



# Corporate Peer Challenge

## Position Statement

April 2025





Contents

Introduction to Hart	3
Hart at a glance	4
Local priorities and outcomes	7
Governance and culture	11
Financial planning and management	16
Capacity for improvement	18

Introduction to Hart

Welcome to Hart, a district in a picturesque area characterised by a mix of a large urban settlement like Fleet and smaller towns and villages such as Hook, Hartley Wintney and Odiham. The space connecting these settlements comprises green fields and woodland, giving Hart a rural feel while being well connected to the rest of the country by rail and road.

Hart is a place where innovation intertwines with tradition. Our district has a rich history, a vibrant local economy, and a strong commitment to sustainability and community well-being.

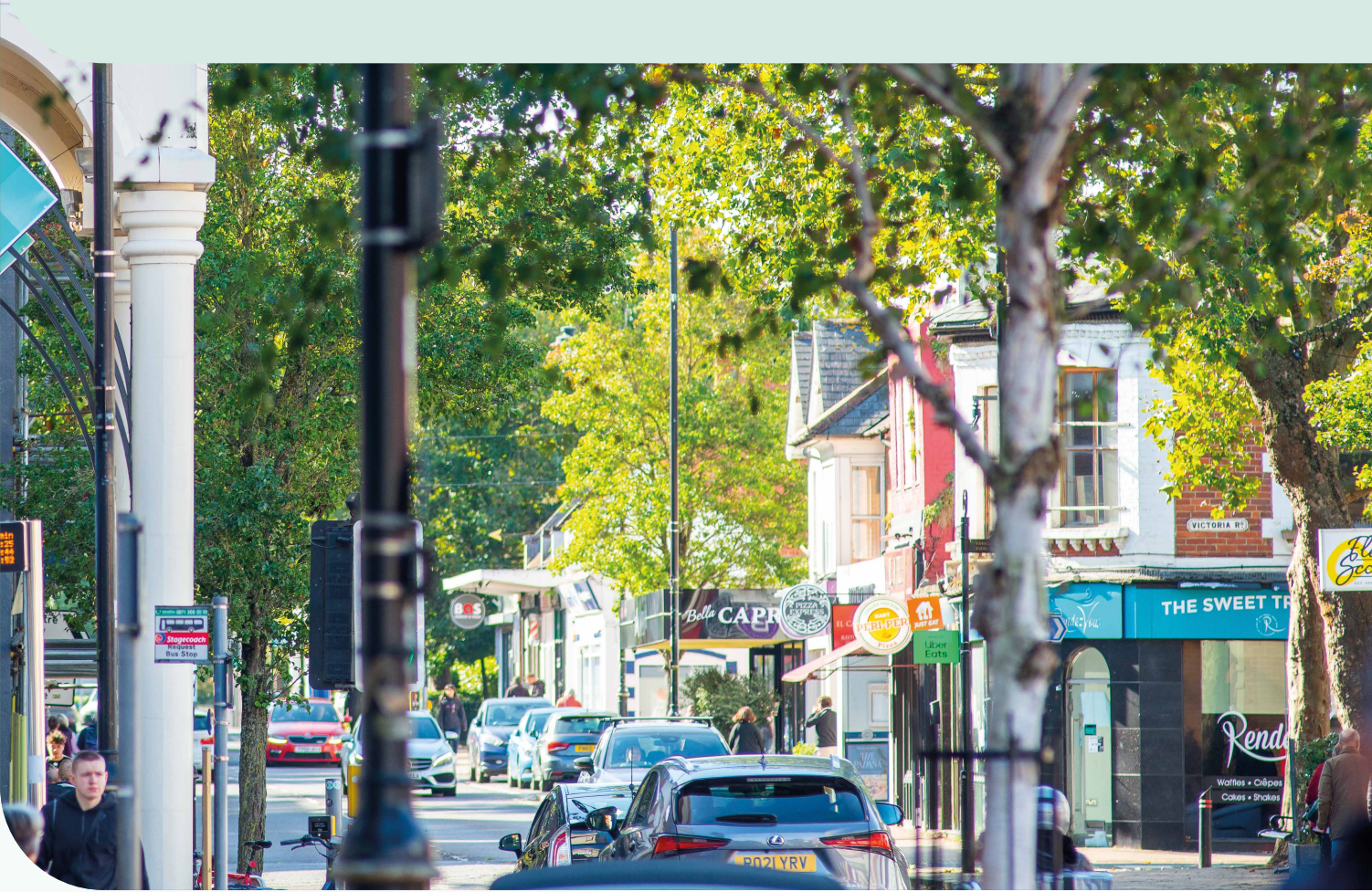
As part of the Local Government Association’s Corporate Peer Challenge, we’re eager to share our journey, achievements, and future aspirations.

During your time with us, you’ll have the chance to meet our dedicated team, explore our key initiatives, and gain insights into the challenges and opportunities that shape our district.

We’re committed to transparency, continuous improvement, and learning from best practice, and we look forward to the valuable feedback and perspectives you will provide.

Like many Councils, we have navigated significant changes over the past five years, primarily driven by the pandemic and shifting financial realities. While we embrace the opportunities presented by the Government’s Priority Devolution Programme, we also confront the challenge of local government reorganisation, which will merge our neighbouring councils into a new unitary authority by 2028.

We’re working together to set a high standard for effective and responsive local governance, striving to ensure a positive future for the communities that call Hart home.



Fleet Road, Fleet



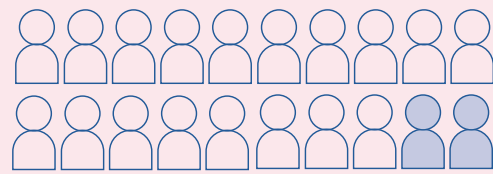
# Hart at a glance

The [Hart narrative](#) encapsulates the spirit of our district. Located a stone's throw from London and surrounded by breathtaking countryside, Hart truly offers the best of both worlds. It's no surprise that Hart has been recognised as one of the best places to live in the country.

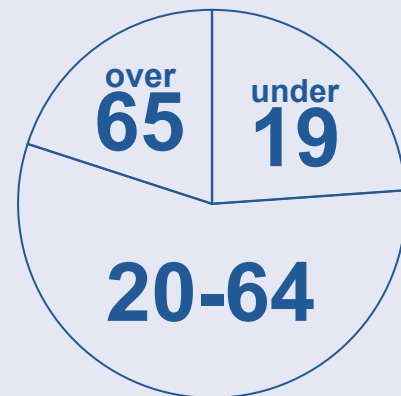
Our district boasts numerous green spaces, including five stunning countryside sites that have earned the prestigious Green Flag award. Key landmarks include King John's Castle, Fleet Pond, Hampshire's largest freshwater lake, and the picturesque Basingstoke Canal. Our countryside rangers care for seven different habitat types in the district including heathland, which is rarer globally than rainforest.



Our population has grown 9.2% since 2011, reaching 99,400 people. This compares to the national average growth of 6.6%.



92.5% of the population are White, higher than the national average of 83.05%. 3.6% are Asian, 2.2% are of Mixed ethnic background, and 0.8% are Black.

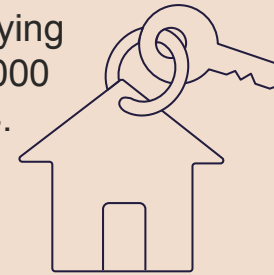


24% of the population is under 19 years old, 56% are between 20-64 and 20% over the age of 65.



The district covers 83.1 sq mi (215.3km<sup>2</sup>) with an average of 462 people per square km. This compares with our neighbours Rushmoor with 2,555 people per sq km, 292 in Basingstoke.

The average house price across Hart is £466,000 with the first-time buyer paying an average £352,000 in December 2024. The average monthly private rent is £1,348.



**31%**

More people in Hart have become managers, directors, and professionals. In 2015, about 8,000 people held these jobs. By 2025, that number had risen to around 10,500, a growth of 31%.



**5000**  
businesses

We have 5,000 businesses in the district across a range of sectors including science, technology, information, catering, retail and construction.



**1.5%**

Only 1.5% of people aged 16 to 64 were claiming unemployment-related benefits in 2024.



**2.3%**

The value of goods and services produced in our area increased from £2.8 billion to £3.5 billion between 2015-2025, an annual growth rate of 2.3%.

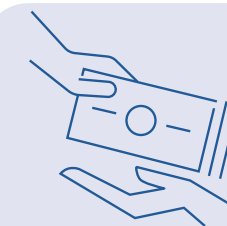


**45%** Level 4 or higher qualification

In 2021, 45% of residents had Level 4 qualifications and above. This marks a significant increase from 35% in 2011.



In 2011, around 12% of people were self-employed. By 2021, this was 15%.



**£39,000**  
per year

The typical salary for full-time workers in Hart District is around £39,000, exceeding the average wage of £37,856 in South East England.

# What is Hart?

Hart district was created on 1 April 1974 and is named after the River Hart, which runs through the area. The River Hart derives its name from the number of deer in the region, which historically had several deer parks dating back to medieval times.

Our landscape is characterised by a mix of urban and rural settings, with significant green spaces, woodlands, and waterways. Our proximity to major transport routes, including the M3 motorway and mainline railway services provide good connectivity to London and other parts of the country.

We're based at the Civic Offices in Fleet. The building was purpose-built in 1986 and we share it with:

- Hart Voluntary Action
- ACAS
- Citizens Advice Hart
- Hampshire Constabulary
- Hart Professional College, an adult education centre linked to Farnborough College of Technology who in turn are partnered with the University of Surrey.



## Public sector landscape

We provide district-level services, and Hampshire County Council offers county-level services. There are also 21 town and parish councils serving Hart.

We're covered by several Integrated Care Systems that coordinate health and care services for the benefit of our residents including:

- **Frimley Health and Care ICS Services:** Provides integrated health and care services, including hospital, community, and mental health services
- **Hampshire and Isle of Wight ICS Services:** Offers comprehensive health and care services across Hampshire, including primary care, community services, and hospital care.

Several NHS trusts also cover the district, each providing different healthcare services:

- **Frimley Health NHS Foundation Trust Services:** Acute hospital services, including Frimley Park Hospital
- **Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust Services:** Community health services and mental health services
- **South Central Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust Services:** Emergency and non-emergency ambulance services.

## Our country parks

We manage several award-winning country parks and green spaces. We're proud of all of them and of the community wellbeing that they contribute to. Highlights include:

1. **Green Flag Awards:** Edenbrook Country Park and Hartland Country Park recently received the prestigious Green Flag Award for the first time, joining Fleet Pond Nature Reserve, Elvetham Heath Nature Reserve, and Hartley Wintney Central Commons, which retained their Green Flag status for 2023/24
2. **Fleet Pond:** This site received the Green Flag Award for the 13th consecutive year
3. **Variety of parks:** We manage various green spaces including Bramshot Farm Country Park, Hazeley Heath, and Odiham Common, each offering unique natural habitats and recreational opportunities.



# Local priorities and outcomes

Our [Corporate Plan 2023 to 2027](#) has three focus areas:

## Planet

tackling climate change is central to all our activities. We aim to become a carbon-neutral council by 2035 and a district by 2040

## People

we are committed to providing fair treatment for all, help for those in need and a sustainable economy that makes Hart a great place to live, work and enjoy

## Place

we will work to deliver warmer, better homes in sustainable locations that people can afford to live in

We underpin these focus areas by providing a resilient and financially sound Council.

Our Councillors, staff, residents, partners, and businesses helped shape the Plan through consultation and engagement. Their views were considered alongside various demographic, economic, and broader policy influences. The next review is scheduled for June 2025.

## Climate change and the environment

We have adopted a Climate Change Action Plan for 2023 to 2027. Some key points are:

1. **Priority actions:** Over the next 18 months, we will focus on reducing energy consumption, investing in renewable energy, and enhancing biodiversity
2. **Community involvement:** we will leverage our leadership role to help organisations and individuals make necessary changes
3. **Funding and accountability:** we actively seek grant opportunities to fund our initiatives



We have implemented several initiatives to support our goal of carbon neutrality:

- **Solar panels:** We have installed solar panels on the Civic Offices and Hart Leisure Centre
- **Energy efficiency grants:** We've awarded £19,000 to local community and voluntary groups to help improve energy efficiency in buildings and tackle climate change
- **Electric vehicle charging points:** We've expanding the network of electric vehicle charging points in our car parks
- **Tree strategy:** We've developed a tree strategy that ensures healthy tree cover, which benefits wildlife and climate resilience
- **Green grid framework:** We're creating a network of green corridors to connect communities, enhance access to green spaces, and promote sustainable living
- **Community eco-hub:** We've established a community eco-hub to engage residents in climate initiatives and volunteer opportunities
- **Thermal imaging project:** Working with Hart Voluntary Action, residents were visited by trained volunteers to conduct thermal imaging surveys. We followed up the visit with a workshop to provide expert advice on insulation and other measures
- **Impact Hart:** We've set up a website and community hub under separate climate change branding to help engage with our residents on all aspects of climate change and foster a collaborative approach with the community.



# Our year in review

## April 2024

Our two leisure centres began offering free membership to people living with Parkinson's disease.

## June 2024

The Defence Employer Recognition Scheme awards employers who demonstrate their commitment to the armed forces community and adhere to the Armed Forces Covenant. We were proud to receive the Silver Military Covenant. To achieve this, we promoted job opportunities for veterans and reservists and assisted them in transitioning to civilian life. This award underscores our commitment to meeting the unique needs of the Armed Forces community.



The first phase of a new bike track in [Edenbrook Country Park](#) was completed in 2020. The BMX track became so popular and well-used that two downhill tracks were built in 2024.

As part of our launch of the new tracks, we approached a local social media influencer and professional mountain biker, Sam Reynolds, to open the latest tracks. We coordinated the support from local community groups, including sponsorship from a local bike shop, Pedal Heaven.

## July 2024



We launched a new Rural Exception Site. These are small-scale sites in rural communities that would not otherwise be allocated for housing and give priority to people with a local connection.

There are currently ten schemes across Hart, including this one in North Warnborough. It provides nine homes for rent and three for shared ownership for local people.



Green Flag Award Scheme recognised five of our countryside sites as some of the best in the UK.

## October 2024

Hartland Village, a new 1,500-home new community, wins two awards at the LABC Building Excellence Awards 2024.

## November 2024

We provided grant funding to ten community groups to support those most in need during the winter months.

## December 2024



The new community hub in Hareshill is low-carbon, with energy-efficient building materials, 36 solar panels, and an air-source heat pump for heating, all of which helped secure a minus EPC rating. Delivery of the hall has been made possible by a series of commitments secured through s106 contributions, which include £10.7 million in contributions to improving the local infrastructure and enhanced pedestrian and cycle connections.

## January 2025

We engaged in the MHCLG Cyber Assessment Framework pilot by reviewing and documenting its processes, controls, and risks associated with key services. It focused on improving cyber resilience, raising cyber security awareness, and integrating these practices into our operations.



We've been designated as a local government exemplar and, as a result, have been provided funding and additional technical support.

We teamed up with the Hampshire Forestry Partnership to plant new disease-resistant varieties of elm trees.

Local organisations working with the Armed Forces community benefited from Council funding to enhance or set up new services across Hart.

## February 2025

A joint project with Vivid Housing Association provided new four-bed homes for let to applicants on our housing register.

We've been successful in our application for grant funding from MHCLG to enhance our digital planning data sets and contribute to the wider Planning community.

# Working with our residents

We regularly consult with our communities and stakeholders to shape priorities and service delivery. We have not carried out a full resident survey for over five years. We intend to launch our survey later this year.

## Our ask of the Peer Challenge Team

We'd like guidance from the Peer Challenge Team about our proposed survey to ensure a meaningful dialogue with our community and how we can tie this into the anticipated local government reorganisation consultation.

Our top priority is working with residents and partners to deliver services right the first time. By using our resources wisely, we support our community in a variety of ways including employment opportunities, delivering sustainable homes that people can afford, providing a foundation for good health, and addressing the climate emergency.

# Embracing complaints



We recognise that we don't always get it right and we want to provide the best customer service to make sure we resolve complaints and identify improvements that we can make. In March 2024, we updated our Corporate Complaints policy to make it more streamlined and reflect the new Code from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman. We're one of twenty pilot Councils supporting the Ombudsman in developing complaints best practice and guidance before finalising their code in 2025.





## External partners

We work with several local authorities and external partners to deliver to our community. Our partners deliver 60% of our core services.

Our waste contract has been extended for eight more years and will see the introduction of weekly waste food collections.

Many of our originally outsourced services were previously delivered by Capita. We've managed a successful programme to return Finance and other back office services in-house. Capita still delivers our Revenue and Benefits services.

We work in partnership with other organisations through a variety of different mechanisms:

- Hampshire-wide communications group
- Hart Voluntary Action
- Citizens Advice Hart
- Safer North Hampshire Community Safety Partnership
- Hampshire Forestry Partnership
- Hampshire Green and Blue Spaces mental wellbeing group

Our networks with other local authority steering groups help share best practices and develop partnerships. We have set up a climate emergency engagement group with local parish and town councils and other key stakeholder groups to create opportunities to engage with residents and businesses.

## Overview and Scrutiny working groups

We run several cross-party working groups to lead and develop policy in priority areas such as the local plan, property and governance. These have had an essential role in supporting joint working, building ownership, and utilising the talent and experience of Councillors. Recent cross-party working groups include:

- fly-tipping
- gypsy and traveller
- complaints

## Our ask of the Peer Challenge Team

We seek guidance on forming working groups to allow greater member participation in policy development, decision-making, and public engagement in meetings.

# Governance and culture

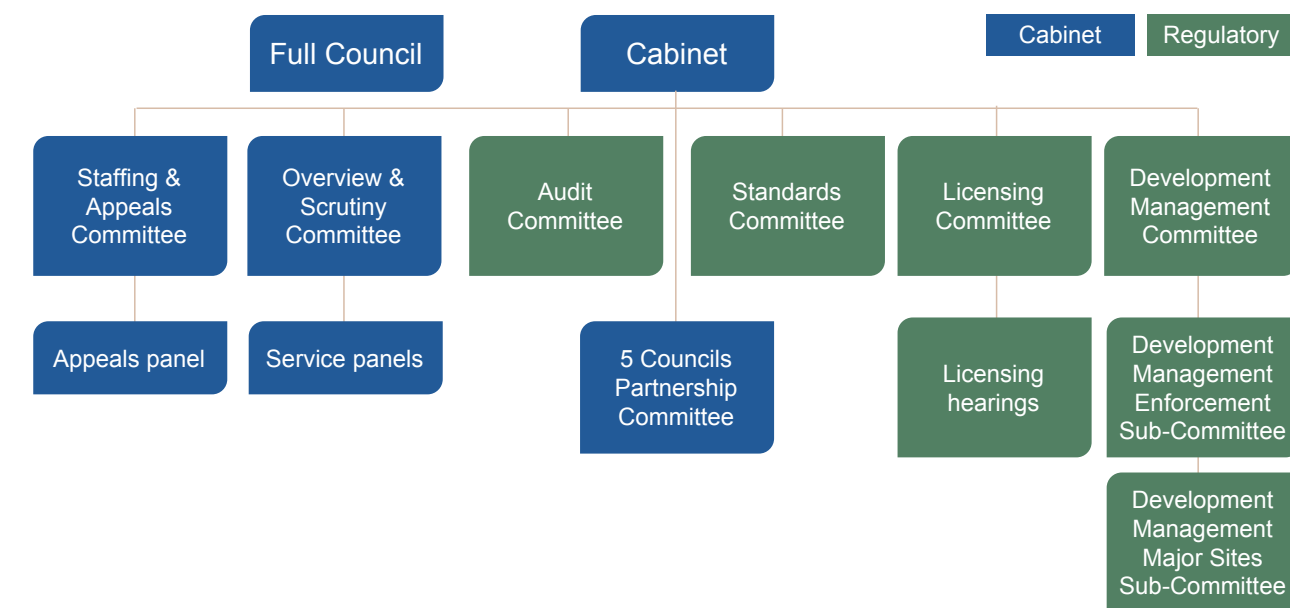
## Our constitution

The Council's [Constitution](#) is our primary document for legislating how we conduct our business and make decisions. Decision-makers and key spending officers receive regular refresher training to ensure the Constitution's lawful, ethical, and consistent application.

In the same way new employees are inducted on the staff Code of Conduct, newly elected Councillors also receive training on their Code of Conduct. This was last delivered in May 2024 when several new Councillors joined the Council, and a further training session is organised for later this year.

## Our council structure

We operate a leader-and-executive model, with eight Executive Members, including our Leader, [each with their own portfolio](#). The Executive, called the Cabinet, makes many of the Councillor-level decisions as a group or as individual Portfolio Holders. These decisions are documented before they are made on a forward plan.



While Full Council approves our overall budget and policy framework, it delegates authority to certain committees to make decisions on its behalf. For instance, our two regulatory committees are delegated to make planning and licensing decisions. Various decisions are delegated by both the Cabinet and the Full Council to officers. These are documented in the Scheme of Delegation within the Constitution.

Our Overview & Scrutiny Committee is crucial in holding the Council's decision-makers accountable and ensuring that public services are delivered efficiently and effectively. The committee meets monthly and tracks the Cabinet's ongoing work programme. Service panels made up of members from Overview & Scrutiny Committee met regularly with Executive Directors to review performance across the annual service plans.

We have a call-in procedure in place to monitor the Cabinet's decisions. This enables Overview & Scrutiny Committee to assess whether a decision is in accordance with the Constitution or requires reconsideration. There are no Cabinet Members on Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and to uphold openness and transparency, every meeting is held in public.

Political control

The political landscape has pivoted over the years from a Conservative-led administration to one of no overall control:

Party in control	Years
Independent	1974–1979
Conservative	1979–1983
No overall control	1983–2000
Conservative	2000–2005
No overall control	2005–2010
Conservative	2010–2012
No overall control	2012–present

Following the 2024 election, the composition of the Council is:

Party	Councillors
Liberal Democrats	12
Community Campaign (Hart)	11
Conservative	9
Independent	1
Total	33

Liberal Democrats and Community Campaign (Hart), a residents’ association, currently run the council as a joint administration. The next election is due in 2026.

Elections

We have 33 councillors representing 11 three-member wards. Elections occur three out of every four years, with one councillor from each ward elected at a time for a four-year term. Elections for Hampshire County Council occur in the fourth year of this cycle when there are no district council elections. In 2025, the government deferred the Hampshire County Council elections while reviewing devolution proposals.

Good Councillor-Officer relationships

Senior officers across the council foster strong working relationships with Portfolio Holders, regularly convening to discuss work plans and projects.

The Leader of the Council attends the Senior Leadership Team meeting, which convenes weekly.

The Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer meet with the main opposition Group Leader and Deputy Group Leader every month. Additionally, the Chief Executive attends informal cabinet meetings. Officers from the senior leadership team participate in the Cabinet’s policy and development away days, which are held twice a year.

The Chief Executive and Lead Officers regularly meet with the Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

We have implemented service area drop-in sessions before Full Council, which have helped councillors understand officers’ day-to-day activities.

Councillor development

While specific committees, such as the Licensing and Planning Committee, have mandatory attendance training opportunities, Committee Services provide an annual member development programme to ensure Councillors possess the skills and knowledge necessary to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. Councillors are also registered to undertake training provided by the Local Government Association and have online access to SEEDL, which offers a diverse range of live and interactive training sessions to help individuals enhance their skills and knowledge.

In addition to our formal decision-making process, we regularly update Councillors on key issues and priorities. These updates ensure that everyone is well-informed and offer an opportunity to ask questions in a formal setting. We also distribute Councillor Connect, a fortnightly email news update for Councillors.

Senior Leadership Team

In 2022, the Council underwent a strategic management reorganisation. The Chief Executive, Daryl Phillips, leads our Senior Leadership Team. This comprises:

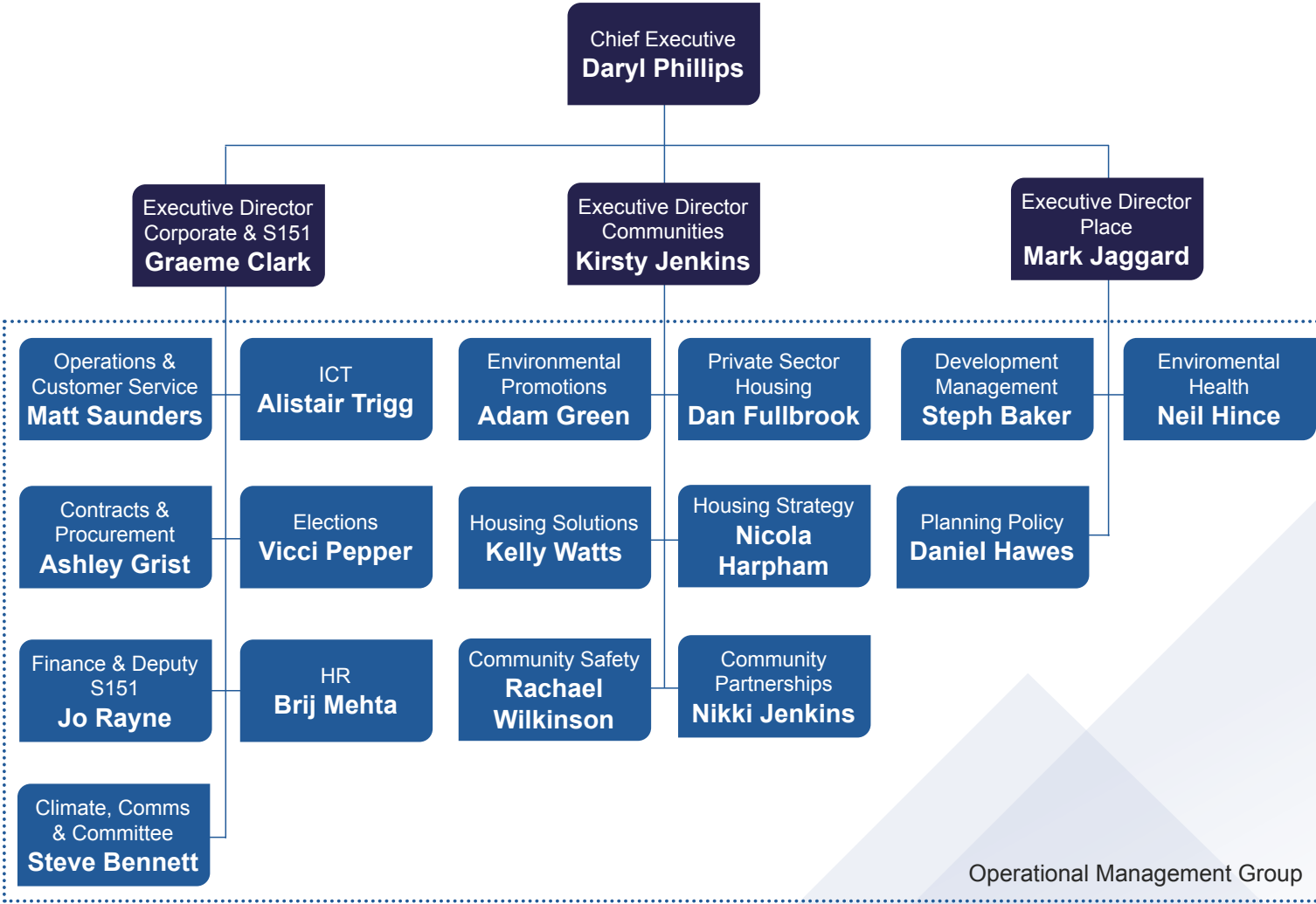
**Kirsty Jenkins**  
Executive Director of Community Services, responsible for affordable housing, community safety, environmental promotion, and strategic housing options, homelessness and lettings.

**Mark Jaggard**  
Executive Director of Place Services, handling building control, development management, environmental health, planning policy, and licensing.

**Graeme Clark**  
Executive Director of Corporate Services, overseeing client management for outsourced services, climate change, communications, finance, HR, IT, and legal services.

**Ashley Grist**  
Monitoring Officer, ensuring our compliance with legal and ethical standards.

SLT meets weekly and is joined by the Chair of Operational Management Group to ensure more inclusive input.







## Governance arrangements

We follow national principles to act in the best interests of the people in Hart. Governance is about doing things right, for the right people, and at the right time. This includes being inclusive, open, transparent, honest, and accountable in everything we do. In this way, we should achieve our goals while always acting in the public interest.

Our [Local Code of Corporate Governance](#) describes the arrangements that we have in place to ensure effective governance. Our [annual governance statement](#) sets out our review of the arrangements in place for the previous year. This is reported to the Cabinet through our Audit Committee. The Local Code of Corporate Governance provides more details on how the council applies the principles of good governance.

## Risk management

The Audit Committee annually reviews the effectiveness of our risk management framework. Our policy ensures that a consistent framework is in place for identifying, analysing, and managing risk. It also permits reasonable and proportionate measures to mitigate risk to acceptable levels. The risk owners and Senior Leadership team review the register throughout the year to ensure the risks remain relevant and adequately reflect the controls and actions implemented to mitigate or manage them.

Service risk registers are reviewed regularly to reflect service plans and future initiatives. Risks are reported twice a year to Service Boards, O&S and Cabinet. We last reviewed the Corporate Risk Register in November 2024.

## Information governance

To support the management of our information governance framework, officers and Councillors receive compulsory and refresher training on GDPR and FOI/EIR. Our intranet has a suite of guidance, policies, and procedures. These documents support us in setting and defining acceptable behaviours in collecting, using, sharing and retaining information. We also have a monthly Information Governance Group meeting comprising the Chief Executive, Monitoring Officer, and the Information Governance Officer to discuss key information governance risks. Agenda items include information governance performance measures and statistics, data protection and ICT incidents/breaches.

Data is our largest asset; therefore, protecting our data is paramount. Regular compliance checks to the necessary regulations and guidance ensure that we continue to improve our control environment. We recently carried out an internal audit review and are now working through the subsequent actions for improvement suggested.

## Equality and diversity

We ensure that everyone, officers and Councillors, attend compulsory equality and diversity training. At the start of this year, we required all officers to attend mandatory training on sexual harassment.

## Staff culture and engagement

Our October 2024 staff survey results continued the trend of impressive engagement results. From an 86% response rate to a Net Promoter Score of +48 for how likely you would recommend Hart as a place to work, we take pride in the engagement and energy our staff display daily.

We communicate regularly with staff, with monthly Team Briefs led by the Chief Executive. Team Brief has been revamped over the last two years, emphasising the work across the Council and actively seeking news and events to showcase the many initiatives and projects led by staff. Our fortnightly staff newsletter supplements this.

Our staff induction programme has also benefited from a review. This allows us to communicate with new staff on various topics and meet other officers and senior managers. We operate monthly 1:1's with staff to review their workloads and identify learning and development opportunities. Our annual Performance Development Review reviews the past 12 months and sets objectives for the forthcoming year.

For the past four years, we've offered reflective practice for officers. This facilitated space allows staff to gain insight into professional practice by thinking analytically about situations and scenarios. Over 30 staff have benefited from this experience. We also offer access to Pam Assist, an Employer Assistance Programme that supports all aspects of wellbeing.

## Communication

We value our strong relationships with partners and engage with them on shared interests and goals, significantly when organisational changes might impact our collaboration.

Our communications are digitally led through our social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube) and a regular residents' newsletter, which integrates with our website. We recognise that some residents are not digitally enabled or choose not to be. To engage with them, we produce Hart News, our council magazine, twice a year, which is distributed to our 43,000 households. We also utilise traditional media, such as annual Council Tax letters, leaflets, posters, and local events.

We've been a subscriber of [LocalGovDrupal](#) for two years, having migrated our corporate website to this community back in 2022.

## LGA communications health check

We recognise how vital it is to communicate clearly and openly about our challenges, future goals, and changes within Hart. We invited the LGA to conduct a communications health check in September 2024 to aid our ongoing development. The recommendations will enable us to refocus our efforts across various areas where we wish to develop including enhancing our resident insight and our new communication strategy.

## Our ask of the Peer Challenge Team

We seek guidance on how we can maintain and develop open, collaborative and productive relationships with residents, partners and neighbouring authorities during local government reorganisation.



High Street, Hartley Wintney





# Financial planning and management

## Our approach to managing our finances

We have robust financial governance arrangements with regular management and public reporting of our financial position.

Our plans consider the ongoing financial impact of the cost-of-living crisis, international uncertainty on the economy, implications following the change of government in 2024, local government reorganisation, and the future of the collection and disposal of waste across Hampshire, with appropriate measures taken to protect our financial standing.

Our main priorities are to produce sustainable spending plans, maintain adequate reserves, and continue to minimise increases in the net revenue budget. We also continue to maximise the benefit from any residual reserves available, deliver corporate priorities, and support our overall financial position in the longer term. We limit the impact on front line services through maximising efficiencies and income generation.

## Current financial health

Our financial situation is stable, even in a challenging economic climate.

We have set a balanced budget for 2025/26 to ensure we spend money wisely and sustainably. Key points of the budget include:

- **Council Tax increase:** The district part of Council Tax will increase by 2.99%. This means an additional £5.93 per year for the average Band D household
- **Parking charges:** Parking charges will increase for the first time in over six years. This will add an extra 20p to a two-hour parking session, bringing in an additional £130,000 each year
- **New projects:** The budget includes funding for new projects, such as starting food waste collection services for all Hart residents in October 2025
- **Support for low-income households:** We will keep the Council Tax support scheme, which helps 2,700 families in Hart.

The budget also plans for future needs, including devolution costs, local government reorganisation, and updating the Local Plan for Hart.

Overall, we aim to manage our finances well while providing essential services and support to the community.

## Key financial risks

Our Medium Term Financial Strategy forecasts a budget deficit for the years beyond 2025/26, which is expected to grow annually. This is primarily due to:

- inflation on costs exceeding income from allowable Council Tax increases
- an anticipated annual decrease in government grants from 2025/26, resulting from funding reviews
- the effects of waste collection costs and recycling income.

It highlights that significant ongoing efficiency savings and strategies for increased investment income will need to be implemented to sustain a balanced and sustainable medium-term budget. A set of budget principles and a budget plan have been created and communicated to service managers.

## Budget monitoring

Our finance team meets monthly to consider our latest budget position, which is fed back to SLT. Updates are then reported to the Cabinet via Overview & Scrutiny Committee every quarter.

The forecasts in the Medium Term Financial Strategy are updated quarterly to clarify the scale of our financial exposure and the opportunities available to minimise costs and secure funding support. We obtain regular updates from our Treasury Advisers to help update our forecasts and inform future budget setting.

## Value for money

We assess value for money through a comprehensive audit process. We communicate the results of our value for money assessments to the public through several channels:

- **Audit reports:** Detailed audit reports are published on our website, providing insights into financial sustainability, governance, and the efficient use of resources. Our external auditor completes an annual assessment of our financial arrangements for securing value for money
- **Annual reports:** We issue annual reports that summarise financial statements and demonstrate how public money has been used
- **Public meetings:** Results are discussed in public meetings, including Audit Committee and O&S, where residents can attend and ask questions
- **Communications strategy:** Our Communications and Engagement Strategy outlines how we will increase engagement with residents through digital solutions and community outreach.

## Capital programme

We assess all potential capital schemes through a robust business case framework incorporating capital, operational, lifetime and debt servicing costs if needed. We capitalise officer salary costs directly attributable to capital schemes as part of the total project costs. Unused resources allocated to particular capital projects are returned to meet future corporate priorities.

## Financial decision making

Full Council sets the Council's Budget at its annual budget-setting meeting in February each year.

Cabinet engagement on future budget pressures starts in mid-autumn. Its purpose is to assess proposals put forward by officers through SLT in consultation with Lead Councillors. These discussions usually inform the preparation of future service plans.

The Section 151 Officer reports regularly on the Council's financial position so that appropriate decisions can be made and action taken where necessary. The Section 151 officer also meets regularly with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, who is the deputy Leader of the Council.



# Capacity for improvement

## Adapting, learning and improving

Our staff surveys show that staff recommend the Council as a great place to work. Many people stay with us for a long time, resulting in a passionate and knowledgeable workforce. However, like many other Councils, we can struggle to attract people to specific roles. We have, therefore, had to adapt to meet the challenges.

### Workforce strategy

Our Workforce Strategy aims to develop a dynamic and high-performing workforce. The strategy focuses on helping us attract motivated and engaged staff in a workplace where they can develop their skills. Local authorities face challenges in recruiting skilled staff.

We're committed to developing our employees in their roles and equipping them with the skills and knowledge to face future challenges and opportunities. Through regular one to one's and annual performance development reviews, we want to provide opportunities for people depending on their individual needs.

We've been successful with our apprenticeship programme with several school leavers being taken on full time after initial placements across a range of services including IT, communications and Planning.

### Our operating model

Building on the insights we gained during the early days of the pandemic, we actively embraced an ongoing review of our operating model. This journey led the Council to carry out a major senior management structural review in 2022. The outcome is that we are focused on enhancing our ability to flexibly deploy the right skills and resources as needed based on the ever-changing operational landscape. Throughout this review, we pinpointed several key objectives that will guide how we operate, including:

- increase strategic capacity and optimise spans of control
- build strong transformational capability
- make evidence-based decisions using data and insight
- implement an agile approach with increased flexibility and ability to adapt to changing circumstances
- be a learning organisation, led by reflection, action inquiry and flexible governance.

The outcome of this approach is reflected in our significantly improving annual staff survey engagement and responses.

### Our ask of the Peer Challenge Team

We seek guidance from the Peer Challenge Team to deliver a digital strategy that considers all residents. We would also value guidance around how we can move forward with the strategy but recognise that local government reorganisation will have a significant impact on our delivery timescales.



### Our approach in key capacity areas

Following the senior management restructure in 2022, our approach has been designed to streamline and modernise the Council's operations to be more efficient and cost-effective and to provide the right environment to improve the customer experience for residents, businesses and visitors.

We have been developing new ways of working that:

- build on the agile working practices that emerged under pandemic conditions
- are supported by a modern employment offer and enabled by modern workspaces and technology solutions
- demonstrate our culture, values and behaviours
- refreshed our agile working approach, including hybrid arrangements where appropriate for service delivery
- helped reconfigure our office –space to support flexible working and encourage collaboration. This has also allowed us to release additional office space to our tenants to generate much-needed income.

We have delivered extensive learning and development to help managers and teams transition to working more agilely. This has included implementing digital tools to support regular check-ins and our performance conversation approach.

The overall outcome is that staff satisfaction levels far exceed past levels, and Hart is seen as a great place to work. Just as importantly, challenges to secure recruitment have been addressed, and without an approach to agile working, our recruitment spreads across a much wider area.

Our [Digital Strategy for 2024-2028](#) focuses on enhancing digital services to meet the needs of its diverse communities. The strategy is developed around three themes:

- Quality interactions
- Responsive council
- Collaborative partnerships.

We're about to embark on a project to look at service design across key resident touchpoints. We will assess the digital maturity and capability of each service and hope to identify quick wins and deliver recommendations to enhance service delivery for the medium term.





To find out more  
about us, please visit  
**[www.hart.gov.uk](http://www.hart.gov.uk)**