

DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2025/26

Executive Summary

Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council has undertaken a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of its governance arrangements for the year ended 31 March 2026.

Overall Opinion:

Based on the results of this review, the Council is satisfied that its governance arrangements are fit for purpose and operating effectively, providing reasonable assurance in relation to the achievement of statutory responsibilities and corporate objectives. However, a few significant governance risks and areas for improvement have been identified, particularly in relation to financial sustainability, Children's Services, SEND, capital programme delivery, and transformation governance.

Governance Outlook:

The Council continues to operate in a challenging environment characterised by financial pressures, demand-led services, and transformation requirements. Strengthening governance resilience, capacity, and oversight will be critical in 2026/27.

Commitment:

The Council is committed to addressing the governance issues identified within this statement and to strengthening its governance framework in line with the CIPFA/SOLACE principles of good governance.

1. Scope of Responsibility

Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council (the Council) remains firmly committed to conducting its business with integrity, transparency and in full accordance with the law. As a steward of public funds, the Council recognises its responsibility to ensure that money is safeguarded, properly accounted for, and used efficiently and effectively. Alongside these duties,

the Council must also meet the requirements of the Local Government Act 1999, which obliges local authorities to demonstrate continuous improvement in how they deliver their functions.

To uphold these obligations, the Council maintains a comprehensive governance framework designed to provide clarity, accountability and robust internal control. This Annual Governance Statement sets out how those arrangements operated over the year ending 31 March 2026 and highlights the areas where focused improvement will be required during the year ahead.

2. The Governance Framework

The Council's governance framework is based on the CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016) and the 2025 Addendum, which defines the seven principles of good governance.

These principles are embedded within the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance which sets out how governance arrangements are designed and operate in practice across the organisation.

The framework comprises the key arrangements through which the Council:

- exercises effective political and managerial leadership
- maintains clear accountability and decision-making structures
- ensures strong financial management and internal control
- manages risk and performance in an integrated way
- upholds high standards of ethical conduct and transparency
- engages effectively with residents and stakeholders

These arrangements are subject to regular review through the Council's assurance framework, including management assurance, corporate oversight functions, and independent internal audit.

During 2025/26, the Council continued to strengthen its governance arrangements through leadership stability, enhanced scrutiny, and improved integration of risk, performance and financial management.

3. Leadership, Vision and Strategic Direction

During the year, the Council secured a fully refreshed Senior Leadership Team, including permanent appointments to the Chief Executive and to key statutory roles such as the Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer. This renewed leadership capacity has provided stability and a clear direction of travel as the organisation continues to deliver its **Corporate Plan 2026–2029**.

At the same time, preparations have progressed for a new **Borough Plan**, shaped through multi-agency collaboration and due for publication in 2026. This work is helping to ensure that long-term priorities, spanning growth, health, poverty reduction and universal services are anchored in a shared vision for the borough.

4. Transparency, Accountability and Decision-Making

The Council has continued to place a strong emphasis on open and accountable decision-making. During 2025/26, scrutiny arrangements were strengthened, including revised operating practices across Scrutiny Panels and the introduction of a Scrutiny Coordination and Strategic Improvement Panel. Alongside this, decisions, performance dashboards and transparency reports have been made routinely available, supporting public confidence and democratic oversight.

5. Integrity, Ethics and Standards

Maintaining high standards of conduct remains a core part of the Council's

governance culture. The Standards Committee has met regularly throughout the year, considering complaints, reviewing member conduct, and ensuring that councillors continue to operate within the expected ethical framework. Updated **Financial Regulations and Procedures** have also been implemented to modernise delegations and reinforce financial discipline.

6. Managing Risks, Performance and Data

The Council has continued to strengthen risk and performance management. Quarterly **Corporate Performance and Risk Reports** have provided Executive Cabinet with insight into service outcomes, organisational risks and areas requiring additional attention. Improvements in service-level risk management have ensured closer alignment with the Strategic Risk Register, particularly in relation to pressures in children's services, the financial position, climate resilience and demand-led services.

7. Capacity, Workforce and Culture

Building organisational capacity has remained a priority. Delivery of the **People Plan 2025–2028**, structured around the Council's STRIVE values, has begun to shape workforce development and culture. Engagement has been strong, with over four hundred staff contributing through "Continuing the Conversations" sessions and the Colleague Conference held during the year. This has supported a sustained reduction in agency use, particularly in Children's Services, and strengthened proposals for enhanced member development, including the introduction of mandatory training.

8. Engaging with Residents and Stakeholders

The Council has continued to work closely with residents, partners and communities to shape policy and major programmes. Engagement activity has supported regeneration in Ashton, Hattersley, Droylsden and

Stalybridge, while the **Council Big Conversation** and a significant programme of consultations ensured that local voices informed work on homelessness, planning, climate change, public health commissioning and the 2026/27 budget.

9. Economic, Social and Environmental Responsibility

Responsibility towards the environment and local economy has also remained a focus. Masterplans have progressed across Denton, Droylsden, Ashton and Stalybridge, and the Council began developing its forthcoming **Climate and Environment Strategy**, which will replace the 2020 plan. Recognition as the “Best Performing Council in the North West for Fly-Tipping Enforcement” demonstrated continued operational commitment, alongside delivery of major programmes relating to Pride in Place, social housing developments and SEND capital improvements.

10. Review of Effectiveness

The Council has undertaken a structured and multi-source review of the effectiveness of its governance arrangements for the year ended 31 March 2026, in accordance with the CIPFA/SOLACE Delivering Good Governance in Local Government Framework (2016) and the 2025 Addendum.

This assessment has been informed by an established assurance framework, incorporating evidence from across the three lines of assurance:

- Management assurance (first line): Directorate self-assessments, performance and budget monitoring, risk registers, and operational governance reviews
- Risk, compliance and oversight functions (second line): Corporate risk management, financial management, legal and regulatory compliance, and thematic governance boards.

- Independent assurance (third line): Internal Audit’s annual opinion, External Audit findings, and external inspection and regulatory reviews

Additional assurance has been obtained from:

- Executive Cabinet and Leadership Team oversight of performance, financial and risk reporting
- Audit Committee challenge and review.
- External inspection regimes, including Ofsted and other regulators.
- Stakeholder engagement and consultation activity

This evidence has been subject to corporate review and challenge to ensure consistency of interpretation, completeness of assurance, and robustness of conclusions.

Based on the review undertaken, the Council confirms that its core governance arrangements, including risk management, internal control, financial management, performance reporting, internal audit and governance oversight, are in place and were operating effectively during the year, subject to the areas for improvement identified in this statement.

11. Significant Governance Issues for 2025/26

The Council continues to operate within a complex and challenging environment characterised by financial constraint, increasing service demand and the need for sustained transformation. The annual review of governance arrangements has identified the following significant governance issues that require focused management attention during 2026/27.

a. Financial Sustainability and Overspend Management

The Council faces ongoing financial pressures driven by demand-led services, inflationary impacts and the delivery of savings. Pressures within Adults and Children’s Services, alongside slippage in the capital

programme, present a risk to in-year budget control.

The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) high-needs deficit, which now sits at a material level, represents a longer-term financial sustainability risk following the cessation of the statutory override. Strengthened financial planning, enhanced budgetary control, and robust delivery of savings plans will be critical.

Principle F – Risk, control and financial management

b. Children’s Services Improvement

Despite demonstrable progress, Children’s Services continues to face challenges in workforce stability, caseload management and placement sufficiency. In addition, delays in key statutory processes, including ICPCs and EHCPs, highlight the need for sustained improvement. Maintaining momentum on the improvement journey and ensuring inspection readiness remains a critical governance priority.

Principle E – Capacity and capability

c. SEND System Pressures and Demand management.

Demand for SEND services continues to increase, placing pressure on both service delivery and financial sustainability. The Council must strengthen its oversight of EHCP processes, stabilise SEN transport arrangements, and accelerate delivery of its DSG recovery strategy. Improved system-wide coordination and performance management will be essential to mitigate risk and improve outcomes for children and young people.

Principle C – Defining sustainable outcomes

d. Capital Programme Delivery and Oversight

The delivery of the capital programme continues to be affected by slippage, cost escalation and dependency on external funding. This creates risks to both financial planning and service delivery outcomes.

There is a need to strengthen programme management, improve forecasting accuracy, and enhance governance oversight to ensure timely and effective delivery.

Principle D – Determining outcomes (interventions)

Principle F – Risk, control and financial management

e. Transformation and Programme Governance

The Council is delivering a broad portfolio of transformation activity, including digital, housing, customer experience and place-based regeneration programmes.

However, the scale and interdependency of these initiatives present a risk that governance arrangements become fragmented. Stronger strategic oversight, prioritisation, and clarity of accountability are required to ensure that transformation delivers intended benefits and remains aligned to corporate priorities.

Principle D – Determining outcomes (interventions)

Principle G – Transparency, reporting and accountability

f. Procurement, Contract Management and Commissioning

Increasing market pressures and significant forthcoming contract renewals have exposed weaknesses in commissioning and contract management arrangements.

The Council must strengthen its contract management framework, improve commercial capability, and ensure consistent oversight of strategic suppliers to secure value for money and manage risk effectively.

Principle F – Risk, control and accountability

Principle D – Determining outcomes (interventions)

g. Climate Governance and Environmental Accountability

As the Council develops its refreshed Climate and Environment Strategy, there is a need to strengthen governance arrangements

relating to delivery, performance monitoring and data integrity. Clear accountability, robust reporting frameworks and effective programme management will be required to ensure progress against the Council's net zero ambitions.

Principle C – Defining sustainable outcomes

Principle G – Transparency, reporting and accountability

Governance Action Plan

- The Council has developed a targeted action plan to address the issues identified, including:
- Strengthening financial planning, forecasting and savings delivery
- Improving workforce stability and statutory performance in Children's Services
- Enhancing SEND governance and multi-agency coordination
- Strengthening capital programme governance and reporting
- Establishing a clearer corporate transformation governance framework
- Improving contract management capability and commercial oversight
- Strengthening climate governance and accountability arrangements

Progress will be monitored through:

- Executive Cabinet
- Leadership Team
- Audit Committee
- Programme and thematic governance boards.

Forward Look on Governance

Looking ahead, the Council recognises that governance will need to evolve to respond to:

- Continued financial pressures and the need for long-term financial resilience.
- Increasing demand in social care and SEND services.

- Delivery of large-scale transformation and capital programmes
- Climate commitments and environmental reporting requirements
- The increasing use of data, digital and emerging technologies

The Council will focus on strengthening:

- Strategic oversight and prioritisation
- Governance integration across programmes
- Data quality and performance intelligence
- Organisational capacity and capability

Conclusion

Taking account of the evidence set out above, the Council is satisfied that:

Its governance arrangements were fit for purpose and operating effectively during 2025/26, providing **reasonable assurance** that the Council can achieve its intended outcomes and meet its statutory responsibilities.

This opinion recognises that:

- The Council continues to operate in a high-risk and financially constrained environment.
- There are known areas of governance requiring improvement, particularly in relation to financial sustainability, demand-led services, and programme delivery.

The identification of these areas reflects a robust and transparent assessment process, consistent with the expectations of the CIPFA/SOLACE Addendum

The review has also considered the Council's ability to maintain effective governance in the face of future challenges. This has highlighted the need to:

- strengthen integration between risk, performance and financial management.
- enhance oversight of transformation and capital programmes.
- improve data quality and performance intelligence.

- ensure sufficient organisational capacity and capability.

These areas are critical to ensuring that governance arrangements remain resilient, adaptive and fit for purpose in future years.

Chief Executive – Emma Alexander

Leader of the Council – Cllr Wills

Significant Governance Issue	Key Actions	Lead Officer	Timescale	Assurance / Monitoring
1. Financial Sustainability and Medium-Term Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen in-year budget monitoring and forecasting • Deliver approved savings programme with enhanced oversight • Develop and implement DSG deficit recovery strategy • Update Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) reflecting demand pressures 	Section 151 Officer	Ongoing, with quarterly milestones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Cabinet financial reports • Audit Committee oversight • External Audit Value for Money assessment

<p>2. Children's Services Performance and Improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stabilise workforce through targeted recruitment and retention measures • Reduce caseload variability and improve management oversight • Improve timeliness of statutory processes (ICPCs, CIN, CP) • Maintain inspection readiness and deliver improvement plan 	<p>Director of Children's Services</p>	<p>Ongoing, with monthly performance tracking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ofsted monitoring activity • Corporate Performance Reports • Internal Audit reviews (targeted)
<p>3. SEND System Pressures and Demand Management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accelerate delivery of DSG recovery plan • Improve timeliness and quality of EHCP processes • Review and stabilise SEN transport arrangements • Strengthen 	<p>Director of Children's Services / S151 Officer</p>	<p>2026/27 financial year</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicated SEND Programme Board • Executive reporting on DSG • External review / peer challenge

	multi-agency SEND governance			
4. Capital Programme Delivery and Oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen programme governance and reporting • Improve project planning, risk management and forecasting • Introduce enhanced oversight of externally funded schemes • Ensure alignment to corporate priorities and affordability 	Director of Finance / Director of Growth	Ongoing, with quarterly review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capital Programme Monitoring Reports • Audit Committee visibility • Internal Audit programme coverage
5. Transformation Programme Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a clear corporate transformation governance framework • Define programme interdependencies and prioritisation criteria • Strengthen benefits realisation tracking • Improve reporting to Leadership 	Chief Executive / Director of Transformation (or equivalent)	Framework in place by Q2 2026/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformation Board oversight • Performance and risk reporting • Internal Audit advisory/review work

	Team and Members			
6. Procurement, Contract Management and Commissioning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refresh Contract Management Framework and guidance • Strengthen commercial and commissioning capability across services • Introduce consistent contract monitoring and reporting • Enhance governance over strategic suppliers and key contracts 	Director of Finance / Head of Procurement	Framework refresh by Q3 2026/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement Board / Commercial Board • Audit Committee updates • Internal Audit reviews of contract management
7. Climate Governance and Environmental Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalise and approve Climate and Environment Strategy • Establish clear governance structures and accountabilities • Improve emissions data quality and reporting • Develop delivery plan with measurable milestones 	Director of Place / Environment	Strategy approval in 2026/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate Programme Board • Executive reporting • Scrutiny oversight