

Title of Report:	Finance Annual Business Plan
Committee Report Submitted To:	Finance Committee
Date of Meeting:	15 May 2025
For Decision or For Information	For decision
To be discussed In Committee YES/NO	No

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Cohesive Leadership
Outcome	Council has agreed policies and procedures and decision making is consistent with them.
Lead Officer	Chief Finance Officer

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	March 2025

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	£1,929,008
Included in Current Year Estimates	YES/NO
Capital/Revenue	Revenue
Code	
Staffing Costs	

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	YES/NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	YES/NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	Yes/No	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	Yes/No	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	Yes/No	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 All Council departments are required to prepare an annual business plan.

2.0 Background

2.1 Attached as Appendix A to this report is the Annual Business Plan for the Finance Department for the 2025/26 financial year

3.0 Recommendation

3.1 **It is recommended that** Council approves the Finance Business Plan as presented



**Causeway
Coast & Glens
Borough Council**

***FINANCE
BUSINESS PLAN
2025/26***

SECTION 1

Summary Narrative

The finance department has a current FTE headcount of 23.7, with 4 fully qualified chartered accountants, overseeing net operating expenditure of £66.0m and an average organizational FTE headcount of 635.

The organizational structure has 7 departments headed by either a Director, Chief Officer, or Head of Service, reporting to a CEO. Annual budgets are aligned to departments supported by Finance Business Partners, that report on monthly basis.

The new finance system is now well established and a new payroll system has been implemented in April 2025 to replace the payroll functionality of the previous system. The aim of the new systems will create value in forward planning indicators that support decision making, reduce costs and create efficiencies across the organization using technology.

Purpose of this plan

- Build steps to achieve strategic goals and achieve overall Vision.
- Give a clear sense of what the service is for and the challenges it faces.
- Show how it is supporting Council's priorities.
- Show how it is contributing to the efficiency drive and transformation of service delivery.
- Show how it is aligning its resources to meet the challenges ahead.
- Help us to hold ourselves to account and ensure we deliver for Council and its residents.
- Bring key information together in one place about the service, which Members, staff and stakeholders can understand.

Vision for the service area

Be "Best in Class" through the creation of a high value added, skilled, innovative, and efficient finance department providing accurate, relevant, timely, forward looking financial information, and ensures timely and accurate payment of staff, Councillors, and creditors and accurate recording of all income streams. Provide decision making information and relevant support to decision makers, that will create value and reduce risk, while keeping strong governance and controls in place. Engage internal and external stakeholders to deliver a customer focused service.

Strategic Themes / Functions

1. Development of strong financial governance and budgetary control. (**Finance/Accounting**)
2. Development of efficient processes to enable the payment of Council's suppliers within agreed terms. (**Accounts Payable**)
3. Manage and coordinate Council's debt always maximizing the cash flow available to Council. (**Accounts Receivable**)
4. Ensuring the accurate, timely payment of Council's staff through efficient processes. (**Payroll**)

5. Development of efficient procurement systems enabling Council to achieve maximum value for money on expenditure whilst maintaining a strong governance framework. **(Procurement)**
6. Development of forward-looking financial indicators and reports that will provide information for decision making purposes ahead of events. **(Finance/Accounting)**
7. Build strong relationships with our key partners through transparent engagement, clear and user-friendly financial reporting, and open dialogue. **(Finance/Accounting)**

Strategic Aims of the Service

1. Support the decision-making process across Council by way of providing accurate, timely relevant financial information that is both historical and forward looking.
2. Full review of business processes maximising efficiency.
3. Ensure that the financial system, processes, and controls are fit for purpose providing a strong framework of governance.
4. Maximise digital capability of Council ICT systems allowing for efficient financial workflow across the Borough.

SECTION 2 - SWOT Analysis

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hardworking dedicated qualified and experienced accountants at senior levels. • Staff adapting to change through implementation of new payroll system. • New account and budget reports developed providing greater insight and decision-making information. • Business partnering roles developing that support budget holders to review of financial information. • Defined roles and specialisms within finance department allowing staff to concentrate on areas of specified responsibilities. • Finance and Finance Committee (council members) actively interested to review and govern financial affairs. • Increased utilisation of automated and electronic processes. • Long serving staff – excellent experience and knowledge 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varied processes and administrative detail inherited from legacy bodies. • Inefficient paper based and reliant processes. • Staff require training in new specialist roles. • Bottom heavy transactional and paper-based processing. • Transactional focused on historical data and controls • Forward looking information not yet at best practice levels.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative working with other departments /councils/public bodies. • Rationalisation of processes utilising best practice. • Further creation of specialist roles within department allowing focus on key areas. • Change that allows development and upskilling of staff with training within new specialist roles. • Greater opportunity for interdepartmental working through business partner relationships. • The new finance/payroll systems present opportunities to enhance processes and efficiencies across business. • Forward looking financial information and indicators that supports Council’s decision-making confidence. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inflation may increase costs and may erode Council reserves, impacting on services provided. • Finite income resources fail to meet the demand of Strategic Capital Expenditure. • Aging workforce, retirements and leavers could result in loss of key knowledge and experience • Long serving staff – threat of loss of key staff • Intense focus from NIAO and Councillors puts additional pressure on finite resources. • Increased pressure to reduce budgets could lead to under resourcing in advance of full implementation of efficient systems and procedures. • Inability to meet demands of other Directorates. • Increased legislation/reporting requirements placing greater demands on finite resource.

PESTEL Analysis

A PESTEL Analysis (political, economic, social, technological environmental and legal) is a management methodology and strategic planning approach whereby an organization can assess major external factors that influence the organizational capabilities of its council area and those it serves.

Political	Councilors desire for further cost-cutting and savings has a significant influence on the operations of the council to maintain and increase the services and quality it provides to its rate payer. Management of Councilors desired policy with the expectations of improving service require future looking financial information to support Councilor's and Officers decision making. Continued erosion of Rates Support Grant disadvantages the Borough.
Economic	Economic activity in the council area remains stable but as the economy is faced with increased taxation through employer's national insurance there remains a high level of uncertainty. This could lead to increased costs being passed onto Council for services and goods purchased which may lead to pressure on budgets and therefore could erode Councils reserves, or force reduced services. The future availability of funding to support the Council with these costs remains uncertain.
Social	Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council covers a large geographic area with services demands spread across the entire Borough, cost control is vitally important to assist key decision makers to continue to deliver service to the areas it is most needed.
Technological	Council has replaced its Payroll system this which together with the new Finance system recently installed should provide opportunities to improve service The finance system went live in April 2023, Payroll following in April 2025. Ongoing enhancements of the system through the natural learning curve should change the way finance completes its operations.
Environmental	Constantly changing and increasing environmental demands place even greater pressure on limited budgets therefore finance has a pivotal role in ensuring budget holders are fully informed with regards the associated financial pressures these demands bring.
Legal	Additional/constantly changing legislative or regulatory requirements continue to place increasing demands upon the service.

SECTION 3

Strategic Aims and Objectives Aligned with Council's Strategic Aims and Objectives

1. Cohesive Leadership.
2. Local Economy.
3. Improvement and Innovation.
4. Healthy and Engaged Communities.
5. Climate Change and Our Environment.

Risk Matrix - May 2025

Heat Map

Likelihood	Critical -5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 22. System security 23. Cash concentration 24. Budgetary control 25. Incorrect supplier 26. Cashflow 27. Fraud 		2. Procurement	1. Central Government Funding	
	High -4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 28. Loss of ICT systems 29. Working capital 30. Incomplete reconciliation 31. incorrect journals 				
	Moderate -3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 32. Remote working 33. Arms length bank accs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15. Late Supplier payment 16. Robustness of Estimates 17. Debt non-recovery 18. Timely information 19. Cash handling/transport 20. Capex overspend 21. Error due to paper based 	6. Asset Disposal 7. Wages Payments		5. Staffing age profile
	Low -2			3. System Implementation 14. Inflation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Data Management 9. Data Protection 10. Non-operational assets 11. Incorrect emp. Details 12. Pensions 13. Payroll over/under paid 	4. Payroll Data Management
	Controlled Business Plan -1					
		Controlled -1	Low -2	Moderate -3	High -4	Critical -5

IMPACT

Strategic Objective			
1. Develop and support staff to maximise their potential performance within the organisation, leading to an efficient, effective and motivated team that is customer focused and service led.			
Link to Corporate Aims and Objectives			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cohesive Leadership 			
Work Streams / Operational Actions / Outcomes	Responsible Officer	Timescale	Performance Indicators / Measures of Success
Ensure Governance and Controls	Chief Finance Officer	Ongoing	<p>Unqualified annual accounts ongoing as per previous years.</p> <p>Completion/implementation of audit recommendations within agreed timeframes and reducing NIAO priority 1 issues to 0.</p> <p>A full review of policies and procedures that are aligned to the new systems and signed off by management.</p>
Departmental Structure	Chief Finance Officer	Mar 2026	Review structure of Finance department to ensure it is still fit for purpose and meeting organisational needs
Succession Planning	Chief Finance Officer	Mar 2026	In conjunction with Council's new performance management process develop the skills of current Finance staff in preparation for the inevitable loss of experienced staff given the department's staffing age profile

Strategic Objective

2. Efficient stakeholder management through delivering effective and engaged communications. Building confidence amongst our relevant stakeholders and improving financial performance through respectful and open dialogue.

Link to Corporate Aims and Objectives

- Cohesive Leadership

Work Streams / Operational Actions / Outcomes	Responsible Officer	Timescale	Performance Indicators / Measures of Success
Identify Key Stakeholders and Communicate	Chief Finance Officer	Ongoing	Develop a stakeholder list that groups stakeholders into categories, and update list on a quarterly basis. Develop a stakeholder communications plan and review on an annual basis
Timely team updates and briefing sessions across the Finance Team	Chief Finance Officer	Ongoing	Monthly Questions & Answers sessions from a full finance team perspective. Weekly meetings with senior finance team leads to future planning and historical reflection, that will include recorded actions points to follow up on. Regular FMT meetings with key budget holders and directors.

Strategic Objective

3. Development of an effective procurement and commercial strategy that will increase income, reduce costs while maximizing the use of local suppliers to the benefit of council rate payers.

Link to Corporate Aims

- **Local Economy, Climate Change and Our Environment**

Work Streams / Operational Actions / Outcomes	Responsible Officer	Timescale	Performance Indicators / Measure of Success
Procurement Controls	Procurement Officer	Ongoing	Develop the procurement function through exam based and networked, that will ensure 100% audit compliance and evidence costs savings.
Procurement Add Value	Procurement Officer	Ongoing, with an annual review at Year End	Develop a procurement function that will make savings through procurement and contract management greater than the costs of its own resources.
ICT system integration	Procurement Officer	During 2025/26 Sept 2025	Continue the development of an online contracts register within the newly installed Finance system, linking procurement to contracts to supplier payments adding improved rigour around procurement processes. Replacing outdated procurement platform, to a newer, more secure and robust system.
Social Value Pilot Scheme	Procurement Officer	Mar 2026	Bring greater benefits to the borough through a financial contributions based system currently under development

Strategic Objective

4. Support the decision-making process across Council by way of providing accurate, timely relevant financial information

Link to Corporate Aims and Objectives

- Improvement and Innovation

Work Streams / Operational Actions / Outcomes	Responsible Officer	Timescale	Performance Indicators / Measures of Success
Implementation of the budgetary system within new finance software	Chief Finance Officer	September 2025	Full budget process being run on new software system for 2026/27 rates setting process completing in February 2026.
Revision of the medium-term (4 year) financial plan	Chief Finance Officer	June 2025 draft to SMT, presentation to Council at next available Committee	Presentation of medium-term financial plan to SMT, Finance Committee and Council Annual refresh of medium-term financial plan within 5 months of the new financial year
Management accounts	Accountants	On-going On-going September 2025	Meet current deadlines when accounts produced or beat that deadline. Benchmark other councils and business to identify “best in class” deadlines to meet. Implementation of management information dashboards for all budget holders

Strategic Objective

5. Maximize technology that improves efficiency and effectiveness

Link to Corporate Aims

- Innovation and Transformation

Work Streams / Operational Actions / Outcomes	Responsible Officer	Timescale	Performance Indicators / Measures of Success
Integration of new Finance system with additional Council ICT systems automating the transfer of information between those systems	Chief Finance Officer	Sept 2025	An accounting system that interfaces with other functioning IT systems across the organisation and that reduces manual human intervention, reducing duplication of effort. Implementation of income integration with Legend leisure software
Integration of Payroll system with other HR systems	Chief Finance Officer	Sept 2025	Integration with HR systems to remove duplication of data entry regarding new starts and leavers
Increased automation	Chief Finance Officer	Sept 2025 Mar 2026 Mar 2026 Mar 2026 Mar 2026	Automated bank reconciliation Increased usage of electronic time sheet input Increased usage of electronic expenses claim input Improve data entry through accounts payable system to allow capture of additional information such as units consumed as opposed to just a monetary value Reduction in number of email authorisations for supplier invoice payments

SECTION 4 – Resources

Service Area	Staffing level	Budget
Management and accountants	5	
Payroll	6	
Accounts Payable	5	
Accounts Receivable	4.1	
General Ledger/Management Information	2.6	
Procurement	1	
All Finance	23.7	£1,929,008