



REPORT TITLE:	Risk Management update
REPORT OF:	David Dickinson, Strategic Director Finance

REPORT SUMMARY

This report updates members of the Audit Committee on the status of the Council's 2024/25 Strategic Risk Register.

The number of very high risks is two, compared to the last report to Committee when one very high risk was reported.

Some risk scores have been adjusted, which are detailed in the report below.

There is one new risk this quarter relating to the Devolution and Local Government Review and one risk has been removed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Committee notes the report.

1.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 1.1 A risk management report and register is considered quarterly by the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT), to ensure that strategic risks are updated to reflect ongoing changes to the internal and external environment. In addition to this, the Risk & Insurance Manager liaises with service heads on an ongoing basis to maintain active management of risks, including strategic, operational and project risks.
- 1.2 Appendix A sets out the strategic risks, each of which is the responsibility of a risk owner. Each risk is scored (out of five) for both likelihood and impact, with a combined score arrived at by multiplying one by the other. Guidance on scoring is set out in the risk ranking table in Appendix B. Previous risk registers are posted on the Council's website here: [Data Transparency | Rochford Council](#).

1.3 Each quarterly risk report will highlight and explain the very high risks, any changes to risk scores and any new risks or risks that have been removed from the strategic risk register. Even if a risk is not included in the strategic risk register, it does not mean that it is not being managed – only that it does not require the intervention of CLT to help manage it. The last report to Audit Committee was on 3 December 2024.

1.4 Very high risks

- Risk 9 - Failure to ensure financial sustainability for the Council.
This risk has been increased from L2 x I5 = 10 to L3 x I5 = 15
Slight increase to risk as the budget process is near completion for 25/26 and there are no major concerns. However, there will be a funding review for 2026/27 including Business Rates retention reform, and there is no idea what impact this may have.

- Risk 18 - There is a threat of loss of data or access to network due to cyber-attack that may result in digital disruption with a loss of productivity and service provision to residents:

This risk is currently scored as very high overall with the impact level being scored as catastrophic. This impact level is based on the worst-case scenario of “digital death” where our IT systems are massively impacted. However planned works as summarised below should reduce the likelihood -

- Cross Organisational Working Group recently established to co-ordinate and drive activity
- Cyber Security Strategy being developed to address initial working group findings and those from recent Internal Audit review.
- Strategy will be based on the 3 key themes of emerging Digital Strategy to embed cyber security and ensure continued focus on this key risk-



- Cyber Assessment Framework (CAF) – Work in progress to assess the Council against emerging Central Government Framework for Cyber Security (formal launch Spring 2025) - findings will inform the future strategy

1.5 Change to risk scores

- Risk 3 – Unable to recruit and retain suitably skilled staff to carry out the Councils statutory obligations in terms of its Food Hygiene, Health and Safety, Environmental Protection and Private Sector Housing.
This risk has been increased from L2 x I4 = 8 to L5 x I5 = 25. Risk increased due to the ongoing project to restructure the department and will be addressed as soon possible.
- Risk 16 - The partnership between Rochford District Council and Brentwood Borough Council fails to bring about the project benefit.
This risk has been reduced from L3 x I4 = 12 to L3 x I3 = 9. The important change / factor here is that the progress of the priorities within the Corporate Plan are to begin to be measured so we will be aware where we may be failing and can react in positive manner if need be.
- Risk 19 – Vacancies and uncertainty for the Finance service coupled with a lack of available supply undermines the Council's financial management and control.
This risk has been increased from L2 x I3 = 6 to L3 x I4 = 12. Risk increased due to due to another vacancy arising in the technical team. Are looking to recruit, but currently this has not happened.

1.6 New/removed risks

There is one new risk that has been identified, and one risk has been removed from the Strategic Risk Register.

- Risk 24 – following the announcement of the Governments White Paper - Devolution and Local Government Review the Council could:
 - Cease to make important strategic decisions due to uncertainty.
 - Fail to enter into new agreements/contracts due to the uncertainty.
 - Fail to commit to further joined up working and efficiency improvements due to the uncertainty.
 - Lose employees or fail to attract staff due to the uncertainty.
- Risk 17 - The Asset Delivery Programme partnership fails to bring about the project benefits. This risk has been removed from the Risk Register as the partnership has now been terminated.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

2.1 None.

3.0 RELEVANT RISKS

3.1 The report itself is in relation to strategic risks.

4.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

4.1 None.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None arising specifically from this report, but some risks include financial risks and some control measures identified in the risk register could have financial implications.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Effective risk management provides a means of identifying, managing and reducing the likelihood of legal claims or regulatory challenges against the Council.

7.0 ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The economic implications are included within this report and identified in risk registers.

8.0 EQUALITY & HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None.

9.0 ENVIRONMENTAL & CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Environmental and climate implications are contained within the report and identified in risk registers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Strategic Risk Register

Appendix B: Risk ranking table

Risk No.	Risk Owner	Risk	Controls and Mitigations	Out of 5 Current Score Feb 2025			Further Planned Actions
				L	I	S	
Risk 1	Director, Policy & Delivery	We fail to deliver the objectives of the Council's Corporate Strategy 2024 - 2028 in terms of measurable outcomes.	Corporate Strategy 2024 -2028 agreed and supported by Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Key Themes identified key priorities under each themes identified Agreed budgets for work projects 2024/2025 Project plans and progress monitoring tools developed Project Management Support, training and development being established further in 2025	2	3	MEDIUM	Corporate Strategy 2024 -2028 approved at Committee Corporate Strategy and Budget Consultation undertaken in Oct/Nov 2024 Information from Consultation to feed the Corporate Plan to be updated in Feb 2025 and the Budget Priorities for the long term themes are being developed to create programme of work through to 2028 and beyond Reporting on Progress of priorities of Corporate Plan to begin in first quarter of 2025/2026 (April/May/June)
Risk 3	Director, Communities & Health	Unable to recruit and retain suitably skilled staff to carry out the Council's statutory obligations in terms of its Food Hygiene, Health and Safety, Environmental Protection and Private Sector Housing.	The service has a detailed service plan and operating procedures that new staff or contractors can follow to ensure a consistent service is provided.	5	5	VERY HIGH	The restructure of the department is currently an ongoing project and will be addressed as soon as is possible.
Risk 5	Director Assets and Investments	We fail to respond to, or provide, relevant services in the event of an incident or disaster	Cloud based systems for IT and remote working established Attendance at Essex Resilience Forum Emergency Plans – regularly tested and reviewed Business Continuity Plans – regularly tested and reviewed Out of hours (OOH) response arrangements Prepare staff to assist in emergencies Essex Countrywide Traveller Committee Partnership Agreement Review of building security	2	3	MEDIUM	New One Team response to emergencies, including the recruitment of Emergency Officers being implemented. Target Date: April 2025 for new systems to start.

Risk 6	Director of People & Governance	Council held data is lost, disclosed, or misused to detriment of individuals or organisations as result of inadequate protection	<p>Data Protection measures including Information Security Policies & Procedures</p> <p>Data sharing protocols are in place where information is shared between parties</p> <p>Annual review of systems and software required to ensure the necessary compliance by Government Connect Code of Connection (CoCo) (or necessary compliance levels?)</p> <p>Freedom of information (FOI) and Subject Access Request (SAR) procedures are in place.</p> <p>A data breach was experienced by the Revenues & Benefits software provider, Capita. The breach did not include sensitive personal data of Rochford residents but officers are working closely with Capita and the LGA (as other councils were also affected). The breach has been reported to the Information Commissioner.</p>	3	3	MEDIUM	Please add a target date for any further planned actions Target Date:
Risk 7	Director Policy & Delivery	Failure to engage with stakeholders to understand and communicate what the Council should be trying to achieve	<p>Consultation programmes involve Members, Residents, Businesses, Service Users, Parishes, Partners, and Staff</p> <p>Communications initiatives including RDC website</p> <p>Networking meetings with partners organisations and businesses</p> <p>Equality and diversity impact assessments of service changes and other proposals</p>	2	2	LOW	<p>Consultation and engagement strategy to go to Committee in February 2025 for approval.</p> <p>Continued Development of Comms Plan to include yearly consultation plan</p> <p>Continued use of Engagment HQ Software to co-ordintate and improve our consiultation performance</p> <p>Developing work to ensure information gathered in consultations is fed back</p> <p>Service Reviews for 2025 to be completed in May 2025 will include services upcoming Consultations for the year</p>
Risk 9	Director Resources (Section 151 Officer)	Failure to ensure financial sustainability for the Council. This includes the requirement to set a balanced budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to allow for the successful delivery of the Council's priorities as set out in its Business Plan, ensuring robust financial controls are in place to keep the budget on track in-year, and delivery of the Council's Capital Programme.	<p>Robust budgetary monitoring & control is exercised by regular reporting and challenge with budget holders.</p> <p>Quarterly budget monitoring reports are presented to committee.</p> <p>Policy ideas and savings proposals are communicated with stakeholders via the appropriate forums, including the budget survey and Member briefings.</p> <p>The Medium Term Financial Strategy reflects corporate priorities, in the context of Government funding announcements for future financial planning.</p> <p>Active treasury management and cash flow management ensure cash is managed with a view to security, liquidity and yield.</p>	3	5	VERY HIGH	<p>No further actions, slight increase to risk as the budget process is near completion for 25/26 and there are no major concerns. HOWEVER, there will be a funding review for 2026/27 including Business Rates retention reform, and there is no idea how this may impact. Need to continue liaising with Essex Finance Officers and ensure responses are sent to consultations.</p> <p>Target Date:</p>

Risk 10	Director of People & Governance	Inability to recruit, retain, develop, and manage appropriately skilled staff to deliver the Council's priority outcomes	People & Culture Strategy and action plan Recruitment policy and procedures Probationary periods Induction, Training and Development plans one you conversations OHS referrals Digitalised Procedure notes to be made available to appropriate officers in event of manager or other experienced officers' absence / non-availability Flexible retirement policy and procedure	4		Please add a target date for any further planned actions Target Date:
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Risk 12	Director Resources (Section 151 Officer)	The Council could fail to provide consistent Value for Money (VFM) across its existing services, or when procuring new services	Value for money is ensured through the Sustainable Commissioning and Procurement Strategy Contract Procedure Rules (CPR) and Purchase ordering rules. Benchmarking, VFM and best practice case studies form part of Business Plan support activities. External Audit produce an annual report to Audit Committee on value for money. Internal Audit Reports consider value for money as part of most audits.	2	3	MEDIUM	Procedure now reported to Members, and new procurement service commences 1 February. Target Date:
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Risk 13	Director of People & Governance	Failure to ensure good governance of the Council's activities and delivery of its priorities.	Business Plans / Medium Term Financial Strategy The Local Code of Corporate Governance Council Constitution, Financial Regulations and Contract Procedure Rules Codes of Conduct and Registers of Interests for Officers and Members Council, Executive and Committee, LT reports, minutes, and records of decisions Internal Audit Programme Annual Governance Statement (AGS) and allied assurance framework Purchasing procedures Legally compliant tendering procedures Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy Whistle Blowing Policy & Procedure National Fraud Initiative Anti-Money Laundering Procedures Project Plans, business cases and risk registers for each project Performance management system and reports Consultation documents and responses to consultation			Please add a target date for any further planned actions Target Date:
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Risk 15	Director of People & Governance	The Council fails to ensure compliance with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and is unable to demonstrate consistent application of information standards, controls, and statutory compliance.	Relevant Policies and Procedures Roles and Responsibility Training 'Opt In' Consent fully detailed on all relevant paperwork. Internal Compliance Audits				Please add a target date for any further planned actions Target Date:
Risk 16	Director, Policy & Delivery	The partnership between Rochford District Council and Brentwood Borough Council fails to bring about the project benefits.	Programme appropriately resourced to delivery outcomes Effective governance and monitoring in place Programme delivered within resource skill set Cross Council/services working produces successful delivery of programme Engaged key stakeholders with understanding of the programme, its goals/achievements and good working relationships with external partners at an operational and strategic level Personal/sensitive data appropriately between both Councils Managed change in Senior Responsible Officer (SRO)	3	3	MEDIUM	Communicate 36 month Transformation Plans by February 2025 . Report the EELGA Review to February Committee Brentwood and Rochford. Develop the Transformation Meeting to agree future Work streams. Continue to report to Transformation Board
Risk 17	Director Assets and Investments	The Asset Delivery Programme partnership fails to bring about the project benefits	Programme appropriately resourced to deliver outcomes Effective governance and monitoring in place Programme delivered within resource skill set Engaged key stakeholders with understanding of the programme, its goals/achievements and good working relationships with external partners at an operational and strategic level Agreed programme review points Managed change in Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) Managed response to partner withdrawing from partnership				Risk to be removed from Risk Register as the partnership has now been terminated.

Risk 18	Director (Customer & Data Insight)	There is a threat of loss of data or access to network due to cyber attack that may result in digital disruption with a loss of productivity and service provision to residents.	<p>We have a Managed Security Service that includes a Security Operations Centre to monitor cyber threats. Immediate response plans are in place for critical threats, and regular investigation review are held, along with Account contract meetings.</p> <p>Most recent extensive cyber audit provided moderate assurance.</p> <p>Sept 2023 - implementation of a secondary Palo Alto backup Firewall & the introduction of the Janet network resolver service (JNRS) offering an additional light touch web filtering service for malicious content websites. Geo Blocker for remote access in place.</p>	3	5	VERY HIGH	<p>A Cyber Action Plan has been developed by the Cyber Working Group to address initial improvements. A Cyber Strategy will be developed as part of the emerging Digital Strategy to focus on 3 themes: Prevention, Education and Response. It should be noted that the Impact score of 5 will be stable due to the potential impact of a cyber incident, the threat is constantly evolving. However planned works should reduce the likelihood.</p> <p>Please add a target date for any further planned actions</p> <p>Target Date:</p>
Risk 19	Director (Resources)	Vacancies and uncertainty for the Finance service coupled with a lack of available supply undermines the Council's financial management and control	<p>Prioritise financial services that are statutory. Ensure the new finance structure has sufficient resilience. Be prepared to offer enhancements to recruit and retain staff. Post-restructure, develop a plan to recruit to vacancies and maintain resilience.</p>	3	4	HIGH	<p>Score has been increased due to another vacancy arising in the technical team. Are looking to recruit, but currently this has not happened.</p> <p>Target Date:</p>
Risk 20	Director of Assets & Investment/ Director of Community and Health	Current leisure operator fails to complete the outstanding delapidations as required from the management agreement for Clements Hall and Rayleigh Leisure Centre which could impact on any new operator as part of the joint leisure procurement. If the works are not undertaken then could fall to the Council or risk closure of the leisure facilities	<p>Regular meeting with current leisure operator. Updated condition survey to highlight priority areas of work. Any new management fee could be negotiated. Legal letter sent to leisure operator requesting update on the delapidation schedule</p>	2	4	MEDIUM	<p>Please add a target date for any further planned actions</p> <p>Target Date:</p>
Risk 21	Director (Housing)	Increase in numbers approaching as Homeless resulting in lack of available Temporary Accommodation to be able to fulfil Statutory Homeless Duties	<p>The Council has good processes in place to deal with homeless approaches. There is a long term lease in place for two large units of accommodation to provide temporary accommodation, alongside other units of accommodation with our Housing Association Partners</p>	2	3	MEDIUM	<p>Work is already underway to continue to engage with Landlords in the Private Sector to secure access to properties to discharge the Council's homeless duties via the rent deposit scheme. We are intending to develop a Temporary accommodation strategy to look at options to increase temporary accommodation options</p>

Risk 22	Director (Environment)	Failure to develop a Sustainability Strategy and action plan due to lack of engagement with communities and businesses will result in the Council actively contributing to climate decline	Alignment between corporate plan and Sustainability Strategy targets allows regular meeting with Chair of C&E Committee to discuss and keep on track key projects	3	3	MEDIUM	Continuation on the delivery of Corporate objectives that are reflective of the Sustainability Strategy. A review of the Environment Strategy and early consideration of the next years' service plan to identify ways in which the Climate Score Card may be improved - Target Date: March 2025.
Risk 24	Director Policy & Delivery	That following the announcement of the Governments White Paper - Devolution and Local Government Review the Council could: Cease to make important strategic decisions due to uncertainty Fail to enter into new agreements/contracts due to the uncertainty Fail to commit to further joined up working and efficiency improvements due to the uncertainty Lose employees or fail to attract staff due to the uncertainty	Agreed Corporate Plans in place setting out clear direction for next few years Continued dialogue with members informing them of the process Regular updates for staff on this issue Projects identified for the upcoming 2025/26 year The Council is part of the ongoing work across Essex to respond to the White Paper	3	3	MEDIUM	NEW RISK: Continue to engage with Staff & Members over progress of the white paper and government decisions Continued reporting on project progress, budget management and resources to ensure we remain on track to deliver against the corporate plan objectives