Full Council and not one individual Member;

- appropriate routes for Member enquiries;
- arrangements for requesting information;
- expectations regarding response times;
- appropriate communication channels;
- standards of professional behaviour;
- confidentiality requirements;
- arrangements for resolving disagreements;
- procedures for dealing with concerns; and
- appropriate boundaries between Member responsibilities and operational management.

The protocol should apply equally to all Members and officers.

The objective is not to restrict legitimate Member scrutiny or challenge. Members must be able to question, scrutinise and challenge officer recommendations appropriately. Rather, the objective is to ensure that challenge takes place through professional, transparent and appropriate channels.

8. Communications and Correspondence

The volume and nature of communications received by officers can have a significant impact on the Council's administrative capacity.

A high volume of repeated, lengthy or contentious correspondence can consume substantial officer time and reduce the capacity available for statutory and operational work.

The Council should therefore establish clear arrangements for:

- Member enquiries;
- requests for information;
- operational instructions;
- correspondence requiring a formal Council response;
- urgent matters;
- complaints;
- confidential matters; and
- communications requiring consideration by the Clerk or Council.

Communications relating to Council business should be professional, proportionate and respectful.

The Council should also consider introducing appropriate arrangements where correspondence becomes repetitive or disproportionately resource-intensive.

This is not intended to prevent legitimate questions or scrutiny. It is intended to ensure that officer resources are managed effectively and that all Members are treated consistently.

9. Publication of Council-Related Information

The Council should ensure that information concerning Council business is published through appropriate and authorised channels.

Particular care is required where information relates to:

- employees;
- grievances or disciplinary matters;
- personal information;
- confidential correspondence;
- legal advice;
- commercially sensitive information;
- ongoing investigations;
- individual residents or members of the public; or
- matters which have not yet been formally considered or decided by Council.

The Council should therefore review its Communications and Publication Protocol setting out:

- who may speak or publish on behalf of the Council;
- what constitutes official Council communication;
- the appropriate use of Council social media;
- the handling of confidential information;
- the publication of documents and decisions;
- data protection requirements; and
- the distinction between an individual's personal communications and communications made on behalf of the Council.

This will provide clarity for Members and officers and reduce the risk of inadvertent disclosure or reputational damage.

10. Governance and Administrative Controls

The current improvement programme provides an opportunity to strengthen the Council's underlying governance arrangements. Priority areas should include:

10.1 Policies and procedures

Council have approved a full governance document review for which quotes are being obtained. A central policy register should be maintained identifying:

- existing policies;
- date of approval;
- responsible officer;
- review date;
- current status; and
- actions required.

10.2 Document management

The Council should establish consistent electronic filing arrangements and ensure that key records can be located efficiently.

10.3 Delegation

The Council should ensure that its scheme of delegation is clear and that officers understand the authority delegated to them.

10.4 Financial controls

Financial procedures should be documented and consistently followed, including arrangements for:

- budgeting;
- expenditure authorisation;
- payments;
- bank reconciliations;
- procurement;
- contracts;
- asset management;
- reserves; and
- financial reporting.

10.5 HR

The Council should maintain appropriate personnel records, recruitment procedures, contracts, policies, training records and performance management arrangements.

Council's HR provider supplies Bright HR software free of charge but this was never set up and files are kept on Sharepoint. The software will be populated as soon as time allows by the locum Clerk/RFO.

10.6 Governance calendar

A comprehensive annual governance calendar should be established so that key statutory, financial, administrative and reporting deadlines are identified in advance.

11. Training and Professional Development

The previous lack of consistent training, support and professional development has contributed to organisational vulnerability. The Council should therefore implement a formal training programme for both officers and Members.

Officer training should be based on individual roles and may include:

- local government administration;
- Council procedures;
- finance;
- HR;
- procurement;
- data protection;
- information governance;
- project management;
- meeting administration;
- records management;
- Microsoft 365; and
- relevant professional qualifications.

Where appropriate, staff should be supported to undertake relevant qualifications, including CiLCA.

Members should also receive appropriate training on:

- their role as Councillors;
- the Member Code of Conduct;
- Member/Officer relationships;
- Council procedures;
- governance;
- financial responsibilities;
- confidentiality;
- data protection; and
- appropriate communications and use of social media.

Council have recently approved Member training and this is currently in hand but there is an unusual scarcity of appropriate courses at present.

As Council are recruiting for a completely new team, it is recommended that the Clerk be qualified and experienced to ensure that there is local government expertise within the staffing team.

12. Risk Assessment

Risk	Current Position	Proposed Mitigation
Staff turnover	Historically high	Improved staffing, training, support & HR
Excessive workload	Currently significant	Additional staffing and prioritisation
Historic backlog	Significant	Structured recovery programme
Loss of corporate knowledge	Existing risk	Improved records and document management
Employment disputes	Historic grievances/settlements	Stronger HR procedures and professional advice
Governance failure	Processes require strengthening	Governance review and documented procedures
Financial risk	Historic work requires review	Strengthened financial controls and reporting. Council agreed to a forensic audit.
Data/confidentiality risk	Publication and information handling require clearer controls	Information governance and publication protocol
Member/officer conflict	Requires clearer boundaries and communication arrangements	Member/Officer Protocol and training
Staff wellbeing	Current workload is very high	Additional capacity, prioritisation and management support
Reputational risk	Existing organisational difficulties may affect confidence	Visible improvement programme and regular reporting

13. Financial Implications

There will be additional costs associated with the revised staffing structure, recruitment, training and potentially external professional advice. These costs should be considered in the context of the risks associated with insufficient staffing capacity.

The Council should consider the cost of appropriate staffing and professional support as an investment in organisational resilience and effective governance.

14. Legal and Governance Implications

The Council must ensure that its activities are undertaken in accordance with its statutory responsibilities, adopted policies, financial procedures, employment obligations, data protection requirements and wider governance framework.

Clear Member/officer boundaries are particularly important.

The Council should obtain appropriate professional advice where a matter raises specific legal, employment, data protection or regulatory considerations.

15. Staffing Implications

The proposed staffing changes are intended to establish a more resilient and sustainable staffing structure.

The four new positions are or will be supported by:

- clear job descriptions;
- appropriate person specifications;
- defined reporting arrangements;
- appropriate salary scales;
- induction arrangements;
- training plans;
- probation arrangements; and
- regular management and performance reviews.

Recruitment should focus not only on previous experience but also on the skills and behaviours required to establish a professional and collaborative working environment.

16. Proposed Improvement Programme

It is proposed that the Council's improvement work is structured into four stages.

Stage 1 – Stabilisation
In progress

- Complete recruitment processes.
- Maintain interim staffing support as required.
- Prioritise urgent statutory and governance matters.
- Identify all major outstanding historic matters.

- Establish clear responsibilities.
- Protect staff wellbeing.

Stage 2 – Organisation
0–3 months

- Establish the new staffing structure.
- Review policies and procedures.
- Establish document management arrangements.
- Review financial and HR processes.
- Implement the Member/Officer Protocol.

Stage 3 – Improvement
0–6 months

- Progress the historic backlog.
- Improve project and workload management.
- Introduce regular performance reporting.
- Review communications arrangements.
- Strengthen governance and financial reporting.
- Assess staffing capacity following implementation of the new structure.

Stage 4 – Continuous Improvement
12 months onwards

- Annual staffing review.
- Annual training programme.
- Regular policy review.
- Regular review of governance arrangements.
- Monitoring of staff turnover and employee wellbeing.
- Review of Member/officer working relationships.
- Continued improvement of Council services.

17. Monitoring and Reporting

A simple organisational improvement dashboard should be maintained and reported to Council periodically. This could include:

- recruitment progress;
- staff turnover;
- training completed;
- outstanding historic matters;
- policy reviews completed;
- governance actions;
- financial actions;
- complaints and grievances;
- projects and key deadlines;
- staff capacity and workload;
- outstanding audits or recommendations; and
- Member/officer protocol actions.

The purpose of the dashboard should be to demonstrate progress and identify areas where further intervention or resources are required.

18. Conclusion

The Council is currently undertaking a significant period of organisational stabilisation and improvement.

The difficulties experienced over previous years have resulted in a considerable backlog of administrative and governance work, alongside ongoing Council responsibilities.

The current position should therefore be regarded as a period of organisational recovery and rebuilding, rather than simply a staffing shortage.

The appointment of an experienced locum Town Clerk, the engagement of temporary administrative staff, completion of a staffing review and recruitment to four new positions represent significant positive steps. However, sustainable improvement requires more than additional staff.

The Council needs to establish:

- clear roles and responsibilities;
- appropriate staffing capacity;
- professional training and development;
- effective HR arrangements;
- robust financial and administrative controls;
- appropriate information governance;
- clear Member/officer boundaries;
- professional communication arrangements; and
- a culture in which staff are properly supported to deliver their responsibilities.

The current situation also provides an opportunity to establish a stronger organisational culture and prevent the Council from returning to the pattern of instability experienced in previous years.

The Council should therefore support the improvement programme set out in this report and recognise that meaningful recovery will take time.

Officers should be given the necessary authority, resources and support to prioritise work according to risk and importance while continuing to deliver the Council's day-to-day responsibilities.

The objective should be to create a stable, professional, properly supported and sustainable Council organisation capable of delivering effective services to the local community and providing Members with confidence in the Council's administration and governance.

19. Proposed Resolution

It is recommended that Council resolve to:

- To note the organisational position and the significant historic and current workload pressures identified within this report.
- To note the actions already taken to stabilise the Council's staffing and administration.
- To support the implementation of the revised staffing structure and recruitment to the four new posts.

- To support the development and implementation of a structured organisational improvement programme.
- To require the review and strengthening of the Council's Member/Officer Protocol and associated communication arrangements.
- To support the introduction of appropriate training and professional development for Members and officers.
- To support the review and strengthening of the Council's HR, financial, administrative, document management and information governance arrangements.
- To require that historic outstanding matters are prioritised according to statutory requirements, legal, financial and governance risk and available resources.
- To receive regular reports on progress against the organisational improvement programme.
- To recognise the significant workload currently being undertaken by officers and to support a proportionate, risk-based approach to the resolution of historic matters.
- To reaffirm the Council's commitment to a professional, respectful and supportive working environment for all Members and officers.

Samantha Haywood, Locum Clerk/RFO
5th October 2026