

## MINUTES OF THE GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

15 October 2025 at 7.00pm

Present:

Councillor K. Franks (Chair)

Councillors H. Ayres, I. Fuller, M. Steel, S. Young

Also in attendance –

Parish Councillor K. Bentley

Independent Person –  
Ms P Mills

### 1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Peter Jackson, Phil Jeremiah and Danny Lamb.

### 2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2025 were confirmed as a correct record.

### 3. Declarations of Interest

All Members were reminded to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests or other registerable interests where appropriate in any items of business on the meeting's agenda, none were made.

### 4. Public Question Time

No questions or statements were received from members of the public.

### 5. Chair's Announcements

No Announcements were received.

### 6. Monitoring Officer Report

The Monitoring Officer presented an update on standards complaints and investigations for the period from June to October 2025. Members were advised that five new complaints had been received since the previous report in June. Since the report was published responses had been received to the three outstanding cases.

Complaints 10 & 11/25 (in addition to the complaint mentioned in the report) had now also been completed and 12/25 is now progressing through the early stages of the complaints process. One complaint was currently under investigation.

It was also noted that the Chelmsford Association of Local Councils had been formed and would be holding its first meeting on 15 October 2025. In response to a question, it was confirmed that CALC was a voluntary association which represented local parish councils in the area. Although CALC had no formal authority, it would function as a representative body, and it was normally the case in other areas that the local association would recommend parish representatives to committees where there are parish representatives such as Governance. CALC also serves as a channel for communication and coordination between local councils and has two seats on the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) committee.

**RESOLVED** that the update be noted and that the standards enquiries and investigations statistics for the period of June to October 2025 be published online.

(7.03pm to 7.15pm)

## 7. Information Governance/Annual SIRO Update

The Committee received the annual update from on the Council's approach to information governance. Members were advised that 979 statutory information requests were processed during 2024/25, with 93% completed within the statutory timescales, and that the Information Commissioner's Office had upheld the Council's decision in the only case referred during the year.

It was reported that the number of data breaches had reduced from 38 in 2023/24 to 23 in 2024/25, with the majority relating to email and enveloping errors. No cases were referred to the ICO. The Committee also heard about continued work to strengthen cyber security, including completion of the Virtual Chief Information Security Officer contract, the introduction of a new Security Operations Centre contract, and ongoing training for staff and councillors, such as phishing simulations and awareness exercises.

Members discussed records retention, information security and training. Members were advised that a seven year retention period for Outlook had been introduced last year, and a seven year retention period for OneDrive had been agreed by Management Team, the aim being to reduce the volume of legacy information the Council holds. Further advice on implementation was being sought prior to roll-out in February 2026.

In response to a question asked seeking clarification of the difference in processes between Freedom of Information requests, Environmental Information Regulations requests and Subject Access Requests, it was explained that different response processes and exemptions applied to FOI, EIR and SARs, that some FOI requests may be refused where estimated time to comply exceeds 18 hours, and that complex requests are managed jointly by the Information Governance team and the relevant service area because records are often dispersed.

The Council ran four different phishing exercises during the year. The Council continues to review how best to raise awareness of cyber security risks to both members and officers, including through phishing exercises. In addition, cyber awareness training will be launched to officers and members November. Committee members recognised the importance for Members to be included in mandatory training.

**RESOLVED** that the annual report be noted.

(7.15pm to 7.31pm)

#### 8. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Annual Report and Complaint Handling Code update report

The Committee received an update on the Council's position regarding the adoption of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Complaint Handling Code. Members were informed that the Ombudsman's annual statistics and accompanying information had been provided as part of the report.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the new Complaint Handling Code, introduced in February 2024, will be considered by the Ombudsman in casework from April 2026. The Council has already made several policy updates to align with the Code, with one further report required annually to Cabinet which is scheduled for in 2026.

**RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

(7.31pm to 7.33pm)

#### 9. Senior Responsible Officer's report in relation to the Council's RIPA arrangements

The Committee received a report on the Council's arrangements under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA). Members were reminded that RIPA authorisations may only be granted for specific and limited purposes, including directed surveillance, the use of covert human intelligence sources, and the acquisition of communications data.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the Council had not required any RIPA authorisations during the reporting period but that a RIPA authorisation for a third party had been noted. The last inspection by the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO) took place in 2023 with the next inspection expected to take place in 2026.

It was reported that the RIPA and RIPA Social Media Policies had been reviewed and updated to reflect recent legislative and personnel changes. Training for key officers is scheduled for January 2026.

The Committee noted that a new Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) policy was being developed. While UAVs may fall within the scope of RIPA in limited circumstances,

their general use is expected to remain non-RIPA, as most applications will not meet the legal threshold for authorisation.

Members suggested that an annual report on the general usage of Drones should be considered.

**RESOLVED** that the update be noted.

(7.34pm 7.46pm)

## 10. Work Programme

The Committee received an update on the work programme for 2025/26.

**RESOLVED** that the work programme of the Committee be noted.

(7.46pm to 7.48pm)

## 11. Urgent Business

There were no matters of urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7:49pm

Chair