

This report is public	
Risk Management Strategy and Guidance	
Committee	Audit Accounts & Risk Committee
Date of Committee	19 November 2025
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, Councillor Chris Brant
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	16 October 2025
Report of	Assistant Director Finance (S151 Officer), Michael Furness

Purpose of report

To propose a new Risk Management Strategy and Guidance, aiming to ensure the council's effective and compliant risk management

1. Recommendations

The Accounts, Audit and Risk Committee resolves:

- 1.1 To consider and endorse the proposed Risk Management Strategy and Guidance

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Risk Management Strategy and Guidance for Cherwell District Council 2025–2030 outlines a comprehensive framework to embed risk management into governance, decision-making, and service delivery, aligning with the Council's strategic vision. Developed in line with the recent internal audit findings, the strategy addresses gaps in documentation, monitoring, and training, and introduces a weighted scoring matrix and centralised oversight mechanisms to enhance consistency and accountability. Key actions include launching a Risk Advisory Group, standardising risk registers, and improving oversight at all levels. The strategy aims to strengthen organisational resilience, ensure compliance, and support informed, transparent decision-making across all services.

Implications	Commentary
Finance	There are no financial implications directly arising from this report. Michael Furness, Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer) 18 August 2025
Legal	Effective risk management and the development of a robust risk management strategy were identified as key actions within the Annual Governance Statement. This report, along with the strategy, must demonstrate our commitment to fostering a cultural shift—one in which officers are risk-aware and confident in making informed assessments. To support this objective, a training

	<p>programme will be offered to officers, ensuring they have the necessary knowledge and skills to embed risk management into their daily practice.</p> <p>Shiraz Sheik, Assistant Director of Law and Governance and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer 7 October 2025</p>			
Risk Management	<p>There are no risk implications arising directly from this report. An updated and fit for purpose strategy and clear guidance, in line with the feedback provided as a result of the latest internal audit, will support effective risk management across the organisation.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 24 June 2025</p>			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact		X		<p>There are no direct equalities and inclusion implications as a consequence of this report.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 24 June 2025</p>
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		
B Will the proposed decision has an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		
Climate & Environmental Impact		x		N/A
ICT & Digital Impact		x		N/A
Data Impact		x		N/A
Procurement & subsidy		x		N/A
Council Priorities	This report links to all council's priorities			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	N/A			
Consultation & Engagement	N/A			

Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 Cherwell District Council requires a revised Risk Management Strategy to ensure alignment with its strategic objectives for 2025–2030 and to address the increasingly complex and dynamic risk landscape. The updated strategy reinforces the Council's commitment to sound governance, informed decision-making, and organisational resilience, while embedding a consistent and proactive approach to risk across all services and levels of leadership.
- 3.2 The council actively and regularly monitors its Strategic, operational and project risks, and periodically reviews its Risk Management Strategy and Guidance to ensure it remains fit for purpose in an ever changing local and national context.
- 3.3 Last year's review was delayed as an Internal Audit was due 2025, so a decision was made to wait for the results and feedback from the audit to make sure the new Risk Management Strategy and Guidance was compliant and in line with best practices, addressing any gaps or potential issues identified by the auditors, and actioning all recommendations put forward by them as part of the Strategy action plan.

4. Details

- 4.1 Risk management is central to effective governance and service delivery at the Council. It ensures public services are delivered responsibly and public funds are safeguarded. In the face of growing challenges, identifying, and managing risks is more critical than ever.
- 4.2 Effective risk management supports organisational goals by ensuring compliance and accountability, enhancing decision-making, ensuring value for money, and maximising opportunities whilst mitigating threats.
- 4.3 The Council is committed to effective risk management aiming to fulfil legal and policy obligations, improve services and meet stakeholder expectations, protect people, property, and resources; manage liabilities and maintain financial control, uphold its reputation and environmental quality, and learn from past experiences. This new strategy has been developed aiming to deliver on these commitments.
- 4.4 The recently published internal audit report confirms that the Council has a generally sound framework for governance, risk management, and internal control. However, the audit also identified several areas where there is scope for improvement, as outlined below:
 - **Risk Framework Implementation**
 - Inconsistent and incomplete documentation across service plans and risk registers.
 - No formal process to monitor mitigating actions.

- No central record of service risk registers or plans.
- **Quality and Monitoring of Risk Registers**
 - Wide variation in detail and format of service level risk registers.
 - Unclear risk owners and mitigating actions.
 - Unclear process for managing residual risks.
- **Quarterly Risk Monitoring Reports**
 - Reports to AARC are overly detailed and complex
 - Lack of clarity on effectiveness of risk management efforts.
- **Officer Training on Risk Management**
 - No evidence of formal training for officers, despite expectations in the risk strategy.
 - Support is provided ad hoc, but no structured programme exists.
- **Risk Strategy Development**
 - Scoring matrix lacks weighting for impact vs. probability.
 - Annual strategy updates do not reflect lessons learned or effectiveness of previous year's implementation.

What has changed?

- 4.5 The new proposed strategy is broader and more strategic, addressing all areas for improvement identified during the internal audit, and aligning clearly with the Council's Vision and Strategy 2025–2030, with an emphasis in governance, culture, innovation, and continuous improvement. Main changes include:
- Clear ISO 31000 alignment.
 - Enhanced governance and oversight.
 - Introduction of a formal Risk Appetite process and Matrix, including a clear process for defining and reviewing the organisation's risk appetite, with a correspondent timetable.
 - Introduction of a weighted risk matrix, providing a more granular scoring system, with detailed descriptors for each impact area (e.g., service delivery, reputation, health & safety, data protection, financial) and clear risk control types (preventive, detective, corrective, directive).
 - Stronger emphasis on culture change and training, including a defined action plan to ensure the new strategy is adopted and embedded across the organisation.
 - Clearer escalation and reporting mechanisms.
- 4.6 The Strategy and guidance includes four appendices:
- Appendix 1 – Risk Methodology
 - Appendix 2 – Risk Appetite Process and Matrix
 - Appendix 3 – Risk Strategy Implementation Action Plan
 - Appendix 4 - Risk Advisory Group Terms of Reference

Next steps

- 4.7 As part of the implementation and embedding plan of the new Strategy and guidance the following activities have been agreed and are currently in development:
- A defined Cherwell's overarching risk appetite will be set up by CLT.
 - Launch the Risk Advisory Group with Risk Champions representing all services to establish and embed a clear process for identifying, monitoring, and managing risks; ensuring risk information is regularly updated, reviewed, and approved at the appropriate management levels before escalation to CLT if needed.
 - A new corporate risk register template has been develop using the newly proposed weighted scoring matrix, providing further clarity on effectiveness of risk management efforts. All fields within this template will be mandatory to ensure that the council records the correct information in each area relating to risk.
 - All risk registers will be held centrally so that the Performance and Insight team have clear oversight of all registers.
 - Risk discussions at all organisational levels will be documented to provide an auditable trail with CLT reviewing risk as a standing item at bi-monthly meetings.
 - Once service plans are approved, their risks will be checked against the service risk register to ensure all are properly recorded. Any missing risks will be investigated, and the relevant service area will be required to update their records. This process ensures central oversight and alignment with current council policies and strategies.
 - The Performance and Insight team will centrally manage all service plans and risk registers, ensuring quality assurance and version control. However, individual officers remain responsible for maintaining and updating the content.
 - A Risk training plan for the organisation, including a detailed timetable, is being developed and will be launched with the Risk Advisory Group.
- 4.8 Details on the Risk Strategy implementation action plan can be found in Appendix 3 of the Strategy.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: This report summarises a new risk strategy and guidance seeking this committee's feedback, therefore there are no alternative options to consider.

6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 It is recommended that the contents of the report are noted, and feedback is provided to help finalise the new Risk Strategy and Guidance for Cherwell District Council.

Decision Information

Key Decision	N/A
Subject to Call in	N/A
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	All

Documents

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Cherwell District Council Risk and Strategy Guidance
Background Papers	N/A
Reference Papers	N/A
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Executive Director Approval (unless Executive Director or Statutory Officer report)	Corporate Director for Resources – Stephen Hinds, 14 August 2025