

# Public Document Pack



## TO THE CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE **EXECUTIVE**

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Executive to be held on Thursday, 21 March 2024 at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Gloucester Square, Woking, Surrey GU21 6YL.

Please note the meeting will be filmed and will be broadcast live and subsequently as an archive on the Council's website ([www.woking.gov.uk](http://www.woking.gov.uk)). The images and sound recording will also be used for training purposes within the Council. The broadcast will be stopped when the confidential/Part II items on the agenda are reached. Generally, the public seating areas are not filmed. However, by entering the meeting room and using the public seating area, you are consenting to being filmed.

The Chairman of the meeting has the discretion to terminate or suspend filming, if in his/her opinion continuing to do so would prejudice the proceedings of the meeting or, on advice, considers that continued filming might infringe the rights of any individual.

As cameras are linked to the microphones, could Members ensure they switch their microphones on before they start to speak and off when finished and do not remove the cards which are in the microphones.

The agenda for the meeting is set out below.

JULIE FISHER  
Chief Executive

## **AGENDA**

### **PART I - PRESS AND PUBLIC PRESENT**

1. Apologies for Absence
2. Declarations of Interest (Pages 5 - 6)
  - (i) To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests from Members in respect of any item to be considered at the meeting.
  - (ii) In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Strategic Director - Corporate Resources, Kevin Foster, declares a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which he is a Council-appointed director. The companies are listed in the attached schedule. The interests are such that Mr Foster may advise on those items.

- (iii) In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Strategic Director - Communities, Louise Strongitharm, declares a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which she is a Council-appointed director. The companies are listed in the attached schedule. The interests are such that Mrs Strongitharm may advise on those items.
- (iv) In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Head of Transformation, Digital and Customer, Adam Walther, declares a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which he is a Council-appointed director. The companies are listed in the attached schedule. The interests are such that Mr Walther may advise on those items.

3. Minutes (Pages 7 - 14)

To approve the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 1 February 2024 as published.

4. Urgent Business

To consider any business that the Chairman rules may be dealt with under Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

### Questions

5. To deal with any written questions submitted under Section 3 of the Executive Procedure Rules. Copies of the questions and draft replies will be published shortly before the meeting.

### Matters for Recommendation

6. The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress - November 2023 to March 2024 EXE24-009 (Pages 15 - 72)

Reporting Person – Julie Fisher

7. Companies Governance Framework - Shareholder Executive Committee EXE24-025 (Pages 73 - 84)

Reporting Person – Kevin Foster

### Matters for Determination

8. Review of Council Meeting Structure EXE24-026 (Pages 85 - 136)

Reporting Person – Gareth John

9. ThamesWey Central Milton Keynes Limited offer to market EXE23-083 (Pages 137 - 142)

Reporting Person – Kevin Foster

10. Victoria Square Woking Ltd - Share Purchase EXE24-024 (Pages 143 - 146)

Reporting Person – Kevin Foster

11. Asset Disposal EXE24-033 (Pages 147 - 150)  
Reporting Person – Kevin Foster
12. Asset Disposal EXE24-035 (Pages 151 - 156)  
Reporting Person – Kevin Foster
13. Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 – Annual Monitoring Report EXE24-007 (Pages 157 - 160)  
Reporting Person – Gareth John
14. NCIL - Application for Funding - Phoenix Cultural Centre CIC EXE24-039 (Pages 161 - 182)  
Reporting Person – Beverley Kuchar
15. Write off of Sundry Debts EXE24-008 (Pages 183 - 186)  
Reporting Person – Eugene Walker
16. Resident Services Programme EXE24-022 (Pages 187 - 236)  
Reporting Person – Kevin Foster

### **Performance Management**

17. Monitoring Reports - Projects EXE24-029 (Pages 237 - 244)  
Reporting Person – Kevin Foster

### **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

18. The Chairman will move and the Vice-Chair will second:-  
“That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of items 19 and 20 in view of the nature of the proceedings that, if members of the press and public were present during these items, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A, to the Local Government Act 1972.

Paragraph 3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).”

## **PART II – PRESS AND PUBLIC EXCLUDED**

### **Matters for Determination**

19. Asset Disposal EXE24-034 (Pages 245 - 246)  
Reporting Person – Kevin Foster
20. Asset Disposal EXE24-036 (Pages 247 - 248)  
Reporting Person – Kevin Foster

AGENDA ENDS

Date Published - 13 March 2024

For further information regarding this agenda and arrangements for the meeting, please contact Julie Northcote on 01483 743053 or email [julie.northcote@woking.gov.uk](mailto:julie.northcote@woking.gov.uk)



**Mixed Sources**

Product group from well-managed forests and other controlled sources

[www.fsc.org](http://www.fsc.org) Cert no. SA-COC-001794  
© 1996 Forest Stewardship Council



# Agenda Item 2.

## Schedule Referred to in Declaration of Interests

### Council-appointed directorships

<b>Kevin Foster, Strategic Director – Corporate Resources</b>	
Brookwood Cemetery Limited	Kingfield Community Sports Centre Limited
Brookwood Park Limited	LAC 2021 Limited (Dormant)
Export House Limited	Woking Necropolis and Mausoleum Limited
Woking Shopping Limited	

<b>Louise Strongitharm, Strategic Director – Communities</b>	
Rutland Woking (Carhouse Lane) Limited	Rutland Woking (Residential) Limited
Rutland (Woking) Limited	

<b>Adam Walther, Head of Transformation, Digital and Customer</b>	
Brookwood Cemetery Limited	Thamesway Developments Limited
Brookwood Park Limited	Thamesway Energy Limited
Thamesway Central Milton Keynes Limited	Thamesway Limited
Thamesway Sustainable Communities Limited	Thamesway Solar Limited
Woking Necropolis and Mausoleum Limited	



Executive 1 February 2024

---

MINUTES  
OF A MEETING OF THE  
**EXECUTIVE**

held on 1 February 2024

Present:

Cllr A-M Barker (Chairman)  
Cllr W Forster (Vice-Chair)

Cllr P Graves	Cllr E Nicholson
Cllr I Johnson	Cllr D Roberts
Cllr L Lyons	

Also Present: Councillor L Rice.

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence were received.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor I Johnson declared an interest in minute item 6 – General Fund Budget 2024-25 and Proposed Savings in respect of the reference to Citizens Advice Woking arising from his wife's employment by the charity. The interest was such that Councillor Johnson would leave the Council Chamber during the determination of the item.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Strategic Director – Corporate Resources, Kevin Foster, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which he was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that Mr Foster could advise the Executive on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Strategic Director – Communities, Louise Strongitharm, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which she was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that Mrs Strongitharm could advise the Executive on those items.

The interest of the Head of Transformation, Digital and Customer, Adam Walther, was referred to in the agenda but it should be noted that Mr Walther was not present at the meeting.

**3. MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 18 January 2024 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

**4. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Urgent Business under Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

**5. QUESTIONS**

The Leader welcomed Ramona Thevenet who had submitted a question under Section 3 of the Executive Procedure Rules regarding Council Tax. A copy of the question together with the reply was before the Executive. The question, together with the reply from the Leader of the Council, was presented as follows:

Question from Ramona Thevenet

“Would Woking Council reconsider their intention of raising Woking Council Tax from 10% to 7%? I believe this to be fair as it is more in line with the average wage increase last year of 6.8%. I have obtained 116 signatures on a petition on the change.org website where Woking residents are also unhappy with an intended 10% increase. Link below.

[Petition · Demand Fair Increase in Council Tax by Woking Council · Change.org](#)”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“Local Government Minister, Simon Hoare, has said he feels a 10% increase would be 'appropriate and proportionate' for Woking Council. Woking needs to make this increase as part of putting its own house in order. This is part of a package, which includes Government support to get us to a balanced budget.

We did put forward a lower, benchmarked figure, which took Woking to a comparable level with the highest charging boroughs in Surrey. It was clear that this would not be acceptable.

Most of the Council Tax paid by Woking residents goes to Surrey County Council (74%). Woking gets just 12%. The Police and Crime Commissioner gets 14%. A 10% increase in Woking's share of Council Tax is a 1% increase on the total Council Tax bill. The extra amount payable to Woking Council will be 50p a week from the baseline Band D property.

We recognise that any increase will add to cost of living struggles so will use some of the increase for a hardship fund for those who find it difficult to pay.”

Ramona Thevenet was thanked for her question and invited to ask a supplementary question.

Supplementary Question from Ramona Thevenet

“Thank you. I don't believe that to be fair, I believe that to be lazy, sloppy, disproportionate. I would like the Council to reconsider raising the tax proportionate to the banding of the housing. So for example, Band A and B 6% increase, C and D 8% increase, E and F 10% increase, G plus 15% increase and whatever your accountant would have to play with the figures to make that the balanced budget.”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“Thank you, I don't actually believe that's possible within the guidelines that govern how Council Tax is applied. Of course, if someone's in a Band A property then the increase becomes around 20 pence a week, a Band B property is around 30 pence a week. So it's obviously proportionate, the increase in terms of the valuation of your property as set in the early 1990's I believe. It's not something that we want to do to put Council Tax up by that amount, but it is important people realise that they will actually pay a lot more when Surrey County Council make an increase in their Council Tax, which I understand is likely to be a 4.99% increase because they take 74% of the Council Tax. You can imagine that's going to be substantially more of an increase that people will need to pay. It is important we try and help people, and that's why we've set up the hardship fund to make sure there is support on our part of the Council Tax, and I would hope that Surrey County Council might do something similar for their part of the Council Tax which has a bigger impact on our residents. Thank you very much for your question, much appreciate you taking the time to set up the petition and then when there wasn't time to submit that to come here and put a question. It is really appreciated.”

The deadline for written questions from members of the public was 12 noon, seven days before the Executive. The next Executive would be held on 21 March 2024, so the deadline for written questions was 12 noon, 14 March 2024.

**6. GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2024-25 AND PROPOSED SAVINGS EXE24-001**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Ann-Marie Barker, provided a short update regarding the Council's budget savings. In order to achieve a balanced budget, the Council faced the difficult decision to remove all grant funding for charities and voluntary bodies. The Leader advised that the Council was working with Citizens Advice Woking and Woking Community Transport, two charities which provided an invaluable service in the Borough and had been the most significant recipients of funds in the past, to try and find a way ahead in which they could continue to deliver a reduced service for local people. The Leader urged both groups to collaborate with the Council rather than campaign against the Council, stressing that there was no money in Council budgets for grants. The Council would continue to provide office accommodation where it could and seek to find funds that could be used to deliver new business models that enabled a revised service from these charities. The Council would be speaking to both Citizens Advice Woking and Woking Community Transport again next week and the Leader hoped a way ahead could be found.

Councillor Roberts, Portfolio Holder for Finance, introduced the report which recommended to Council service savings of £8.4m and provided updates on the processes for Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) and public consultation which had been part of the decision-making process. It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the report at its meeting on 29 January 2024. The Portfolio Holder explained that an Extraordinary meeting of Council on 4 March 2024 would receive a report finalising the treatment of the Council's debt in 2024-25 and the level of Council Tax.

The Executive discussed the regrettable but necessary proposed savings for 2024-25 which included a staff reduction programme of up to 20% across most Council services resulting in the loss of some 60 employees, the removal of community grant funding, the closure of public toilets, transferring sports pavilions and community centres to community ownership, reductions to street cleaning and grounds maintenance services, and increasing fees and charges for non-statutory services. The savings had been subject to public and staff consultation, benchmarking with statistically similar councils, and had been reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Finance Working Group and at Member Briefings. The Portfolio Holder thanked all Members for their input. The Executive was informed that, despite these savings, the Council still faced a deficit on its business-as-usual services of £12.4m and required Government support to set a legally balanced budget. Without Government support, the Council's budget deficit next year could be up to £785m given the scale of its debt problem. The Extraordinary Council on 4 March 2024 would receive a report on the Government's support mechanisms; a Capitalisation Directive and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) exceptional support.

The Executive welcomed the work undertaken by the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Officers and residents to find a viable option to keep the Pool in the Park open in 2024-25 by increasing fees and charges. The Community Asset Transfer Policy discussed at the last Executive was highlighted as an alternative way to run facilities such as sports pavilions and community centres. It was noted that the Council had recently facilitated local charities to meet The National Lottery to discuss options for funding.

The Executive thanked Officers for their hard work on the 2024-25 budget and agreed to recommend the proposals to Council on 8 February 2024, noting that a further report on the treatment of debt and level of Council Tax would be received at an Extraordinary Council meeting on 4 March 2024.

#### **RECOMMENDED to Council**

**That (i) the £8.4m of savings set out in Appendix 3b to the report be agreed;**

**(ii) the Equality Impact Assessment and public consultation processes on the savings proposals that are summarised in Appendix 5 to the report, with detailed reports on each resident facing saving proposal, be noted as part of the decision-making process; and**

**(iii) it be noted a further report to Full Council on 4 March 2024 will receive a final report from the Director of Finance to finalise the treatment of the Council's debt and Council Tax in 2024/25.**

Reason: The contents of the report is to ensure open and transparent governance in the financial affairs of the Council in balancing the 2024/25 Budget.

**7. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGETS 2024-25 EXE24-002**

The Executive received the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budgets 2024-25 for recommendation to Council. It was noted that a review of recharge allocations had been undertaken during 2023-24 to ensure recharges were fair and reasonable to the HRA, and the 2024-25 budget assumptions included those adjusted recharges. The Executive was informed that the HRA was forecast to make an estimated surplus of some £960k in 2024-25. It was reported that the 2024-25 HRA Budget included an increase in interest costs that would be incurred from borrowing an additional £2.5m to support the capital programme for housing. Due to the poor condition of the Council's housing stock, capital investment was required to fund high risk safety remedial works and Decent Homes improvements. The Executive welcomed the 30-year HRA Business Plan and the Housing Asset Management Plan which was part of the Capital Programme report later on the agenda. Consideration of reaching Net Zero by 2030 and improving energy efficiency was highlighted when investing in and refurbishing the Council's housing estate.

Regarding service charges, the Portfolio Holder for Housing highlighted the need for support to be made available to vulnerable tenants to ensure that those tenants claimed benefits to which they were entitled and which would cover service charges.

Following national issues around damp and disrepair, it was highlighted that there was a new Government requirement for all local authorities and social landlords to consult Council tenants. This positive step to consult tenants would take place in Woking in the coming months.

The Executive welcomed the Council's focus on homes for local people and the investment planned in the Council's social housing to tackle fire safety and to undertake Decent Homes improvements.

**RECOMMENDED to Council**

**That (i) the Final Housing Revenue Account budgets for 2024-25, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed; and**

**(ii) with effect from 1 April 2024, rents be increased by 7.7%.**

Reason: To approve the resources necessary to implement the Council's objectives for Housing and to enable the Council to determine charges to tenants for 2024/25.

**8. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023-24 TO 2027-28 EXE24-003**

The Executive received the Capital Programme 2023-24 to 2027-28 which set out the investments required to deliver the Council's key strategies and objectives. Following the Section 114 Notice, it was noted that the Capital Programme (formerly known as the Investment Programme) had been largely suspended with provisions only for items such as urgent health and safety and regulatory works, Housing Asset Management Programmes funded by the HRA, and payments related to business cases agreed with the Commissioners and DLUHC. Attention was drawn to the Capital Planning Principles adopted by the Council in July 2023 for the General Fund Capital Programme year 2024-25 and the period of the MTFS.

As discussed under the Housing Revenue Account Budgets 2024-25 item, the Executive welcomed the Council's new focus on homes for local people and the significant upscaling of the Housing Capital Programme. Investment was planned in the Council's social housing to tackle fire safety and to undertake Decent Homes improvements, and work was taking place on a 30-year HRA Business Plan.

The Executive also welcomed the inclusion in the Capital Programme of Pool in the Park capital maintenance, play area and parks and green spaces works, and West Byfleet Recreation Ground tennis courts.

Regarding Byfleet flood relief works, it was noted that although the Council was no longer able to make a £5m contribution as originally intended it was still able to give land to the scheme. Officers were looking at whether the Environment Agency and Surrey County Council could increase their contributions to the scheme.

**RECOMMENDED to Council**

**That (i) the Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2027/28 be approved subject to reports on projects where appropriate; and**

**(ii) the proposed financing arrangements be approved.**

Reason: To recommend to Council that it approves the capital resources for 2023/24 onwards considered necessary to support the Council's service plans and objectives.

**9. FUTURE OF BROCKHILL EXE24-017**

Following consultation on the proposed closure of Brockhill Extra Care Housing agreed by the Executive at its meeting on 14 December 2023, the Executive received a report which provided an update on the results of the consultation and which recommended to Council the closure of Brockhill. Councillor Nicholson, Portfolio Holder for Extra Care, expressed regret at the proposed closure of Brockhill Extra Care Housing scheme, a much valued and loved facility. Due to the significant capital expenditure required on fire safety remedial works, a full heating system replacement and limited investment over the years, the building was unfortunately considered unviable due to the level of capital investment needed; some £5.8m over the next 10 years. In addition, the design and layout of the building did not meet the current expectations for extra care housing as set out in Surrey County Council's Accommodation with Care and Support Strategy and national best practice. The Council was working with SCC Adult Social Care to support residents with identifying and moving to alternative accommodation based on their individual assessed needs.

The Executive was informed that no discussions had taken place on the long-term future of the Brockhill site as the focus was on supporting residents through this difficult period.

Following a query regarding the medium-term plans to return some of the lost capacity as a result of the closure of Brockhill, the Portfolio Holder for Extra Care advised that she had submitted a question to SCC Cabinet regarding capacity concerns. SCC had advised that it did have an Accommodation with Care and Support Strategy dated July 2019 which looked at the County Council's overall strategy across Surrey. In the future, SCC was planning to deliver about 200 units in North West Surrey.



**RECOMMENDED to Council**

- That (i) the closure of Brockhill Extra Care Housing be agreed;
- (ii) the residents of Brockhill be offered suitable alternative accommodation which best meets their needs and preferences and be paid Statutory Home Loss and Disturbance payments, where eligible; and
- (iii) authority be delegated to the Strategic Director - Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to make any further decisions required in respect of the closure.

Reason: To set out the future plans for Brockhill Extra Care Housing scheme and the support that will be available to impacted residents.

**10. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

The Executive considered the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information contained in the Performance Management Report – Quarter 3, 2023/24. The report, covering October to December 2023, summarised the financial picture, provided progress against the IRP and KPIs, and was structured around the three Directorates with the Council. The Executive recognised the intense activity being undertaken by the Council.

Regarding the Communities Directorate, the Portfolio Holder for Housing drew attention to the KPIs relating to homelessness and allocations on pages 18 to 19. The need to bring more Sheerwater properties back into use was highlighted.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Meals highlighted a campaign which was currently being publicised by the Council offering a free two day trial for potential new clients to experience and sample the food on offer. Councillor Nicholson encouraged Members to raise awareness of the offer which was hoped would increase take-up of the community meals service.

**RESOLVED**

That the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information contained in the Performance Management Report – Quarter 3, 2023-24, be received.

Reason: To manage the performance of the Council.

**11. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT - BUDGET MONITORING AND FORECAST 2023-24 - QUARTER 3 EXE24-010**

The Executive received a Financial Monitoring Report which set out the material financial issues identified since the 2023/24 budget was set, based on the income and expenditure as at end of December 2023 (Quarter 3). The Executive was advised that the December (Q3) outturn projected an overspend of £3.277m for the year, compared with a £7.5m projected overspend reported for September (Q2). It was noted that many changes between forecasting periods had been due to better forecasting and monitoring.

It was suggested that Officers consider the presentation of future reports in order to help Members better understand the numbers.

RESOLVED

That (i) the Council's forecast General Fund outturn position for 2023/24 be noted; and

(ii) it be noted that the Corporate Leadership Team will continue to identify mitigations to enable the net expenditure for 2023/24 to be contained within budget approved by Council on 23 February 2023.

Reason: Controlling the outturn within budget is essential to maintain financial control.

**This document was published on Friday 2 February 2024 and the decisions within it will be implemented on Monday 12 February 2024, subject to call-in.**

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and ended at 8.52 pm.

Chairman: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

## THE IMPROVEMENT AND RECOVERY PLAN PROGRESS – NOVEMBER 2023 TO MARCH 2024

### Executive Summary

Following statutory government intervention and the issuing of a Section 114 Notice, the Council was required to put in place an [Improvement and Recovery Plan](#).

The Improvement and Recovery Plan will deliver the expectations detailed in the [Secretary of State's Directions published on 25 May 2023](#) and will help the Council return to meeting its best value duty. It will also draw upon the recommendations of the [non-statutory external assurance review](#) into the Council's finances, investments and related governance.

The three-to-five-year Improvement and Recovery Plan, which was adopted at Council on 22 August 2023, details the actions that the Council will undertake to deliver against the Government Directions, together with milestones and delivery targets to measure progress.

The Council is required to report to the Commissioners on the delivery of the Improvement and Recovery Plan after three months, six months and thereafter at six-monthly intervals, or at such intervals as the Commissioners may direct. The first three-month progress report was submitted to Commissioners in August, the second in November and this report outlines the next three months' progress.

The Chief Executive's position statement in relation to the Improvement and Recovery Plan is included at Appendix A.

The full progress update is included at Appendix B.

The Executive is asked to consider and recommend to Council that the progress outlined in the report be approved.

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### **RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL That**

**the third Improvement and Recovery Plan progress report to Commissioners be approved.**

The item(s) above will need to be dealt with by way of a recommendation to Council.
---

## The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024

**Reporting Person:** Julie Fisher, Chief Executive  
Email: Julie.Fisher@woking.gov.uk

**Contact Person:** Lee Danson, Senior Programme Manager  
Email: Lee.Danson@woking.gov.uk

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Ann-Marie Barker  
Email: cllrAnn-Marie.Barker@woking.gov.uk

**Date Published:** 13 March 2024

## Chief Executive Position Statement

### Introduction

1. I am pleased to present the third of Woking Borough Council's (WBC) Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP) progress reports, providing an update on how the Council has responded to the Government Directions. This report sets out progress since November 2023 to March 2024. In my position statement, I want to recognise the continued progress of the Council, whilst also highlighting the key challenges and risks WBC faces going forward.
2. In December 2023, Jim Taylor stepped down from his role as lead Commissioner for WBC, and I would like to recognise the significant contribution he made to Woking, through both his work on the external assurance review and his support and guidance in our first seven months of intervention. Following Jim's departure, Sir Tony Redmond joined the Council as lead Commissioner in January 2024 and, alongside Commissioners Carol Culley and Mervyn Greer, has already made a strong contribution to driving the continued delivery of the IRP. I am proud that, throughout the intervention, WBC has maintained an open and collaborative relationship with Commissioners and Government, which I believe has significantly strengthened our work together.

### Background

3. As with my last update, all progress detailed in this position statement must be set against the scale of the challenge that we face here at WBC. The Council is in an extremely difficult financial position due to its historic investment decisions which has left it £2.1 billion in debt. There are also issues with historic governance and record-keeping which means that, in some areas, we may still not fully understand the complexities of some of our financial arrangements. At the same time, the Council still lacks some of the data, systems, and capacity to enable it to respond quickly to many of the challenges it faces.
4. The IRP outlines what the Council will do over a period of three to five years, to respond to this significant challenge and the Government Directions. The plan is divided into five themes, which I shall report on in turn.

### Theme 1: Financial Recovery

5. Across two meetings in February and March 2024, the Council set a legal budget. This included agreeing £8.4m of reductions to its service budgets, a plan for handling its historic debt, and details of a Government financial support package. This is the culmination of a robust budget development process which included public consultation, Equalities Impact Assessments, and the development of detailed options appraisals. It is not possible to deliver such a high level of savings in a one-year period without it having some impact on the services to the residents of Woking, and this is why we adopted a strategy that targeted maintaining funding for statutory services to help shape the savings proposals we brought forward. I am proud that, through this work, we have found alternative ways of continuing to provide many important services – whether that is by increasing fees at Pool in the Park, transferring services to partners or by providing a route for council-owned assets to be transferred to the community.
6. The budget clearly illustrates to Government and residents that the Council is taking steps to get its own house in order and move towards financial sustainability. However, significant financial challenges remain. The Council has an ongoing annual liability that

## **The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024**

is unaffordable without Government support. We will need to build on the constructive conversations that have been held with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to date, to agree how this liability will be handled in future years.

7. Although the quality of the Council's budget information has improved, there is still work to do to ensure that the processes, systems, and capability within the Finance team enables the regular and reliable production of budget monitoring information. There are also several interim appointments within Finance, which the Council recognises is not sustainable. On 8 February 2024, the Council endorsed the appointment of a permanent Strategic Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer), and a review of the Finance function will be one of his priority tasks, developing the team and ensuring the reliance on interims is reduced. Another key focus will be the development of a debt reduction plan, that delivers value for money for the public purse whilst enabling WBC to focus on delivering essential services for residents.
8. The Financial Control Panel continues to meet and is chaired by a service director rather than by the Section 151 officer. This service ownership promotes financial accountability and responsibility across the organisation.

### **Theme 2: Commercial**

9. Good progress is being made across each of the workstreams within the Commercial Theme of the IRP. An overarching Commercial Strategy is being developed that establishes clear commercial objectives for the Council, which incorporates all of the Council's commercial activity, clearly articulates a deep understanding of the markets the Council has made its investments in, and knows how to approach balancing the need to reduce the Council's debt whilst delivering value for money. Initial work has begun in this area and further development of the strategy will be a priority for the coming months.
10. A key achievement over the last reporting period has been the production of a draft Asset Rationalisation Plan (ARP). This work has progressed quickly following the appointment of a Strategic Assets Consultant. This document sets out the approach to asset rationalisation over the next 36 months, to realise the maximum beneficial capital investment return from the Commercial Investment Portfolios. A significant asset sale has also been agreed, with Victoria Gate having exchanged and completed in February 2024.
11. There has also been significant progress in strengthening governance and assurance in relation to the Council's companies. Proposals to disband the existing Shareholder Advisory Group and create a new Shareholder Executive Committee have been developed and are being considered at the 21 March 2024 meeting of the Executive. This new model will ensure the appropriate distinction between the Council and its companies is in place, alongside greater accountability and transparency.
12. Through the Commercial Workstream of the IRP, we are working with the Council's companies to develop business plans, in line with the Commercial Governance Framework and expected industry norms. The outcome of this work is that each company will have a clear purpose and strategic direction, alongside a set of performance measures which the new Shareholder Executive Committee can utilise to hold the Board and Chief Executive to account.

### **Theme 3: Governance and Assurance**

13. In January 2024, the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) held a workshop with Members, sharing the findings from their review of the Council's scrutiny function and enabling Councillors to feed into an action plan. The feedback from this workshop has

## **The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024**

also supported a review of the Council meeting structure, with a proposal being developed that aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the governance process at WBC. The proposals have been developed with Member engagement and will be considered by Council later this month. If approved the changes will be implemented for the next municipal year.

14. Work is also taking place to strengthen the role of the Standards and Audit Committee, with the recruitment of two new independent Members due to commence shortly. The Local Government Association (LGA) are also undertaking an assurance exercise to strengthen the Committee's effectiveness and there is a proposal to increase the number of meetings from three to four a year.

### **Theme 4: Organisation and Service Redesign**

15. Phase Two of Council's Fit for the Future Staff Restructure is nearing completion, delivering £2.4m of savings. This has been a significant programme of work, delivered at pace, and I would once again like to recognise the professionalism of staff who have maintained essential service delivery to residents throughout a very challenging period.
16. Following consultation with both Members and Officers, the Council's leadership has developed a clear vision for the future organisation. The vision, '*A financially and environmentally sustainable Council, delivering services that residents value in every part of the borough*' also includes a set of mission statements that articulate how the vision will be delivered. The vision will be a key tool for the Council, underpinning the development of future strategies and operating models, such as a new Organisation Development Strategy. The Council is going through a significant transformation, and we need to support staff through this change, providing development opportunities that will motivate our teams and enable the Council to deliver for residents.
17. Another focus in the coming months will be embedding the service changes arising out of the budget. The successful delivery of these changes will enable savings to be realised whilst, wherever possible, looking to minimise the impact for residents. For example, in February 2024, the Council approved a new Community Asset Transfer policy, providing the framework for the community to take responsibility for Council-owned assets that we can no longer afford to run. The Council is utilising UK Shared Prosperity Funding to deliver this work, including the recruitment of a new Community Broker post, who will support interested community groups to take on several of our sports pavilions and community centres, enabling several valuable local services to be maintained.

### **Theme 5: Housing Recovery and Improvement**

18. In December 2023, the Executive approved a new theme to be added to the IRP – Housing Recovery and Improvement. This theme aims to ensure the service is compliant with housing regulatory standards. The workstreams and projects are designed to deliver an efficient, reliable, and modern housing service that meets the Council's statutory requirements and supports strong neighbourhoods and communities for our residents.
19. The initial focus of the theme has been to establish the programme, with a focus on prioritising building safety. The scoping of other workstreams is still being finalised but will include work to improve a number of areas within the service, including resident engagement and consultation, finance, staffing, and culture. I am pleased that this workstream is bringing a renewed focus and investment in Local Authority Housing – something that will make a huge difference to many of our most vulnerable residents.

## **Conclusion**

20. To conclude, I am proud of the progress that has been made over the past three months, with the Council achieving a significant milestone with the approval of the 2024/2025 budget. However, these achievements must be set against the scale of the challenge that we face at WBC and the focus must now move to continuing to stabilise the Council's financial position whilst delivering the ambitious programme of savings and embedding service changes.
21. At the end of March 2024, I will leave the Council and handover to Richard Carr who will commence his role as Managing Director Commissioner for WBC from the start of April. Richard brings with him extensive experience as a local authority chief executive, and we are working together to ensure a smooth transition. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the committed and talented staff, Councillors, and Commissioners here at Woking, who all work in the best interests of residents and businesses. I leave the Council confident that it has made significant progress on its recovery journey which will continue in the years ahead.



## Progress Report

### 1.0 Government Intervention

- 1.1 The Council remains in a challenging financial position. As previously reported, this is due to historical commercial and regeneration investments leading to unsustainable levels of borrowing. The Council has not made, nor does it have the financial capacity to make, sufficient provision to repay this debt. Furthermore, the level of service provision historically enjoyed by residents has become dependent on the use of reserves and high target levels from commercial income which are no longer available.
- 1.2 The Council needs to significantly reconfigure services, taking 25% out of its gross revenue budget to live within the resources available, alongside rationalising the assets held to reduce the £2bn debt WBC holds and make sufficient provision for the repayment of that debt. It needs to consider the future of commercial ventures, particularly Victoria Square Woking Ltd. and the ThamesWey group of companies, in a way that best protects the public purse. The Council also needs to ensure that all the steps are in place to deliver sound commercial governance and financial management, and to deliver the scale of organisational change required. The Council continues discussions with the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) to negotiate a substantial package of Government support.
- 1.3 On 25 May 2023, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities announced an intervention package and a set of Directions (see Appendix 1) to ensure that the Council was able to comply with its best value duty under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. The basis for the intervention is the following: -
  - *“The scale of the financial and commercial risks facing your Authority, which are compounded by the Authority’s approach to financial and debt management, corporate governance, including scrutiny of strategic financial decision making, commercial projects and property management. This has been made clear by the findings of the External Assurance Review that Minister Rowley commissioned in January.*
  - *The failure of the Authority to provide assurance to Ministers and the Department on the adequacy of the actions that it is taking to address the issues or provide assurance of its capacity to take the necessary action, considering the scale and pace of the response required.”*
- 1.4 The intervention package is formed of actions the Council is directed to take, and powers over council functions to be enacted by Commissioners. The Directions will be in place for five years. This is a longer duration than in other councils’ interventions which reflects the severity of the challenge at Woking, in comparison to other intervention areas.
- 1.5 The Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP) was developed following the intervention and sets out actions to address the issues outlined above.
- 1.6 The Council is required to report to the Commissioners on the delivery of the IRP after three months, six months and thereafter at six-monthly intervals, or at such intervals as the Commissioners may direct. The first three-month progress report was submitted to Commissioners in August, the second in November and this report outlines the next three month’s progress.
- 1.7 At the March Improvement and Recovery Board, the Board reviewed a maturity assessment of the journey so far. This incorporated the nine Directions and the activity

## The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024

underway to deliver the success measures associated with each direction. The document includes all outputs and capabilities that have been delivered in the first 10 months of the intervention and next steps. Each activity was assessed against a 1 to 5 criteria. This is designed to show the overall progress since the start of the intervention in May 2023 and recognise that there is still a way to go. The Journey so Far maturity assessment is found in Appendix 5.

### 2.0 The Improvement and Recovery Plan

2.1 The IRP approved in August contained four themes. In December 2023 the Executive approved a fifth theme to focus on Housing recovery and improvement. The themes and their strategic aims are:

- (i) **Financial recovery:** Sustainable budget management, making difficult decisions whilst delivering against Council strategic priorities and safeguarding future capacity.
- (ii) **Commercial:** Release the Council from unaffordable commitments, whilst protecting the public purse and optimising the value of existing assets.
- (iii) **Governance and Assurance:** Ensure risk is managed and decisions are made transparently and safely, improving future decision-making.
- (iv) **Organisation and Service Redesign:** Deliver a smaller, data driven organisation, where staff feel empowered and digitally confident, and are delivering on key priorities.
- (v) **Housing Recovery and Improvement:** Ensure the service is compliant with all the housing regulatory standards, delivering an efficient, reliable, and modern service that meets our statutory requirements, and supports strong neighbourhoods and communities for our residents.

2.2 All the Directions from Government are aligned to one or more of the themes, with progress reported to the Secretary of State as part of the governance arrangements. Each Direction has one or more success measure by which the Commissioners will judge if the Council has improved sufficiently. The full success measures are included at Appendix 2.

2.3 Updated IRP Theme Summary Plans are included in Appendix 6 which includes the new theme and also updated actions for the other themes.

### 3.0 Progress since November 2023

3.1 This section describes the progress that the Council has made since the second progress report which was submitted to the Commissioners in early December. The progress is grouped by theme and is aligned to each of the Directions.

## 4.0 Financial Recovery Theme

**Direction:** An action plan to achieve financial sustainability.

**Success measure:** The Council has a balanced revenue budget and a sustainable MTFS.

4.1 The Financial Control Panel continues to meet twice a week to ensure all spend is robustly challenged. The terms of reference are currently being reviewed to incorporate more challenge on procurement and contract issues. The aim of this work is to have

## **The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024**

better organisational oversight of spend and identify potential improvements to collective procurement for certain areas to improve value for money.

- 4.2 Since the Medium-Term Financial Plan was updated in September 2023, there has been significant work carried out to validate the savings that had been identified. This led to £8.4m revenue savings for the 2024/25 budget which were approved at the first of two 2024/2025 budget setting meetings of Council on 8 February. Prior to this there has been extensive Member engagement on the savings options and on the component parts of the budget. This has enabled Members to make very difficult, but informed decisions based on evidence and supported by high levels of information. This engagement included multiple sessions with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; several briefings for the Finance Working Group to drill down into the key financial issues; and a series of all-Member briefings. It is important to note that the budget reports for both the Council meetings were prepared jointly by the Section 151 Officer and the Finance Commissioner.
- 4.3 The second budget report (Council meeting 4 March) sets out the full 2024/25 budget position for the Council, taking into account the previously agreed service changes, the final changes in the level of resources available to the Council and the final debt position. It sets out the proposed treatment of the deficit from the Council's debt arising from its historic investments and how the Exceptional Financial Support being offered by Government will be used to set a legally balanced budget. Again, this report was jointly produced by the Section 151 Officer and the Finance Commissioner.
- 4.4 The work that has led to these budget reports has largely been supported by temporary resources through consultancy and contractors. This is not sustainable. A permanent Section 151 Officer has been appointed and will start in April. There is an outline structure for a revised finance function which will be driven by the new Section 151 Officer and put in place over the next period. Further work is needed to ensure processes and systems are robust and supported by the necessary capability and capacity in the finance team.
- 4.5 The Statement of Accounts for 2022/23 was scheduled to be presented to the Standards and Audit Committee in November 2023, however this was not possible and it is now due in June 2024 which will be on an unadjusted basis. Following this, a report on outturn will be considered by the Corporate Leadership Team. Statement of Accounts 2023/24 are due in summer. The Statement of Accounts adjusted/final (subject to audit) versions for 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21, 2021/22, and 2022/23 will follow the completion of audit reports by BDO on the unadjusted versions which are now due by Summer 2024 (in accordance with the national "backstop" dates). The Council has struggled to resource the closure of the 2022/23 accounts alongside the priority of the 2024/25 budget, despite employing interim resources. However, PWC are now progressing this work, having successfully assisted in helping finalise the 2024/25 budget.
- 4.6 Grant Thornton is currently looking at the Value for Money (VfM) assessments that are part of the 2023/24 accounts and a major investigative VfM review report of the Council's previous decision making and governance is imminent. Planning for the audit of the 2023/24 final accounts audit by Grant Thornton has also commenced.
- 4.7 An area that required major improvements was financial reporting and budget monitoring. A process is now in place which brings service performance and financial performance reporting together, presented to the leadership team monthly and quarterly to Members. While work has been done to improve this, much is still required. This will be the area of focus for the next period.
- 4.8 Significant work has been undertaken with Government on how the Council can set a legal budget given the scale of its debt problem. Without that support the Council's

## The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024

budget deficit next year could be up to £785million. Much of this is a one-off, including restating the debt repayment provision (Minimum Revenue Provision) that should have previously been made, but there is also a significant ongoing annual liability that is unaffordable without Government support.

**Direction:** Action plan to ensure the capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable and affordable.

**Success measure:** The Council's capital investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable.

- 4.9 The 2024/25 budget report to 4 March Council was accompanied by the required suite of Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategies. These strategies have been comprehensively reviewed and updated to reflect the pivot away from major investments funded by borrowing to asset rationalisation and debt reduction. They will form the basis of quarterly reporting on debt and treasury indicators to Members during the year.
- 4.10 The Treasury Strategy also approved an updated Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP i.e., provision for debt repayment) policy that meets best practice and also a set of Principles to guide a Debt Reduction Plan, linked to the Council's Asset Rationalisation Plan.
- 4.11 The costs of debt financing and cash flow modelling have been thoroughly reviewed and improved modelling developed with the support of external advisers that is now embedded in the internal team.
- 4.12 The £78m investment to complete Victoria Square and Sheerwater regeneration phases met state subsidy requirements and has received Government funding support via the Capitalisation Directive.

**Direction:** A strict debt reduction plan.

**Success factor:** The Council's debt position has been improved.

- 4.13 The Council's debt position is confirmed and is based on updated savings plans, the revised MRP and the asset sale plan. The commercial strategy currently in development will support this. The first significant sale was made in January 2024, and it was agreed that all receipts from asset sales will be used to reduce the Council's Capital Financing Requirement (CFR).
- 4.14 The Asset Rationalisation Plan (ARP) is now in draft. This document sets out the approach to asset rationalisation over the next 36 months in order to achieve the core aim of realising, over a relatively short period of time, the maximum beneficial capital investment return from the Commercial Investment Portfolios.
- 4.15 A Debt Reduction Plan is being developed by the Section 151 Officer alongside the ARP. The Treasury Management Strategy approved by Council on 4 March included the principles for repayment of the debt from the proceeds of any sales under the ARP. The key principle is that all sales proceeds will be assumed to be applied to reducing the level of debt, except for housing assets. It is an imperative for the Council to reduce its levels of outstanding debt and the Asset Rationalisation Plan and associated Debt Reduction Plan will need to be completed and approved by the Council and Commissioners within the first quarter of 2024/25.

**Direction:** Compliance with financial management guidelines (updated Minimum Revenue Provision policy).

## The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024

**Success Factor:** The Council's functions are operating in line with the appropriate rules, guidance and good practice. The Council has a compliant Housing Revenue Account.

- 4.16 Revised Treasury Management Strategy and MRP Policy agreed 4 March.
- 4.17 The work on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) recharges is now complete back to 2019 and adjustments have been made to the relevant years' accounts. Further work is reviewing any need for further backdating. The preparation of the HRA budget monitoring report is now up to date. The HRA budget was approved at Council which included a significant investment of up to £17m in fire safety and decent homes standards. This capital programme is funded within a sustainable budget for 2024/25. The HRA is now more stable but further work is underway to develop the longer term HRA budget and 30 year business plan – this is being developed with the service. The current focus is to procure a HRA Business Plan model to be used internally for this exercise.

**Direction:** Resourcing Plan to support Recovery – capacity; capability; skills.

**Success measure:** The structure of the Council is proportionate to that service offer and to the wider corporate plan and is designed in such a way as to deliver the objectives of that plan.

- 4.18 Additional specialist finance resource has been brought in on a temporary basis to support the progression of the Financial Recovery theme key actions. This has been essential to enable a budget to be developed, however is not sustainable and a permanent structure is required. The Council has successfully recruited a permanent Section 151 Officer who will develop and shape the new finance function including the immediate recruitment of a Deputy Section 151 Officer.

### 5.0 Commercial Theme

**Direction:** An action plan to strengthen financial and commercial functions (also within the Governance and Assurance Theme).

**Success measure:** The structure of the Council is proportionate to that service offer and to the wider corporate plan and is designed in such a way as to deliver the objectives of that plan.

**Direction:** An action plan to secure value for money in dealing with and financing of and strategies for companies.

**Success measure:** The Council's remaining assets and commercial interests following a programme of exit are appropriate to the Council's size, in line with the corporate plan.

- 5.1 The aim of the Commercial theme is to "Release the Council from unaffordable commitments, whilst protecting the public purse and optimising the value of existing assets".
- 5.2 The Council is developing a Commercial Strategy. The strategy will contain the plans for commercial activities which the Council will execute to achieve its commercial strategic aim as set out above. This will include commercial asset disposals, procurement and contract management, role of companies and fees and charges. The strategy will clearly outline how assets will be reviewed to determine what should happen to them. This includes analysis of the contribution (and potential contribution) of each asset to the Council's strategic aims, including the IRP, and its financial, social, environmental, and local economic impacts. It also includes an analysis of the revenue

## **The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024**

and capital impacts of disposal, development or re-purposing of assets. The outcome of this review will determine whether the Council is to retain the asset.

- 5.3 The appointment of a Strategic Assets Consultant has brought pace to the development of the Asset Rationalisation Plan. This is a critical element of the Commercial Strategy and will inform the debt reduction plan.
- 5.4 The first significant sale of an asset has been Victoria Gate which has now exchanged - all legals are now finalised and contracts exchanged. Completion of the sale was achieved on 29 February. A comprehensive market assessment is underway for 10 key commercial assets.
- 5.5 Progress to improve data quality and records has seen a step towards major improvement in the commissioning of an Asset Management System. A company has been selected following a competitive tender process and the contract is being finalised. An exercise to commence the data cleanse of the asset list itself will be undertaken over the course of the first part of March.
- 5.6 Profit and loss analysis for all commercial property assets is underway. This will be taken to the Property Strategic Oversight Group on 26 March for the 10 key commercial assets alongside the market assessments referred to in 5.4. above.
- 5.7 A Companies Governance Framework has been approved by the Executive. This document provides a clear set of requirements for all companies in which the Council has an interest. The Governance Framework sets out a process for developing and agreeing business plans and a reporting framework that will produce critical information for each company. Governance reviews for ThamesWey group, Victoria Square and Brookwood group of companies have been completed and have been considered by the respective boards who will agree plans for implementation of governance focus areas with Ethical Commercial (commercial experts for the Council).
- 5.8 Proposals to disband the Shareholder Advisory Group (SAG) and create a new Shareholder Executive Committee (SEC) have been developed and are being considered at the 21 March 2024 meeting of the Executive. These arrangements provide greater clarity and transparency to decision making authority and strengthen the demarcation between the Council as an entity and companies as separate entities. The model builds on a similar approach taken by Nottingham City Council.
- 5.9 The process to potentially sell ThamesWey Central Milton Keynes (TCMK) has been somewhat removed from the Council and, as a result of the confidentiality arrangements put in place, the Council had no sight of the details around any potential sale. The process to potentially sell TCMK has been under review prior to the next stage to enter into Best and Final Offer for sale. The review is highlighting that the Council now requires greater visibility of the commercial process and negotiations and therefore arrangements are being put in place to enable this to take place. The Company has been requested by the Council to bring the Council's commercial consultants, Ethical Commercial, into the confidentiality agreement and to share all relevant details and bidder submissions. This will allow the implications mentioned previously to be thoroughly assessed and an informed recommendation brought back to the SEC, in pursuit of the commercial aim set out by the Commissioners, to release WBC from unaffordable commitments and secure the best possible value for the public purse.
- 5.10 Building on the implementation of the Companies Governance Framework (CGF) and a self-assessment of the companies for the compliance against the same, the Council's commercial consultants are assisting the companies and their boards to produce business plans in line with the CGF and expected industry norms. The first drafts of these are now being reviewed and will be ready by the end of March 2024. The outcome

## The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024

will be clear statement of purpose and strategic direction for each company group and a set of measures against which the SEC can hold the board and CEO accountable. These Business Plans are being enhanced when compared to plans for previous years to reflect the strengthened commercial and governance requirements that have been established.

- 5.11 The companies have been asked, as part of the business planning process, to set out their approach to the disposal of their assets to support the strategic aim put in place by the Commissioners. The outcome will allow the Council, as shareholder, client and lender, to determine the strategic fit for disposal of assets and for compliance with its wider policy approach to inform the decision as to whether to dispose of the assets, hold the assets or to wait.
- 5.12 Work on the debt standstill has allowed the companies to provide the Council with an appropriate level of assurance - based on protecting liquidity, future asset disposal and repayment of debt – for a debt standstill to be signed off by the Section 151 Officer. The standstill is essential as, without it, the companies would be insolvent. Adopting a debt standstill position avoids this considerable loss. As part of the debt standstill process, the companies are coming forward with independently assured proposals for contributions to debt repayment which will be reviewed and agreed on a quarterly basis during 2024/25.
- 5.13 A comprehensive peer review has been undertaken which looked at 254 areas regarding procurement and contract management. This has identified a number of areas for improvement which will, once implemented, lead to better value for money and additional savings.

### 6.0 Governance and Assurance Theme

**Direction:** An action plan to strengthen financial and commercial functions (also within Commercial Theme).

**Success Measure:** The Council has ensured that there are effective governance, risk management and scrutiny arrangements and functions in place for Council decisions, that Members and Officers demonstrate that they understand and respect their roles in Council business, and that decisions are taken on the basis of appropriate evidence and analysis.

**Direction:** An action plan to secure continuous improvement.

**Success measure:** The Council has demonstrated that it is focused on continuously improving in all areas and has robust processes in place to collect and analyse data on its delivery, and to manage its performance effectively, and has developed an organisational culture, at all levels, where staff are enabled and empowered to constructively challenge and improve ways of working.

The Council has considered properly and decided as to whether to move to a four yearly electoral cycle.

- 6.1 The chair and vice-chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received mentoring from an LGA Member in autumn 2023. Following the rapid review of the Overview and Scrutiny function carried out by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) in autumn 2023, an action plan has been set out by WBC Officers with support from CfGS to make improvements to the function for the 2024/25 municipal year and beyond. A Member workshop led by CfGS and the LGA took place at the end of January to engage Councillors with the review of the committee and wider Overview and Scrutiny function. The thoughts captured at the workshop largely echoed the sentiments of Officers in

## **The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024**

reviewing the function, and the inputs from Members have been worked into the action plan.

- 6.2 A decision was taken following the intervention to release Part II confidential documents dating back to municipal year 2016/17, with appropriate redaction, for increased transparency and in response to an increasing number of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. Approximately 500 documents were initially identified as part of the review. After removing duplicates and other documents that cannot be released, mostly due to confidentiality clauses, there are approximately 240 documents to release, with the vast majority requiring redacting of personal details and commercially sensitive information. The redacting has been completed and final legal checks of the documents carried out. The website upload method has been decided and approved by the Financial Control Panel, and the webpages have been prepared. The documents will be uploaded in coordination with the Grant Thornton Value for Money report. A communications plan has been agreed to support the release of the documents, including briefing for Members and Officers, a press release and explanatory website text for residents, and a dedicated email address for handling Part II document queries.
- 6.3 Discussions have taken place with the LGA regarding a potential move to all-out elections, as well as with other authorities who have implemented this change. It has been recommended that the best option for doing so would be to implement the change first in 2028, to align with the Police and Crime Commissioner elections to achieve the maximum savings. The next steps will be to carry out informal Member discussions regarding the change early in the next municipal year, and from there make a decision regarding the best option to pursue.
- 6.4 A decision has been taken to increase the number of independent Members on the Standards and Audit Committee from one to two, with one of those Members acting as the Chair. Once approved at Standards and Audit Committee and Council, recruitment of the new Members will begin for introduction in the 2024/25 municipal year. The LGA is also currently carrying out an assurance mapping exercise of our audit function.
- 6.5 The Council's commercial consultants have completed a review of our operating manual for companies, and the Council has sought external legal advice on its business cases to Government on both ThamesWey and Victoria Square. Work on ThamesWey and Victoria Square is being prioritised but work on other companies is ongoing.
- 6.6 The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2022/23 was approved at the November 2023 Standards and Audit Committee. The Statement reflected the Council's assessment of its governance arrangements for the previous year, therefore the impact of the Government intervention and external audit will be addressed in the 2023/24 Statement, to be published later this year. Following the approval of the 2022/23 AGS, quarterly Performance, Finance and Assurance meetings have been set up to better monitor our assurance and governance arrangements and improve the process for preparing the 2023/24 AGS. The first of these took place in January 2024.
- 6.7 Considerations about the future size of our legal and commercial capability are ongoing, but the conclusion will largely depend on the future of Council companies and assets.
- 6.8 A review of the Council meeting structure to improve efficiency and enable robust and effective governance has produced a proposal for the structure of Council committees and committee meetings in 2024/25. The proposal has been well received by Officer and Member stakeholders, with feedback incorporated prior to the proposal going to Council for approval at the end of March 2024. This review is part of a new workstream, 'democratic process review', which also captures improvements to internal and external communications regarding decision making, improved report writing for committees, and updating the Member induction in light of the Government intervention. Initial discovery



## The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024

work and project planning has taken place on all these projects, for implementation of proposals in time for the 2024/25 municipal year.

- 6.9 The next phase of the Governance and Assurance theme will prioritise completion of the documentation review workstream with the publication of the Part II documents, aligned with the Grant Thornton report. Also implementing improvements across the Overview and Scrutiny function, Standards and Audit and Democratic Process Review workstreams in time for the start of the 2024/25 municipal year.

### 7.0 Organisation and Service Redesign Theme

**Direction:** An action plan to reconfigure services.

**Success measure:** The Council has a service offer which is shaped by a focus on its residents and customers and responsiveness to their needs and demands and which is affordable.

- 7.1 Since the last progress report there has been a significant amount of work to validate the savings that were previously identified. This has resulted in £8.4m savings for 2024/25 within the revenue budget. This represents around a third of the business as usual budget. These savings have all been approved at the full Council meeting and are moving into delivery.
- 7.2 To ensure that Members were properly informed when taking these difficult decisions, a series of Equality Impact Assessments were carried out on all resident-facing services, to ensure that all potential impacts were identified and that mitigations were proposed where possible. Detailed options appraisals were also developed for some of the major proposed service changes, to aid Member decision making.
- 7.3 A major public consultation was carried out on proposals to reduce or stop certain discretionary services in October and November 2023. During this time senior managers also engaged stakeholders and partners to understand the impact of the savings proposals and discuss potential mitigations. These include transferring some services to another Local Authority which has now been agreed. During the consultation, several partners and community groups contacted the Council to discuss options to transfer an asset to them rather than see it close. The Council has adopted a Community Asset Transfer Policy which provides guidance to support such groups for the transfer to happen. The Council is now progressing a series of community asset transfers which will be delivered throughout 2024/25. This will see a number of community centres and pavilions remaining open.
- 7.4 The second phase of the staff consultation (affecting staff across the Council) has now concluded, resulting in £2.4m savings.
- 7.5 The Council's leadership has developed a clear vision for the future organisation which provides a narrative to support the proposed service changes within the budget and the IRP. The vision '*A financially and environmentally sustainable Council, delivering services that residents value in every part of the borough*' also includes a set of mission statements that build on what this means in practice. The vision will be a key tool for the Council, underpinning the development of future strategies and operating models and the culture needed to support this change.
- 7.6 Initial improvements and efficiencies have been identified for customer-facing services. A joint ICT and customer services team has been formed to make improvements to the website and user journeys. A more comprehensive service redesign programme begins in early 2024, after the staff restructures have been completed. The longer-term goal of

## The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024

improving the way services are delivered through channel shift<sup>1</sup> is underway with soft market testing to potential suppliers starting in November 2024.

- 7.7 The next phase of this theme focusses on implementation. This includes ensuring community asset transfers are delivered, and all savings are achieved. Subject to approval of the Resident Services Programme at the meeting of the Executive on 21 March 2024, the next stage of resident services improvements will commence. The Council will commence the development of the organisational development which will support the culture change needed to deliver the vision. There will be further changes to the remaining services to ensure they are as efficient as possible.

### 8.0 Housing Recovery and Improvement Theme

- 8.1 In December 2023 the Executive approved a new theme to be added to the Improvement and Recovery Programme – Housing Recovery and Improvement. This theme will enable the service to ensure it is compliant with all housing regulatory standards. The workstreams and projects are designed to deliver an efficient, reliable, and modern service that meets our statutory requirements, and supports strong neighbourhoods and communities for our residents.
- 8.2 The initial focus of this theme has been establishing the programme, engaging external support, and project planning. The first programme board was held at the end of February. The two workstreams of most significance for Improvement and Recovery Board oversight are Homes and safety, following referral to the regulator, and Finance, due to the importance of the HRA in whole Council budget setting.
- 8.3 Programme delivery so far has prioritised building safety as part of the 'Homes and safety' workstream. Many projects in this workstream have seen good progress in the first couple of months of the theme:
- 8.3.1 There has been a focus and progress on remedial actions highlighted in the Fire Risk Assessments (FRA); schedules of work have been created and management actions are underway. Engagement with the regulator has focused on ensuring that action is being taken to address the root causes for previous failures, seeking to understand improvements in resourcing, processes and systems.
  - 8.3.2 Work is ongoing to instruct and appoint contractors to deliver the remaining FRA actions; it is hoped and expected that significant progress will be made over the coming financial year.
  - 8.3.3 Procurement of a fit for purpose compliance system continues to be a priority and it is expected that this will be resolved before the new financial year. This is necessary to ensure that delivery of fire safety actions is auditable and assurance data can be provided.
  - 8.3.4 Planning for 2024/25 fire safety works and Decent Homes delivery is underway. Additional external support will be required as this progresses. Pilot removal of UPVC cladding in proximity to escape routes at Lakeview has commenced in

---

<sup>1</sup> 'channel shift' is the process by which organisations encourage customers to change the way they choose to interact with services, from the customers' current preferred approach to a new one. Channel shift is not about asking people to adopt new technologies or habits or to make it more difficult for them to interact with the council. It is about asking customers who can, to interact with the council in ways that they already do with other businesses and organisations.

## **The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024**

February 2024. If successful, this will be rolled out to the remaining 13 blocks. Design work for a longer term solution is underway.

- 8.3.5 The Brockhill closure was approved by Council in February 2024. Arrangements are in place to continue with Mountjoy as repairs contractor until the original contract date of March 2025 (with the options to extend) making the re-procurement a lower priority and a reducing risk.
- 8.4 The Finance workstream has set a balanced HRA budget for 2024/25 and has identified a preferred provider to support the development of the 30 year HRA business plan; this is expected to deliver in June 2024. The 2024/25 HRA budget was approved by Council in February 2024, including the capital programme with £17m spend on fire safety and decent homes works. Housing PFI also sits within this workstream – the project is complete but the workstream will provide ongoing financial oversight.
- 8.5 As part of the resident engagement and consultation workstream, a tenant satisfaction survey was distributed at the beginning of February. There are approximately 250 returns to date, with a desired response level of around 600 returns. The priority moving forwards will be complaints handling to ensure regulatory compliance, and a rolling resident engagement plan aligned with delivery of the consumer standards.
- 8.6 The Tenants and Communities workstream has improved voids performance considerably through increased contractor resource and improved processes. Progress is being made to improve performance on rent collection. There have been challenges in staffing and it is hoped that there will be further improvement once a stable team is in place. Arrears have remained stable over this period which is positive. The service is delivering recommendations made by the DLUHC Homelessness Advice Support Team (HAST) around homelessness – there is a continued need to focus on prevention and reduce the cost of providing bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation when a household's homelessness cannot be prevented. A detailed review of service delivery against regulatory standards is planned over the coming months. A review against the rent standard is already underway.
- 8.7 The Data and insight and Ways of working workstreams have to date focused on implementation of the Capita system upgrade. This work has progressed more slowly than desired, partially due to contractual challenges, but there is now a plan in place to improve the pace. The work requires a review of existing data and processes in order to ensure the new system meets current needs. Work has begun on data benchmarking with peers via Housemark – over the coming months there will be an increased focus on performance reporting within the service to support service delivery and meet regulatory standards.
- 8.8 The staffing and culture workstream is newly in delivery, with resourcing and project plans being determined in February. External support is helping drive this work. This will support the delivery across workstreams.

### **9.0 Programme level progress**

- 9.1 The Programme Management Office continues to manage the delivery of the programme on a day-to-day basis, with a dedicated Programme Manager responsible for the delivery of the programme and managing the dependencies between themes. There have been eight Improvement and Recovery Board (IRB) meetings since the start of the intervention and there are established supporting working groups and boards which include both the Corporate Leadership Team and Commissioners.
- 9.2 The IRB, which comprises the Corporate Leadership Team and Commissioners, meets on a monthly basis. Highlight reports for each theme are provided at each board, which

## **The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024**

cover progress of the actions and milestones within the delivery plan, and management of risks and issues. An overall report is also provided, which outlines the dependencies and overall 'health' of the programme in a dashboard format. This suite of documents is shared with the Executive monthly.

- 9.3 The IRP is a live document, continuously updated to take account of progress and relevant changes. These changes will be tracked through programme management mechanisms and may include the addition of new workstreams or objectives, or the amendment of timescales for delivery of actions. The Executive will retain oversight of these changes through the regular reporting process.
- 9.4 A set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have been agreed by the Board. These KPIs will be the means for measuring the improvement journey of the Council. They are: a) Expenditure against the Programme; b) Savings identified; c) Savings delivered; and d) Debt reduction status. Others will be added later in the improvement journey. These performance indicators will be monitored as part of the Corporate Performance monitoring.
- 9.5 Programme costs are tracked monthly. Any new resource requirements are subject to approval at the Financial Control Panel. There continues to be a high level of temporary/interim staff to deliver the Plan, and this comes at a higher cost than in-house resource. The current forecast shows £3.5m allocated over a three-year period. Updated programme costs are outlined in Appendix 4.

### **10.0 Corporate Strategy**

- 10.1 The deliverables set out in this IRP will achieve long-term sustainable improvements in how the Council operates, ensuring it is able to take effective decisions focused on improving outcomes for residents. This impacts on the Council's ability to deliver its Corporate Plan, which will have its objectives and actions revised.

### **11.0 Implications**

#### Finance and Risk

- 11.1 If the Council fails to take appropriate action to meet the requirements set out in the Government Direction, or if the Commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State do not have sufficient confidence that appropriate actions are being taken to implement and sustain the required improvements, then the Council risks not having appropriate arrangements in place to comply with its best value duty under Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999. This could lead to further Government intervention, increased costs and damage to reputation.
- 11.2 An IRP Risk Register is maintained which will underpin the Council's Strategic Risk Register. This is reported monthly to the Board and to the Informal Executive. The current key risks are outlined in Appendix 3.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

- 11.3 The successful delivery of this IRP will require the development and review of many of the Council's services. These will include an Equality Impact Assessment where appropriate prior to decisions being made.
- 11.4 The staffing changes as a result of the Organisation and Service Redesign theme are being carefully managed and a formal consultation has been undertaken. Full Equality Impact Assessments have been carried out as part of this process.

## **The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 to March 2024**

### Legal

- 11.5 The Monitoring Officer reiterates the guidance provided by the Section 151 Officer under the Finance heading of this report as well as highlighting that the Council is still obliged to meet its statutory duties and continue to make decisions in accordance with public law principles. It is anticipated that the IRP outlined in this report will support the Council to rationalise and deliver its statutory obligations.

### **12.0 Engagement and Consultation**

- 12.1 The IRP is published on the Council's website. The progress reports produced to the Commissioners are also published on the Council's website. A communications plan to keep staff, residents, partners, businesses and stakeholders informed is also in development.

### Staff and Members

- 12.2 It is vital that the Council effectively engages staff and Members to drive organisational changes. The Council is having an open conversation with staff and Members about the values the Council needs to adopt and embed going forward. The Council has around 350 Members of staff, many of whom work on the frontline, and internal communications will support staff to understand the relevance of the IRP to their day-to-day work, alongside the Council's Corporate Plan and priorities for residents.
- 12.3 The Council is communicating with staff in a variety of ways, including regular video and email messages, staff Q&A sessions and manager briefings. This is a two-way conversation with the intelligence gained from staff throughout the organisation used to inform the IRP.

### Residents

- 12.4 The Council is committed to becoming a listening, responsive Council that enables residents to influence the design of services. The Council carried out a resident engagement in the summer, to understand the issues residents care about. A major consultation was carried out with residents in the autumn on proposed changes to services. As the Council transforms, there will be further resident engagement and ongoing communications.

### Partners and stakeholders

- 12.5 The Council is reviewing ways of working and partnership arrangements as it continually strives to provide the best possible services. The Council wants to build on its operational relationships with partners that have been strengthened during the pandemic and is keeping them informed of progress against the IRP.

REPORT ENDS

**The Secretary of State Directions**

The Directions include requirements for the following:

- a. An action plan to achieve financial sustainability and to identify and close any short and long-term budget gaps across the period of its Medium Term Financial Strategy, including a robust multi-year savings plan.
- b. An action plan to ensure the Authority's capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable and affordable.
- c. A strict debt reduction plan, demonstrating how overall capital financing requirement and external borrowing will be reduced over a realistic but expedient timescale, reducing debt servicing costs.
- d. An action plan to ensure the Authority is complying with all relevant rules and guidelines relating to the financial management of the Authority. An updated Minimum Revenue Provision policy in line with all relevant rules and guidelines. Monitoring Officer to be involved in implementing.
- e. An action plan to reconfigure the Authority's services commensurate with the Authority's available financial resources.
- f. A plan to ensure that the Authority has sufficient skills, capabilities and capacity to deliver the Improvement and Recovery Plan, within a robust Officer structure, including appropriate commercial expertise and capacity.
- g. An action plan to strengthen the Authority's financial and commercial functions, and to secure improvements in risk management and governance.
- h. A plan to secure value for money during any exit from the Authority's arrangements with its companies, and the revolving lending arrangements between them, including a plan on how to mitigate associated risks and an appropriate timescale for doing so.
- i. Actions to secure continuous improvement in all services.

The Directions and Success Measures

Direction	Success measure
(a) An Action Plan to achieve financial sustainability	The Council has a balanced revenue budget and a sustainable Medium Term Financial Strategy.
(b) An Action Plan to ensure the Authority's capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable and affordable	The Council's capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable.
(c) A strict debt reduction plan	The Council's debt position has been improved.
(d) Compliance with Financial Management guidelines – updated MRP policy	The Council's functions are operating in line with the appropriate rules, guidance and good practice. The Council has a compliant Housing Revenue Account.
(e) An action Plan to reconfigure services	The Council has a service offer which is shaped by a focus on its residents and customers and responsiveness to their needs and demands and which is affordable.
(f) Resourcing Plan to support Recovery – capacity; capability; skills	The structure of the Council is proportionate to that service offer and to the wider corporate plan and is designed in such a way as to deliver the objectives of that plan.
(g) An action plan to strengthen financial and commercial functions	The Council has ensured that there are effective governance, risk management and scrutiny arrangements and functions in place for Council decisions, that Members and Officers demonstrate that they understand and respect their roles in Council business, and that decisions are taken on the basis of appropriate evidence and analysis.
(h) An action plan to secure value for money in dealing with the financing of and strategies for companies	The Council's remaining assets and commercial interests following a programme of exit are appropriate to the Council's size, in line with the corporate plan.
(i) An action plan to secure continuous improvement	<p>The Council has demonstrated that it is focused on continuously improving in all areas and has robust processes in place to collect and analyse data on its delivery, and to manage its performance effectively, and has developed an organisational culture, at all levels, where staff are enabled and empowered to constructively challenge and improve ways of working.</p> <p>All the recommended actions from the External Assurance review and other actions identified as part of the Improvement and Recovery Plan have been progressed, or a concrete plan is in place to action them.</p> <p>The Council has considered properly and decided as to whether to move to a four yearly electoral cycle.</p>

**Risk Register**

The following risks are extracted from the Risk Register as the top ‘red’ risks to the delivery of the Improvement and Recovery Plan. They are monitored by the Improvement and Recovery Board on a monthly basis.

Risk	Mitigation
1. Resources – major competency and capacity gaps identified but difficulty in filling them leading to continued reliance on temporary resource.	Upskilling staff where possible. Appointment of permanent Section 151 Officer and Deputy Section 151 Officer. Updated finance function to be implemented
2. Pace of change and ability of staff to cope with the pace alongside delivering BAU services.	The pace required and the scale of the change with limited resources continue. Regular senior manager briefings and staff briefings are being held. Additional support in place from HR change team.
3. Insufficient data and poor record keeping leading to delays in delivering the programme actions e.g. asset rationalisation strategy.	This is improving as more attention is given. Still remains a high risk.
4. The level of organisational change and uncertainty has an adverse impact on staff morale leading to higher numbers leaving and a resultant loss of corporate knowledge.	Vision being developed and supporting narrative regarding what the vision means for staff, residents, and partners. Regular staff briefings and additional support is being provided during this phase. Organisational development work is being scoped.



### Flexible use of capital receipts update

As part of the budget setting process last year the Council approved the flexible use of capital receipts to fund the transformation programme. Following on from the Government Intervention the Improvement and Recovery Programme was developed and adopted by Council in August. This appendix provides an update on the spend and a forecast for the next two years spend.

Project	Summary	Update	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Commercial	Commercial expertise to review companies' governance and performance and provide commercial capability to ensure value for money, security and confidence in decision making. Improve procurement and contract performance and practice to deliver additional savings, control cost and ensure value for money.	Commercial Expertise brought in. Commercial Governance in place. Review of companies and implementation plans.	£445,994	£300,000	
Asset strategy	Development and delivery of Strategic asset management strategy and plan to ensure the Council's estate is fit for purpose, efficient and performing well. Development and delivery of the debt reduction plan.	Strategic Property Consultant brought in. Asset Rationalisation Plan developed. Additional resource brought in to deliver the disposals.	£93,409	£169,000	£46,591
Resident Services	Channel shift - improving service delivery and web offer, freeing up vital resources to assist those who cannot use digital channels or have complex enquiries. Will lead to further efficiencies.	Project manager in place to develop the programme. Quick wins identified and the longer term plan to improve resident facing services has been shaped.	£101,850	£205,000	
Service offer	Vision for organisation, service restructure and implementation of staffing change delivering £2.4m savings in staff budget (Forecast includes exit costs).	Vision developed. Service offer restructured (following consultations with staff and public).	£ 402,612	£750,000	
Savings delivery	Savings (£8.4m) implementation and service redesign and transformation.	Delivery project manager in place. Will include support for the Community Asset Transfers and other transformation required to ensure savings are delivered.	£36,500	£253,000	£36,500
Transformation team	Transformation team (temporary) to manage the change.	Programme Manager and PMO in place to manage the transformation.	£186,055	£135,000	£27,000
	Contingency			£311,490	
	<b>TOTALS</b>		<b>£1,266,420</b>	<b>£2,123,490</b>	<b>£110,091</b>

**£3,500,000**



# Improvement Programme journey so far

March 2024

Shaping the *future*  
of our borough



# Executive summary

March 2024 marks the tenth month since the start of the five-year Intervention. Significant progress has been made however there is still a way to go on the improvement journey.

This first year has been focussed on discovery and establishing the building blocks for the improvement journey. The next phase focusses on consolidation and further improvement.

The Intervention included nine Directions and for each of these Directions the Commissioners have described what achieving each direction looks like – ‘success measures’.

The Improvement and Recovery Plan, adopted in August 2023, describes how we will deliver each of the Directions. The delivery was organised into 4 themes with specific activity described. A fifth theme has since been added to the plan.

This document describes the journey so far – what has been achieved against each direction and what is still to do.

There are two parts to this document:

**(1) Summary of the IRP and maturity assessment:**

This shows each of the Directions, the activity underway or planned to deliver the Directions, and the success measures. A maturity assessment has been made for each of the activities, recognising that while there has been a lot of activity and huge improvements made, we are on a five year journey and there is still much to do to achieve sustained improvement and the supporting culture change required. This assessment reflects where we are on that journey.

**(2) Journey so far:** For each of the Directions, what is established and what is still to be done.

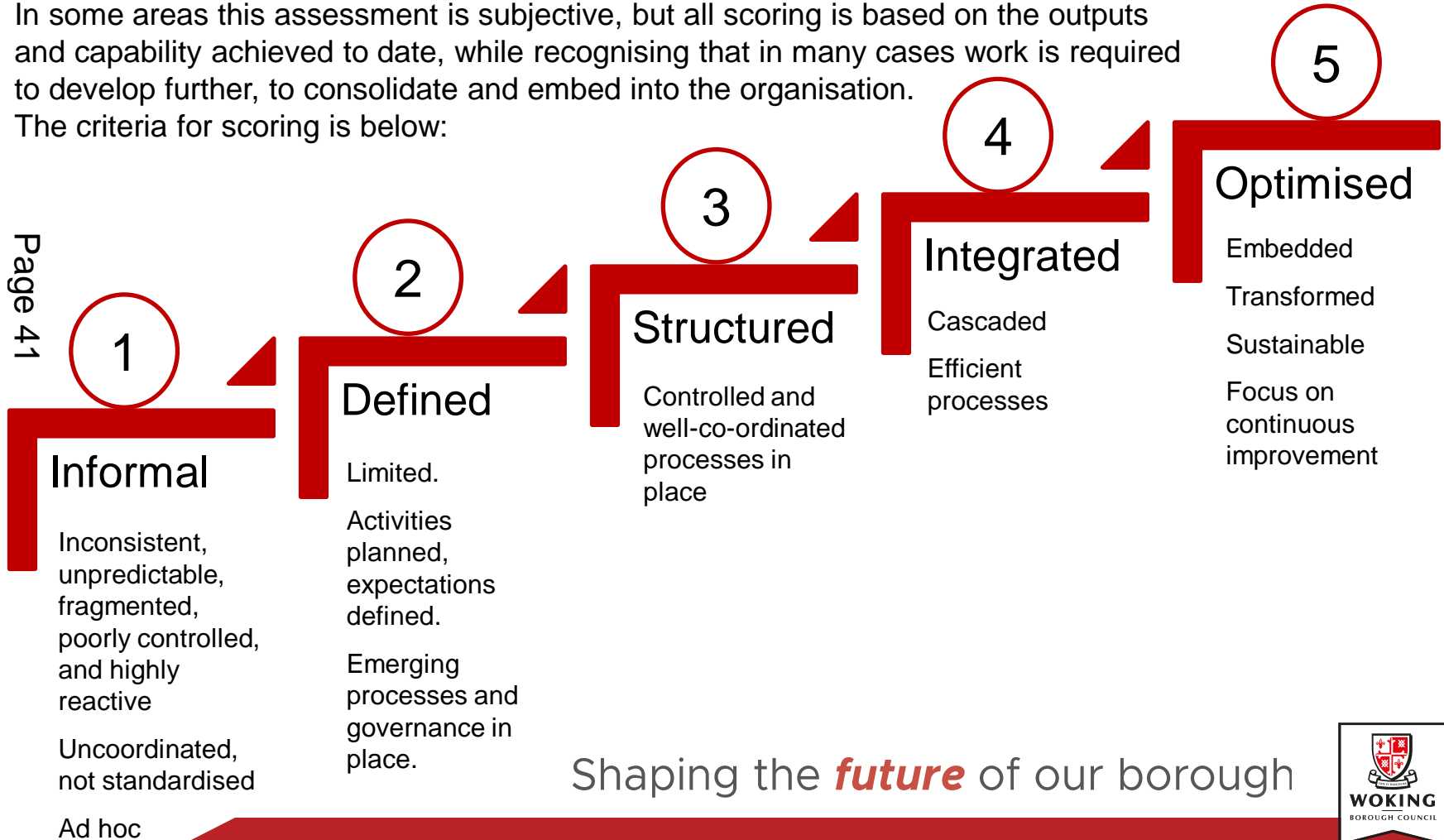
Shaping the *future* of our borough





# Maturity assessment: Improvement and Recovery Programme

- A maturity assessment has been carried out across all activity within the programme - whether it is completed, underway or planned. This aims to show the context for where we are on the journey of improvement.
- In some areas this assessment is subjective, but all scoring is based on the outputs and capability achieved to date, while recognising that in many cases work is required to develop further, to consolidate and embed into the organisation.
- The criteria for scoring is below:



Shaping the *future* of our borough

# Directions – Activity – Success Measures

- Financial Recovery
- Commercial
- Governance & Assurance
- Organisation & Service Redesign
- Housing Recovery & Improvement

Direction	Activity underway to deliver the direction	Maturity	Success Measure
(a) An action plan to achieve financial sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Finance workplan and capacity</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Financial assurance and cost control</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Borrowing and cashflow</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Annual accounts and crystallisation of debt</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Debt reduction plan</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> 2024/25 MTFP &amp; revenue savings</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Financial reporting</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Engagement with DLUHC</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> HRA accounts</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> HRA Business Plan</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Asset Rationalisation Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 3</li> <li>• 0</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 5</li> <li>• 3</li> <li>• -</li> <li>• 3</li> </ul>	The Council has a balanced revenue budget and a sustainable Medium Term Financial Strategy.
(b) An action plan to ensure the Authority's capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable and affordable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Treasury management strategy</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> 2024/25 budget</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Commercial protocol</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Capital programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 3</li> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 3</li> </ul>	The Council's capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable.
(c) A strict debt reduction plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Commercial strategy</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Debt reduction plan</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Valuations</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Asset Rationalisation Plan</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Property profit and loss trading accounts</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Strategic Options for TW and VSWL</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 3</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 2</li> </ul>	The Council's debt position has been improved.
(d) Compliance with Financial Management guidelines – updated Minimum Revenue Position policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Updated MRP policy</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> HRA accounts</li> <li><span style="color: blue;">■</span> HRA Business Plan</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 3</li> <li>• -</li> </ul>	The Council's functions are operating in line with the appropriate rules, guidance and good practice. The Council has a compliant Housing Revenue Account.

Shaping the *future* of our borough



# Directions – Activity – Success Measures

- Financial Recovery
- Commercial
- Governance & Assurance
- Organisation & Service Redesign
- Housing Recovery & Improvement

Direction	Activity underway or planned to deliver the Direction	Maturity	Success measure
(e) An action plan to reconfigure services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Service offer change and associated savings</li> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Resident engagement, public consultations and impact assessments</li> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Vision for smaller organisation</li> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Channel shift programme</li> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Savings implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3</li> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 1</li> </ul>	The Council has a service offer which is shaped by a focus on its residents and customers and responsiveness to their needs and demands and which is affordable.
(f) Resourcing plan to support recovery – capacity; capability; skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Vision and mission</li> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Woking for All corporate strategy review</li> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Staff restructure</li> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Job evaluation review and implementation</li> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Channel shift programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 2</li> </ul>	The structure of the Council is proportionate to that service offer and to the wider corporate plan and is designed in such a way as to deliver the objectives of that plan.
(g) An action plan to strengthen financial and commercial functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: cyan;">■</span> Scrutiny function review</li> <li><span style="color: cyan;">■</span> Standards and Audit review</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Governance (e.g. Commercial and Finance Governance Board) and reporting</li> <li><span style="color: cyan;">■</span> Committee restructure</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Commercial protocol</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Commercial strategy</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Contracts and procurement review</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Orbis plan</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">■</span> Finance team restructure</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Commercial team requirements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 3</li> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 3</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 0</li> </ul>	The Council has ensured that there are effective governance, risk management and scrutiny arrangements and functions in place for council decisions, that members and officers demonstrate that they understand and respect their roles in council business, and that decisions are taken on the basis of appropriate evidence and analysis.

Shaping the *future* of our borough



# Directions – Activity – Success Measures

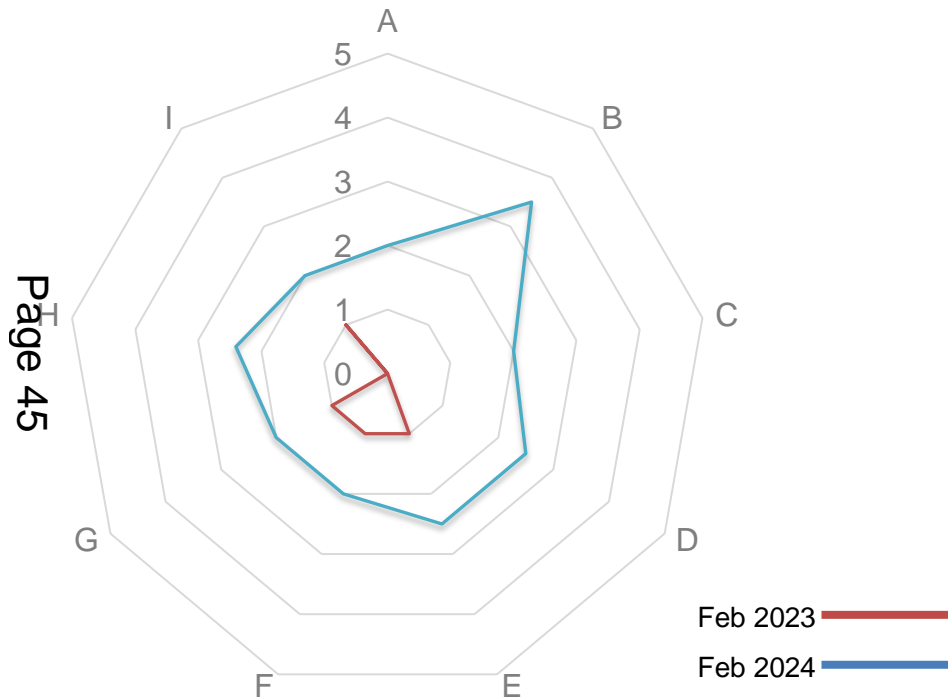
- Financial Recovery
- Commercial
- Governance & Assurance
- Organisation & Service Redesign
- Housing Recovery & Improvement

Direction	Activity underway or planned to deliver the Direction	Maturity	Success measure
(h) An action plan to secure value for money in dealing with the financing of and strategies for companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Company assurance review</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Company governance framework</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Companies review – implementation</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Commercial strategy</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Commercial protocol</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Company business plans</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Strategic Asset review and plan</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Profit and loss</li> <li><span style="color: purple;">■</span> Asset management system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 3</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 1</li> </ul>	The Council's remaining assets and commercial interests following a programme of exit are appropriate to the Council's size, in line with the corporate plan.
(i) An action plan to secure continuous improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Service improvement (process, systems, people)</li> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Performance management – process and governance</li> <li><span style="color: green;">■</span> Organisational Development strategy and plan</li> <li><span style="color: lightblue;">■</span> Overview and Scrutiny Committee improvements</li> <li><span style="color: lightblue;">■</span> Electoral cycle review</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 2</li> <li>• 1</li> <li>• 4</li> <li>• 2</li> </ul>	<p>The Council has demonstrated that it is focused on continuously improving in all areas and has robust processes in place to collect and analyse data on its delivery, and to manage its performance effectively, and has developed an organisational culture, at all levels, where staff are enabled and empowered to constructively challenge and improve ways of working. All the recommended actions from the External Assurance review and other actions identified as part of the Improvement and Recovery Plan have been progressed, or a concrete plan is in place to action them.</p> <p>The Council has considered properly and decided as to whether to move to a four yearly electoral cycle.</p>



# Summary assessment

## Maturity Assessment



- A. An action plan to achieve financial sustainability
- B. An action plan to ensure the authority's capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable and affordable
- C. A strict debt reduction plan
- D. Compliance with Financial Management guidelines – updated MRP policy
- E. An action plan to reconfigure services
- F. Resourcing plan to support recovery – capacity; capability; skills
- G. An action plan to strengthen financial and commercial functions
- H. An action plan to secure value for money in dealing with the financing of and strategies for companies
- I. An action plan to secure continuous improvement

Shaping the *future* of our borough



## (a) An action plan to achieve financial sustainability

The Council has a balanced revenue budget and a sustainable Medium Term Financial Strategy.

### Financial workplan & capacity

*Maturity (1) – activity to date has been delivered by temporary resources rather than a permanent team. Work is in hand to resolve this.*

- Interim financial specialist support has been brought in to support the Section 151 and Deputy Section 151 officers to set a legal budget.
- A permanent Section 151 officer has been appointed and will be in place from 1 April.
- A **permanent finance function structure** is drafted, ensuring new capability will be put in place to address the current gaps that are being filled by consultants and contractors.

### Annual accounts and crystallisation of debt

*Maturity (0) – annual accounts not reported as planned in 2023 due to lack of capability; (3) crystallisation of debt however this is subject to audit.*

- **Annual accounts 22/23** due to be reported to the June Audit Committee.
- **Annual accounts 23/24** due to be reported to the July Audit Committee.
- **Debt position** has been established.
- Grant Thornton are currently looking at the Value for Money (VfM) assessments that are part of the 2023/24 accounts and a VfM review report is imminent.

### Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) balanced budget for 2024/25

*Maturity (4) – savings identified, and decisions made however (0) – no long term MTFP which includes forecasts on a longer term basis.*

- Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) report **identified £8.4m General Fund savings** which is over 25% of the business as usual budget. These savings proposals have been approved by full Council and are moving into delivery.
- Significant work undertaken with government on how the council can set a legal budget given the scale of its debt problem.
- Council meeting (4 March) approved the five year MTFS.
- Improved and increased frequency of Overview & Scrutiny Committee in scrutinising proposals.
- Significant increase in member engagement on proposals via All Member briefings and specifically the introduction of a Finance Working Group.

### Assurance and expenditure controls

*Maturity (4) – expenditure in better control, fewer issues identified.*

- **Financial Control Panel** established and led by Service Managers. Meets twice a week to ensure all spend is scrutinised. Terms of Reference are being reviewed to include procurement requirements
- **Quarterly Assurance meetings** now in place to review audit, finance, procurement & contracts with leadership and with members.

## (a) An action plan to achieve financial sustainability

The Council has a balanced revenue budget and a sustainable Medium Term Financial Strategy.

### Financial reporting

*Maturity (1) – major improvements needed.*

- The assessment against the Financial Management Code is complete and includes an improvement plan.
- An improved **budget monitoring** process is in place which includes greater ownership by budget holders. However, this needs significant additional development work.
- **Performance Management reporting** has an improved process and report format. Financial information is reported monthly to the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) and quarterly to members.
- *This remains work in progress. An improved integrated finance and performance monitoring report is now in place but has not been produced every month due to capacity issues within finance. This needs improving and embedding across the organisation.*

### Engagement with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)

*Maturity (5)*

- Ongoing dialogue with DLUHC regarding the financial support package.
- Additional focus on Asset Rationalisation Strategy is now in place to support the debt reduction discussions.

### Borrowing and cashflow

*Maturity (3) – in a better position, however team resilience remains a risk. Need to embed and improve reporting.*

- Tight controls are now in place for all **borrowing activity**. This has been limited to either refinancing, essential and committed capital spend and work on assets agreed in conjunction with government.
- The **interest budget** has been prepared on the forecast net debt position.
- Top level **cashflow work** is complete.
- **Performance indicators** on debt are now in place and will be reported on.

### Next:

- Finance restructure
- Annual accounts finalise
- Revenue outturns
- Financial reporting and budget monitoring
- Training and awareness raising
- Integra system review
- Governance and decision making
- Debt reduction plan
- Debt collection improvements
- Further General Fund savings to be identified

## (b) An action plan to ensure the authority's capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable and affordable

The Council's capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable.

### Treasury Management Strategy

*Maturity (4) – fundamentally changed approach.*

- The Treasury Management Strategy, as included in the budget report to Council on 4 March, has been comprehensively reviewed and updated to reflect the pivot away from major investment, funded by borrowing to asset rationalisation and debt reduction.
- This will form the basis of quarterly reporting on debt and treasury indicators to members during the year.

### 2024/25 budget

*Maturity (3) – budget set, however collection fund capability needed.*

- £8.4m revenue savings identified for the 2024/25 budget which were approved by Council on 8th February.
- Extensive member engagement on the savings options and on the component parts of the budget, enabling members to make very difficult, but informed decisions based on evidence and supported by high levels of information.
- The Budget reports for both the Council meetings were prepared jointly by the S151 officer and the Finance Commissioner.

### Commercial investment assurance

*Maturity (4) – in place but requires embedding into core processes and raising awareness.*

- **Commercial Protocol** developed to ensure that future commercial activities and use of commercial assets are demonstrably aligned to the Council's prevailing strategic priorities. This will be used for all future commercial decisions within scope.
- **Commercial and Financial Governance Board** established to ensure all commercial decisions are reviewed against robust business cases ahead of Executive Approval.

### Capital Programme

*Maturity (3) – a smaller capital programme is in place. Monitoring and embedding discipline still needed.*

- The Capital Programme has been largely suspended with provisions only for items such as urgent health and safety and regulatory works and Housing Asset Management Programmes funded by the Housing Revenue Account.
- Payments are now only made to companies and joint ventures to cover business cases agreed with the Commissioners/DLUHC.
- Only projects complying with the Council's capital principles have been included in the Capital Programme.

## (c) A strict debt reduction plan

The Council's debt position has been improved.

### Commercial Strategy

*Maturity (1) – in early draft. Supporting Asset Rationalisation Plan (3) – developed but needs supporting plans.*

- **Commercial Strategy** is in development.
- The **Asset Rationalisation Plan** sets out the approach to asset rationalisation over the next 36 months, which will support the debt reduction plan.

### Debt reduction plan

*Maturity (2) – as expected at this stage in the improvement journey. Asset Rationalisation Plan needs to mature and there are ongoing discussions with DLUHC.*

- **Business cases** for the future of the ThamesWey (TW) and Victoria Square Woking Ltd. (VS) companies are completed and the financing requirements understood and approved to prevent insolvency of TW and VS.
- The **Asset Rationalisation Plan** is in place and aims to ensure that the Commercial Investment Property portfolios are managed and rationalised over the coming three years so as to extract the best possible returns under the constraints of time and market conditions.
- A **Debt Reduction Plan** is being developed by the Section 151 officer alongside the Asset Rationalisation Plan.
- The first significant asset sale was made in January 2024 and it is agreed that all receipts from asset sales will be used to reduce the Capital Financing Requirement.
- DLUHC conversations are ongoing.

### Next:

- Complete the **Debt Reduction Plan** for approval by the Council and Commissioners
- Delivery of the **Asset Rationalisation Plan**:
  - Commence exercise to analyse revenue and capital/borrowing impact of rationalisation strategy on individual sites
  - Complete disposal of Victoria Gate
  - Commence data cleanse and recording of data information on a single database
  - Produce a prioritised plan which will need to balance the need to reduce the levels of debt with achieving value for money on the assets sold
  - Undertake Civic Estate review
  - Market additional pipeline of identified current disposals
  - Prepare business cases for individual identified additional disposals from all portfolios and bring to market if appropriate.

## (d) Compliance with Financial Management guidelines – updated Minimum Revenue Provision policy

- The Council's functions are operating in line with the appropriate rules, guidance and good practice.
- The Council has a compliant Housing Revenue Account.

### Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)

*Maturity (4) – rules are now in place, which need embedding and monitoring.*

- Extensive work has been carried out on understanding the council's loan book. Further work on impairments will be carried out as part of the final accounts process and the preparation of the company final accounts for 31 March.
- A new MRP policy is in place which is in line with the guidance that is currently out to consultation.

### Housing Revenue Account (HRA)

*Maturity (3) – further work to be done on recharges.*

- The preparation of the HRA budget monitoring report is up to date. The 2024/25 HRA budget went to 4 February Council meeting for approval – included the capital programme is funded within a sustainable budget for 2024/25.
- HRA general fund recharge adjustments into budgets and into prior year accounts.

### Next:

- The capital programme to support the new regulatory requirements is still in development
- The 30 year business plan is now due in the first quarter of 2024/25.

## (e) An action plan to reconfigure services

The Council has a service offer which is shaped by a focus on its residents and customers and responsiveness to their needs and demands and which is affordable.

### Service offer changes and associated savings

*Maturity (3) – still further work to ensure sustainability.*

- **Gateway review:** comprehensive ‘bottom up’ review of all services took place to identify minimum viable position and other options for raising income. Options appraisals developed by senior managers to support the decision making process.
- **Benchmarking:** carried out across statistical neighbours to support the decision making process by providing additional evidence.
- **Revenue savings:** identified £8.4m savings potential.
- **Member engagement:** regular updates at Informal Executive, additional all Member briefings to present proposal and discuss. Overview & Scrutiny sessions on major topics.
- **Community Asset Transfer policy:** developed and adopted by full council to enable some services to transfer to community groups rather than close.
- **Transfer of services to partners:** social prescribing, hoarding, hospital discharge support, family support and family centres all TUPE’d rather than the service closing.

### Resident engagement, public consultation and impact assessments

*Maturity (4) – successfully carried out; lessons learned for future engagement.*

- **Resident engagement:** borough-wide engagement on what residents value the most received 8,154 responses. This supported decision making on options (e.g. fees and charges, stop funding discretionary services and make them self-funding or find partners to deliver these services).
- **Formal public consultation:** on service proposals received 5,792 responses. As well as promotion via media releases, 206 stakeholder groups were directly contacted.
- **Impact analysis:** equality impact assessments, analysis and action plans to mitigate impacts were carried out on 17 proposals.
- **Options appraisals:** carried out on major resident services. Alternatives to closure identified as a result.
- **Partner engagement:** to identify alternatives to WBC providing services, and instead be delivered by partners.

## (f) Resourcing plan to support recovery – capacity; capability; skills

The structure of the Council is proportionate to that service offer and to the wider corporate plan and is designed in such a way as to deliver the objectives of that plan.

### Vision, mission, strategy

*Maturity (2) – work needed to now embed and support the culture change.*

- **Vision** for the new council has been developed with the leadership (Executive and CLT). This vision describes the new organisation and will inform the Corporate Strategy refresh.
- **Mission statements** to set out how this will be achieved have been developed with the leadership.

### Staff restructure

*Maturity (4) – phase 1 and 2 complete within timescales. Embedding resultant service changes now required.*

- Council-wide restructure undertaken to align the staffing capacity and capability to the proposed service offer. Involved around 300 staff.
- Regular communications and engagement.
- Training and support provided to staff.
- Staff savings of £2.2m.
- Two phases of staff consultation and assessment between July and March 2023.
- TUPE transfer of services:
  - Social Prescribing, hoarding and hospital discharge support to Spelthorne Borough Council.
  - Family Support to Surrey County Council.



## (e) An action plan to reconfigure services

The Council has a service offer which is shaped by a focus on its residents and customers and responsiveness to their needs and demands and which is affordable.

## (f) Resourcing plan to support recovery – capacity; capability; skills

The structure of the Council is proportionate to that service offer and to the wider corporate plan and is designed in such a way as to deliver the objectives of that plan.

### Next:

- Finalise phase 2 of the staff restructure
- Review and refresh the Working for All strategy and supporting objectives
- Audit of service strategies
- Culture change – design, develop and deliver the Organisational Strategy and Plan phase 1:
  - Commission an organisational development specialist
  - Performance development review process for appraisal and objectives setting
  - Job evaluation review and implementation
  - Values and behaviours development with change champions
  - HR policies review
- Communications strategy and plan – external and internal communications for the programme
- Residents Services Improvement programme (systems, processes and people) – customer services, planning service, environmental health, property
- Benchmarking deep dive into core services
- Data, insights and AI pre discovery work to understand the current position and gaps

## (g) An action plan to strengthen financial and commercial functions

The Council has ensured that there are effective governance, risk management and scrutiny arrangements and functions in place for Council decisions; that Members and Officers demonstrate that they understand and respect their roles in Council business; and that decisions are taken on the basis of appropriate evidence and analysis.

### Governance and reporting

*Maturity (4) – Commercial and Finance Governance Board well established and providing challenge.*

- **Commercial and Financial Governance Board implemented:** oversees the implementation and operation of the Companies Governance Handbook, the Commercial Strategy, and the Commercial Protocol. Significant improvements seen in commercial finance decision making.
- **Shareholder Executive Group:** governance formalised. Shareholder and take decisions in respect of companies in which the council has an interest.

### Assurance and risk

*Maturity (2) – in place but requires embedding.*

- **Quarterly performance reporting:** improved and more accessible for councillors and the public. Interpreting the data rather than presenting. Focussed on the new structure. Financial monitoring information has been improved with the new integrated performance report and clear milestones and delivery plans to accompany the savings. Includes operational performance, finance, key performance indicators, and risk.
- **Quarterly assurance reporting:** deep dives into all assurance areas reported quarterly – health and safety, audit, contracts, risk and business continuity.
- **IRP risks:** reviewed monthly at the Improvement and Recovery Board and six monthly at Overview and Scrutiny.

### Commercial controls and compliance

*Maturity (4) – improved controls in place but require further embedding.*

- **Commercial protocol:** ensures that commercial activities and use of commercial assets are demonstrably aligned to the council's prevailing strategic priorities.
- **Companies Governance Framework:** controls the way the companies operate. It acts as a practical guide for WBC members and officers, and is starting to improve with new staff and board members of entities in which the council has an interest, in their dealings with each other and with the important business that is conducted by them.
- **Constitution part 6 review:** sets out the principles and governance that relate to council owned entities. Proposals for re-drafting part 6 of the constitution have been developed and will be considered by Shareholder Advisory Group.

### Procurement and contracts

*Maturity (2) – issues identified, and action plan agreed. Needs implementing.*

- **Orbis** onboarded via framework agreement. Commercial Continuous Improvement Assessment Framework review carried out. Action plan drafted for roll out of improvements.

## (g) An action plan to strengthen financial and commercial functions

The council has ensured that there are effective governance, risk management and scrutiny arrangements and functions in place for council decisions; that members and officers demonstrate that they understand and respect their roles in council business; and that decisions are taken on the basis of appropriate evidence and analysis.

### Standards and Audit

*Maturity (3) – now in place but needs testing, refinement and embedding.*

- **Independent member arrangements:** decision approved to have two independent members, one acting as chair.
- **Assurance mapping exercise:** being carried out by the Local Government Association (LGA).
- **Annual Governance Statement (AGS):** 2022/23 AGS well received at November 2023 Standards and Audit committee. Quarterly Performance, Finance and Assurance meetings implemented as a result. Review of AGS monitoring process being undertaken.

### Committee restructure

*Maturity (2) – proposal for change agreed, needs to be implemented.*

- **Council meeting structure review:** proposal being reviewed by stakeholders. The proposals will streamline the calendar of meetings, reduce officer and member burden, increase transparency, and make the decision making process more efficient.

### Scrutiny

*Maturity (2) – early improvements made, however still a way to go to ensure effective scrutiny function.*

- **Scrutiny function review:** Action plan produced with support from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. Member training workshop held and input fed into action plan. Chair and vice chair received mentoring from the LGA.

### Next:

- Embed commercial protocol
- Review commercial capability required for the council
- Finance team restructure
- Overview and Scrutiny action plan implementation
- Orbis procurement and contracts improvements implementation
- Implement new Standards and Audit committee independent member arrangements
- Council meeting structure review approved by Council and implemented for 2024/25 municipal year

## (h) An action plan to secure value for money in dealing with the financing of and strategies for companies

The council's remaining assets and commercial interests following a programme of exit are appropriate to the council's size, in line with the corporate plan.

### Company assurance and governance

*Maturity (4) – in place and working effectively, but requires further maturity and embedding.*

- **Commercial protocol:** ensures that commercial activities and use of commercial assets are demonstrably aligned to the council's prevailing strategic priorities. Adopted and applied to assets sales. From 2024/25, this will be used to develop council-wide fees and charges.
- **Company Governance Framework:** produced and endorsed by the Executive. Provides a clear set of requirements for all companies in which the council has an interest.

### Companies review

*Maturity (2) – review and assessment complete however improvements and changes need to be implemented.*

- **Commercial capability:** Ethical Commercial consultancy appointed in August to provide valuable commercial expertise.
- **Company assurance review:** companies review completed using the Company Governance Framework, with issues and areas requiring improvement identified.
- **Company boards:** purchase of Moyallen shares is ready to be approved.

### Commercial strategy

*Maturity (1) – commercial strategy drafted; requires further development and supporting plans.*

- **Asset rationalisation strategy:** draft produced which sets out the approach to asset rationalisation over the next 36 months.
- WBC Investment Asset **Profit and Loss account trading performance** for top eleven assets – this is essential to support any business cases for disposals.
- **Sale of ThamesWey Central Milton Keynes** to best and final offer stage – 21 March 2024 Executive for approval to progress.
- Engagement with the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero for a TW Energy Heat Network Zone pilot.
- **Asset management system** procured.

### Company solvency

*Maturity (3) – ongoing.*

- **Business cases for VS and Sheerwater:** approved by DLUHC to protect and maximise the value of assets held by the companies to subsequently reduce the debt burden on the council as far as possible.

## (h) An action plan to secure value for money in dealing with the financing of and strategies for companies

The council's remaining assets and commercial interests following a programme of exit are appropriate to the council's size, in line with the corporate plan.

### Next:

- Strategic review to determine how (and to what extent) the companies support the council's core strategic aims
- Company business plans to 21 March Executive
- Adopt new Shareholder Executive Governance
- Recruitment of new Chairs and NEDs
- Company loan deferrals for 2024
- TCMK BAFO decision
- Commercial strategy further developed to incorporate commissioning and procurement and supporting strategic plans for assets and companies
- Development of Strategic Options for TW and VSWL through 2024:
  - Strategic cases – end Q1 (June)
  - Outline cases – end Q2 (September)
    - Full cases – end Q3 (December)
- Asset rationalisation strategy finalised
- Market appraisals for an initial three WBC key commercial assets
- Year 1 disposals
- WBC and TW pipeline sales plan – target £30-£40m
- Implementation of WBC asset management system
- Review of WBC property services

## (i) An action plan to secure continuous improvement

- The council has demonstrated that it is focused on continuously improving in all areas and has robust processes in place to collect and analyse data on its delivery, and to manage its performance effectively, and has developed an organisational culture, at all levels, where staff are enabled and empowered to constructively challenge and improve ways of working.
- All the recommended actions from the External Assurance review and other actions identified as part of the Improvement and Recovery Plan have been progressed, or a concrete plan is in place to action them.
- The council has considered properly and decided as to whether to move to a four yearly electoral cycle.

### Electoral review

*Maturity (2)*

- Proposal identified for move to all out elections cycle – first in 2028 to align with Police and Crime Commissioner elections for maximum savings. Informal member support test to be undertaken at start of 2024/25 municipal year. Decisions paper to go to CLT for decision.

### Overview and scrutiny

*Maturity (2)*

- Action plan reviewed regularly at meetings with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to refine for best results. Plan includes immediate actions and steps for continued improvement.

### Culture change

*Maturity (1)*

- **Organisational development** approach is being developed to ensure that managers and staff are equipped to deliver the vision for the organisation.

### Constitution review

*Maturity (3)*

- Constitution amendments are being made when identified.

### Next:

- **Resident services improvement** (processes, people, platforms) review of planning, housing, environmental health and property services
- **Culture change** to shape the vision and behaviours with staff
- **Organisational Development Strategy and Plan** to be developed and shaped with extensive staff engagement
- Embed and refine **Quarterly Assurance** meetings aligned to the Annual Governance Statement
- Embed and refine the **performance management framework** and develop the culture of performance management to inform decisions
- Test member support for all out **elections** cycle
- Implementation of the **Overview and Scrutiny** action plan

# Financial Recovery

**Strategic aim:** Sustainable budget management and supporting culture, making difficult decisions whilst delivering against council strategic priorities and safeguarding future capability.

## Key directions and success measures

### An action plan to achieve financial sustainability

The council has a balanced revenue budget and a sustainable Medium Term Financial Strategy.

### An action plan to ensure that capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable and affordable

The council's capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable.

### Debt reduction plan

The council's debt position has been improved.

### Compliance with financial management guidelines (updated Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy)

The council's functions are operating in line with the appropriate rules, guidance and good practice.

The council has a compliant Housing Revenue Account.

## Objectives

1. Develop and embed governance to underpin financial decision making.
2. Reduce the level of outstanding debt – support asset rationalisation, debt reduction and commercial strategies.
3. Continue to limit future borrowing to refinancing and essential/committed capital spend.
4. Delivery of a long term plan and 2025/26 budget.
5. Start work on the process and ideas for the next programme of savings for 2025/26.
6. Improve financial reporting to aid decision-making and performance management including monitoring delivery of 2024/25 savings.
7. Ensure 2022/23 draft accounts are completed and an audit process has been agreed with external auditors.
8. Deliver a balanced Housing Revenue Account (HRA), correct historic recharge issues and ensure HRA reserves correctly accounted for.
9. Ensure the finance team is fully resourced with the right skills, processes and systems in place to ensure an effective finance function.
10. Ensure budget holders and business partners clear on roles and responsibilities to manage and monitor budgets and savings delivery.
11. Deliver the requirements for the package of financial support from central government.

## 2024/25 workstreams

People and systems

Assurance and expenditure controls

Borrowing and cashflow

Annual accounts

Policies review

Debt reduction (process and quantum)

Delivery of the MTFP and savings tracking

Financial reporting

Housing Revenue Account

Set a balanced budget for 2025/26

Engagement with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC)

# Action plan

Workstream	Aim	Activity
People and systems	To support having a longer term finance function with the right skills and capacity in place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Induction of new permanent Section 151 officer</li> <li>• Appointment of deputy Section 151 officer</li> <li>• Restructure of the finance team</li> <li>• New processes and procedures</li> <li>• Service plans and team objectives</li> <li>• Integra system review (includes shared service options)</li> <li>• Budget Managers and Business Partners training &amp; development</li> <li>• Gap - commercial finance capability/capacity (connected to the commercial theme)</li> </ul>
Assurance and expenditure controls	Ensure basic governance in place to underpin financial decision making and rebuild the commercial decision making frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial control panel – incorporate procurement</li> <li>• Review financial control panel effectiveness</li> <li>• Financial Regulations training for managers</li> <li>• Work with Mazars to ensure an effective internal audit service</li> <li>• Review new arrangements for anti-fraud and corruption</li> <li>• Review processes for monitoring collection fund and benefit overpayments</li> <li>• Financial Management Code assessments updated and finalise update of financial regulations (follow on from Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) work)</li> </ul>
Borrowing and cashflow	To minimise and confirm borrowing requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure clear process for all borrowing approvals within WBC and with DLUHC</li> <li>• Understand how borrowing for capitalisation directive will operate and should be accounted for</li> <li>• Capital programme approvals and business plan process</li> </ul>
Annual accounts	To meet statutory reporting requirements and deliver updated minimum revenue position policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2022/23 final accounts to the audit committee (June 2024)</li> <li>• 2023/24 final accounts to the audit committee (July 2024)</li> </ul>



# Action plan cont.

Workstream	Aim	Activity
Policies review	Review specific policies and associated processes to ensure they are fit for purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Debt collection policy review</li> <li>• Improved process for monitoring collection fund (decisions and returns)</li> <li>• Holistic approach to debt collection and recovery</li> </ul>
Debt reduction (process and quantum)	Reduce the level of debt for the council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quarterly reports to scrutiny/audit</li> <li>• Monitoring of borrowing cashflow and Capital Financing Requirement</li> <li>• Ensure receipts are correctly accounted for and a debt reduction plan is developed, monitored and reported to Commercial and Finance Governance Board</li> </ul>
Delivery of MTFP and savings	To close budget gap as per priority 1 in the directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial benefits monitoring</li> <li>• Financial savings tracking</li> </ul>
Page 61 Financial reporting	To support the production of meaningful financial monitoring information and meet the requirements for government returns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement improved monthly financial reporting to leadership</li> <li>• Implement quarterly financial reporting to members</li> <li>• To include a new capital programme monitoring process</li> <li>• Training for budget holders</li> <li>• Tracker to monitor completion of all government returns</li> <li>• M and A account review</li> <li>• M and A account implement changes</li> <li>• M and A account training and awareness</li> <li>• Revenue outturns and all other statutory financial returns complete</li> </ul>
Housing Revenue Account	Deliver a balanced Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium term HRA budget projections</li> <li>• Correction of historic issues (and accounting for reserves)</li> </ul>
Set a balanced budget for 2025/26	Set a balanced budget for 2025/26 (excluding impact legacy debt)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop budget timetable (CLT/ Executive/ O&amp;S/ Council)</li> <li>• Process for opposition amendments at budget setting</li> <li>• Draft of full suite of budget documents – MTFP, Capital Strategy, Treasury Management Strategy</li> </ul>
Engagement with DLUHC	Deliver the requirements for the package of financial support from central government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain ongoing discussions with DLUHC regarding the government support requirements</li> </ul>

# Commercial

**Strategic aim:** Release the council from unaffordable commitments, whilst protecting the public purse and optimising the value of existing assets.

## Key directions and success measures

### An action plan to strengthen financial and commercial functions

The council has ensured that there are effective governance, risk management and scrutiny arrangements and functions in place for council decisions, that members and officers demonstrate that they understand and respect their roles in council business, and that decisions are taken on the basis of appropriate evidence and analysis.

### An action plan to secure value for money in dealing with and financing of and strategies for companies

The council's remaining assets and commercial interests following a programme of exit are appropriate to the council's size, in line with the corporate plan.

## Objectives

1. Develop a commercial strategy and ensure that effective governance is in place to deliver this strategy. To include:
  - a) A review of all 24 companies and their assets to determine a company restructure programme, aligning them to council objectives and ensuring best value in reducing costs and risk to the council.
  - b) Engagement with the companies on options for the future to ensure revised business plans are in place to deliver the commercial strategy.
  - c) Implementation of improved governance, decision making and risk management frameworks for remaining companies.
2. Develop a strategic options plan for the ThamesWey (TW) Group. To include:
  - a) A strategic options plan for TW Housing (including completing the regeneration of Sheerwater, but also for the whole housing portfolio).
  - b) Strategic options for TW energy including TW Central Milton Keynes disposal.
3. Develop a strategic options plan for Victoria Place and related town centre assets.
4. Develop a strategic options plan for the council's wider commercial estate, assessing disposal and retention options.
5. Ensure that the resources and information requirements to deliver the commercial strategy are in place. To include developing the capacity and skills necessary to drive a profit centre approach to management of the asset portfolio.

## 2024/25 workstreams

Commercial strategy and governance	ThamesWey and subsidiaries	Victoria Square Woking Ltd.
Resourcing, requests and data room	Commercial estate and commercial options	Procurement services improvement

# Action plan

Workstream	Aim	Activity
Commercial strategy and governance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop a long term commercial strategy to develop an asset strategy to support the delivery of a debt reduction programme</li> <li>2. Implement appropriate governance framework for each company and within the council</li> <li>3. Review the 24 council owned companies</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop Commercial Strategy</li> <li>• Commercial and Financial Governance board</li> <li>• Governance review of companies</li> <li>• Implementation of changes required</li> <li>• Adopt new Shareholder Executive Governance</li> <li>• Company loan deferrals</li> <li>• Company Business Plans</li> <li>• Appoint WBC investor advisor</li> <li>• Recruit to boards</li> </ul>
ThamesWey and subsidiaries	Develop strategic options for ThamesWey Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of Strategic Options for TW through 2024:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic cases</li> <li>• Outline cases</li> <li>• Full cases</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Victoria Square Woking Ltd.	Develop strategic options for Victoria Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of Strategic Options for VSWL through 2024:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic cases</li> <li>• Outline cases</li> <li>• Full cases</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Resourcing, requests and data room	Ensure resourcing and information requirements are in place, including skills and capacity for a profit centre approach to asset management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet resourcing requirements to operate the strategy, and meet governance requirements effectively</li> <li>• Assessment of existing commercial asset information, and creation of rectification plan as required to ensure complete asset information is available</li> <li>• Following the identification of strategic options for the council's wider commercial estate, propose resourcing requirements to manage these appropriately based on sector norms through benchmarking vs performance</li> </ul>

# Action plan cont.

Workstream	Aim	Activity
Commercial estate and commercial options	Develop strategic options for the council's wider commercial estate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Analysis of revenue and capital impacts of disposal, development or repurposing</li><li>• Create subsequent options for each asset</li><li>• Make recommendations for each asset based on 'keep, hold or dispose'</li></ul>
Procurement services improvement	Reviewing contracts to ensure value for money and embedding improved procurement and commissioning process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Commercial Continuous Improvement Assessment Framework review of procurement and contract management procedures</li><li>• Contracts register and procurement forward plan</li><li>• Improved processes and procedures</li><li>• Manager training and guidance</li><li>• Incorporation into Commercial Strategy and protocol</li></ul>

# Governance and Assurance

**Strategic aim:** Ensure risk is managed and decisions are made transparently and safely, improving future decision-making.

## Key directions and success measures

### An action plan to strengthen financial and commercial functions

The council has ensured that there are effective governance, risk management and scrutiny arrangements and functions in place for council decisions, that members and officers demonstrate that they understand and respect their roles in council business, and that decisions are taken on the basis of appropriate evidence and analysis.

### An action plan to secure continuous improvement

The council has demonstrated that it is focused on continuously improving in all areas and has robust processes in place to collect and analyse data on its delivery, and to manage its performance effectively, and has developed an organisational culture, at all levels, where staff are enabled and empowered to constructively challenge and improve ways of working.

The council has considered properly and decided as to whether to move to a four yearly electoral cycle.

## Objectives

1. Strengthen the role of scrutiny within the organisation including how the council scrutinises the performance of its companies.
2. Improve standards and audit to ensure greater scrutiny of the audit and governance functions and avoid past mistakes recurring.
3. Develop a legal function to support the council and future commercial activity with the right skills and capacity in place.
4. Work with the commercial theme to ensure enhanced oversight as a shareholder in the remaining companies in line with best practice.
5. Undertake improvements to the constitution in order to ensure it remains effective and fit for purpose in light of changing circumstances.
6. Review the election format to aid long term strategic decision making within the council.
7. Improve the democratic process to ensure members are making well informed decisions that are communicated to officers and the public.
8. Strengthen the process for producing the Annual Governance Statement.

## 2024/25 workstreams

Elections review

Overview and scrutiny function

Democratic process review

Standards and audit (+ Annual Governance Statement)

Legal capability and capacity

# Action plan

Workstream	Aim	Activity
Elections review	Review election format and approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CLT approval to gauge member support</li> <li>• Carry out gauge of member support for moving to all out elections</li> <li>• Subject to levels of support, consider a paper to Council outlining the process to change the election format and seek approval to carry out formal consultation</li> <li>• If relevant, Council to approve a move to all out elections. Potential implementation in May 2028 to align with the Police and Crime Commissioner elections for maximum cost savings</li> </ul>
Overview and Scrutiny function	Review and implement improvements to Scrutiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the Overview and Scrutiny action plan, including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvements to work programming</li> <li>• Improvements to the quality of scrutiny carried out</li> <li>• Improvements to transparency and communication</li> <li>• Improvements to the training of committee members</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Review the need for ongoing support and training requirements</li> </ul>
Democratic process review	Review and implement improvements to the council's democratic process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement internal and external comms plans for improving understanding of and engagement with the Executive and Council, pre and post decision making</li> <li>• Introduce updated report template for committee reports for better quality report writing and more transparent decision making</li> <li>• Complete Council meeting structure review prior to 2024/25 Municipal Year</li> <li>• Update members' induction programme to address the impact of being a council under government intervention and promote the member/officer protocol</li> <li>• Initiate and complete consequential constitutional amendments</li> </ul>
Standards and Audit (+ Annual Governance Statement (AGS))	Review and implement improvements to the Standards and Audit committee and monitoring process for producing the AGS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assurance mapping carried out by the Local Government Association</li> <li>• Recruit and train new independent member(s) as necessary</li> <li>• Implement improvements to the monitoring process to feed into the AGS</li> <li>• Review the need for ongoing support and training requirements</li> </ul>
Legal capability and capacity	Right-size the legal team capability and capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review legal team requirements following staff restructure and review of companies</li> <li>• Implement new 'right-sized'/skill matched legal team</li> </ul>

# Organisation and service redesign

**Strategic aim:** Deliver a smaller, data driven organisation, where staff feel empowered and digitally confident, and are delivering on key priorities.

## Key directions and success measures

### An action plan to reconfigure services

The council has a service offer which is shaped by a focus on its residents and customers and a responsiveness to their needs and demands and which is affordable.

### An action plan to secure continuous improvement

The structure of the council is proportionate to that service offer and to the wider corporate plan and is designed in such a way as to deliver the objectives of that plan.

## Objectives

1. Ensure the staff savings and structural changes are delivered in a timely manner and are managed consistently.
2. Work with communities to deliver the community asset transfers which will lead to some services remaining open.
3. Ensure that all actions within service Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are delivered for resident-facing services and consistently communicated.
4. Manage and monitor the UKSPF funding for EIA actions ensuring timely delivery of required actions.
5. Move customer-facing services online, improving processes and technology to deliver further efficiencies and improved customer service.
6. Develop a culture that ensures the workforce is empowered and digitally confident and aligned to the new vision for the organisation.
7. Improved internal communication and engagement with staff to support the new organisation and culture change.
8. Understand the data we hold, where the gaps are and identify opportunities to improve performance and decision making with better use of data, insights and AI.

## 2024/25 workstreams

Savings delivery: staff changes

Resident services programme (core service improvements & channel shift)

Organisational development

Staff communications and engagement

Savings delivery: resident-facing

Data, insights and AI

# Action plan

Workstream	Aim	Activity
Savings delivery	To ensure the effective delivery of the service changes to realise financial savings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>EIA action plan implementation</li> <li>Communicating service changes to residents</li> <li>Community Asset Transfers</li> <li>Working with partners to support their transformation (CAW, Lightbox)</li> </ul>
Resident services programme	Move customer-facing services online, improving processes and platforms to deliver further efficiencies and improved customer service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Channel Shift (phase 1): delivery of identified 'quick wins' and improvements. Design of a new operating model and wider improvements for Phase 2</li> <li>Channel Shift (phase 2): Customer Services, Revenues and Benefits. Delivery of the new operating model for Customer Services, Revenues and Benefits and the functions, processes and capability to maximise its impact</li> <li>Channel Shift: consistent Resident Experience, other service areas. Same remit as above in, for example housing, planning, parking, environmental health</li> </ul>
Organisational development	To have skilled people delivering good quality services, focusing on organisational priorities and delivering improving organisational performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisational development strategy &amp; Plan</li> <li>Vision and values</li> <li>Working for All refresh</li> <li>HR policies review</li> </ul>
Communications and engagement	Improved internal communication and engagement with staff to support the new organisation and culture change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communications and engagement plan</li> <li>Staff surveys and temperature checks</li> </ul>
Data, insights and AI	To understand the data we hold and where the gaps are and identify opportunities to improve performance and decision making with better use of data, insights and AI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pre-discovery piece of work to establish our position and shape the project</li> </ul>



# Housing Recovery and Improvement

**Strategic aim:** Ensure the service is compliant with housing regulatory standards and deliver an efficient, reliable and modern service that meets statutory requirements and supports strong neighbourhoods and communities for our residents.

## Key directions and success measures

### An action plan to secure continuous improvement

The council has demonstrated that it is focused on continuously improving in all areas and has robust processes in place to collect and analyse data on its delivery, and to manage its performance effectively, and has developed an organisational culture, at all levels, where staff are enabled and empowered to constructively challenge and improve ways of working.

### The Regulator for Social Housing concluded that:

- Working Borough Council has breached the Home Standard; and
- As a consequence of the breach, there was the potential for serious detriment to the council's tenants.

The regulator is working with the council as it seeks to remedy the breach (relating to fire safety and installation of carbon monoxide and smoke detectors) and will continue to consider what further action may need to be taken.

## Objectives

1. Demonstrate compliance with the regulatory standards, leading to homes for our tenants that are safe and fit for purpose.
2. Improve all housing services through the greater use of performance data, benchmarking data and resident feedback.
3. Comply with the regulatory standards, build strong communities and neighbourhoods and increase tenant and leaseholder satisfaction across all parts of the service.
4. Build the council's relationship with its tenants and leaseholders and increasingly involve and seek their views in shaping its service offer.
5. Modernise tools and practice across the housing service, including digital tools and channel shift to online applications and information.
6. Ensure the Council has a sustainable Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 30-year Business Plan that can adequately deliver services to tenants and support its capital investment requirements.
7. Deliver the cultural change across the housing service to deliver the Housing Improvement Programme and achieve compliance with all regulatory standards.

## 2024/25 workstreams

Homes and safety

Data and insight

Tenants and communities

Resident engagement and consultation

Tools and ways of working

Finance

Staffing and culture

# Action plan

Workstream	Aim	Activity
<b>Homes and safety</b>	Demonstrate compliance with the regulatory standards, leading to homes for our tenants that are safe and fit for purpose. Design and deliver the capital investment programme and asset management strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fire risk assessment actions</li> <li>• Compliance monitoring system</li> <li>• Carbon monoxide and smoke detection</li> <li>• Lakeview estate – cladding</li> <li>• Sheerwater refurbishment</li> <li>• Decent homes stock condition survey and 30 year plan</li> <li>• Annual rolling asset management strategy and capital investment programme</li> <li>• Brockhill risk mitigation and closure</li> <li>• Repairs contract reprocurement</li> </ul>
<b>Data and insight</b>	Improve all housing services through the greater use of performance data, benchmarking data and resident feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that our data is available to demonstrate our performance and compliance</li> <li>• Benchmarking with peers to learn and improve via Housemark</li> <li>• Improve internal performance monitoring and utilisation of data in service delivery</li> </ul>
<b>Tenants and communities</b>	Comply with the regulatory standards, build strong communities and neighbourhoods and increase tenant and leaseholder satisfaction across all parts of the service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assessment against regulatory standards and development of action plan</li> <li>• Delivery of DHLUC Homelessness Advice Support Team recommendations</li> <li>• Review of safeguarding policies and procedures</li> <li>• Income collection improvement plan</li> <li>• Void turnaround improvement plan</li> <li>• Update tenancy agreement and handbooks</li> <li>• Review end to end customer journey</li> </ul>
<b>Resident engagement and consultation</b>	Build the council's relationship with its tenants and leaseholders and increasingly involve and seek their views in shaping its service offer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tenant satisfaction survey</li> <li>• Resident communications on fire safety</li> <li>• Complaints improvement plan</li> <li>• Resident engagement plan</li> </ul>

# Action plan

Workstream	Aim	Activity
Tools and ways of working	Modernise tools and practice across the housing service, including digital tools and channel shift to online applications and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process mapping across the service</li> <li>• Implement Capita system upgrade and asset management module</li> <li>• Policy review across housing</li> <li>• Channel shift and improvements to online resources</li> </ul>
Finance	Ensure the Council has a sustainable Housing Revenue Account 30-year Business Plan that can adequately deliver services to tenants and support its capital investment requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set balanced 2024/25 budget</li> <li>• Recharge review and budget structuring</li> <li>• Develop a 30 year Housing Revenue Account business plan</li> <li>• Housing Private Finance Initiative (PFI)</li> </ul>
Staffing and culture	Deliver the cultural change across the housing service to deliver the Housing Improvement Programme and achieve compliance with all regulatory standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create vision and ways of working with housing managers</li> <li>• Roll out to all housing staff</li> <li>• Culture shift programme of activities within the service</li> </ul>



EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

## **COMPANIES GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK – SHAREHOLDER EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

### **Executive Summary**

In July 2022 the Council approved changes to the governance of its companies based on best practice guidance at that time, including that published by Local Partnerships and Lawyers in Local Government. Since that time, further detailed work has been undertaken as part of the Improvement and Recovery Plan and the follow on from the s114 Notice on reviewing the arrangements. This led to a decision by the Executive to adopt the Companies' Governance Framework at its meeting on 16 November 2023, which has resulted now in proposals to further strengthen the Council's oversight and governance of its companies. Accordingly, it is recommended that the Shareholder Advisory Group (SAG) should cease to exist as a group, and a formal Shareholder Executive Committee should be established by the Executive as its replacement.

The meetings of the Shareholder Executive Committee would be held in public (the SAG was previously held in private) and become a formal decision-making body of the Council. It would meet up to nine times per annum, and the meetings' schedule will be published along with agendas and subsequent minutes on the Council's website, subject to Part Two requirements. Decisions made by the Committee will be subject to the same Call-in procedure as for the Executive. The Committee will comprise of the Leader, all Members of the Executive and an Independent Co-opted Member, with the Leader (or appointee) chairing its meetings. The Director for Finance (s151 Officer) and the Director for Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer), or their deputies, and the Strategic Director – Corporate Resources with the Shareholder Liaison Service will advise the Committee and representatives of the subsidiary companies will be invited to attend as required.

The draft Terms of Reference for the new Committee are attached as Appendix 1. In addition, there will be subsequent changes to the Constitution which will require Council formal endorsement; a revised Part 6 is attached as Appendix 2. Meeting dates for the 2024/25 Municipal Year are included in the wider committee structure review as part of the revised Calendar of Meetings elsewhere on this agenda.

The proposal was considered at the meetings of the Corporate Governance Working Group held on 20 February 2024 and the Shareholder Advisory Group on 27 February 2024.

### **Recommendations**

The Executive is requested to:

#### **RESOLVE That**

- (i) the Shareholder Advisory Group cease to exist as a group and the Shareholder Executive Committee be established as its replacement;
- (ii) the Terms of Reference for the new Committee, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved; and

#### **RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL That**

- (iii) **Part 6 of the Council's Constitution be amended as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.**

## Companies Governance Framework – Shareholder Executive Committee

### Reasons for Decision

Reason: Establishing a new Committee will formalise arrangements for the oversight and governance of the Council's companies in the interests of accountability and transparency.

The Executive has authority to determine recommendations (i) and (ii) above; (iii) will need to be dealt with by way of a recommendation to Council.

**Background Papers:** None.

**Reporting Person:** Kevin Foster, Strategic Director – Corporate Resources  
Email: kevin.foster@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3198

**Contact Person:** Kevin Foster, Strategic Director – Corporate Resources  
Email: kevin.foster@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3198

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Ann-Marie Barker  
Email: cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk

**Date Published:** 13 March 2024

## Companies Governance Framework – Shareholder Executive Committee

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Since July 2022, the Council has made proactive steps to improve its governance arrangements in managing and having oversight of its companies. The Council then adopted a Companies Governance Framework based on the best practice issued by the Local Partnerships, Lawyers in Local Government, and the UK Corporate Governance Code. The Framework set out the legal obligations and governance processes for both the companies and the Council.
- 1.2 The Shareholder Advisory Group (SAG) had been set up following the Council's decision in July 2022; but since then the Council has issued a section 114 and in response to the Secretary of State's Directions the Council approved its Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP). The IRP contained four strategic aims one of which, under the Commercial theme, is to strengthen the Shareholder Advisory Group and develop reporting content from the Shareholder Liaison Service. Robust monitoring, with clear roles and responsibilities is key to the successful delivery of the IRP.
- 1.3 To support and advise the SAG, a Shareholder Liaison Service (SLS) was set up comprising of officers for Commercial, Financial and Governance. The team reports into the Strategic Director – Corporate Resources. The officer support through the SLS remains in place and is unchanged.
- 1.4 Currently, the SAG consists of the Leader, all Executive Members, an Independent Co-opted Member and the SLS and they meet in private once a quarter to discuss 1) ThamesWey, 2) Victoria Square and 3) other companies in three separate meetings. The Chair of Overview and Scrutiny, as a Member of the Council from outside of the Executive may attend to act in the capacity of an observer.
- 1.5 Whilst the SAG was established to perform the shareholder function and provided the necessary oversight on behalf of the Council, it has no decision-making powers and is not subject to the legislation around public meetings. It is proposed that the SAG cease to exist as a group and a new Shareholder Executive Committee (SEC) be established as its replacement in order to further improve openness and transparency.
- 1.6 The SEC would meet up to nine times per annum, not normally more often than meetings of the Executive, and be bound by the existing rules at meetings of the Executive. Whilst many of the items discussed may be subject to Part Two requirements (where certain matters can be heard in private), the meetings shall be open to the public and the meetings' schedule will be published along with agendas and subsequent minutes on the Council's website, subject to Part Two requirements. The quorum shall be one-third of the number of members of the Executive (with such rounding-up as may be necessary to achieve whole numbers) or two (whichever is the greater).
- 1.7 The SEC will comprise of the Leader, all Members of the Executive and an Independent Co-opted Member. The Leader (or appointee) will chair the Committee meetings and a Vice Chair will be selected from the Elected Members of the Executive.
- 1.8 The Strategic Director – Corporate Resources with the SLS, Service Director for Finance (s151 Officer) and the Service Director for Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer), or their deputies, and the SLS will be advisors to the Committee to provide open and strong advice. Representatives of the subsidiary companies will be invited to attend the meetings as required.
- 1.9 To assist it in its functions the SEC may establish and consult with standing sub-groups, such as might be required in respect of Audit, Performance and Risk, Ethical Practices or Nominations and Remuneration. It may also establish and consult task and finish sub-groups in respect of any matter.

## **Companies Governance Framework – Shareholder Executive Committee**

- 1.10 The responsibility to represent the Council as the Shareholder of the Company is an Executive function as per the Local Authority (Functions and Responsibilities) England Regulations 2000.
- 1.11 Furthermore, under the Local Government Act 1972, a Committee, including the Executive, can establish a formal Sub-committee and delegate any of its functions to such a Sub-committee. The Committee is responsible for setting the terms of reference and duration of the Sub-committee and appointing the membership, which must be from members of the parent Committee, and the chair. There is no conflict of interest since the Council made the decision to remove all Councillors and Senior Officers off the company boards.
- 1.12 Subsequent material Constitution amendments have been made to the following and is recommended to Full Council for approval:
- The Shareholder Advisory Group cease to exist as a group and the Shareholder Executive Committee be established as its replacement, with Terms of Reference (Appendix 1); and
  - Changes to Part 6 from Wholly Owned WBC Companies to Council Companies (Appendix 2).

### **2.0 Corporate Strategy**

- 2.1 The establishment of the SEC and the adoption of the Companies Governance Framework fulfils the requirements of the Improvement and Recovery Plan to deliver stronger governance, commercial oversight, and the strategic aims of the Council.

### **3.0 Implications**

#### Finance and Risk

- 3.1 There would be no financial implications other than the operational cost of holding the Shareholder Executive Committee in public in the Council Chamber as an in-person meeting.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

- 3.2 None.

#### Legal

- 3.3 As outlined in the report, representing the Shareholder for the Council is an Executive function.
- 3.4 As part of this review, further work will continue so as to ensure that, as far as possible, the Council's Constitution, the Companies Governance Framework, and the Articles for each company that the Council owns, are in close alignment and are consistent throughout. A review of the Victoria Square Woking Limited and ThamesWey Woking Limited Articles will be carried out, and a revised set of Articles for each company will be presented to the first meeting of the Shareholder Executive Committee seeking the Committee's approval for adoption.

### **4.0 Engagement and Consultation**

- 4.1 The Leader of the Council, the Corporate Governance Working Group and the Shareholder Advisory Group have been consulted in the working up of the report.

REPORT ENDS



## **Shareholder Executive Committee**

### Terms of Reference

#### **Overview**

The purpose of the Shareholder Executive Committee (SEC) is to act as the Shareholder and take decisions in respect of companies in which the Council has an interest. The responsibility to represent the Council as Shareholder of the company falls to be an Executive Function under the Local Authority (Functions and Responsibilities) England Regulations 2000.

#### **Decision making**

The Committee will have functions relating to the Council's companies and joint ventures. It will act as the decision making body in relation to the functions delegated to it. Support and advice will be provided to the Shareholder Executive Committee by the Strategic Director of Corporate Resources with the Shareholder Liaison Service (SLS), the Service Director for Finance (s151 Officer) and the Service Director for Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer). Decisions made by the SEC will be subject to the same Call-in procedures as for the Executive.

#### **Membership and Arrangements**

The SEC will comprise of the Leader, all Members of the Executive and an Independent Co-opted Member. The Leader (or appointee) will chair the Committee meetings and a Vice Chair will be selected from the elected members of the Executive.

The Service Director for Finance (s151 Officer) and the Service Director for Legal and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer), or their deputies, and the Strategic Director of Corporate Resources with the SLS will be advisors to the Committee to provide open and strong advice. Representatives of the subsidiary companies will be invited to attend the meetings as required.

#### **Restrictions on Membership**

As the SEC is to advise and discharge Executive functions in relation to company matters, only Executive members can be members of the Committee with voting rights, although non-Executive members may attend the public meetings without voting rights.

#### **Meetings**

The SEC shall normally meet up to nine times per annum, not normally more often than meetings of the Executive, and be bound by the existing rules at meetings of the Executive. Whilst many of the items discussed may be subject to Part Two requirements (where certain matters can be heard in private), the meetings shall be open to the public and the meetings' schedule will be published along with agendas and subsequent minutes on the Council's website, subject to Part Two requirements.

The quorum shall be one-third of the number of members of the Executive (with such rounding-up as may be necessary to achieve whole numbers) or two (whichever is the greater).

## Sub-Groups

To assist it in its functions the Shareholder Executive Committee:

1. may establish sub-groups for advisory purposes such as:
  - (a) Audit and Risk;
  - (b) Ethical practices; or
  - (c) Nominations and Remuneration
2. an ad-hoc or task and finish sub-groups in respect of any matter; and
3. stakeholder groups on any particular aspect or the generality of the objects of the trading companies.

A sub-group or stakeholder group may contain such co-opted members, advisors or observers and set the terms of reference as the SEC sees fit. The SEC cannot delegate any of its functions to the sub-groups.

## Functions

1. Hold the companies to account for delivery of the Business Plan and, in particular, the company's performance:
  - (a) in financial matters
  - (b) against the social goals of the company as set out in the company's Objects, Business Case or Business Plan; and
  - (c) against the values of the Council.
2. Evaluate and monitor:
  - (a) the financial and social returns on investment (be that shareholding, loans, or direct investment); and
  - (b) risks and opportunities including those arising from joint ventures or new opportunities.
3. Consider matters reserved to the Council for shareholder approval, such as:
  - (a) Varying Articles of Association
  - (b) Varying ownership and structure
  - (c) Variations to shares (number of, rights, etc.
  - (d) Entering contracts that: are outside of the business plan or do not relate to the business
  - (e) Material legal proceedings outside of ordinary business
  - (f) Adopting and amending business plans each year and strategic plans (3 years)
  - (g) Appointment, removal, and the remuneration of directors (members of the company board)
  - (h) Selection of the chair of the board
  - (i) Appointment of auditors
  - (j) Payment of dividends

as more particularly set out in a company's Articles of Association or Shareholder Agreement and the Companies' Governance Framework.

## **Relationship**

The Shareholder Executive Committee as it considers appropriate in accordance with its functions described above, may:

1. make reports and consult with Full Council, or
2. make reports to and consult Overview and Scrutiny or
3. make reports to and consult the Standards and Audit Committee, in relation to that Committee's particular functions.

## **Communication with the Shareholder Representative and Shareholder Executive Committee**

1. The Board of each Company attaches great importance to maintaining good relationships with all shareholders, who are kept informed of significant company developments.
2. The Companies shall work closely with the SLS and the SEC. The Companies shall report to the SEC when requested and in accordance with the agreed work programme and on matters set out in the Companies' Governance Framework.

Date approved by Executive: 21 March 2024 (to be confirmed)

(The Terms of Reference are to be included in the Companies Governance Framework as appendix 2.)



## **Part 6 – Council Companies**

### **Introduction**

The Council has various statutory powers to enable it to set up a company which may take various forms. The Council must effectively manage the relationship between the Council and the companies to ensure that they deliver the objectives established for it by the Council and to ensure transparent and robust governance processes for both the Council and the companies with reference to the Council Companies' Governance Framework.

The Council owns 24 companies either as 100% Shareholder or through joint ventures. Where the Council uses the enabling legislation to create its own companies, either as the sole or as a joint owner, the broad terms of the objects of each Council company will be recorded in its Articles of Association, while its Shareholder Agreement (where necessary) will set out more detailed operational arrangements and the matters which are reserved for determination by the Council as the shareholder. In general, these reserved matters will be key structural and high-level strategic matters rather than the "day-to-day" business and operations of the company, which will be the responsibility of the company directors.

This part of the Constitution should be read in conjunction with the Council's Companies' Governance Framework.

### **Principles of Governance of Council Companies**

Any decisions or recommendations in relation to the companies shall be formed with clear reference to the principles outlined in the Council's Companies' Governance Framework.

The Council's governance arrangements will seek to ensure the following:

#### **Appropriate Controls and Freedoms**

- The companies will be provided with sufficient freedoms to allow it to achieve its objectives, but
- The Council will retain sufficient controls to ensure that its investment is protected, that appropriate social and financial returns on investment can be obtained in line with the companies, confirmed in the business case and business plan.
- The trading activities of the companies are, wherever possible, conducted in accordance with the values of the Council.

#### **Appropriate Relationships, Integrity, Transparency and Accountability**

- Procedures operate in a way that protects the commercial interests of the companies **and** those procedures will ensure that the Council can carry out its functions as an investor, as a trustee of public funds and a Council committed to due responsibility for the exercise of its functions.

- An Executive Committee or the Leader can make decisions based upon complete and accurate consideration of company business plans or proposals,
- An Executive Committee or the Leader can evaluate social and financial benefits and returns in line with the business plan, and
- The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee(s) are able to exercise their powers in relation to the Executive's decision making.

### Understanding of roles of the Council and the Company

- That there is sufficient induction, regular training and other materials in place so that:
  - their legal duties,
  - stewardship of assets,
  - the provision of the governing documents,
  - the external environment, and
  - the total structure of the Council and the Company

are appropriately understood by Councillors in their various roles including as a Member of the Council, the Executive, Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Shareholder Executive Committee, by officers of the Council and by Directors of the Company and that the standards outlined in the Companies' Governance Framework (informed by the Lawyers in Local Government Code of Practice, the UK Corporate Governance Code, the Institute of Directors and CIPFA) are met or, where not deemed appropriate, reasons for not doing so are clearly set, justified and approved.

### **Roles, Responsibilities and Decision Making**

The responsibility to represent the Council as shareholder for the companies is an Executive function under the Local Authority (Functions and Responsibilities) England regulations 2000.

The Shareholder Executive Committee will decide any matters falling within company's reserved matters, to protect the Council's interests and investments in the company and determine the future direction of the company.

The Shareholder Liaison Service (SLS) comprises the officers for Commercial, Financial and Governance. The team reports into the Strategic Director of Corporate Resources.

The activities of the Shareholder Executive Committee will be subject to consideration by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee(s) and call-in procedures.

The individual companies will not be directly accountable to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee(s). Each Council-owned company is an independent legal entity which is entirely separate from the Council. The company will have its own identity and responsibilities, so cannot be treated as an internal department of the Council. A Council-owned company is required to comply with Company law, its Articles of Association and its Shareholder's Agreement. It is not governed by the Council's Constitution.

Reserved matters follow the Council's Executive decision making processes set out in Article 7 – Executive Arrangements and will be treated as subject to part 4 section 6 – Access to Information Procedure Rules.

Decisions on Reserved matters relating to companies where the Council has a controlling interest, or a minority interest will be taken in the same manner as wholly owned companies. The constitution notes that in the case of companies which are not wholly owned an Executive Decision is subject to the consent of the other shareholders in the entity which shall be governed in accordance with the provisions of the relevant Shareholder Agreement.

Each company will be governed by a formally constituted Board which is tasked with delivering the Shareholder's objectives and reporting to the Shareholder/ Owner on strategic and key operational matters as set out in the Companies' Governance Framework.

The appointment and dismissal of Directors (including non-executive Directors) is a reserved matter for the Shareholder/ Owner/ Owners and this must be reflected in the companies' articles. Directors are responsible for the management of the business of the company with exception of the reserved matters.

The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee(s) are responsible for scrutiny of the Executive's decisions in relation to companies and can make recommendations to the Executive on company related matters. Executive decisions on companies are subject to the Call-in processes outlined in Article 8 – Overview and Scrutiny.

Overview and Scrutiny Committees can invite company representatives to attend meetings to provide information to support the scrutiny of the Executive. This does not extend to scrutiny of the company and its performance.

### **Access to Information**

This should be read in conjunction with Part 4 section 6– Access to Information Procedure Rules which covers access to meetings and documents of the Council, the Executive and its Committees.

Reserved matters which require Shareholder/ Owner consent are defined in the Articles of Association or Shareholder Agreement for each company. The process for approving and recording decisions relating to reserved matter will be defined within the Shareholder Agreement and will be consistent across all companies as far as possible. Such decisions are Executive Decisions and are also captured by the Council's Access to information Procedure Rules.

Each Company will maintain strong controls framework with adequate financial records which meet the requirements of the Companies' Governance Framework. Each should have the documents set out below:

- Business Case – assesses the risks and benefits involved in the creation of proposed COEs

- Articles of Association – sets out the constitution of the COE
- The Shareholder Agreement – sets out the rights of the Council as the sole/co-shareholder and how it can exercise those rights
- The Funding Agreement – sets out what financial assistance is to be provided by the Council to the COE and on what terms
- The Business Plan – forward looking, setting out what the COE will do and the objectives of the business and how they are to be achieved
- Shareholder Board Agenda and summary or meeting discussions and decisions
- Monthly performance reports.
- Monthly management accounts

All of the above documents and details about which individuals sit on the Board of Directors are accessible by Councillors and members of the public unless they contain exempt or confidential information.



EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

## REVIEW OF COUNCIL MEETING STRUCTURE

### Executive Summary

Appended is the report and appendices on the Review of Council Meeting Structure due to be received at the Council meeting on Thursday, 28 March 2024.

The Executive is requested to review the recommendations, report, appendices and provide any commentary it may have to Council.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is due to receive the report and appendices at its meeting on Monday, 18 March 2024. Any comments raised by the Committee shall be presented to Council and the Executive for review and consideration.

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### RESOLVE That

comments of the Executive on the proposed new structure be submitted to Council.

### Reasons for Decision

Reason: For the Executive to review and provide commentary on the proposed new meeting structure.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

<b>Background Papers:</b>	None.
<b>Reporting Person:</b>	Gareth John, Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer Email: gareth.john@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3077
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Frank Jeffrey, Head of Democratic Services Email: frank.jeffrey@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3012
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Ann-Marie Barker Email: cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk
<b>Date Published:</b>	13 March 2024



## REVIEW OF COUNCIL MEETING STRUCTURE

### Executive Summary

Over recent months Officers from Woking Borough Council have been working with a number of stakeholders, including the [Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#) (CfGS), on a review of the Council's arrangements for formal and informal meetings. The purpose was to draw up proposals which would achieve a range of outcomes to address comments received and measures taken following the decision of the Council to issue a Section 114 Statement and the subsequent [Government intervention](#).

These objectives include:

- Improved effectiveness and efficiency of meetings and decision making.
- Improved effectiveness and impact of scrutiny.
- Rationalisation of 'closed' meetings such as Working Groups, Boards etc.
- Greater openness and transparency of the decision-making process.
- 'Smarter working' to reflect the impact of changes to services and staffing levels.
- Improved cross-committee cooperation and coordination.

A detailed paper on the proposals has been drawn up and is attached to this report. A copy of the report is due to be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 18 March 2024, and a summary of the Committee's discussion will be provided to both the Executive and Council following that meeting. Also attached is a proposed calendar of meetings for the coming Municipal Year to replace the calendar adopted towards the end of 2023.

### Recommendations

The Council is requested to:

#### **RESOLVE That**

- (i) from 20 May 2024, the current Overview and Scrutiny Committee be disbanded and replaced by three, directorate specific Committees, each with responsibility for overview and scrutiny, namely the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee, the Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee and the Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee;
- (ii) Officers be instructed to draw up a Committee Responsibility Protocol for consideration at Council in the new Municipal Year;
- (iii) from 20 May 2024, the Standards and Audit Committee be renamed the Audit and Governance Committee;
- (iv) annual training on audit and governance be made mandatory for the Members of the Committee;

## Review of the Council's Meeting Structure

- (v) the Audit and Governance Committee completes a review of its function by the end of each Municipal Year;
- (vi) an Employment Committee be constituted, to come into effect from 20 May 2024;
- (vii) Officers be instructed to draw up a protocol for the Group of Chairs for consideration at Council in the New Municipal Year;
- (viii) Officers be instructed to draw up a policy framework for decision-making for submission to Council in the new Municipal Year;
- (ix) from 20 May 2024, the Appeals Committee be disbanded;
- (x) the revised calendar of meetings for 2024/25, as set out in Annex 2 of the report, be adopted;
- (xi) the Working Groups and Panels as set out in Section 28 of the Annex 1 be disbanded from 1 May 2024;
- (xii) authority be delegated to the Strategic Director for Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, to determine any applications for Community Infrastructure Levy funding below £10,000;
- (xiii) any outstanding pieces of work from the old Committee Structure, including Working Groups, be brought forward under the new arrangements;
- (xiv) a limit of four be placed on the total number of active task and finish groups operating at the Council at any one time unless exceptional circumstances exist as deemed by the Group of Chairs in Consultation with Statutory Officers;
- (xv) the Monitoring Officer be instructed to make consequential amendments to the Constitution, the revised Constitution to be presented to Council on 20 May 2024; and
- (xvi) a joint Member-Officer review of the new structure be undertaken at the beginning of 2025, the outcomes to be reported to Council.

The Council has the authority to determine the recommendations above.

**Background Papers:** None.

**Reporting Person:** Gareth John, Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer  
Email: gareth.john@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3077

**Contact Person:** Frank Jeffrey, Head of Democratic Services  
Email: frank.jeffrey@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3012

## Review of the Council's Meeting Structure

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Ann-Marie Barker  
Email: [cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk](mailto:cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk)

**Date Published:** 20 March 2024

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report summarises the full proposal paper attached at Annex 1.
- 1.2 As part of the [Improvement and Recovery Programme](#) it has been identified that the Council's meeting structure could be made more efficient and prioritise the scrutiny function of Council.
- 1.3 It was noted in the [External Assurance Review](#) that the Council runs a number of non-public meetings through Working Groups and Panels and that these could be rationalised.
- 1.4 The proposals impact the Council meeting structure and aim to reduce the resource required to service them by Members and Officers while simultaneously improving the efficiency and transparency of decision-making.

### 2.0 Proposal

- 2.1 The key changes of the proposal paper are summarised below:
  - 2.1.1 The Council meeting structure is streamlined including the disbanding of many Working Groups, Panels and Boards.
  - 2.1.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is reconstituted as three, directorate-specific, scrutiny committees.
  - 2.1.3 The Standards and Audit Committee is renamed to the Audit and Governance Committee and its responsibilities for governance and audit be reviewed.
  - 2.1.4 A Group of Chairs is formed to help Committees coordinate work.
  - 2.1.5 An expansion of the Executive/ O&S protocol to encompass responsibilities and working relationships between Committees, the Executive and Council.
  - 2.1.6 An Employment Committee is constituted.
  - 2.1.7 The Appeals Committee is disbanded.
  - 2.1.8 Applications for Community Infrastructure Levy funding below £10,000 to be determined by the (Acting) Strategic Director of Place in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning.
  - 2.1.9 A new Calendar of Council Meetings is attached at Annex 2.

### 3.0 Purpose and Outcome

- 3.1 The restructure is intended to:
  - 3.1.1 Improve transparency at the Council moving more business and information to public meetings.
  - 3.1.2 Streamline and make more transparent the decision-making process.
  - 3.1.3 Improve the scrutiny function at the Council.
  - 3.1.4 Improve the coordination of work between Committees, the Executive and Council.
  - 3.1.5 Prioritise the governance and audit functions of the Council.

3.2 Success will be measured by:

3.2.1 Scrutiny forming a more central function to the development of policy and overview of Council business.

3.2.2 Governance of the Council and its monitoring being more effective.

3.2.3 Council business and policy is better coordinated and monitored.

### 4.0 Background and Process

4.1 The full proposal paper is set out at Appendix 1. Each change to the Council meeting structure is laid out covering the background and rationale that led to the development of the proposals.

#### Alternatives

4.2 Consideration was given to retaining the Council Meeting structure currently employed. However, recommendation had been given that it should be reconsidered as part of the [External Assurance Review](#).

4.3 The Council's organisational restructure, reducing Officer resource, added risk to the sustainability of output for the number of extant public and non-public meetings.

4.4 It was recognised that the number of meetings placed burden on Members and due to the multitude of Groups it was difficult to stay abreast of all relevant information.

4.5 Throughout the formation of the proposals alternatives were considered. Consideration was always given as to whether each part of the structure could benefit from being amended or retained as is.

4.6 The number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees was given considerable attention. Alternative proposals of 1, 2, or 4 Committees were considered;

4.6.1 Retaining a 1-committee structure was deemed incompatible with the aim of providing focus on both the Council's Improvement and Recovery Programme and business as usual work. A 1-committee structure only allows for a minority of Councillors to take part in scrutiny.

4.6.2 A 2-committee structure was considered but did not split responsibilities cleanly leading to overlap or uncertainty.

4.6.3 A 4-committee structure, following the directorates and a dedicated committee for the improvement and recovery programme was considered. However, it was recognised that it was not possible to separate out directorate-level improvements from the Council's ordinary business.

### 5.0 Implications

#### Finance and Risk

5.1 There are no known financial implications from this report.

### Equalities and Human Resources

- 5.2 The Council meeting restructure is designed as a consequence of the organisational changes that are taking place at the Council, reducing Officer resource. It is expected that resource will benefit or mitigate the reduction in resource from the organisational change Officer workload.

### Legal

- 5.3 Changes to the Council meeting structure will require changes to the Constitution.
- 5.4 There are no known legal implications from this report.

## **6.0 Engagement and Consultation**

- 6.1 Senior Officers, Managers and Corporate Leadership have been consulted.
- 6.2 [Commissioners](#) have been consulted.
- 6.3 Members have been consulted through workshops and briefing sessions.
- 6.4 The [Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#) (CfGS) have supported Officers in developing the proposals.
- 6.5 The proposal is being submitted to [Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#) and the [Executive](#) prior to approval.

REPORT ENDS





Proposals Paper

**Review of  
Council Meeting Structure**

**Woking Borough Council**

2024

Version 3.5

## Contents

_Toc160789927Summary of Proposals.....	4
1. Key Proposals .....	4
Introduction .....	5
2. Outcomes .....	5
3. The Constitution.....	5
4. Review of Changes .....	6
5. Timeline .....	6
6. Elected Member Workshop .....	6
7. The Improvement and Recovery Plan .....	7
8. Governance and Assurance.....	7
Overview and Scrutiny Committees .....	8
9. New Scrutiny Committee Structure .....	8
10. Allocation of Service Scrutiny Responsibilities.....	9
11. Intervention .....	10
12. Overview and Scrutiny / Executive Protocol .....	10
13. Scrutiny .....	11
14. Performance and Financial Management .....	11
The Standards and Audit Committee .....	12
15. CIPFA Guidance .....	12
16. Training .....	13
17. Strengthening Function.....	13
18. Review of Governance and Audit Function.....	13
Employment Committee .....	14
19. Proposal .....	14
Chairs' Group.....	14
20. Proposal .....	14
Council, the Executive and Remaining Committees.....	15
21. Full Council.....	15
22. Decision Making Responsibilities .....	15
23. The Executive .....	15
24. Licensing Committee and its Sub-Committees .....	16
25. Appeals Committee.....	16
26. The Shareholder Executive Committee.....	16
Review of the Annual Calendar of Meetings.....	17
Calendar of Meetings Comparison.....	18
27. In-Year Comparison.....	18
Working Groups, Boards and Panels .....	19
28. Proposal .....	19
Task and Finish Groups.....	21
29. Proposal .....	21
30. Scrutiny Toolkit .....	21
31. Resourcing and Prioritisation .....	21
Briefing / Workshop Programme .....	22
32. Proposal .....	22

33. Mandatory (Essential) Training .....	22
34. Briefings (regular, informal, online) .....	22
35. Workshops (ad-hoc, informal, in person) .....	22
Clearer Communication of Proposals and Decisions.....	23
36. Report Writing Review .....	23
37. Communication of Proposals and Decisions .....	23
The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny .....	23
38. Feedback.....	23
Appendix 1 .....	26
CIPFA’s Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022.....	26
1. Scope.....	26
2. Status of the position statement .....	26
3. Purpose of the audit committee .....	26
4. Independent and effective model.....	26
5. Core functions.....	27
6. Audit committee membership.....	28
7. Characteristics of audit committee membership: .....	28
8. Engagement and outputs.....	28
9. Impact .....	29
Appendix 2 .....	30
Task and Finish Group Guidance .....	30
1. What is a Task and Finish Group? .....	30
2. Purpose and Duties .....	30
3. Membership/Roles/Leadership .....	30
4. Resources.....	31
5. Planning .....	31
6. Evidence Gathering .....	32
7. Meetings .....	32
8. Monitoring .....	33
Appendix 3 .....	34
Employment Committee – Draft Terms of Reference.....	34
1. Membership.....	34
2. Procedure Rules .....	34
3. Terms of Reference.....	34
Appendix 4 .....	36
Overview and Scrutiny Member Session Analysis and insight from workshop, 24 January 2024.....	36
1. Review of scrutiny findings .....	36
2. Key areas for future focus.....	37
3. CULTURE .....	37
4. BEHAVIOURS .....	37
5. IMPACT.....	38
6. Recurring themes across CULTURE, BEHAVIOURS and IMPACT .....	39
7. Ideas for taking the themes forward .....	40

## Summary of Proposals

The [External Assurance Review](#) of the Council tasked the Authority with strengthening the Authority's scrutiny responsibilities as well as reviewing the Working Groups with a view to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of both the formal and informal meetings of the Council.

Consequently, the Overview and Scrutiny workstream of the [Improvement and Recovery Programme](#) was developed. In scoping the workstream it was recognised that, to improve the Council's scrutiny processes, a review of the Council meeting structure and democratic process was required, which in turn became a workstream of the Governance and Assurance Theme.

Separately, the Council has undertaken an organisational restructure leading to the loss of resource throughout the Authority. Therefore, the level of business conducted by Committees must be rationalised against the remaining sustainable output of the Corporate structure.

### 1. Key Proposals

This paper articulates the outcomes of the review and proposes significant changes to the Council meeting structure. Notably they are:

- Replacement of the existing single Overview and Scrutiny Committee with 3, service-specific scrutiny committees.
- Reduction in the number of full Council meetings per Municipal Year to 6.
- Increase in the number of Executive meetings per Municipal Year to 9.
- Rebalancing of the Council calendar to ensure business can efficiently reach the appropriate Committee sequence (O&S → Executive → Council (if appropriate)) when the business is ready.
- Closing of the majority of Working Groups, Boards, Panels etc. with the exception of those required by statute or whose loss would otherwise have adverse consequences for the Council, partners and the wider community.
- Develop a programme of regular briefings and workshops informed by both Officers and elected Members to communicate and develop Council business on a less formal basis than at Committee.
- Renaming of the Standards and Audit Committee to the Governance and Audit Committee to highlight its role in actively monitoring the governance of the Council.
- Completing an assurance mapping exercise of the Standards and Audit Committee before the start of the new Municipal Year with the support of the LGA.
- Expansion of the O&S / Executive protocol to include Council, Governance and Audit Committee and other Committees as well as promote greater dialogue between the Executive and Committees.
- Removal of the now redundant Appeals Committee.
- Establishment of a 'Chairs' Group' to encourage cross-committee discussions and ensure the business of Council is considered holistically.
- The proposals, if adopted from May 2024, be reviewed after twelve months to ensure the ambitions and outcomes of these proposals are realised.

These proposals follow multiple months of review which considered a variety of different 'models' and configurations, taking in the advice of the [Commissioners](#), [the Local Government Association](#) (LGA), the [Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#) (CfGS) and Officers. The feedback received through the Member workshop on scrutiny, held in January 2024, was also used in the development work, and the feedback is summarised at the end of this paper. Furthermore, Officers have looked at examples of best practice

employed by other local Authorities, in particular those which have been, or are currently, under Government intervention.

## Introduction

This paper outlines proposals arising from a review of Woking Borough Council's Committee structure conducted by Officers in partnership with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (the CfGS). The Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan has highlighted the importance of the Authority's governance arrangements and it is apparent that the Council's Committee structure as a whole is due a substantial reconsideration amid perceived shortcomings.

Details of the Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan, and in particular the objectives relating to the governance and assurance theme, are outlined later in the paper.

The proposals have been drawn up to deliver a series of outcomes necessary if the Council is to strengthen its governance arrangements, in particular the Authority's responsibility to undertake effective scrutiny for the benefit of residents, local communities, partner organisations and the Council itself.

More information on the CfGS and the role it has played is set out later in this paper.

The start time of Committees has not been altered.

## 2. Outcomes

The intended outcomes of the proposals outlined in this paper include:

- Improved effectiveness and efficiency of meetings and decision making.
- Improved effectiveness and impact of scrutiny and a strong ethos of scrutiny amongst elected Members, the Corporate Leadership Team and Officers.
- Implementation of the recommendations of CfGS and the LGA.
- Rationalisation of closed meetings such as Working Groups, Boards etc.
- Greater openness and transparency of the decision-making process.
- 'Smarter working' to reflect the impact of changes to services and staffing levels.
- Improved cross-committee cooperation and coordination.

These outcomes seek to address those areas raised as concerns in discussions with elected Members, Officers, Commissioners, the LGA and the CfGS. It is clear that the Council's committee structure can be improved, recognising the many changes the Council has seen since the model was first adopted over 20 years ago. The Council must also adapt to having fewer resources.

Through changes to the structure, greater clarification of the roles of elected Members appointed to Committees, and the roles of the Committees, it is intended that decisions are made in an efficient, robust and transparent manner and that scrutiny is given a more central role. Such improvements will be achieved with the assistance and advice of the CfGS and the aspirations of elected Members and Officers.

The review will also contribute to other workstreams of the Governance and Assurance Theme.

## 3. The Constitution

The changes proposed will require significant redrafting of sections of the Constitution, including the creation of clear and robust terms of reference for the Committees. The intention is to determine the

proposals at Council on 28 March 2024 and that, subject to resources being available, a revised version of the [Constitution](#) be submitted to Council on 20 May 2024 based on the decision of 28 March 2024.

#### 4. Review of Changes

These proposals represent substantial changes to the current arrangements and it is recommended that, if adopted, the new measures are reviewed to ensure that they are effective, efficient and sustainable.

It is therefore proposed that a review is undertaken towards the end of the 2024/25 Municipal Year/beginning of the 2025/26 Municipal Year. All Members will be afforded an opportunity to comment on the effectiveness of new arrangements, with a final paper to be presented to the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee. Any changes will be recommended onto Council for decision.

It is recognised that even the most suitable arrangements for a Council in intervention may not be appropriate for the Council in future. Therefore, further reviews should be considered as the Council continues to recover and adapt to the needs of its residents.

#### 5. Timeline

Set out below is a summary of the timeline and engagement followed in the development of these proposals:

- Initial discussions started in August 2023, working with the LGA and the CfGS in particular.
- CfGS hosted workshop for elected Members – 25 January 2024
- Improvement and Recovery Board Briefing – 6 February 2024
- [Council – 8 February 2024](#) – Decision taken to merge the two Council Meetings in May, moving the election of Mayor (16 May 2024) to the meeting of Council on 20 May 2024.
- Informal Executive Briefing – 19 February 2024.
- Senior Managers Group Briefing – 21 February 2024
- Informal Member Briefing – 29 February 2024.
- Informal all Member Briefing – 7 March 2024.
- [Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#) – 18 March 2024. Undertake pre-decision scrutiny of proposals.
- [Executive – 21 March 2024](#) – Consider the proposals with a view to recommending them to Council.
- [Council – 28 March 2024](#) – To determine proposed changes to (i) the Committee Structure and (ii) a revised calendar of meetings for 2024/25.
- Selection Panel – 14 May 2024 – To consider the membership and proportionality of Committees and other Groups based on the new structure and the outcomes of the May elections.
- [Council – 20 May 2024](#) – Appointments to be confirmed. New Constitution to be adopted.

#### 6. Elected Member Workshop

On 25 January 2024, the CfGS hosted a workshop on the role of scrutiny to which all elected Members were invited. The workshop included an exercise in which smaller groups of Councillors were asked to provide feedback, inviting suggestions for ways in which the Council's scrutiny functions could be strengthened. Outlined below is a summary of the key points raised by Members, elements of which have been included in these proposals.

- A need to increase scrutiny skills and knowledge.
- A lack of clear impact with a danger of Overview and Scrutiny becoming a 'talking shop.'



- Poor documentation data and record keeping, lack of transparency and the need for better connectivity across Committees.
- A need for improved induction process and clearer structure for scrutiny.
- A desire for fewer working groups with better collaboration between Committees.
- A need for greater openness and transparency, increasing visibility.
- A desire to get more deeply involved in scrutiny, holding meetings ‘in the open,’ rather than in closed working groups.
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be more reflective of itself, to help nurture understanding of what its impact has been.
- The scrutiny work programme to be designed collaboratively, involving both the Committee members and the Executive.
- A need for advance planning, reviewing topics at an earlier stage at Scrutiny Committee to determine the best impact.
- A proposal to assign a Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) Member to each scrutiny meeting, ensuring that outcomes are shared back to CLT and Council service areas.
- The Committee to arrive at clear recommendations.
- Concern over resourcing in view of the staffing restructure.

The full details of the feedback received through the workshop is set out in Appendix 4 to this paper.

## 7. The Improvement and Recovery Plan

Following statutory government intervention and the issuing of a Section 114 Notice, Woking Borough Council was required to put in place an Improvement and Recovery Plan.

The Improvement and Recovery Plan will deliver the expectations detailed in the Secretary of State’s Directions published on 25 May 2023 and will support the Council in meeting its best value duty. The Plan will also draw upon the recommendations of the non-statutory external assurance review into the Authority’s finances, investments and related governance.

The three-to-five-year Plan, adopted at an Extraordinary Meeting of Full Council on 22 August 2023, details the actions that the Council will undertake, together with milestones and delivery targets to measure progress. The Plan seeks to deliver sustained improvements in financial management, governance and commercial functions, and organisational effectiveness.

There are five themes to the Plan, namely Financial Recovery (Theme 1), Commercial (Theme 2), Governance and Assurance (Theme 3), Organisation and Service Redesign (Theme 4) and Housing Improvement Programme (Theme 5).

## 8. Governance and Assurance

The purpose of this theme is to strengthen and radically improve how decisions are made, improving the scrutiny and transparency of the process. This will include reviewing the approach to reporting and the content of reports to ensure decisions are based on evidence and are scrutinised. Included within the objectives of the theme are:

- Strengthen the role of scrutiny within the organisation including how the Council scrutinises the performance of the companies.
- Improve standards and audit to ensure greater scrutiny of the audit and governance functions and avoid past mistakes recurring.

- Undertake improvements to the constitution in order to ensure it remains effective and fit for purpose in light of changing circumstances.
- Improve the democratic process to ensure Members are making well informed decisions that are communicated and the public.

## Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Officers have drawn up a detailed proposal based on a committee structure involving three Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The following section seeks to explain the reasoning behind the suggestion, how it would work in practice and the change in the annual calendar of meetings that would result.

It should be noted that Officers explored a range of alternative options, including the potential benefits of adopting a structure based on two Overview and Scrutiny Committees with a variety of responsibility splits. It was recognised that a two Committee structure had some merit, but generally did not adequately divide responsibility for scrutiny of all Council functions and resident interests.

It was also considered whether the current structure of one Committee would be sufficient, however there are distinct benefits of Committees focused on specific areas and with clear remits.

### 9. New Scrutiny Committee Structure

One of the most significant changes proposed to the Council meeting structure is the replacement of the single Overview and Scrutiny Committee with three, service-specific Scrutiny Committees, namely the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee, the Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee and the Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee, reflecting the three directorates of Corporate Services, Communities and Place.

The change would enable each Committee to attract those Councillors with knowledge specific to the service areas covered and would link each Committee to a Strategic Director of the Authority and specific Portfolio Holders. Above all, however, the division of responsibilities would focus the role of each of the Committees and would make clear to residents the purpose and scope of each Committee.

The objective is to achieve a position where more of each Committee's work is Member-led and as a consequence does not increase Officer resource in servicing each Committee.

The Forward Plan of Key Decisions to be taken by the Executive would be drafted in such a way that a select number of service specific items are taken forward to those meetings of the Executive falling after the meetings of the respective Scrutiny Committees to enable pre-decision scrutiny. This would ideally be informed by the annual cycle of Council business.

As is the case now, there will be the option to convene Extraordinary Meetings of the Committees under exceptional circumstances if deemed necessary, where items could not otherwise be considered and scrutinised. Such decisions should be made in consultation with the Monitoring Officer.

It is recognised that a directorate focused structure could risk items affecting the whole of Council not being effectively considered. To mitigate such a scenario the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee is anticipated to have an explicit role to scrutinise such strategic, existential matters. Additionally, the Group of Chairs of the Council's Committees is intended to coordinate work.

It is recommended that each Scrutiny Committee should be Chaired by a different Councillor and that those Chairs work closely together to coordinate their work programmes with the support of Vice-Chairs. A review of the Council's Special Responsibility Allowances would need to be completed as part of these proposals.



**10. Allocation of Service Scrutiny Responsibilities**

Summarised below is an indication of where the scrutiny responsibilities for service areas would lie under the proposed three Committee structure, together with an indication of the associated working group under the current structure. The list is considered inexhaustive and open to refinement.

<b>Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Service Areas</b>	<b>Relevant Working Groups</b>
Asset Management Corporate Finance planning and policy Council tax Fees and charges Revs and Benefits Corporate strategy and policy review Customer services HR services Digital services and ICT Democratic and Legal Services Elections and electoral registration Marketing, Communications and engagement Improvement/Recovery Plan Medium Term Financial Strategy Transformation	Corporate Governance Working Group Elections Panel Finance Working Group

<b>Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee Responsibilities</b>	
<b>Services Areas</b>	<b>Relevant Working Groups</b>
Community Centres Community development Regeneration Cultural development Sports development Voluntary/faith communities Community Meals Independent living Community safety Health and wellbeing Homelessness Housing assets Housing needs Housing Revenue Account Refugee support	Housing Infrastructure Working Group HIF Housing Outcomes Working Group Housing Working Group Leisure Partnership Military Covenant Advisory Panel Safer Woking Partnership Group Sheerwater Regen Oversight Panel Woking Wellbeing Group

Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee Responsibilities	
Service Areas	Relevant Working Groups
Accessibility Building control Development management Planning policy Climate Change Flood risk management Economic development UKSPF Environmental health Environmental maintenance Open spaces and play areas Woking Palace Infrastructure Local Plan Parking services Recycling Waste collection	Economic Development Working Group Greener Woking Working Group Local Development Framework Working Group Woking Access Group Woking Palace Consultative Panel UKSPF Partnership Group

**11. Intervention**

While the Council remains in intervention it is recognised that there will be a greater workload for certain committees, in particular for the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee. Though there are no proposals to disband the Finance Working Group, which will continue to scrutinise financial services, it is proposed that the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee should have more scheduled meetings than the other two Scrutiny Committees. This will enable the Committee to deal with the workload emerging from the Council’s Improvement and Recovery Plan.

As a recommended approach, the scrutiny function of the three Committees should focus on key issues around corporate health and the most business-critical of service-specific issues.

The proposed structure will only be achievable if resources are redirected to the formal calendar of meetings (and to member briefings) with the objective of enhancing the productivity of this scrutiny activity. Even so, if adopted, it is proposed that the structure is reviewed at the end of 2024/25 in order to ensure that the scheme is effective, inclusive and, above all, realistic in terms of the level of resources necessary to support it.

**12. Overview and Scrutiny / Executive Protocol**

The CfGS has recommended, following the successful adoption of the Executive / Overview and Scrutiny Committee protocol several years ago, that the protocol is extended to formalise the coordination between the Executive, the Scrutiny Committees and Audit Committees. As well as promoting dialogue between the meetings, the protocol will encourage liaison and co-ordination on financial management and oversight.

It is recognised that the outcomes of scrutiny need to be tracked and promoted for the benefit of all parties and provide confidence that Council business and function is scrutinised.

### 13. Scrutiny

The work of the Scrutiny Committees needs to become more focussed on achieving outcomes that have demonstrable benefits, particularly for local communities. The support of the CfGS will help significantly, as will the creation of service-specific Committees.

Both Elected Members and Officers must recognise the importance of effective scrutiny and its potential for positive impact or influence on Council business and the Borough, its residents and organisations within.

The current momentum around enhancing the Council's governance arrangements needs to be maintained and the Authority must carefully consider the level of resource required to achieve its governance ambitions.

### 14. Performance and Financial Management

The Council publishes the Performance Management Report (formerly referred to as the 'Green Book') on a quarterly basis. As part of the proposed scheduling of meetings of the Executive and the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee, Officers have sought to ensure that meetings of the two Committees fall within a reasonably short period following the publication of the Report. The proposed scheduling for 2024/25 is set out below:

**Quarter 4 (January to March 2024).** Published End April 2024.

- Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee – Tuesday, 11 June 2024\*.
- Executive – Thursday, 13 June 2024\*.

**Quarter 1 (April to June 2024).** Published End July 2024.

- Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee – Tuesday, 10 September 2024\*\*.
- Executive – Thursday, 12 September 2024\*\*.

**Quarter 2 (July to September 2024).** Published End October 2024.

- Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee – Tuesday, 5 November 2024.
- Executive – Thursday, 14 November 2024.

**Quarter 3 (October to December 2024).** Published End January 2025.

- Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee – Tuesday, 4 February 2025.
- Executive – Thursday, 13 February 2025.

In the event an elected Member has any concerns over performance figures, these concerns should be referred for consideration to the next available meeting of the appropriate Scrutiny Committee through the relevant Chair. Should a Member have questions over any of the information provided in the quarterly Performance Management Report, these should be referred to Officers in the first instance.

\* The month of May each year is taken up with the election timetable, essential training and half-term; the earliest that meetings of the Executive and the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee can take place to consider the Q4 Performance and Financial Management information is therefore early June.

\*\* The month of August each year is formal recess during which meetings of the Council are not held; the earliest that meetings of the Executive and the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee can take place to consider the Q1 Performance and Financial Management information is therefore early September.

## The Standards and Audit Committee

It is proposed that fundamental changes are introduced to the Standards and Audit Committee which would see:

- the name of the Standards and Audit Committee changed to the 'Audit & Governance Committee' to reflect its key roles in holding the governance of the Council to account and overseeing its audit responsibilities;
- assurance mapping and independent review are in train to ensure that the audit committee is sufficiently constituted and reflected in its Work Programme and the working knowledge of the Committee;
- up to two Independent Co-Opted Members being appointed by the Council to serve on the Committee; and
- adoption of a protocol between Committees that emphasises the Governance and Audit Committee's role in reviewing aspects of Council business.

The role of Chair of the Committee would continue to be filled by one of the two Independent Co-Opted Members.

The recruitment of the Independent Co-Opted Member will be undertaken once Council agreement has been received, to ensure that an appointment can be made early in the Municipal Year.

### 15. CIPFA Guidance

It is proposed that the role of the Standards and Audit Committee is reviewed and governance actions and arrangements of the Council be prioritised in the Committee's function. This will in part be achieved by implementing the key principles drawn up by the [Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy \(CIPFA\)](#).

The Council should ensure that the Committee:

- is directly accountable to Full Council;
- remain independent of both the executive and the scrutiny functions;
- has rights of access to and constructive engagement with other committees/ functions such as the Scrutiny Committees;
- has the right to request reports and seek assurances from relevant Officers; and
- includes co-opted independent members in accordance with the appropriate legislation or, where there is no legislative direction, includes at least two co-opted independent members to provide appropriate technical expertise.

The CIPFA guide sets out the specific responsibilities of the Committee to ensure that it provides oversight of a range of core governance and accountability arrangements. The CIPFA guide is attached at [Appendix 1](#) to this paper.

### 16. Training

It is recommended that training opportunities for the members of the Committee are pursued to ensure that they are in a position to exercise all elements of the Committee's responsibilities.

In addition to the yearly free training provided by the LGA through our membership, financial resources will need to be identified to ensure there is sufficient corporate knowledge and best practise maintained.

#### **17. Strengthening Function**

It is recommended that a more formal Work Programme model be adopted, akin to that used by the Scrutiny Committees to set and guide the objectives of the Audit Committee.

The areas of responsibility for the Audit Committee in the Constitution is proposed to be further defined to aid the development of the Work Programme.

It is also proposed that the extant Executive / Overview and Scrutiny Committee protocol be expanded to include the Governance and Audit Committee. It is recognised that the Audit function is best placed to review certain areas of Council business.

The Group of Chairs will have a role in ensuring that the work of the Audit and Scrutiny Committees are coordinated and where there is overlap between responsibilities work does not become siloed or too narrow of focus.

There is benefit in formalising the link between the Committee and its lead Officer, the Section 151 Officer particularly on formulating and maintaining the yearly Work Programme.

#### **18. Review of Governance and Audit Function**

The Council has engaged the LGA to perform an assurance mapping exercise to ensure that all responsibilities of the Audit Committee are captured within the Constitution and that these are reflected in the Work Programme of the Committee.

The Council is seeking to perform an independent review of its governance and audit function imminently.

CIPFA recommends that audit committees should review and assess themselves annually or seek an external review. The results of the assessment should be available in the annual report from the Committee.

It is suggested that the review is completed at the end of each Municipal Year. Any recommendations of the Committee would be reported to Council.

## Employment Committee

### 19. Proposal

It is proposed that an Employment Committee is formed which shall combine the functions of an Appointments Panel, appointing statutory officers and strategic directors, and with the functions of determining employee pay and conditions.

The Committee will be responsible, amongst other matters, for:

- overseeing the recruitment and selection process of the Council's Head of Paid Service, Strategic Directors, the Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer and determine terms and conditions of employment and make recommendations to Council in this respect;
- considering allegations concerning the conduct or capability of Statutory Officers and other Chief Officers;
- reviewing local terms and conditions of employment for employees and make recommendations regarding the annual local pay award;
- considering, and recommending appropriate actions to, proposals for changes within the structure of the organisation which involve substantial changes in the responsibilities of Chief Officers;
- promoting equal opportunities in employment; and
- considering matters relating to superannuation, pensions and gratuities.

A draft terms of reference for the Employment Committee is set out in Appendix 3. It is envisaged that 2 meetings of the Employment Committee will be held in each Municipal Year, though additional meetings will be convened in the event any issues are raised which cannot be determined at the scheduled meetings. The meetings will be held in public. It is proposed that the Committee size is set at 7 elected Members based on the proportionality of the Council.

## Chairs' Group

### 20. Proposal

The review has looked at the relationships between the Committees and has explored ways in which those relationships could be strengthened and developed. The suggestion of a Chairs' Group was raised through group feedback by Councillors and the Independent Co-opted Member at the recent elected Member workshop hosted by the CfGS. Such an arrangement would have the added benefit of ensuring that there is coordination of work across the Committees.

It is therefore proposed that an opportunity for Chairs to meet regularly should be established, consisting of the Chairs of the main Committees. The importance of the Vice-Chairs should not be underestimated and it is therefore proposed that they too be invited.

The Group would meet through Teams three times a year on an informal basis to allow free discussion between those elected Members attending. Portfolio Holders may be invited to attend if specific matters are to be discussed. Actions will be captured and the meetings would be held in private. In terms of Officer attendance, it may be useful for Members of the Corporate Leadership Team to attend the meetings to advise on any discussions together with a Democratic Services Officer and any other relevant Officers.

The meeting would be informed by way of forward plans of each Committee.

The inclusion of dates within the calendar of meetings should enable a high level of engagement by the different Chairs. However, consideration should be given to cancelling the sessions in the event no items for discussion are identified.

In terms of managing the business of the Group, CfGS has advised against the Leader of the Council acting as Chair. It is instead suggested that at its first meeting each year one of the Scrutiny Committee Chairs should be elected to lead the Group. The Group could otherwise choose to invite the Chief Executive or their nominee to act as Chair, in a similar fashion to that adopted for the Council's Selection Panel.

## Council, the Executive and Remaining Committees

### 21. Full Council

These proposals do not make any significant changes to operation of the Full Council meetings of the Authority.

At the meeting of Full Council meeting on 8 February 2024 Council agreed to 'merge' the two meetings of Council traditionally held in May; as a result of this change, the elections of Mayor and Deputy Mayor will take place on the same evening that the Committees are appointed to for the year.

In addition to this change, the review of the calendar of meetings has highlighted that the number of Full Council meetings can be further reduced by one (1) a year. It is therefore proposed that six (6) Full Council meetings are held annually.

### 22. Decision Making Responsibilities

Feedback from the CfGS has highlighted a concern that the Council has evolved a decision making process which has led to a greater level of decision making being undertaken by meetings of Full Council than would normally be expected under the Strong Leader/Executive model adopted by the Council. The representations make clear that the range of decisions taken by Full Council should be narrowed, with those items affected referred to the Executive for decision rather than simply recommendation to Full Council.

This piece of work has not yet commenced and is anticipated to be completed in the first half of the new municipal year. It is likely that the advice of the CfGS will be needed, together with engagement with relevant Officers and elected Members. The intended outcome is to have a clearer definition of the types of decision to be taken at meetings of the Executive and Full Council, reducing any uncertainty when bringing proposals forward and ensuring a consistent approach.

A framework for decision making will be developed to achieve greater clarity in responsibilities for decision making.

### 23. The Executive

No significant changes are proposed to the Executive.

As part of the overall review, Officers have sought to create a calendar of meetings which develops the effectiveness and efficiency of the Committee structure. Central to this is ensuring the Calendar supports the relationship of the Executive with other meetings, notably Full Council and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In light of this, it is proposed that the optimum number of meetings of the Executive should be nine (9) in each Municipal Year, an increase of one (1) on previous years.

#### **24. Licensing Committee and its Sub-Committees**

No changes are proposed to the Licensing Committee and its Sub-Committees.

#### **25. Appeals Committee**

The Appeals Committee, which consists of three elected Members, is responsible to considering appeals against intentional homelessness decisions. Meetings of the Committee have only been scheduled in the event of an appeal being received; as such, it has been a number of years since the Committee has had to meet other than to appoint a Chair and Vice-Chair annually.

As part of this review, the role of the Committee has been discussed with Officers involved in such appeals and it is apparent that procedures are now in place within authority delegated to Officers which mean that the Committee is unnecessary. It is therefore proposed that the Committee is disbanded; no additional delegated authority is required to achieve this.

#### **26. The Shareholder Executive Committee**

Included with the proposals to go to Council at the end of March 2024 is the intention to replace the Shareholder Advisory Groups (SAGs) with a single Shareholder Executive Committee (SEC) which will meet 9 times per year and comprise the Members of the Executive.

The purpose of the new Committee will be to approve and oversee the Council's strategic objectives across the Authority's group of companies and to support the development of the companies, in line with the Council's regulations and ambitions.

A separate report on the proposals for the Shareholder Executive Committee will be brought to the Council meeting on 28 March 2024.



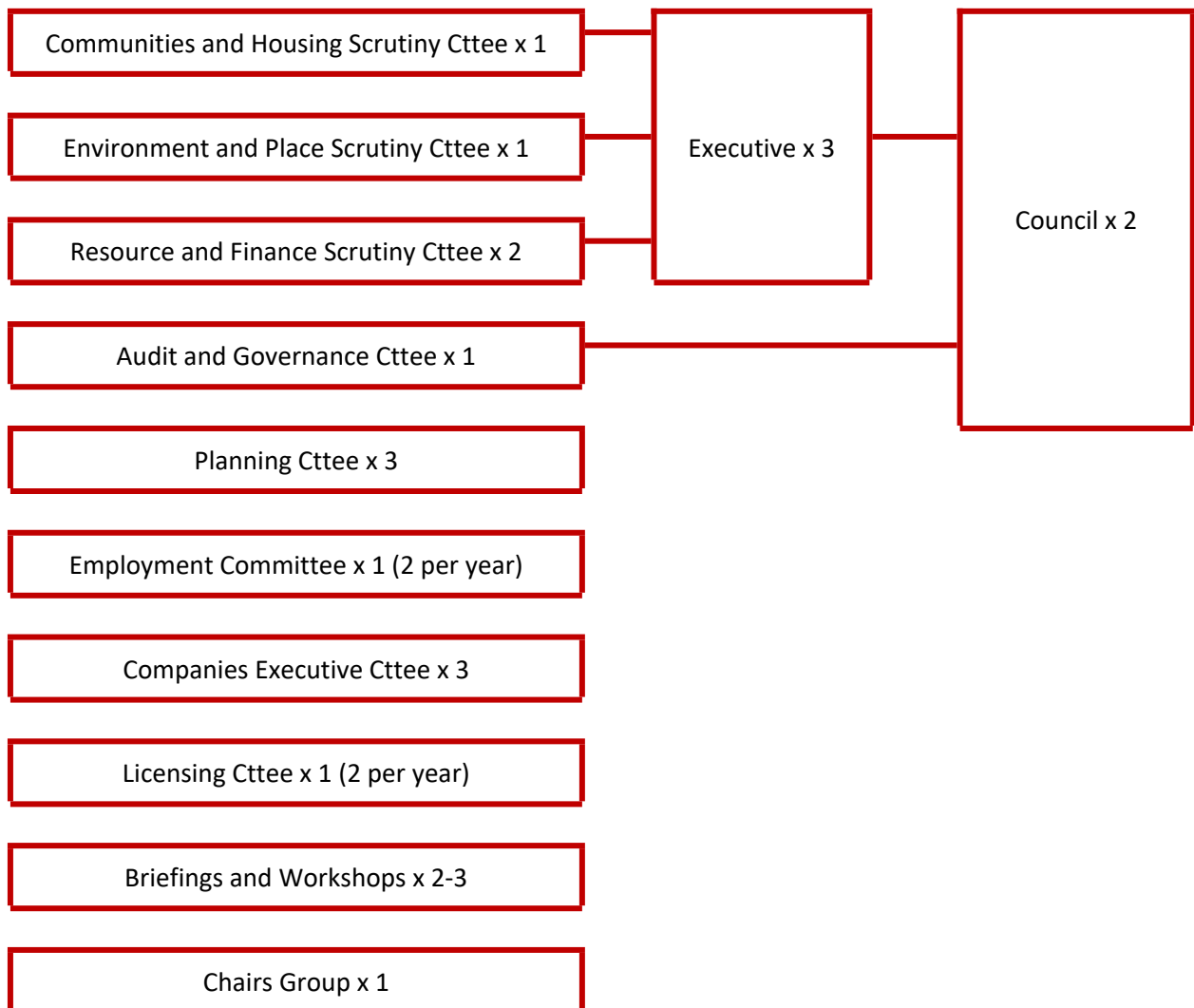
## Review of the Annual Calendar of Meetings

It is proposed to adopt a new calendar of meetings from May 2024 onwards, comprising a set of Committee meetings scheduled to maximise the opportunities for pre-decision scrutiny of Executive recommendations and provide a consistent and logical route for the business of Council.

A calendar based on the proposals has been drawn up and will be put before the Council on 28 March for determination. If supported, the revised calendar will replace the calendar of meetings for the coming Municipal Year which was agreed at the end 2023. An example of a four-month period is set out below.

As part of the agreed Gateway savings proposals there will be a reduction in the presence of security staff for evenings. Accordingly, in-person, evening meetings are now scheduled for Tuesdays and Thursdays.

### January-April example



## Calendar of Meetings Comparison

### 27. In-Year Comparison

Set out below is an indicative comparison between the number of scheduled Committee meetings in 2023/24 (excluding any extraordinary meetings) and the Committee meetings that would form the proposed calendar for the coming Municipal Year.

In recognition of the intervention, the focus of the Council must be on the actions of the Council in accordance with the Improvement and Recovery Plan. As such, it is proposed that five (5) meetings of the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee should be scheduled for the year. Should it be necessary, the option to arrange extraordinary meetings for specific matters of business remains available, where such items of business could not otherwise be determined.

These proposals do not reduce the volume of Committee meetings and are designed to enhance to productivity of scrutiny. Whilst Officer resources are expected to be significantly reduced, included within these proposals is a rationalisation of the numerous working groups which will provide the resource 'saving' necessary to achieve a productive new governance structure, reduce the overall number of meetings held and free up Officer capacity.

Meeting Type	Frequency (excl. extra meetings)	
	2023/24	2024/25
Council	8	6
Executive	8	9
Shareholder Executive Committee	16	9
Overview and Scrutiny Cttee	8	-
Resource and Finance Scrutiny Cttee	-	5
Communities and Housing Scrutiny Cttee	-	3
Environment and Place Scrutiny Cttee	-	3
Planning Cttee	11	10
Licensing Cttee	2	2
Employment Cttee	-	2
Governance and Audit Cttee	4	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>53</b>

## Working Groups, Boards and Panels

### 28. Proposal

It is clear that Woking Borough Council has a far higher number of such groups than would be expected for a Council of its size. This review is therefore proposing a significant reduction in the variety and volume of working groups, boards etc., recognising that the Council needs to direct its attention more towards decision-led meetings and away from items for noting or information. It is also important for the Council to improve the openness and transparency of its governance arrangements; all the working groups, boards etc. are currently held in private. The proposals also reflect the reduced staffing capacity to support the current range of groups.

The list below proposes the ways in which each of the existing working groups, boards etc. are treated under the review. The reductions proposed are significant; however, capacity has to be created if the new Scrutiny arrangements are to be effectively supported, including the scope to establish task and finish groups to drive demonstrable outcomes from the work of the Members of the Scrutiny Committees.

Retained groups shall necessarily be held virtually, as previously resolved by Council. If there is a need for a meeting to be held in person or as a hybrid these will need to be held on a Tuesday or Thursday when there is adequate security presence.

#### **Withdrawal of administrative support.**

There are several Groups which the Council has historically supported with free accommodation and administrative support, but which do not come under the remit of the Council. These include the Woking Access Group and the Woking Palace Community Group.

The proposal does not include the Council withdrawing from engagement with the Groups; the intention is to remove secretarial support.

The Groups would continue to be able to use the meeting rooms of the Council and would continue to be engaged by the Officers in the respective service areas.

#### **The Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy Working Group**

The Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Working Group is the only one of all Working Groups that has decision making authority, namely, to determine applications for CIL funding up to maximum of £9,999. Any requests for funding of £10,000 and above are determined by the Executive. As part of the review, it is proposed that authority to approve funding applications below £10,000 is delegated to the Strategic Director of Place in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder and Ward Councillors.

Any scrutiny on the use of CIL funds would fall under the responsibility of the Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee.

## Proposals Paper - Review of Council Meeting Structure

Body	Proposal	Scrutiny Responsibility
Appointments Panel	Disband	Employment Committee / Council
Corporate Governance WG	Disband	Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee / Standards and Audit Committee
Economic Development WG	Disband	Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee
Elections Panel	Disband	Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee
Finance WG	Retain	Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee
Freedom of the Borough WG	Disband	Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee / Council
Greener Woking WG	Disband	Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee
HIF Housing WG	Disband	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee.
HIF WG	Disband	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee.
Housing WG	Disband	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee.
Leisure Partnership Board	Disband	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee
Local Development Framework WG	Disband	Task and Finish Group / Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee.
Military Covenant Advisory Panel	Withdraw administrative support.	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee / Council.
Neighbourhood CIL WG	Disband	Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee / Executive.
Ostensible Authority Standing Panel	Disband	No role to be allocated
Safer Woking Partnership Group	Retain	Retain
Selection Panel	Retain	Retain
Sheerwater Regen Oversight Panel	Disband	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee / Council.
UK Shared Prosperity Fund PG	Disband	Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee.
Woking Access Group	Withdraw administrative support.	Responsibility for accessibility* to go to the Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee. Responsibility for equalities to go to Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee. *Any accessibility issues in respect of the Council's housing stock to be referred to Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee.
Woking Palace CP	Withdraw administrative support.	Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee.
Woking Wellbeing Group	Disband	Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee.

## Task and Finish Groups

### 29. Proposal

Under these proposals, it is recommended that the emphasis of the Council, and in particular that of the Scrutiny Committees, should move to establishing Task and Finish Groups for specific matters based on anticipated outcomes, impact for residents and available resources.

Task and finish groups may be established by a committee for the purpose of doing and undertaking a time-defined piece of work. This may be a service development, a locality plan, a local pathway change or any piece of work which needs to be undertaken and which falls under the remit of that Committee. This would align the Council with the recommendations of the CfGS and best practice.

### 30. Scrutiny Toolkit

The Council's Scrutiny Toolkit includes ways in which such Task Groups can conduct their reviews, including involvement of stakeholders, experts and 'witnesses'. A draft guide for the work of Task and Finish Groups is set out in [Appendix 2](#).

Key elements of a successful Task and Finish Group include:

- Keeping the size of the Group to a minimum; smaller is more effective, fast moving and flexible;
- Ensuring the Groups include elected Members who have the responsibility and knowledge to deliver the objective(s);
- Ensuring the Members of the Groups are given a clear task and time frame;
- Defining the topic for review, using tools such as SMART objectives to ensure the desired outcomes are clear, that the Authority has the resources available for the piece of work and that the process is project managed.
- Ensuring Task and Finish Groups are time-defined and are disbanded once the area of work has been completed.
- Regularly reporting to the parent Committee including the outcomes and any recommendations.

### 31. Resourcing and Prioritisation

Task and finish groups can be resource intensive for both Officer and elected Member time and can have potential financial implications for the Council, either through the actions of the task and finish groups (consultations, off-site meetings etc.) or through the proposals to come out of a scrutiny review. Establishing a programme of task and finish groups without proper consideration of resource availability will hamper and indeed jeopardise the successful outcome of such groups.

To ensure that the Council's resources are fully considered in the establishment of any task and finish group, and to avoid the number of ongoing reviews placing undue pressure on existing resources, the statutory officers – the Head of Paid Service, the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer – will be consulted as part of the process of considering a request to undertake scrutiny through a task and finish group.

This has therefore been reflected in the guide set out in appendix 2 to this paper.

The Group of Chairs will also be important in ensuring that the programme of task and finish groups is considered jointly between the Committees to ensure that the ambitions of the Committees for scrutiny do not go beyond the resources of the Authority.

It is proposed that a limit be placed on the total number of task and finish groups running concurrently in recognition of the size of the Authority and its ability to resource groups. This would allow for one task and finish group per Committee and a further one to be agreed through the Group of Chairs for a total of four task and finish groups running at any one time.

In the event that Members consider another topic has a pressing need for scrutiny by way of a task and finish group it will be the responsibility of the Group of Chairs to propose the scheduling and potential early closure of an extant task and finish group.

## Briefing / Workshop Programme

### 32. Proposal

These proposals would see a large number of long-established groups being disbanded. The scrutiny roles these groups played will in future fall to the newly created Scrutiny Committees and, where necessary, task and finish groups. However, there will also be a need for Elected Members and Officers to have frank and open discussions in an informal setting and to this end it is proposed that a formal programme of briefings and workshops should be included in the calendar of meetings.

### 33. Mandatory (Essential) Training

Each year, the Council provides essential training for Members sitting on each Committee. A number of these sessions are held at the beginning of each Municipal Year, in advance of the first relevant Committee meeting. Further training will be identified throughout the year.

It is proposed that supplementary training, strengthened by being declared mandatory by Council, are held at regular intervals throughout each Municipal Year.

It has been identified through the work of the IRP that training should be reviewed.

### 34. Briefings (regular, informal, online)

Briefings are an opportunity for Officers, Portfolio Holders, Partner Organisations and other agencies to impart key information or training to Elected Members. To-date, these have been arranged on an ad-hoc basis and have tended to be specific to a single topic. Attendance at such briefings has been mixed in the past.

It is proposed that briefing sessions are held regularly, at least six times per year and as requested by service areas. Each briefing would cover one or more topics, with the sessions supported by agendas. All Members of the Council would be invited to attend the briefings. Dates would be reserved in the calendar of meetings. As such, it is hoped that attendance would be consistently high.

### 35. Workshops (ad-hoc, informal, in person)

In addition to briefing sessions, it is proposed that workshops are organised at intervals as requested by Members or service areas. Each would consider one or more topics with the specific purpose of enabling Elected Members to discuss matters in an informal setting and for Officers to seek the views of Councillors on matters still under development.

All Members of the Council would be invited to attend the workshops, dates for which would be reserved as part of the annual calendar of meetings.

## Clearer Communication of Proposals and Decisions

Two further strands of work have grown out of the review amid comments from both Officers and Members. Both projects are being taken forward with the prime objective of ensuring that there is clear communication of both proposals and decisions going forward. The work is at an early stage, and outcomes are likely to be adopted in the new Municipal Year.

### 36. Report Writing Review

Reports to meetings of the Council and Committees have to be clear and concise and yet provide all the information needed for Members of Public to be fully informed and for elected Members to be able to take decisions with all the relevant information to-hand. There is certainly a level of knowledge and skill necessary for Officers to prepare such reports in a consistent manner, which can be difficult in such a broad-service Authority, particularly for those Officers who seldom have to draw up such reports.

A review has now started of the core report templates used for meetings of Council, the Executive and Committees to identify ways in which the template structure can support the objective of ensuring reports are consistent and clear. Once drawn up, the templates will form the basis of a training programme for Officers on writing reports for Committees.

### 37. Communication of Proposals and Decisions

The second piece of work is looking at ways in which both forthcoming proposals and recent decisions of the Council, Executive and Committees can be communicated in a clear and user-friendly format which would be equally beneficial to Officers, elected Members and Members of Public.

## The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

### 38. Feedback

[CfGS](#) exists to promote better governance and scrutiny, both in policy and in practice. The organisation supports local government, the public, corporate and voluntary sectors in ensuring transparency, accountability and greater involvement in their governance processes. The Centre offers a range of services to identify governance challenges, design interventions and support ongoing improvement, and through the support of the Local Government has been working with Woking Borough Council since the summer 2023.

The rationale for this review was identified through the work of the [Improvement and Recovery Plan](#).

The feedback received from the CfGS is summarised below. The CfGS feedback has been incorporated into the review and the CfGS continues to be consulted.

Several Officers, including those that have experience of Council meeting structure from other Local Authorities, have been engaged. Their feedback has been incorporated.

Senior Officers have been engaged on the process and their feedback is sought.

## Proposals Paper - Review of Council Meeting Structure

Feedback	Council Response	CfGS Response
Concern at use of trimesters instead of quarters for Municipal Year	Use is entirely for Democratic Services' internal use and it was ensured that those items of business that must go quarterly still match up optimally to meetings.	Accepts reasoning. Requested comparative calendar be provided to confirm.
Concern that business is not decided by Executive with responsibility abrogated to full Council	Confirmed that the business received by Council is not in contravention with the strong leader-Executive model that the Council has adopted.	Acknowledges the WBC position but urges that business is not in contravention of the model.
Concern as to the legality of widening the role of S&A to include scrutiny	Misuse of language with lack of explanation. No intention to remove Scrutiny function from those Committees legislated to do it. Simply only to ensure that G&A is empowered to undertake its statutory powers and those recommended by CIPFA (instead scrutiny with a small 's').	Accepted by CfGS but wishes for the Executive/O&S protocol to be strengthened/ expanded to meet this.  Suggested LGA do assurance mapping.
Establishment of 3 scrutiny committees good, but to review the division of work.	Changes have been made to the proposal, agree with the suggested arrangements.	Accepted
Limiting Members' contributions at Committee	No new stringencies. New forms of communication only to be used in addition to improve the running of Committees (submission of questions ahead of meeting).	Accepted, encourage Officers not to attempt to 'control' Members.
Use of briefing papers instead of taking items to Committee	Agreed	n/a
Lack of dedicated scrutiny resourcing; concern that without a dedicated scrutiny (not Dem Services) Officer change will not be effected or maintained.	Accepted but financial constraints of Council may prevent this from happening.	Accepted
Establishment of three new boards not understood.	Agreed, removed from proposal and instead increased emphasis on Member briefing programme and workshops.	Accepted. Emphasised that member briefings should be controlled by the service area with minimal involvement of Democratic Services.



## Proposals Paper - Review of Council Meeting Structure

Establishment of Task and Finish groups not fleshed out	Explained that this had already been developed through the Constitution review last year and not included on the working paper seen by CfGS.	Accepted. Guide to Task and Finish Groups drafted to provide clarity and consistency in the role of the Task and Finish Group ( <a href="#">Appendix 2</a> ).
Task and Finish Groups shouldn't be in public.	Accepted, only to be used if and when considered necessary by the Council in recognition of its intervention status.	Accepted.
Establishment of a Council Business Management Cttee.	Accepted but would be radical for Council.	Agreed, not ordinarily recommended but suggested as of possible benefit to Working specifically.
Establishment of Board of Chairs – should be an informal arrangement.	Agreed, want to foster coordination between the O&S Committees and with Governance and Audit and the Executive.	Accepted. (Note: suggestion now to establish a Chairs' Group.
Concern that not all Working Groups etc can be shuttered.	Agreed, will meet with stakeholders of each Group to determine which should be shuttered and which closed.	Accepted
Improvements to the scheduling of meetings.	Agreed and will continue to refine the calendar of meetings to ensure it meets the needs of the Council.	Accepted
Consider increasing Executive to meet more regularly than proposed.	Accepted, will explore with senior Officers.	Accepted.
Consider increasing each O&S Committee meetings to 4pa.	Agreed, will explore.	Accepted.

## CIPFA's Position Statement: Audit Committees in Local Authorities and Police 2022

### 1. Scope

This position statement includes all principal local authorities in the UK, corporate joint committees in Wales, the audit committees for PCCs and chief constables in England and Wales, PCCFRAs and the audit committees of fire and rescue authorities in England and Wales.

The statement sets out the purpose, model, core functions and membership of the audit committee. Where specific legislation exists (the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 and the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016), it should supplement the requirements of that legislation.

### 2. Status of the position statement

The statement represents CIPFA's view on the audit committee practice and principles that local government bodies in the UK should adopt. It has been prepared in consultation with sector representatives.

CIPFA expects that all local government bodies should make their best efforts to adopt the principles, aiming for effective audit committee arrangements. This will enable those bodies to meet their statutory responsibilities for governance and internal control arrangements, financial management, financial reporting and internal audit.

### 3. Purpose of the audit committee

Audit committees are a key component of an authority's governance framework. Their purpose is to provide an independent and high-level focus on the adequacy of governance, risk and control arrangements. The committee's role in ensuring that there is sufficient assurance over governance risk and control gives greater confidence to all those charged with governance that those arrangements are effective.

In a local authority the full council is the body charged with governance. The audit committee may be delegated some governance responsibilities but will be accountable to full council. In policing, the police and crime commissioner (PCC) and chief constable are both corporations sole, and thus are the individuals charged with governance.

The committee has oversight of both internal and external audit together with the financial and governance reports, helping to ensure that there are adequate arrangements in place for both internal challenge and public accountability.

### 4. Independent and effective model

The audit committee should be established so that it is independent of executive decision making and able to provide objective oversight. It is an advisory committee that has sufficient importance in the authority so that its recommendations and opinions carry weight and have influence with the leadership team and those charged with governance.

The committee should:

- be directly accountable to the authority's governing body or the PCC and chief constable.

- in local authorities, be independent of both the executive and the scrutiny functions.
- in police bodies, be independent of the executive or operational responsibilities of the PCC or chief constable.
- have rights of access to and constructive engagement with other committees/functions, for example scrutiny and service committees, corporate risk management boards and other strategic groups.
- have rights to request reports and seek assurances from relevant officers.
- be of an appropriate size to operate as a cadre of experienced, trained committee members. Large committees should be avoided.

The audit committees of the PCC and chief constable should follow the requirements set out in the Home Office Financial Management Code of Practice and be made up of co-opted independent members.

The audit committees of local authorities should include co-opted independent members in accordance with the appropriate legislation.

Where there is no legislative direction to include co-opted independent members, CIPFA recommends that each authority audit committee should include at least two co-opted independent members to provide appropriate technical expertise.

## 5. Core functions

The core functions of the audit committee are to provide oversight of a range of core governance and accountability arrangements, responses to the recommendations of assurance providers and helping to ensure robust arrangements are maintained.

The specific responsibilities include:

### Maintenance of governance, risk and control arrangements

- Support a comprehensive understanding of governance across the organisation and among all those charged with governance, fulfilling the principles of good governance.
- Consider the effectiveness of the authority's risk management arrangements. It should understand the risk profile of the organisation and seek assurances that active arrangements are in place on risk-related issues, for both the body and its collaborative arrangements.
- Monitor the effectiveness of the system of internal control, including arrangements for financial management, ensuring value for money, supporting standards and ethics and managing the authority's exposure to the risks of fraud and corruption.

### Financial and governance reporting

- Be satisfied that the authority's accountability statements, including the annual governance statement, properly reflect the risk environment, and any actions required to improve it, and demonstrate how governance supports the achievement of the authority's objectives.
- Support the maintenance of effective arrangements for financial reporting and review the statutory statements of account and any reports that accompany them.

### Establishing appropriate and effective arrangements for audit and assurance

- Consider the arrangements in place to secure adequate assurance across the body's full range of operations and collaborations with other entities.
- In relation to the authority's internal audit functions:

- oversee its independence, objectivity, performance and conformance to professional standards;
- support effective arrangements for internal audit; and
- promote the effective use of internal audit within the assurance framework.
- Consider the opinion, reports and recommendations of external audit and inspection agencies and their implications for governance, risk management or control, and monitor management action in response to the issues raised by external audit.
- Contribute to the operation of efficient and effective external audit arrangements, supporting the independence of auditors and promoting audit quality.
- Support effective relationships between all providers of assurance, audits and inspections, and the organisation, encouraging openness to challenge, review and accountability.

#### **6. Audit committee membership**

To provide the level of expertise and understanding required of the committee, and to have an appropriate level of influence within the authority, the members of the committee will need to be of high calibre. When selecting elected representatives to be on the committee or when co-opting independent members, aptitude should be considered alongside relevant knowledge, skills and experience.

#### **7. Characteristics of audit committee membership:**

- A membership that is trained to fulfil their role so that members are objective, have an inquiring and independent approach, and are knowledgeable.
- A membership that promotes good governance principles, identifying ways that better governance arrangement can help achieve the organisation's objectives.
- A strong, independently minded chair, displaying a depth of knowledge, skills, and interest.
- There are many personal skills needed to be an effective chair, but key to these are:
  - promoting apolitical open discussion;
  - managing meetings to cover all business and encouraging a candid approach from all participants; and
  - maintaining the focus of the committee on matters of greatest priority.
- Willingness to operate in an apolitical manner.
- Unbiased attitudes – treating auditors, the executive and management fairly.
- The ability to challenge the executive and senior managers when required.
- Knowledge, expertise and interest in the work of the committee.

While expertise in the areas within the remit of the committee is very helpful, the attitude of committee members and willingness to have appropriate training are of equal importance.

The appointment of co-opted independent members on the committee should consider the overall knowledge and expertise of the existing members.

#### **8. Engagement and outputs**

The audit committee should be established and supported to enable it to address the full range of responsibilities within its terms of reference and to generate planned outputs.

To discharge its responsibilities effectively, the committee should:

- meet regularly, at least four times a year, and have a clear policy on those items to be considered in private and those to be considered in public;
- be able to meet privately and separately with the external auditor and with the head of internal audit;
- include, as regular attendees, the chief finance officer(s), the chief executive, the head of internal audit and the appointed external auditor; other attendees may include the monitoring officer and the head of resources (where such a post exists). These officers should also be able to access the committee members, or the chair, as required;
- have the right to call on any other officers or agencies of the authority as required; police audit committees should recognise the independence of the chief constable in relation to operational policing matters;
- support transparency, reporting regularly on its work to those charged with governance;
- report annually on how the committee has complied with the position statement, discharged its responsibilities, and include an assessment of its performance. The report should be available to the public.

#### **9. Impact**

As a non-executive body, the influence of the audit committee depends not only on the effective performance of its role, but also on its engagement with the leadership team and those charged with governance.

The committee should evaluate its impact and identify areas for improvement.

## Task and Finish Group Guidance

### 1. What is a Task and Finish Group?

A Task and Finish Group is a time-defined group set up as an action subgroup of one of the Scrutiny Committees, the Executive and Council with the aim of a delivering a specified objective. Task and finish groups may be established by a committee for the purpose of doing and undertaking a time-defined piece of work. This may be a service development, a locality plan, a local pathway change or any piece of work which needs to be undertaken and which falls under the remit of that Committee.

The size of the Task and Finish Groups should be kept to a minimum and should ideally include those who have the responsibility and knowledge to deliver the objective(s). Smaller is better - more effective.

Larger, long standing Working Groups are traditionally quite difficult places to get work done; Task and Finish Groups are used because it is easier to get work done when a small number of people are given a clear task and time frame.

The key to success is to clearly define the problem or deliverable, using tools such as SMART objectives: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bounded. The relevant Committee setting up a Task and Finish Group must define and sign off the remit of the Group and agree the resources needed to do the job.

Task and Finish Groups should be time-defined and, once that area of work has been completed, should be disbanded. The outcomes are then fed back into the authorising Committee.

### 2. Purpose and Duties

Task and Finish Groups will undertake specific agreed pieces of work whether is it to develop local priorities, deliver locality service change priorities or carry out a deep dive on key items or other areas requiring specific consideration. Task and Finish Groups will report back on progress and final outcomes to the responsible Committee, giving assurance by:

- Developing an agreed action plan on the key task at hand;
- Action the work programme in a timely fashion i.e. doing the work;
- Developing measures of evaluation; and
- Reporting on the impact, learning, and outcomes, and making recommendations in the final report to the relevant committee.

### 3. Membership/Roles/Leadership

In general, Task and Finish Groups are small in number of Members, given that they are a 'doing' group. Members of the Task and Finish Group should be chosen based on their personal knowledge and expertise and capacity to deliver. Someone is elected as a Lead of the Task and Finish Group.

Every Task and Finish Group need not be politically balanced. Members of the Task and Finish Group should have a special knowledge or interest in the subject to be investigated.

The presumption shall be that other members of Council have delegated their authority and trust to those subsequently appointed to serve on the Task and Finish Group, to complete their work in an effective manner. If it is not possible to reach agreement on the membership of a Task and Finish Group, the make-up of the group will be based on political balance.

Unless otherwise agreed by the Task and Finish Group, the documents relating to it should be regarded as documents for a “work in progress” and as such are not in the same category as committee documentation which is generally regarded as complete.

Task and Finish papers may contain work undertaken on a range of proposals, some of which may be put forward to give comparison between a range of possibilities, and/or to help members clarify arguments for or against certain actions.

In some cases, premature publication of such documents may be counter-productive, in raising concerns that the Council may be inclined to a particular course of action, before any alternative courses of action have been considered or tested.

Members of a Task and Finish Group should therefore consider the papers sent to them in connection with their work to be of a sensitive nature, and should not copy, or cause them to be copied, outside the group. However, where a member of the Task and Finish Group feels that there would be benefit from the Group seeking the views of an external body, group or individual, then they should be invited to attend a future meeting for this purpose.

Adequate resources should be available for Task and Finish Groups to complete the tasks.

#### 4. Resources

Task and finish groups can be resource intensive for both Officer and elected Member time and can have potential financial implications for the Council, either through the actions of the task and finish groups (consultations, off-site meetings etc.) or through the proposals to come out of a scrutiny review. Establishing a programme of task and finish groups without proper consideration of resource availability will hamper and indeed jeopardise the successful outcome of such groups.

To ensure that the Council’s resources are fully considered in the establishment of any task and finish group, and to avoid the number of ongoing reviews placing undue pressure on existing resources, the statutory officers – the Head of Paid Service, the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer – will be consulted as part of the process of considering a request to undertake scrutiny through a task and finish group.

It is proposed that a limit be placed on the total number of task and finish groups, one per Committee and a further one agreed by the Group of Chairs for a total of 4 task and finish groups running at any one time.

In the event that Members consider another topic has a pressing need for scrutiny by way of a task and finish group it will be the responsibility of the Group of Chairs to propose the scheduling and potential early closure of an extant task and finish group.

#### 5. Planning.

A plan is the backbone of every project and is essential for a successful outcome. It describes how, when and by whom specific target(s) are to be achieved. The activities of the group need to be clearly identified and the appropriate resources allocated to them to ensure successful completion of each element within the time scales agreed.

A plan is a design of how identified targets for outcomes, timescales, costs and quality can be met. Effective planning will:

- Identify whether the targets set can be achieved;
- Identify the resources required;
- Ensure that quality is built into the process;
- Identify any risk;

- Avoid confusion and ad hoc decisions;
- Aid communication of what is to be done, how it is to be done, allocation of responsibilities and monitoring of progress;
- Provide control;
- Gain commitment from members of the group;
- Develop a Business Plan for the service area under consideration; and
- Agree the type and level of communication;

The key elements of a plan are:

- The products/outcomes to be produced;
- The activities needed to create the products/outcomes;
- Validation of the quality of the products/outcomes;
- The resources needed (including specific skills);
- Any dependencies on partners or external agencies;
- Time scales;
- Monitoring and reporting points; and
- Allocation of responsibilities

If the task is complex and/or extensive in scope then an overall plan may be required.

## 6. Evidence Gathering

The task and finish group can gather evidence through a variety of ways, including (but not limited to):

- written evidence;
- oral evidence and interviews with external and internal witnesses;
- site visits;
- visiting other organisations - partners, user groups, other councils;
- research;
- holding public meetings to seek views on an issue; and
- talking to people who are affected by the issue.

Once the evidence has been gathered, the task and finish groups will produce a report to be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee outlining details of the review process, evidence gathered, conclusions and any subsequent recommendations.

## 7. Meetings

Unless otherwise agreed by the Task and Finish Group, its meetings will be held in private. Agendas will be provided for all members and will clearly indicate the items to be discussed. Any member wishing to attend the meeting who is not a member of the Group shall be entitled to attend. Unless they have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter under discussion, any member may speak having first given prior notice of their intention to do so or otherwise at the discretion of the chair.

The Groups will need to agree the frequency and intervals of its meetings in order to achieve its purpose and specific duties within the timescale agreed. A significant proportion of the work may be expected to be undertaken by the Members outside the Task and Finish Group meetings. In general,



Task and Finish Groups will complete their work and submit an evaluation and outcome report to the Committee within a period extending from a few weeks to six months of the work commencing, with the time duration being determined by the task.

#### **8. Monitoring**

Task and Finish Groups report directly to the establishing body (Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Executive or Council) via the Chair of the Task and Finish Group, who will present progress reports, either verbal or written as required.

The meetings of Task Groups will be supported by Democratic Services and Officers from the relevant service areas.

## Employment Committee – Draft Terms of Reference

### 1. Membership

The Employment Committee will be composed of 7 Councillors to be appointed annually at the annual Council meeting.

The membership of the Employment Committee will comply with the political balance rules set out in s.15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and must include at least one Member of the Executive.

Membership of the Committee will from time to time as and when required include the involvement of the relevant appointed independent person as required by Officer Employment Procedure Rules.

### 2. Procedure Rules

#### Meetings of the Committee

The Employment Committee will meet as frequently as it requires to discharge its responsibilities. Meetings will be held in person and in public.

#### Chair and Vice Chair

At the Annual Meeting, the Council shall appoint the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Employment Committee. If the Chair or Vice-Chair resigns by giving written notice of resignation to the Chief Executive, the Committee shall, as the first item of business at the next ensuing meeting, elect a successor.

The Chair, if present, shall preside. If the Chair is absent, the Vice-Chair shall preside. If both the Chair and Vice-Chair are absent, the Committee shall elect one of the Councillors present as Chair for the duration of the meeting.

### 3. Terms of Reference

Subject to Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Committee shall meet to:

- oversee the recruitment and selection process of the Council's Head of Paid Service and determine terms and conditions of employment and make recommendations to Council in this respect.
- oversee the recruitment and selection process of Strategic Directors, the Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer and posts falling within the definition of Deputy Chief Officer in Section 2(1) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and make recommendations to Council in this respect.
- consider allegations concerning the conduct or capability of Statutory Officers and other Chief Officers in order to establish whether or not they are sufficiently well-founded and serious in content to justify investigation.
- suspend, if appropriate, a Statutory Officer or other Chief Officer under the terms of the Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) Conditions of Service for Chief Executives or the JNC Conditions of Service for Chief Officers.
- appoint an external investigator to carry out an investigation on behalf of the Committee.
- receive and consider any report of an investigator and, if appropriate, hold a capability or disciplinary hearing and, following any capability and/or disciplinary hearing, to determine a course

of action (up to and including dismissal) within the Council's power under law and within its procedures.

- dismiss Chief Officers, the Monitoring Officer, Section 151 Officer and posts falling within the definition of Deputy Chief Officer in Section 2(1) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.
- settle all matters relating to the above appointments or dismissals.
- oversee the recruitment and selection process of the relevant independent person in accordance with the Localism Act 2011 and make recommendations to Council in that respect.

The Committee will take decisions affecting the remuneration, terms and conditions of service of the Head of Paid Service.

The Committee will undertake performance appraisals of the Head of Paid Service and contribute to Corporate Directors annual targets against which performance can be measured.

The Committee will discharge the Council's functions under Section 112 of the Local Government Act 1972 which have not otherwise been delegated, including advising the Council and Committees on:

- the requirements for, and the availability of, human resources necessary for the fulfilment of the Council's policies;
- the promotion of good employee relations in the Council;
- matters of general employment and personnel concern to the Council;
- the promotion of equal opportunities for all employees of the Council, and in the Council's recruitment and selection procedures, and to monitor the effectiveness of such measures;
- to consider matters affecting the efficient use of the Council's staff resources and to make recommendations to Executive;
- to review and recommend adoption of the People and Organisational Development Strategy and Annual Pay Policy prior to going to Council.

The Committee will keep under review local terms and conditions of employment for employees and make recommendations regarding the annual local pay award.

The Committee will consider and recommend appropriate actions where necessary in response to proposals relating to changes within the structure of the organisation which involves substantial changes in the responsibilities of Chief Officers.

The Committee will promote and pursue a policy of equal opportunities in employment and "sign-off" key information before it is published i.e. Gender Pay Reporting.

The Committee will consider matters relating to superannuation, pensions and gratuities.

## Overview and Scrutiny Member Session

### Analysis and insight from workshop, 24 January 2024

From table discussions with 15 cross-party Members, a total of 77 lines of data were recorded from notes and banded into key themes. These have been synthesised and analysed by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to arrive at the following findings.

#### 1. Review of scrutiny findings

In the first section of the workshop, Members were invited to reflect on the findings for the Scrutiny Impact Review that CfGS led in 2023.

- From the insight collated through table discussions the main area recorded (23% of themes) a need was identified to increase scrutiny **skills and knowledge** within the council. Retaining corporate memory of scrutiny functions was also raised, via ongoing training, peer support and a commitment to sharing knowledge across the organisation.
- It was acknowledged that more **scrutiny confidence** is needed in Woking Borough Council. To build this, Members highlighted that they would like encouragement to ask questions without fear of retribution:

*“Nervous of saying something wrong - ideal is ‘permission to fail’.”*

*“Balance - Good questions and good answers. Honest we don't know is ok [sic].”*

- **Lack of clear impact** was also mentioned, representing just over 15% of reflections. Comments highlighted a danger of Overview and Scrutiny being a ‘talking shop.’
- The majority of other clustered themes related to **current processes** within the Council, (totalling 61%) emphasising poor documentation data and record keeping, lack of transparency and the need for better connectedness across Committees.

*“Look at O&S and S&A work programmes for overlap.”*

*“Assign CLT Member to each scrutiny meeting and ensure they share outcomes with all of CLT and handover to the next CLT Member.”*

**‘Churn’** was referenced, including lack of continuity, non-contributing councillors, and a high number of new councillors who would benefit from an improved induction process. Scrutiny was described in this context as a ‘bewildering experience’ for new Members. To address this, an amended, clearer Terms of Reference and clearer structure for scrutiny was suggested by Members taking part in the workshop.

Views shared about current processes also included a vision for fewer working groups as Committees connected and collaborated.

## 2. Key areas for future focus

In the second part of the workshop, Members were asked to think about their ambition as a council and identify priority areas to focus on in the future.

Three main themes for future focus were identified by Members:

1. **CULTURE** – 57%
2. **BEHAVIOURS** – 29%
3. **IMPACT** – 14 %

## 3. CULTURE

3.1 On CULTURE, the most significant ambition (25% of themes discussed) was for Woking Borough Council to develop its internal **learning culture**. Members wanted more opportunities to discuss, reflect, ask questions, and take part in training, in order to build deep understanding of the value that scrutiny can offer. This would include peer mentoring and use of role modelling to demonstrate scrutiny practice, teamed with examples of best practice from other organisations – Thames Water, for instance, was mentioned.

Exactly 50% of the themes on future focus were split evenly (12.5% each) across the need to prioritise:

- Greater **openness and transparency**
- Developing **skills and knowledge**
- Increasing **visibility and ownership**
- Making the work of the Council more **welcoming and inclusive**

Members discussed ways to get more deeply involved in scrutiny, holding meetings ‘in the open,’ rather than in closed working groups. Creating more opportunities for public involvement was also a key consideration.

- 3.2 Building **skills and knowledge** and being well-informed were seen as important. High quality, accurate and timely information were mentioned as factors the support this.
- 3.3 Members talked about garnering more **ownership** of the scrutiny process, encouraging fellow Members to increase their buy-in through making scrutiny more **visible**. Ideas included wider promotion of the Executive Forward Plan and a dedicated webpage to promote the work of Overview and Scrutiny.
- 3.4 A focus on the Council being more **welcoming and inclusive** was covered. This theme included more public involvement – for example, inviting resident panels to have input at scrutiny meetings and Committees.

## 4. BEHAVIOURS

4.1 In review of BEHAVIOURS, developing a **learning culture** was also a primary theme, accounting for 50% of ideas shared by Members. Practical suggestions to influence a behaviour shift, included setting up pre-scrutiny time for asking the Executive and officers questions. Emphasis was also on the Committee to be more reflective of itself, to help nurture understanding of what its impact has been. Another idea was for the Chair and Vice-Chair to model behaviour expected of Committee Members. It was thought that Councillors should keep their focus away from politics and play a more active role in preparing their Members before taking them on the scrutiny journey.

**4.2** Developing more **strategic processes** would support Members to embody behaviours that enhance scrutiny. One thought was for the Chair to employ stricter time management and challenge/limit speeches made by Members at Committee. Work is needed to train Lead Members on the induction process for new Councillors and to ensure that this includes detail on the function of each Committee. This theme of strategic processes accounted for 25% of collated ideas. Another was for Members to make questions to Officers more strategic than operational in Committee:

*"...ignore the details and focusing on minutiae in favour of wider view."*

**4.3** **Collaboration and connection** were raised as a way to enhance behaviours (17% of ideas). Here, Members thought it was important to design Scrutiny Work Programme collaboratively, involving both the Committee Membership and the Executive. One view was that the Committee does not necessarily need to be proportionally cross-party.

**4.4** Finally, **accountability** was highlighted as an issue to address (8% of comments). Although Members do buy-in the principle of scrutiny, this is not necessarily followed through with actions.

## 5. IMPACT

**5.1** To increase IMPACT, introducing more **strategic processes** was considered as a core area for Woking Borough Council to focus on. With 40% of themes, there were plenty of ideas to draw from here. Ways to improve processes and make them more strategic included advance planning, reviewing topics at an earlier stage at Scrutiny Committee to determine the best impact. It was important here to also provide Members with accurate data and information on the topic in advance.

**5.2** **Collaboration and connection** were a recurring theme (25%) in which Members discussed how to increase the impact of their scrutiny work. Assigning a Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) Member to each scrutiny meeting was one suggestion, ensuring that outcomes are shared back to CLT and Council service areas. Overview and Scrutiny could also work more closely together on work programming, spotting areas of overlap.

**5.3** The role of **audit** was seen as key (15%) for enhancing impact, used to measure and monitor the effectiveness of scrutiny. Taking lessons learned for the audit process was seen as a valuable step to improve scrutiny.

**5.4** Increasing **visibility and ownership** (5%) was an issue to tackle as some Members said that they...

*'...struggle to know what impact we can have/we do have in a meeting.'*

*"How do we get more ownership? Maybe have O&S Members sharing their thoughts to wider council - a pre-meet approach for informal discussion."*

**5.5** Arriving at clear recommendations was considered as a target to strive for, within the theme of greater **clarity** (5%).

**5.6** **Information** flow was raised (5%), specifically how data can be optimised to demonstrate impact.

**5.7** Some concern was expressed on **resourcing** (5%) in relation to a fall in Officer support given that the total of Woking Borough Council resources are subject to restructure.

## 6. Recurring themes across CULTURE, BEHAVIOURS and IMPACT

Themes crosscut and reoccurred across the areas of **CULTURE, BEHAVIOURS and IMPACT**.

Developing a **learning culture** in hand with introducing **smarter, more strategic processes** (37% together) were most commonly referenced. This was followed by **skills and knowledge** and encouraging more and clearer **collaboration and connection** (18% together).

- a) Developing a **learning culture** was an area for future focus, where there would be ample opportunities for discussion, asking questions and reflection. Role modelling and mentoring to help develop this culture was a suggestion here:

*“Councillors should play a role in getting Members prepared and take them on the journey.”*

- b) Ideas for **smarter processes** included a shift towards a more balanced strategic outlook, away from overview to an increased focus on scrutiny. Attention was also placed on stricter time management, including time limits for Committee Member speeches. A review of processes supporting Committee meetings was mentioned:

*“Review the Council meeting structure, especially those meetings not in public and the number to increase the effectiveness of scrutiny.”*

- c) **Skills and knowledge** touched all areas - culture, behaviours and impact – as a topic for Woking Borough Council to prioritise. Thinking here was in how to effectively share knowledge and information across the organisation, with a view to encourage ownership whilst building and retaining corporate memory of scrutiny. Two pathways to achieve this were identified: ongoing training and peer learning.

- d) Better **collaboration and connection** across Committees, and between service areas of scrutiny and audit work programmes was referenced for the future. An ambition here was for closer collaboration between Committees to design a work programme together. Also, to assign a CLT Member to each scrutiny meeting and ensure they share outcomes with all of CLT with handover to the next CLT Member.

- e) Other recurring and crossing themes included:

- f) Accountability
- g) Audit
- h) Clarity
- i) Confidence
- j) Connectedness
- k) High profile
- l) Openness and transparency
- m) Resources
- n) Structure
- o) Time
- p) Trust
- q) Visibility and ownership
- r) Welcoming and inclusive

These ranged from between 1 and 6% of mentions during the workshop.

### 7. Ideas for taking the themes forward

As a final activity, Members were asked to complete 'I will...' statements, in support of how ideas might follow into action:

Cross-party discussions, open mind, leave politics out to increase understanding - 'listen and learn,' 'Informed and prepared.'

Advocate closer ties between S&A and O&S.

Embrace cross-party co-operation.

I will contribute by co-ordinating and making recommendations on training and development for the Committee.

More conversations/communication with Executive.

Relationships building with Commissioners.

People and Place Holistic.

Members and Officers joint training support.

Please scrutinise CAT Policy and consequences (social impact).

Structural review.

Lots of training and support for Members and officers.

Meetings of SCR with SSO and Commissioners.

Work programmes facilitated externally.



2024 / 2025 Year Planner

	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25
Mon				Recess									
Tue						1 #						1 #	
Wed	1					2			1 B Holiday			2	
Thu	2 Election			1		3 #			2 #			3 #	1 Election
Fri	3			2		4	1 Half Term		3			4 Term End	2
Sat	4	1		3		5	2		4	1	1	5	3
Sun	5	2		4	1	6	3	1	5	2	2	6	4
Mon	6 B Holiday	3	1 LGA Conf	5	2 Term Start	7	4	2	6 Term Start	3	3	7	5 B Holiday
Tue	7	4 1a. Planning	2 1a.C&H SC	6	3 3b. Planning	8 2b. C&H SC	5 3b. R&F SC	3 2b. E&P SC	7 3c. C&H SC	4 4c. R&F SC	4 3c. E&P SC	8 #	6
Wed	8 CLT Ind'n	5	3	7	4 2b. Chairs WS	9	6	4	8 3c. Chairs WS	5	5	9	7 CLT Ind'n
Thu	9 DemServ Ind'n	6 1a. A&G Cttee	4 #	8	5 2b. A&G Cttee	10 #	7 3b. A&G Cttee	5 6b. Executive	9 #	6 4c. A&G Cttee	6 5c. R&F SC	10 #	8 MS Ind'n
Fri	10	7	5	9	6	11	8	6	10	7	7	11	9
Sat	11	8	6	10	7	12	9	7	11	8	8	12	10
Sun	12	9	7	11	8	13	10	8	12	9	9	13	11
Mon	13 Eq & D'ty Train	10	8	12	9	14	11	9	13	10	10	14	12 Eq & D'ty Train
Tue	14 1a. SPanel	11 1a. R&F SC	9 #	13	10 2b. R&F SC	15 4b. Planning	12 5b. Planning	10 6b. Planning	14 7c. Planning	11 8c. Planning	11 9c. Planning	15 10c. Planning	13 SPanel
Wed	15	12	10	14	11	16	13	11	15	12	12	16	14
Thu	16	13 1a. Executive	11 2a. Executive	15	12 3b. Executive	17 4b. Executive	14 5b. Executive	12 4b. Council	16 7c. Executive	13 7c. Executive	13 9c. Executive	17 8c. SEC	15
Fri	17	14	12	16	13	18	15	13	17	14	14	18 B Holiday	16
Sat	18	15	13	17	14	19	16	14	18	15	15	19	17
Sun	19	16	14	18	15	20	17	15	19	16	16	20	18
Mon	20 1a. Council	17	15	19	16	21	18	16	20	17	17	21 B Holiday	19 1a. Council
Tue	21 Pl'g Ind'n	18 #	16 2a. Planning	20	17 1b. Licensing	22 #	19 1b. E'mnt Cttee	17 #	21 2c. E'mnt Cttee	18 #	18 2c. Licensing	22 #	20 Pl'g Ind'n
Wed	22 1a. Chairs WS	19	17	21	18	23	20	18	22	19 Half Term	19	23	21
Thu	23 Scrutiny Ind'n	20 #	18 #	22	19 #	24 #	21 #	19 #	23 #	20 #	20 6c. Council	24 #	22 Scrutiny Ind'n
Fri	24	21	19	23	20	25	22	20 Term End	24	21 17 - 21 Feb	21	25	23
Sat	25	22	20	24	21	26	23	21	25	22	22	26	24
Sun	26	23	21	25	22	27	24	22	26	23	23	27	25
Mon	27 B Holiday	24	22	26 B Holiday	23	28	25	23	27	24	24	28	26 B Holiday
Tue	28 #	25 1a. E&P SC	23 2a. SEC	27	24 3b. SEC	29 #	26 #	24 #	28 #	25 #	25 #	29 #	27 Half Term
Wed	29 Half Term	26	24	28	25	30 Half Term	27	25 B Holiday	29	26	26	30	28 26 - 30 May
Thu	30 #	27 1a. SEC	25 2a. Council	29	26 3b. Council	31 4b. SEC	28 5b. SEC	26 B Holiday	30 6c. SEC	27 5c. Council	27 7c. SEC		29
Fri	31 27 - 31 May	28	26	30	27	28 Oct - 1 Nov	29	27	31	28	28		30
Sat		29	27	31	28		30	28			29		31
Sun		30	28		29			29			30		
Mon			29		30			30			31		
Tue			30 #					31 #					



## 2024/25 Revised Calendar of Meetings

Meeting	2024/25 Dates
<b>Council (6)</b> 7pm on Thursday evenings.	20 May 2024 25 July 2024 26 September 2024 12 December 2024 27 February 2025 20 March 2025
<b>Executive (9)</b> 7pm on Thursday evenings.	13 June 2024 11 July 2024 12 September 2024 17 October 2024 14 November 2024 5 December 2024 16 January 2025 13 February 2025 13 March 2025
<b>Governance and Audit Committee (4)</b> 7pm on Thursday evenings.	6 June 2024 5 September 2024 7 November 2024 6 February 2025
<b>Planning Committee (10)</b> 7pm on Tuesday evenings.	4 June 2024 16 July 2024 3 September 2024 15 October 2024 12 November 2024 10 December 2024 14 January 2025 11 February 2025 11 March 2025 15 April 2025
<b>Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee (3)</b> 7pm on Tuesday evenings.	2 July 2024 8 October 2024 7 January 2025
<b>Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee (3)</b> 7pm on Tuesday evenings.	25 June 2024 3 December 2024 4 March 2025
<b>Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee (5)</b> 7pm on Tuesday evenings (with exception of Thursday, 6 March 2025).	11 June 2024 10 September 2024 5 November 2024 4 February 2025 6 March 2025

Meeting	2024/25 Dates
<b>Licensing Committee (2)</b> 7pm on Tuesday evenings.	17 September 2024 18 March 2025
<b>Shareholder Executive Committee (8)</b> 7pm on Thursday evenings (with exception of Tuesday, 23 July and Tuesday, 24 September 2024).	27 June 2024 23 July 2024 24 September 2024 31 October 2024 28 November 2024 30 January 2025 27 March 2025 17 April 2025
<b>Chairs' Group</b> ( <i>Elected Members and Officers only</i> ) 7pm on Wednesday evenings.	22 May 2024 4 September 2024 8 January 2025
<b>Selection Panel</b> ( <i>Elected Members and Officers only</i> ) 7pm on Tuesday evenings.	14 May 2024

EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

## THAMESWEY CENTRAL MILTON KEYNES LIMITED OFFER TO MARKET

### Executive Summary

The Council's current adopted Business Plan for ThamesWey includes a commitment to appraise future options for ThamesWey Central Milton Keynes (TCMK), including potential market sale. This report summarises progress to date on engagement with the investor market to understand the appetite for acquisition of TCMK, the outcome of an exercise inviting expressions of interest in by potential investors, and the next steps towards inviting offers from the market for the business.

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### RESOLVE That

ThamesWey be authorised to proceed to the next step of inviting offers (Best and Final Offer) from prospective bidders for the acquisition of ThamesWey Central Milton Keynes (TCMK).

### Reasons for Decision

Reason: In pursuance of the Council's adopted Business Plan for ThamesWey.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

<b>Background Papers:</b>	None.
<b>Reporting Person:</b>	Kevin Foster, Strategic Director of Corporate Resources Email: Kevin.Foster@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3070
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Kevin Foster, Strategic Director of Corporate Resources Email: Kevin.Foster@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3070
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Ann-Marie Barker Email: cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk
<b>Date Published:</b>	13 March 2024



### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on 23 February 2023 Council noted the ThamesWey Business Plan 2023. The Business Plan included action in 2023 to appraise future options for ThamesWey Central Milton Keynes (TCMK), including potential market sale.
- 1.2 Whilst TCMK does deliver positive earnings before interest payments, taxation and depreciation charges, it cannot currently afford to service its historic debts and therefore requires ongoing funding from Woking Borough Council to cover overall losses. A direction has been given to ThamesWey to explore options for TCMK, including market sale in 2023. The company has to be maintained as going concern whilst this course of action is pursued.
- 1.3 The Council has reviewed the medium-term financial forecast provided by TCMK with a view to understanding if there is potential for meaningful improvement to the company's capacity to repay its debts over the medium to long term.
- 1.4 At the present time there is no expected opportunity to enlarge the company's customer base. Notably, the plots of land within the boundaries of the historic Project Development Agreement remain undeveloped. As such there is no greater certainty of how the existing TCMK network fits with Milton Keynes City Council wider plans for expansion of district heating. In addition, medium-term risks that the recent DESNZ grant awarded to a new provider, Milton Keynes Energy Limited, have brought a significant competitor into the local Milton Keynes market.
- 1.5 In addition to the absence of growth opportunities, there is a longer term threat that within the next decade the company will lose its ability to generate revenue from gas powered electricity sales (via its current Combined Heat and Power engines). This remains a fundamental business threat. In that scenario the company would need to change its operating model to become a distributor as opposed to generator of power. This would provide increased uncertainty that the company will be able to address its debt commitments to the Council in the long term. In the same timeframe there is also the risk of customer loss when current supply contracts are due for renewal from 2033 onwards.
- 1.6 Given the lack of opportunity for improvement, and presence of strategic business threats, the Council has chosen to explore the option of a business sale. By doing so, the Council will at least achieve certainty of its overall residual debt exposure. Strategically, the TCMK business does not provide direct benefits to the residents of Woking Borough, and a full review of the environmental and equality implications will be undertaken if a business sale is proposed following the outcome of the competitive process.
- 1.7 Amberside Advisors Limited (AAL) were appointed by ThamesWey in March 2023 following a competitive exercise to provide expert advice on the potential market for sale of TCMK. AAL have a strong track record in UK energy sector disposal and acquisitions and are included in the panel of experts that advise Department of Energy Security and Net Zero on government support for heat networks.
- 1.8 AAL's appointment was based on two stages of work together named 'Project DENO' (District Energy Network Options). Stage 1 comprised a financial review of TCMK, its business model, advice on the market appetite for this asset class and a soft market test. The results of this work were considered by ThamesWey Limited Board in June 2023 and AAL were given the go-ahead to proceed to Stage 2 comprising offering TCMK to the market with a view to attracting offers for the business, and ultimately a preferred bidder's offer for consideration by the ThamesWey Limited Board and Woking Borough Council as Shareholder by the end of the calendar year.
- 1.9 The ThamesWey Ltd Board have approved the Information Memorandum for issue to prospective purchasers of TCMK and, subject to the Executive's approval, will proceed to the next steps for sale which is to move to the Best and Final Offer (BAFO) stage.

## ThamesWey Central Milton Keynes Limited offer to market

1.10 It is important to note that by issuing the Information Memorandum and moving to Best and Final Offer neither ThamesWey Limited nor Woking Borough Council are obligated to complete the transaction to sell ThamesWey Milton Keynes Limited or its assets. Following this exercise the Council as Shareholder may upon consideration of any binding offer choose an alternative course of action.

### 2.0 Progress to date

2.1 Close consultation between AAL and ThamesWey Officers has been maintained throughout the project with weekly briefings and regular workshops held to maintain momentum. As a result good progress has been made on the market offer exercise.

2.2 A 'teaser' proposal was prepared by AAL setting out a summary of TCMK, its principal assets and supply contracts, operating costs and revenues, and potential opportunities for growth. This was issued by AAL on 26th July 2023 to a wide range of investors covering a range of backgrounds including infrastructure investors (both domestic and overseas), major energy service companies, private equity firms and known district energy players in the UK market. The response to the teaser was largely positive and investors that attended the Q&A sessions signalled a good level of interest in the opportunity to acquire TCMK.

2.3 Experience from similar market offers has demonstrated the value of providing a robust vendor's model that enables prospective bidders to understand the fundamentals of the business and apply their own risk and opportunity valuations to it. AAL have provided a vendor's model for TCMK in consultation with ThamesWey Officers.

2.4 An engineering consultancy was appointed to prepare a vendor's technical due diligence report on TCMK's energy centre plant and equipment, heat and power distribution infrastructure, asset maintenance and service records, plant life cycle and operational information.

2.5 ThamesWey's lawyers (Clyde and Co) were appointed to provide legal advice throughout the next steps including matters relating to the process, warranties and warranty limitations, drafting of sale and purchase agreement and negotiations with bidders, disclosure letter and supporting documentation.

2.6 An Information Memorandum (IM) was prepared by Amberside which will be the central document in the pack of information provided to potential bidders and is to be sent to all investors that have expressed an interest in submitting a bid. The IM covers matters such as:

- Key investment highlights
- Commercial overview
- Financial summaries
- Operating position
- Strategic opportunities
- Organisation of the company
- Timeline and Advisors

2.7 A vendor's pack comprising the IM will be sent to prospective bidders along with the vendor's model, the technical due diligence report and a process letter setting out timelines and procedure for submitting non-binding offers through to binding offers and financial close.



### **3.0 Next Steps**

- 3.1 The process to potentially sell ThamesWey Central Milton Keynes (TCMK) has been under review prior to the next stage to enter into Best and Final Offer for sale.
- 3.2 This review has included independent review from Local Partnerships who have been providing support to the Council funded through the Local Government Association and internal review through the Council's commercial service. The reviews have recommended progressing to the Best and Final Offer Stage in order to seek a proposal that supports the Council reducing its debts whilst also delivering the best value outcomes for the public purse.
- 3.3 The review is also highlighting that the Council now requires greater visibility of the commercial process and negotiations and therefore arrangements are being put in place to enable this to take place.
- 3.4 TCMK has been requested, by the Council, to bring the Council's commercial consultants, Ethical Commercial, into the confidentiality agreement and to share all of the relevant details and bidder submissions. This will allow the implications mentioned previously to be thoroughly assessed and an informed recommendation brought back to the Shareholder Executive Committee, in pursuit of the commercial aim set out by the Commissioners, to release the Council from unaffordable commitments and secure the best possible value for the public purse.
- 3.5 Subject to approval by the Executive, the vendor's pack of information will be sent to prospective bidders with submission of binding offers expected in late May / early June 2024 to support a proposal to Council in July 2024.

### **4.0 Corporate Strategy**

- 4.1 Divestment of Council investment into TCMK is part of the Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan and supports the strategic aim of the rationalisation of assets and investments in order to reduce debt and deliver value for money for the public purse.

### **5.0 Implications**

#### Finance and Risk

- 5.1 The costs of this market exercise have been built into the approved ThamesWey budgets.
- 5.2 There is a risk that there will not be any market interest following the issue of the IM however, from the soft market testing this is not considered to be a likely outcome.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

- 5.3 None at this stage.

#### Legal

- 5.4 None at this stage.

### **6.0 Engagement and Consultation**

- 6.1 This report follows consideration by ThamesWey Limited Board and its support for progressing with the offer to market as proposed.

REPORT ENDS



EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

## VICTORIA SQUARE WOKING LTD – SHARE PURCHASE

### Executive Summary

This report seeks approval from the Executive to authorise the Share Purchase option available to the Council under the Shareholders' Agreement dated 25 April 2017 in relation to Victoria Square Woking Limited.

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### RESOLVE That

- (i) the Council exercise its option to purchase the shareholding from Moyallen Holding Limited; and
- (ii) the Section 151 Officer and Monitoring Officer be delegated powers to finalise and complete all necessary legal agreements.

### Reasons for Decision

Reason: To enable the Council to rationalise its assets and seek the best value for return on its investment.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

<b>Background Papers:</b>	None.
<b>Reporting Person:</b>	Kevin Foster, Strategic Director – Corporate Resources Email: kevin.foster@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3198
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Kevin Foster, Strategic Director – Corporate Resources Email: kevin.foster@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3198
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Will Forster Email: cllrwill.forster@woking.gov.uk
<b>Date Published:</b>	13 March 2024



### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Following the decision of the Executive in November 2016, the Council entered into a joint venture with Moyallen Holdings Limited and Victoria Square Woking Limited. A Shareholders' Agreement was completed on the 25 April 2016 with Moyallen holding 52% shareholding and the Council with 48% of the shareholding.
- 1.2 The Victoria Square development was a major step towards the regeneration of Woking Town Centre. The project comprised of 429 build to rent apartments, 189 room Hilton Hotel and parking spaces as well as retail and leisure spaces. In December 2022, the development was valued at £193.25m on completion. As part of the Improvement and Recovery Plan, the Council has been reviewing its assets and seeking to ensure it maintains the best value to the public purse.
- 1.3 The Shareholders' Agreement provides the Council with the option to 'acquire all of Moyallen's shares on completion of the Victoria Square Development.' The purchase value of the shares stands at £15,600 and it would enable the Council to become 100% shareholder of the company.
- 1.4 There has been significant delay in the complete of the development and as the option is contingent on the completion it will require a slight variation to the option clause to allow for purchase at an earlier date.

### 2.0 Commercial case for the Share Purchase

- 2.1 The Improvement and Recovery Programme (IRP) published in August 2023 recognised that Woking Borough Council (WBC) is in a challenging financial position largely through historic commercial property investment and regeneration projects which have resulted in unsustainable levels of current borrowing.
- 2.2 The IRP commercial workstream will set out plans for the Council owned companies, to realise the best possible returns from asset sales under the constraints of time and market conditions to ***extract the Council from unaffordable commitments, whilst protecting the public purse, and optimising the value of existing assets.***
- 2.3 To ensure the Council is able to mandate that its preferred plans can be expedited by the companies, using its powers as a shareholder as is necessary, it is desirable that WBC assumes fully ownership and control of Victoria Square Woking Limited (VWSL) and its subsidiaries. The Council is currently a minority shareholder but is in a position to assume full ownership through an amendment to the Shareholders Agreement which has been negotiated with Moyallen.
- 2.4 It is important to note that the value in owning the shares is not a financial one, per se. However, 100% ownership will give the Council the power to authorise disposals quickly and efficiently in response to opportunities and market conditions that may be problematic under the current ownership structure. It will also allow the Council to make changes to the Articles of the Company to reflect best practice and to protect the Council's interests as shareholder, client, and lender. It will also allow the Council to make changes to the company group structure when this becomes necessary or desirable, and is very much in line with Commissioners' and other Government stakeholders' expectations.
- 2.5 Exercising the option to purchase the Moyallen shareholding will enable VSWL to consolidate into the Council's group accounts and away from the Moyallen Group and accounts where it currently sits. It is expected that this will provide greater control, oversight and transparency to all Council stakeholders.

### **3.0 Corporate Strategy**

- 3.1 To exercise the option will allow the Council to have 100% shareholding and enable more control and flexibility for the Council to deliver the aims of the IRP.

### **4.0 Implications**

#### Finance and Risk

- 4.1 Whilst levels of borrowing at Victoria Square Woking Limited has been widely reported, the joint venture referred to in this report does not result in Moyallen Holdings Limited sharing any of the existing debt burden.
- 4.2 The main cash implication for the Council is the £15,600 it is going to cost to buy the shares in question from Moyallen Holdings Limited. The Council's existing operational funding will be used to fund this purchase.
- 4.3 The Council's Finance Director / S151 Officer agrees that it would be beneficial to acquire 100% shareholding and enable more control, agility and flexibility for the Council to deliver its strategic aim to reduce its financial burden and seek the best value for the asset. The s151 Officer also confirms that this share transaction does not alter any of the other assets, liabilities or costs associated with Woking BC's interests in VSWL Limited.
- 4.4 The Company and its assets and liabilities will have to be consolidated into the Council's Group accounts in 2023/24, but it is likely that this would have to be done in any case as part of work with the Council's new auditor's Grant Thornton. This work is being built into the resource planning for the Finance Team.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

- 4.5 There are no equalities and human resources implications.

#### Legal

- 4.6 A formal deed of variation to the original Shareholder's Agreement and a Share Purchase Agreement will be required.
- 4.7 Once completed the Company's Articles of Association will need to be amended and updated.

### **5.0 Engagement and Consultation**

- 5.1 The share acquisition has been developed in conjunction with the VSWL Board.

REPORT ENDS

EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

## ASSET DISPOSAL

### Executive Summary

This report sets out the proposal for the sale of the freehold interest in the Egley Road Barn Site, via the preferred method of sale, Informal Tender.

The site proposed for disposal is known as the Egley Road Barn Site, Egley Road, Woking, GU22 0HN.

The vendor is Woking Borough Council (WBC).

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### RESOLVE That

- i) the Council dispose of the freehold interest in the Egley Road Barn Site via an Informal Tender; and
- ii) the site should be marketed and sold on the basis set out within the Part I and II reports.

### Reasons for Decision

Reason: This disposal of the Egley Road Barn Site will generate a capital receipt for the Council and will enable the delivery of housing on this site by a third-party developer.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

**Background Papers:** None.

**Reporting Person:** Kevin Foster, Strategic Director – Corporate Resources  
Email: kevin.foster@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3198

**Contact Person:** Mike Sudlow, Strategic Assets Consultant  
Email: mike.sudlow@woking.gov.uk

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Dale Roberts  
Email: [cilrdale.roberts@woking.gov.uk](mailto:cilrdale.roberts@woking.gov.uk)

**Date Published:** 13 March 2024



### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The site proposed for disposal is known as the Egley Road Barn Site, Egley Road, Woking, GU22 0HN.
- 1.2 The vendor is Woking Borough Council (WBC).

### 2.0 Proposed Disposal

- 2.1 This report sets out the rationale behind the proposed sale of the freehold interest in the Egley Road Barn Site.
- 2.2 The site was purchased in October 2019. It is part of a wider Site Allocation GB7: Nursery Land adjacent to Egley Road, Mayford, GU22 0PL). Following the purchase, the site was the subject of a failed planning application (PLAN/2019/1177) which was subsequently dismissed at appeal.
- 2.3 The application sought consent for a mixed-use scheme to deliver houses and a David Lloyd leisure complex.
- 2.4 The key reasons for refusal of the original application PLAN/2019/1177 (and subsequent dismissal of the Appeal, APP/A3655/W/20/3265969) were the loss of the trees in the south, the impact on the openness of this former greenbelt site, and that the proposed David Lloyd leisure complex was not part of the site allocation's proposed mix of uses. The need to create a sense of visual separation between Mayford village and the Woking conurbation was a key planning concern for this site.
- 2.5 The Site to be disposed of is the southern part of a wider site which includes the Hoe Valley School and the Cala Homes site. The Cala Homes site secured consent under PLAN/2022/0694 for 180 residential units (inclusive of 118 dwellings plus a 62-bed care home).
- 2.6 The decision was made by the Council to undertake an outline planning application to address the major uncertainties over the level of housing that can be delivered on the site. The finer details of layout and house design can be left to the purchaser, as each developer will have their own preferences and business model.
- 2.7 Executive approval is requested to commence marketing of the site given that it is anticipated the outline planning application submitted by the Property Services Team to establish the likely quantum of development is anticipated to go before the Planning Committee in the next 12 weeks.
- 2.8 It is proposed that preparations for the disposal process, and the subsequent marketing of the site, are commenced prior to the outline consent application being heard, so that the Council is able to finalise a sale as and when an outline planning consent is granted.
- 2.9 A pre-application submission was submitted by the Property Services Team in January 2024 in respect of an outline planning application for residential development. The proposed outline application is intended to increase the site's asset value by reducing planning risk and establishing the broad quantum/footprint of housing that can be delivered. Following a pre-application meeting, it is anticipated that the Council can realistically expect to secure consent for circa 50 houses.
- 2.10 The outline consent will establish key aspects of the proposed scheme, including the site's red-line boundary, the maximum floor area of residential, the maximum building heights, affordable housing quantum, and several ecological and environmental matters.

- 2.11 It is proposed that the site will be sold unconditionally (subject to any planning consent) to a residential developer, who will then submit a Reserved Matters application to address the detailed design, layout and other reserved matters.
- 2.12 It is anticipated that an overage agreement will be incorporated, to ensure that additional land payments are made if the purchaser subsequently secures consent for a greater amount of residential floorspace than envisaged/permitted by the Outline consent.
- 2.13 It is proposed that the disposal method will be by an Informal Tender. In a sale via an Informal Tender, the site will be widely advertised to the open market and expressions of interest sought by a pre-determined date.
- 2.14 The benefits of this proposed sale are largely commercial and financial, through generating a capital receipt but there is also the social benefit of delivering additional housing, in line with the Local Plan's objective for housing on this site.
- 2.15 The Council has considered if there are any other uses that could feasibly be developed on the site. Given that the Site Allocation GB7 earmarks this site for residential development, it is considered unrealistic that alternative uses would secure planning consent.

### **3.0 Corporate Strategy**

- 3.1 The Corporate Plan (2021/22) has been followed by the *Working for all supplementary priorities (2022-2027)* strategy, and the proposed sales meets a number of this strategy's objectives, including encouraging a "A high performing council" by helping to "Get the Council's finances under control" and "Consider new approaches to increase income".

### **4.0 Implications**

#### Finance and Risk

- 4.1 No major risks identified.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

- 4.2 None arising from this report.

#### Legal

- 4.3 There are no legal implications, other than those outlined in this report.

### **5.0 Engagement and Consultation**

- 5.1 None arising from this report.

REPORT ENDS

EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

## ASSET DISPOSAL

### Executive Summary

This report proposes that the authority dispose of a site located at Westfield Avenue known as the Westfield Avenue Compound, 65-79 Westfield Avenue, Westfield a bare site. The Compound site is in temporary occupation by Woking FC as a yard and offices. The site has an allocation for residential development under the Site Allocations DPD.

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### **RESOLVE That**

the Council dispose of the freehold interest in the Westfield Avenue Compound to the preferred bidder once planning consent has been secured for nine houses.

### Reasons for Decision

Reason: The disposal of Westfield Avenue Compound will provide a capital receipt to the Council and will facilitate the redevelopment of this vacant site to deliver houses and improve the local area.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

<b>Background Papers:</b>	None.
<b>Reporting Person:</b>	Kevin Foster, Strategic Director – Corporate Resources Email: kevin.foster@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3198
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Mike Sudlow, Strategic Assets Consultant Email: mike.sudlow@woking.gov.uk
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Dale Roberts Email: clldale.roberts@woking.gov.uk
<b>Date Published:</b>	13 March 2024



## 1.0 Westfield Avenue Compound

- 1.1 The Site previously had nine houses on site, demolished in c. 2010, following which it was in temporary use as a construction yard for the residential development on the opposite side of Westfield Avenue. Following completion of that neighbouring development, the Site has been in temporary use by Woking Football Club for storage, parking and office use.
- 1.2 Following a review in 2023 It was decided that the Council should submit a planning application in its own right with a view to offering the site to the market with an outline consent, in order to maximise the capital receipt.
- 1.3 The Council made a planning application for development of nine houses on the site under planning reference PLAN/2023/0980. The Site was subsequently marketed by Seymour's both in 2023, prior to submission of the planning application, and has subsequently been re-marketed on the basis of the application scheme.
- 1.4 The Council sought unconditional bids in late 2024 for the site and the highest bid has now been accepted in principle subject to Executive approval. This bid is made on the basis that the application scheme receives consent. The application is expected to be determined by the Planning Committee in April 2024.
- 1.5 The Council has invited Woking Football Club on several occasions to bid for the site . The Club are aware that the authority intends to proceed with a disposal based on the recent marketing exercise.
- 1.6 Under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council has a duty not to dispose of land for a consideration less than the best that can be reasonably obtained ('Best Value/Best Consideration' and alternative options for the Site have been considered:

- **Apartment development**

Property Services created a draft plan for an apartment scheme on the site, and undertook a valuation of this option, which indicated that a nine-house scheme generates a higher land value than an apartment scheme. In addition, a housing scheme is considered to pose less planning risk and is more popular with local residents.

The marketing of the site has been open to offers from developers looking to deliver apartments on the site, but these have not resulted in the highest bids.

- **Alternative Uses**

Other alternative options for redevelopment of the Site have been considered and have been dismissed as unfeasible. The fact that the site has a residential allocation under the Site Allocations DPD, means that alternative uses are unlikely to secure planning consent.

## 2.0 Corporate Strategy

- 2.1 The proposal to sell the Compound contributes to a number of Objectives in the Corporate Strategy as set out in the *Woking for all supplementary priorities (2022-2027)* strategy. The proposed sale meets a number of this strategy's objectives, including encouraging a "A high performing council" by helping to "Get the Council's finances under control" and "Consider new approaches to increase income".

- 2.2 The Commercial Protocol has been consulted in respect of the decision-making process to apply to this disposal. The disposal meets a number of Guiding Principles within the Protocol including No 11, “to maximise receipts from all funding streams ...over the period of the MTFs”.
- 2.3 This project will impact directly on the Councils key priorities under the Working for all 2022-2027 (June 2022 Supplementary and amended priorities 2022-23 from the new administration):

### A high performing council

- *Get the Council’s finances under control – this is our first priority.*
- *Consider new approaches to increase income.*

### Greener communities

By enabling the re-use of a brownfield site, to deliver houses meeting sustainability criteria, and reducing the pressure on greenfield development.

## **3.0 Implications**

### Finance and Risk

- 3.1 No major risks identified.

### Equalities and Human Resources

- 3.2 None arising from this report.

### Legal

- 3.3 None arising from this report. This disposal is considered to be compliant with the provisions of S123 of the Local Government Act 1972.

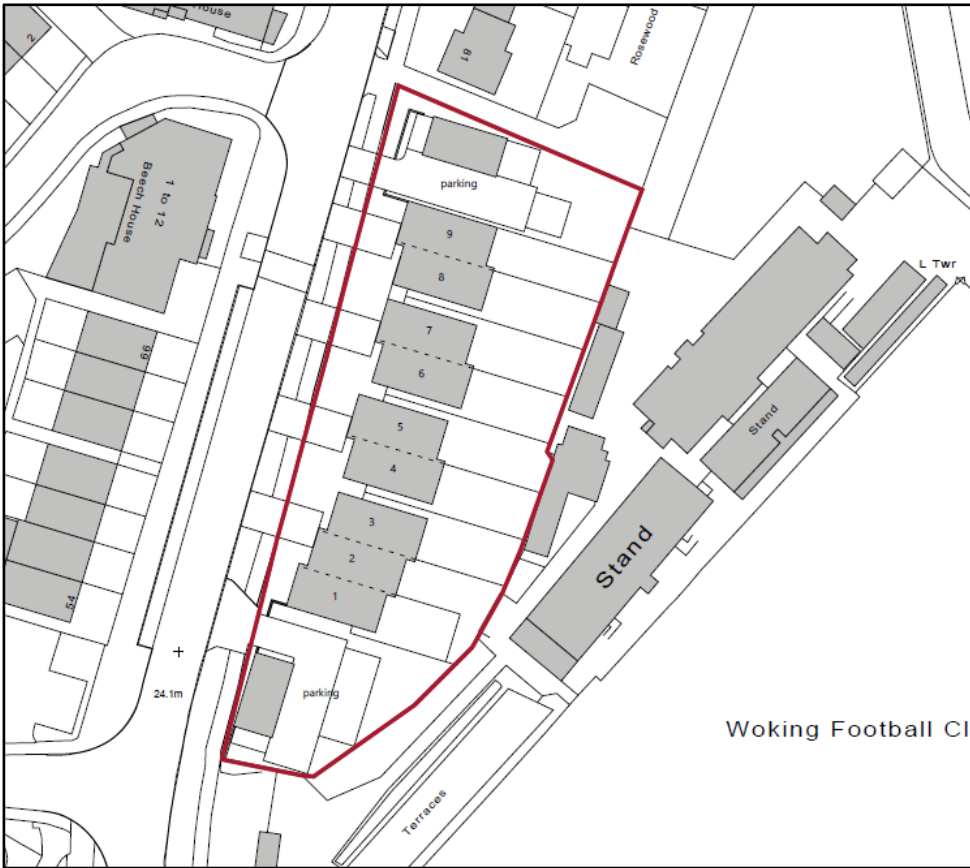
## **4.0 Engagement and Consultation**

- 4.1 A consultation exercise was undertaken with local residents and stakeholders supporting a residential scheme on this site.

REPORT ENDS

Site plans showing the proposed scheme under planning application PLAN/2023/0980 for nine houses.







EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

## REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 – ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT

### Executive Summary

This report considers the Council's use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 ("RIPA") during the 2023 calendar year.

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### **RESOLVE That**

the Council's non-use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 during the 2023 calendar year be noted.

### Reasons for Decision

Reason: To comply with the Council's RIPA policy and Home Office Codes of Practice.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

<b>Background Papers:</b>	None.
<b>Reporting Person:</b>	Gareth John, Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer Email: gareth.john@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3077
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Gareth John, Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services & Monitoring Officer Email: gareth.john@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3077
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Ann-Marie Barker Email: cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk
<b>Date Published:</b>	13 March 2024



## Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 – Annual Monitoring Report

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (“RIPA”) provides for, and regulates, the use of a range of investigative powers by a variety of public authorities. RIPA will impact on the Council’s activities on the rare occasions when covert surveillance is undertaken, e.g. as part of investigations undertaken in connection with the Council’s environmental health, housing, taxi licensing and audit functions.

### 2.0 Use of RIPA during the 2023 Calendar Year

- 2.1 No RIPA authorisations were issued during 2023.

### 3.0 Corporate Strategy

- 3.1 RIPA powers would only be used for a purpose which was consistent with the Council’s Corporate Strategy.

### 4.0 Implications

#### Finance and Risk

- 4.1 None.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

- 4.2 None.

#### Legal

- 4.3 None.

### 5.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 5.1 None.

REPORT ENDS



EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

## NCIL – APPLICATION FOR FUNDING - PHOENIX CULTURAL CENTRE CIC

### Executive Summary

An application has been put forward by the CEO/Founder of the Phoenix Cultural Centre CIC and Councillors of Canalside Ward to apply for £17,500.000 of NCIL money (earmarked) to pay for repairs and maintenance to a lift within the building to improve accessibility for those who use the centre’s facilities and increase community participation. The Executive is asked to consider the application and decide whether the application meets the agreed criteria for the money to be approved.

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### RESOLVE That

- (i) the application submitted by Ward Councillors for Canalside to secure £17,500.00 to repair a lift within the Phoenix Cultural Centre be approved; and
- (ii) the Financial Control Panel be authorised to approve payment for the cost of lift repair which will be drawn from the total NCIL income earmarked and available for Canalside Ward. This currently stands at £322,413.32 (Post S114 funds available £29,704.70).

### Reasons for Decision

Reason: To enable the Council to contribute toward the improvement and provision of community infrastructure within Woking.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

<b>Background Papers:</b>	None.
<b>Reporting Person:</b>	Beverley Kuchar, Acting Strategic Director - Place Email: beverley.kuchar@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3473
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Jade Bowes, Planning Policy Officer Email: jade.bowes@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3731
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Liam Lyons Email: cllrliam.lyons@woking.gov.uk
<b>Date Published:</b>	13 March 2024



**1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The Council introduced the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) from 1 April 2015 as the main means for securing development contributions towards the provision of infrastructure to support development across the Borough.
- 1.2 The Government requires the Council to pass on a proportion of the CIL income to local communities where the chargeable development occurred. If the community has an adopted Neighbourhood Plan it receives 25% of the CIL income from development occurred in the Neighbourhood Area. If there is no Neighbourhood Plan, the area receives 15%.
- 1.3 An application has been put forward by the CEO/Founder of the Phoenix Cultural Centre and Councillors of Canalside Ward to apply for £17,500,000 of NCIL money (earmarked) to pay for repairs and maintenance to a lift within the building to improve accessibility for those who use the centre's facilities and widen community participation. The Executive is asked to consider the application and decide whether the application meets the agreed criteria for the money to be approved.
- 1.4 The agreed list of requirements to be met when applying for NCIL money to fund local community projects includes: (a) Name of the infrastructure/project that the NCIL income will deliver (b) A brief description of the project and what it seeks to achieve (c) Evidence of broad community support for the project.
- 1.5 The Government has prescribed that the CIL money can only be used for: (d) The provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure (e) Anything else that is concerned with addressing the demands that development places on an area.
- 1.6 The above are the key requirements against which Members should assess the application.

**2.0 Officers' analysis and recommendations**

- 2.1 Officers confirmed that the application and evidence of support was received September 2023, however, quotes for the work were missing. After feedback from officers, three quotes from different suppliers were provided. The applicant requested that the second most expensive quote be funded. It was then requested by officers that a statement be provided to set out why that quote was considered the most appropriate option and demonstrated best value.
- 2.2 It has been highlighted to the Councillor associated with the application that NCIL cannot be used speculatively to pay for the ongoing maintenance of works. Instead, it is advised that NCIL applications for maintenance work are submitted once they are needed and evidenced through the submission of further quotes. It is also recommended that the applicant liaise directly with the Council on how much funding is available to their Ward as further works to improve the building, as mentioned within correspondence, may be feasible subject to meeting NCIL criteria.
- 2.3 Analysis is provided below to assist Members in deciding whether this project meets the definition above of what NCIL funds can be used for.
- 2.4 In July 2023, the Phoenix Cultural Centre was granted temporary change of use of part of the ground floor and first floor of 32 Goldsworth Road to an events space (Sui Generis) and use of car park for outdoor events for a period of 5 years (PLAN/2023/0313). The applicant has noted within their application that they have been given use of the building for 3 years with a view to a permanent space.
- 2.5 It is important that Members note that the centre occupies a section of the EcoWorld development site (PLAN/2020/0568) and the developers have provided a contribution of £120,000 towards the refurbishment of the space (see CIL application).

## NCIL – Application for Funding – Phoenix Cultural Centre CIC

- 2.6 The building has 40k sqft available to use alongside outdoor space and car parking facilities, which have been assessed and approved by the Highway Authority through grant of temporary planning permission.
- 2.7 The centre is an important and valued community asset which provides cultural, community, wellbeing and learning activities for the Canalside community, in addition to those beyond the Ward boundary.
- 2.8 Other groups have also been offered space within the building to operate, these include Surrey Choices, Man In The Moon Theatre, Surrey Arts, Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum, The Jam Exhibition.
- 2.9 The repairs to the lift will enable greater usage of the available space as users of all mobility types are able to access more areas of the building. Currently the only space available for wheelchair users is 10k sqft. This project should be viewed as contributing towards the Council's ambitions for economic prosperity and community investment as the usage of the centre increases to accommodate more activities to the benefit of Woking's residents.
- 2.10 This application is benefiting from other funding sources as detailed within the NCIL application (appended at Appendix 1). The bid for NCIL funding from WBC is to cover 'infrastructure' improvements to the building that were 'out of scope' to other funding opportunities. Therefore, this application for NCIL funding contributes to the wider ongoing maintenance and repair of the building.
- 2.11 The applicant has provided examples where specific activities would require access and usage of the lift. This includes operating music focused sessions for young people, individuals with disabilities, children in care/care leavers, and refugee/asylum seeking people.
- 2.12 The proposal has received broad community support from many community groups toward plans to improve the centre. Ward and County Councillors for the area have been notified of this project and verbal support has been confirmed from Councillor Aziz and Councillor Raja. Councillor Forster has also confirmed support. Supporting documents are appended at Appendix 2. Please note that some of these supporting documents are directed towards YourFund Surrey, which was a previous bid for funding that maintained the same objective (i.e., the wider repair, maintenance, and operation of the Phoenix Cultural Centre).
- 2.13 A 'Commonplace Community Feedback Report' was also provided as evidence of support and sets out questionnaire-style feedback from individuals who support the centre and benefit from its activities. This report is over 100 pages and has not been appended but can be made available to individuals on request.
- 2.14 Based on the above, it is recommended that £17,500,000 be approved towards the repair of the lift as evidenced within the quote provided to officers. Officers are satisfied that the proposal meets the agreed list of requirements, and the application should be approved.

### **3.0 Implications**

#### Finance and Risk

- 3.1 NCIL constitutes developer contributions which is earmarked for spend by wards and neighbourhood areas.
- 3.2 Funding for this project will need to be drawn down from money available to Canalside Ward. This currently stands at £322,413.32 (Post S114 funds available £29,704.70).



Equalities and Human Resources

- 3.3 The Phoenix Cultural Centre provides a space to hold various activities that promote diversity within the community, and this application will enable further usage of the space for this purpose by improving accessibility.

Legal

- 3.4 Approval of this application at Executive will commit the Council to funding this project as specified above.

**4.0 Engagement and Consultation**

- 4.1 As per the requirements of NCIL, the applicant has notified the relevant Ward and County Councillors of this project and has received support.
- 4.2 Additional support from other groups and organisations has been collected to support this project and has been appended.

REPORT ENDS





## **Woking Borough Council**

### **Community Infrastructure Levy**

**Application form for CIL money to deliver local community infrastructure projects**



**Produced by the Planning Policy Team**

**For further information please contact:**

**Planning Policy, Woking Borough Council, Civic Offices, Gloucester Square,  
Woking, Surrey, GU21 6YL. Tel: 01483 743871. Email:  
[planning.policy@woking.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@woking.gov.uk)**

**Woking Borough Council**  
**Community Infrastructure Levy**

**Application form for CIL money to deliver local community infrastructure projects**

**Introduction**

Woking Borough Council adopted its Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule on 24 October 2014 to take effect from 1 April 2015. The Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended) imposes a duty on Woking Borough Council as a CIL Charging Authority to pass on a proportion of its CIL income to local communities where the chargeable development takes place.

Where there is an adopted Neighbourhood Development Plan in place for the area, the Neighbourhood Area gets 25% of the CIL income. Where there is no Neighbourhood Development Plan in place, the local community gets 15%. Where there is no designated Neighbourhood Area, it is proposed that the Ward boundary will be the basis for earmarking the CIL income for the local community.

The CIL Regulations prescribe what CIL income earmarked for local community projects should broadly be used on. The money must be used to support the provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure, or anything else that is concerned with addressing the demands that development places on the area.

In December 2022 the Council agreed updated partnership arrangements for local communities to take forward community projects delivered with CIL money. This ensures arrangements are in place to deliver the actions of the Joint Committee, which has been disestablished. It includes an approval mechanism for CIL applications under £10,000 to be taken to the CIL Task Group, and CIL Neighbourhood funds of a value over £10,000 to be approved by the Executive. A Flowchart summarising the process for securing CIL money for community projects is available at [How we spend the income from the CIL levy | Woking Borough Council](#).

This application form is intended to guide Councillors to provide the necessary information that will enable the CIL Task Group or Executive to determine applications for CIL funds.

For further information, clarification or guidance please contact the Planning Policy Team on 01483 743871 or email: [planning.policy@woking.gov.uk](mailto:planning.policy@woking.gov.uk). Please use this email address to submit your completed application form, along with the supporting information and evidence highlighted in the Application Checklist at the end of this form.

## APPLICATION FORM

Question	Response
1. Name of Ward or Neighbourhood Area	Canalside
2. Name of councillor submitting the application (or anyone with delegated authority to submit the application on behalf of councillors). Please list all Borough Ward Councillors and County Divisional Councillors who have been consulted prior to submitting the application.	Councillor Javaid (Canalside Ward)
3. Preferred contact details of councillor submitting the application (phone number or email or address)	<u><a href="mailto:CllrAnila.Javaid@woking.gov.uk">CllrAnila.Javaid@woking.gov.uk</a></u>
Name of Project Manager who will be responsible for the proper implementation of the project and for all associated cost/financial processes.	Elaine McGinty - Phoenix Cultural Centre CIC Phoenix Cultural Centre CIC Board Member Finance - Joe Buckley APAD Phoenix Cultural Centre CIC Board We are also externally audited annually.
4. Name of project/infrastructure that CIL money will deliver	Repair and maintenance of lifts in Cultural space* to allow accessibility and widen community participation
5. Location of the project such as address, Location Plan.	32 Goldsworth Rd Woking GU21 6JT

<p>6. A brief description of the project and what it seeks to achieve</p>	<p>Phoenix Cultural Centre CIC has been given use of a large building to house cultural, community, wellbeing and learning activities for 3 years with a view to a permanent space. The building has 40k sqft available plus 100 car park spaces &amp; outdoor space. As well as their own work, PCC are offering space to groups such as Surrey Choices, Man In The Moon Theatre, Surrey Arts, Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum, The Jam Exhibition &amp; many others both groups &amp; individuals. The owners of the building are offering it rent free and investing £120k in works to make good for community use however the lift repair and maintenance will be out of budget. This is estimated to be £25k over the 3 year period. With the lifts out of action the only available accessible space is 10ksqft which will cut out a lot of users and work that could help others ie Surrey Arts wish to keep their 'Up!' accessible orchestra there on a floor above the venue but without lift access this won't be possible. If we can get the lifts working not only can we support more people but attract more interest and income to Woking.</p>
<p>7. What is the estimated total cost of the project and how much CIL money is requested? Have you taken into account the cost of managing the delivery of the project?</p> <p>Please provide quotes for the work/project</p>	<p>The whole project is costed as  £120000 Building repair - ECOWorld  £10000 Phoenix works - decoration, cctv, Wi-Fi, cleaning, capital items etc  £25000 for the lifts - initial repair and ongoing safety and maintenance during the project.  £280000 - sliding cost of contribution for three years - employing staff members, utilities, insurances, equipment (currently with national lottery)</p> <p>We request £25000 as we are starting out to get the building ready. We have included project management. Note as yet this is an estimate sent by owners who have a lift condition survey but as yet no quotes</p> <p>We are awaiting quotes from owners and will sign the lease this week.</p> <p><u>Officer comments: the applicant has amended their request and now wishes for CIL funding (earmarked) for £17,500 to pay for works.</u></p>
<p>8. Would there be additional sources of funding necessary and available to deliver the project? If yes, provide details</p>	<p>Yes, we have secured some ie owner's contribution (£120k, Phoenix reserves £70k, Arts Council £14500 - programming, Power to Change - £20k sustainability work &amp; supporting transition)  We have an application with The National Lottery Reaching Communities at its final stage for core costs - £280k  Current funding secured is ring fenced and can't be used on lifts or large capital costs such as this</p>
<p>9. A brief statement of why CIL funding is being sought?</p>	<p>For accessibility measures in a community cultural space to open up usage to create greater impact and support for community members and a greater income and sustainability for the project going forward ie increased hire income</p>

<p>10. How would the project help address the demands or impacts of development in the area.</p>	<p>It provides a community cultural and wellbeing space in the heart of the town where none currently exists.  It utilises an empty building and brings economy and vibrancy back into an area waiting for development  It increases accessibility to learning, employment and leisure for a broad range of people  It provides space that is not currently available for groups working with specific communities of need to meet their needs an increase the impact of their work</p>
<p>11. Is there evidence of broad community support for the project? Please provide the necessary evidence. In particular, any written support by Ward and County Councillors and from local community groups, specific references to surveys and Neighbourhood Plans are examples of evidence to demonstrate support. Applications might be delayed/deferred and/or refused without the necessary evidence of local community support for the project.</p>	<p>Yes, we have gathered evidence over a number of years and piloted the project in several different locations. We had two resolutions by WBC to find us space in 2014 &amp; 2019 following these pilots.  We had been given a permanent space by Woking BC in recognition of the value of the project to the Borough but due to the financial situation the budget to refit it was removed.  We applied to Your Fund Surrey and as part of that process had to gather information to demonstrate support. We received letters of support from LinkAble, Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum, Woking College amongst others and from local and county councillors as well as our MP  We have mapped our project to Woking's 2027 plan and are part of Surrey's Cultural Partnership strategy, founding members of Woking Arts Hub Steering group, representatives on Surrey Police Hate Crime Scrutiny Panel.</p>
<p>12. What is the indicative timescales for the delivery of the project</p>	<p>Lease signing taking place July 23.  Work is starting to restore the building immediately with aim for community side to be finished in 4 weeks and Live venue in 8 weeks with opening beginning of Sept.</p>

<p>13. Would there be associated revenue spend (such as day-to-day running costs, maintenance) for the project? How would this be met? Please note that any revenue spend such as cost of maintenance will have to be met from the CIL money earmarked for the Ward or Neighbourhood Area and not by the Council.</p>	<p>There would be maintenance checks to be carried out and this has been included in the CIL amount applied for.</p>
<p>14. Would you need planning permission to carry out the works? Officers can provide advice.</p>	<p>Planning permission is at the final stage and was submitted by the owners. Advice has been sought throughout.</p> <p><u>Officer comments: planning permission has been granted on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2023 for (PLAN/2023/0313)... “Temporary change of use of part of the ground floor and first floor of 32 Goldsworth Road to an events space Sui Generis and use of car park for outdoor events for a period of 5 years.”</u></p>
<p>15. Will the project affect the public highway? If yes, have you had an early consultation with Surrey County Council? An early consultation with the County Council will be helpful.</p>	<p>No</p> <p><u>Officer comments: as part of PLAN/2023/0313, SCC (as Highway Authority) provided comment. To sum “the application would not have a material impact on the safety and operation of the adjoining public highway. The County Highway Authority therefore has no highway requirements.”</u></p>
<p>16. When to submit an application</p>	

**CIL Funding Application Form requirements – application checklist:**

- Have you read the CIL Flowchart on arrangement to use CIL money for local community projects? All Councillors have been sent a copy.
- Have you provided a brief description of the project, including address, costs and what the project seeks to achieve?
- Have you provided evidence of broad community support for the project? Evidence should be attached to the application.



REF CF116

Mrs Anna Power

June 7<sup>th</sup> 2021

Elaine McGinty FRSA  
CEO/Founder Phoenix Cultural Centre  
CIC/Fiery Bird Live Music Venue

Dear Elaine,

Re: Phoenix Cultural Centre & Fiery Bird Music Venue.

I write as a resident of Woking and as Head of Music at Woking College for the past 13 years. Our recent meeting to discuss exciting plans to develop the Albion House site into the Phoenix Cultural Centre Arts Café and Acoustic Venue and the Fiery Bird Live Music Venue left me feeling extremely inspired and optimistic about the future of the Arts in Woking. I would like to formally support the bid for funding from the Surrey County Council Community Fund for this project.

As an experienced educator, specifically of post-16 Music and Music Technology students, I know just how important it is for young people to be able to express themselves through the visual and performing arts. It is a medium that brings communities closer together and fosters a strong sense of mutual understanding and wellbeing. I have been struck by the talent that exists in Woking residents, young and old, yet there is a real need for an outlet for that talent. Clearly, the visual arts are well catered for by The Lightbox, which has proved to be a fantastic venue that has rightly garnered national and international attention and respect. However, music for local people, by local people, is less well-resourced and students of mine must seek performance opportunities elsewhere, mainly in Guildford and London. We have such a wealth of local talent that it seems a shame that there is nowhere for them to gain valuable performance experience in a supportive, community environment which is so very much needed in the early stage of their careers. Certainly, the Rhoda McGaw theatre is a much-loved local venue, but this is expensive to hire and difficult to fill without a large and established following, so it is out of the reach of many young performers. Most young people embarking on a performance career, as well as older professionals and amateurs alike, prefer the feeling of a more intimate venue, the informality and friendliness of a smaller space and the opportunity to share the stage with others. It seems that the proposal by the Phoenix Cultural Centre is just what Woking has been waiting for. I can already envisage forging some longstanding and valuable links with the possibility of providing our very talented and keen arts students with opportunities to share their performance work locally with parents and friends at a venue away from the College, thus giving them the first taste of true public performance.

Indeed, it should be noted that several of our students are already benefitting from the outstanding Young Promoters' course, organised by yourselves at the Phoenix Cultural Centre and at least one of our students will be undertaking work experience with you. This is real industry training and advice, opportunity and guidance from professionals into putting on gigs

without risk in their hometown venue with speakers from every aspect of the live music industry working successfully across the UK. Having spoken to students on this course and other students and staff at the College, as well as local neighbours, friends and parents of students, I just wanted it on record that I wholeheartedly support the plan, both as a Woking resident and as a teacher at Woking College. I have also noticed that some of the acts planned for the Autumn season include several ex students of Woking which is great as it means that musicians who have gone to London Conservatoires and colleges to train are returning to the town to perform. The interest it would generate locally is huge, not to mention the positive effect on other local businesses such as restaurants and shops, as no doubt audiences will patronise the town in other ways when they visit for performances. The fact that the proposed venue is so close to Woking train station is also a great advantage and will surely draw audiences from further afield, thereby regenerating interest in the Woking arts scene after such a devastating pandemic.

I would therefore support the bid for funding and urge YourFund Surrey to give generously to such a worthwhile and enduring cause.

Kind regards

Anna Power, Head of Music, Woking College, and resident of Woking.

CF116



Your Fund Surrey  
Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Dear Sir/Madam

**Re: Phoenix Cultural Centre/Fiery Bird Albion House – Letter of support.**

On behalf of LinkAble Woking Limited, please accept this letter of support to Phoenix Cultural Centre/Fiery Bird Albion House in their application to Your Fund Surrey and their request for funding.

Since 1989 LinkAble has been supporting children and adults with learning disabilities in Woking and the surrounding areas. We aim to provide life-long support to people of all ages to enable them to live happy, healthy, and independent lives. Attending LinkAble provides routine, familiarity, and social interaction for its service users.

We are the only charity in the area supporting both children and adults with learning disabilities. For over 10 years part of our programme for adults with learning disabilities, pre pandemic, was a nightclub night known as 'Mayhem'. Unique to Woking, this was held 5 times a year alternating between the HG Wells Centre and Fiery Bird as venues, regularly attracting over 250 people.

For our adult service users not being able to attend Mayhem because of the pandemic has been hard and losing the two venues as part of the town centre redevelopment means that there is no suitable and accessible place to hold Mayhem once restrictions are lifted. Not only will it impact our service users personally in a negative way, but it also means LinkAble loses out financially from the income future events would generate.

From our experience of working with the Fiery Bird team, we are confident that any bid will take into consideration the specific needs of our service users and those of other stakeholders. In fact, they have collaborated with LinkAble to develop their plans as part of their work to ensure that the premises they are developing will be suitable to be used by the widest range of the community as possible.

If you require more information about the importance of the Phoenix Cultural Centre/Fiery Bird Albion House application, please contact me or our CEO, Alison Keeley, who will be happy to discuss our support of this project and the positive impact it will have in more detail.

Yours sincerely,

Rhys Parker

**Fundraising & Communications Manager  
LinkAble**

Email: [rhys.parker@linkable.org.uk](mailto:rhys.parker@linkable.org.uk)  
Tel: 01483 770037

---

**The Link** 2 Board School Road, Woking, Surrey GU21 5HE  
t 01483 770037 e [info@linkable.org.uk](mailto:info@linkable.org.uk) [www.linkable.org.uk](http://www.linkable.org.uk)

*Our Mission Statement* – to enable those with learning disabilities to develop their potential and enjoy socially inclusive fulfilled lives



LinkAble Woking Limited, Registered Charity Number 1119596  
Registered in England and Wales as LinkAble Woking Limited No. 06056940 Registered office as above

Page 175





Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum Ltd.  
Astolat, Coniers Way, Burpham, Guildford Surrey GU4 7HL  
Tel: 01483 497 292 Email: [admin@smef.org.uk](mailto:admin@smef.org.uk)  
[www.smef.org.uk](http://www.smef.org.uk)

CF116

29<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum (SMEF) is Surrey's one and only 'Race Equality Charity' with a membership of forty-eight grass root community groups of diverse ethnicities. SMEF wholeheartedly supports the Pheonix Cultural Centre one of its earliest member groups in its bid to house the 'Fiery Bird Live Music Venue'.

The Fiery Bird promises to be an open, inclusive cultural space for people of all ethnicities, faiths, and dispositions to mingle, interact, make music, and enjoy the arts.

SMEF and its forty-eight member groups endorse this project and cannot wait for the venue to be opened. We intend to use the space for our community workshops and events. We see the 'Fiery Bird' as our opportunity to mix, integrate and share our culture with all communities in Surrey. The pandemic year has tested the resilience of people, the lockdown and social isolation has not boded well for the vulnerable amongst us. We look forward to the coming months and relish the idea that at long last a truly inclusive space will be open for the people of Surrey.

Upwards and Onwards Pheonix!

Suzanne Akram  
SMEF Executive Director

## PHOENIX CULTURAL CENTRE FEEDBACK, PARTNERSHIPS AND DEVELOPMENT

### Comments From Users

**Greg Freeman** - Published Poet & Woking Writers Circle Management, Heart of Woking Blog. Local resident and father of four.

I've enjoyed coming to the Phoenix to read poetry off and on over the last couple of years, and have been very impressed with the warm, encouraging welcome there to newcomers and first-timers, just a kind of place a proper centre for the whole community should offer. Woking desperately needs a designated community building to give it some heart, and to help create an identity. The Phoenix music and community arts centre can be that place. There is a crying need for it in Woking. Just as the Lightbox and WWF have done, it will help to put this town on the map and give it confidence and pride.

**Jane Armitage** Admin officer, children grown up, Grandmother and wishing to meet others and try music -

'Just look what its done for my confidence, which has meant I have grown musically too. You help and encourage. No-one fails, we are all on a journey and you help us find the way.'

**Tracy Ginn** Local Resident who lacked confidence and being a single mother, was looking for some social interaction after her son went to university, she now gets up and sings regularly and has progressed from singing along to her phone to singing in front of an audience with musicians from the Phoenix who support her. She has now asked to volunteer at The Phoenix Centre to help others, she regularly attends music events both in and around Woking and feels she has a safe group of friends amongst those she has met there so is happy to go alone to things.

'This place is great I have singing here for 6 months and yes where have time going I don't know it made me grow and I thank all the people there and all there support and I did not think that I get up and sing again but now I just love every minute of from the bottom of my heart I would to say a very big thank for the Phoenix central xxx'

**Catherine Rogan - local resident mother of one who works and previously socialised in London.**

The Phoenix Centre ran the music for Adult Learners Week and was looking for inexperienced adult musicians to try out doing a gig to inspire others to try learning and Catherine responded. From that first gig we found other opportunities for them and they grew from scared people to seasoned performers doing 80 gigs in that year, many secured by the Phoenix Centre. They have now been booked by us to entertain dementia patients in care homes as well as a variety of other performances and have become well known on the Surrey Scene recently supporting Bella Hardy Radio 2 award winning folk artist on her national tour at The Boilerroom. Through the Phoenix Centre, Catherine was introduced to Woking Writers Circle and wrote a novel which she launched at the Centre, she was also introduced to We Love Woking who had her on their Radio Woking show to talk about the novel.

'I first came across the Phoenix Centre on Facebook when Elaine put out a call for people to have a go at performing on the bandstand at Woking. I pasted the message onto the UkeJam facebook and somehow got landed with arranging something. That something

turned into the The Surrey Ukeaholicss! Back when the Ukeaholics started I didn't sing audibly. I'd stand well away from the mike (I still do a bit) and if someone asked how a song goes I'd find it on YouTube rather than try and hum it. I gradually got used to singing with the band, albeit quietly. The first time I sang alone (in front of people) was at the phoenix open mike night, I sang The Phone Book by Editors. There was hardly anyone there or I would have bottled out.

The open mike is very welcoming. You feel like you can mess up and it doesn't matter - people want each other to do well.

I've sung on my own a few other times at the phoenix, often roping Julian Ukeaholic into playing bass on a song he's never heard of. The Ukeaholics are busy gigging and I've sung in front of people I don't even know. Some of whom had paid to get in! None of that would be possible without a friendly hub of people who care about music and art in a very inclusive way.

Alongside the music, I've met loads of great people at the phoenix, including Greg Freeman who told me about Woking Writers' Circle, which I joined, then I wrote a novel!! I had my book launch at the Phoenix as that was where it all began.

I've lived in Woking for 14 years now and to begin with I'm afraid I thought it was a bit of a cultural wasteland. But there's actually loads going on and the Phoenix is a focal point for all that. While chatting with the Ukeaholics I only half-jokingly compared it to Factory Records in Manchester in the late 70s/early 80s - the cultural heartbeat of the town.

**Carola Bauer - Local Teacher and musician, mother of two** - from their appearance at The Phoenix Centre they are now receiving bookings all over the South East at festivals, gigs and radio shows

The Phoenix Cultural Center is a place of great importance. It hosts, among other community events, a welcoming place where artists can have a voice or platform to share their art. As a mother of two, I have been out of the music scene for a number of years and have just recently ventured back. One of the first places I played in was the Phoenix center on one of their music open mic nights. I was apprehensive but received a fantastic welcome which not only boosted my confidence, but also opened up connections with other local musicians. I have since continued to play live from these initial first connections I made that day. I fully support a permanent venue and hope to be able to perform and contribute to this center for years to come.

**Lisa VonH Local singer/songwriter, learning support assistant in a special needs school, mother of four.**

When I moved back to Woking I had retired from music for some 15 years or so. Most of my musician friends had also moved on and my confidence was lower than low. The Phoenix cultural Centre help to pick me up dust me off and get me back on my feet as a musician again. They started me off gently with little comfortable gigs in the cultural centre and before I knew it I was getting some really nice gigs and regularly my picture was being shown in the local newspaper. On top of that there was a bonus that I really wasn't expecting -I have made some of the best friends -beautiful hard-working honest people I never would have met without the Phoenix Cultural centre. I've no idea where I would be without them but I do know this, that with them my life is 100% richer.

### **Graham Armfield Local Resident - Father of One.**

Graham used to travel out of Woking to try and get opportunities to play but found the Phoenix Centre by recommendation from another music promoter working in Hants and from seeing one of our community events - The Last Post. Since then he has been a regular contributor and has gained in confidence to take part in Street Live and other opportunities we are arranging

'I have only started coming to the [Phoenix Cultural Centre](#) fairly recently, but it's already had a huge impact on me. My musical 'career' (for want of a better word) had tailed off dramatically over the last few years, and although I still played occasionally at other open mic events I felt quite isolated from other musicians. But the [Phoenix Cultural Centre](#) have created a warm, friendly and supportive environment for musicians of all abilities. The centre's open mic nights give a unique opportunity for musical development and collaboration - and they can help improve people's confidence no end - mine included. Improved confidence can help all aspects of people's lives - employment opportunities, relationships, health and well being. Another spin-off is that in the last two months I have gained a whole new set of friends, and I now feel more a part of Woking than at any time in the 14 years I've lived here. I want to be more involved - to give back some of the positivity and friendship that's been shown to me'

### **Other stories**

J & M are ladies in their fifties who are long term unemployed due to ill health. They found out about the Phoenix Centre by attending the Confidence Building and Workplace Readiness courses and Job Club run by Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership there. Being signed off with further medical problems which prevented looking for work, they felt isolated and, without confidence or funds, stopped going out. A few times over the year they would ask when the nights were on and say they would try and come. One day they said they definitely were and on the open mic night they arrived 30 minutes before opening to wait outside. We let them in to make themselves at home while we set up and they said they were that early so they could get a seat in a corner and no one see them. They were visibly shaking as they said they hadn't been out in the evening for over a year. They paid £1 each to come in and 50p for a cup of tea.

Three weeks later they come every week, they have also now been to a heavily attended feature music night and travelled to Guildford with Tracy Ginn (above who also would never go out) to see one of the artists they met at an open mic do a professional gig. They try out the instruments and join in on the songs and talk confidently to all the volunteers, other audience members and musicians.

P

Is a recovering alcoholic in his 40's who found out about the Phoenix on being referred by the Job Centre to a Confidence Building Course run by SLLP there. He struggles with recovering and is wary of situations that can stress him and set him back. He sat quietly on his first visit however by the end of the evening had got up to sing an Elvis song and has planned songs asking the volunteer musicians if they will learn them to accompany him next time.

A

Is a recovering alcoholic who is also bi polar and needs to ensure he takes his medication which he often forgets. He was a very successful musician and songwriter when younger but lost everything due to the alcoholism and, at the time undiagnosed, bi-polar. He



regularly attends open mic sessions and writes songs to perform there which he feels gives direction to his week. He was spotted and asked to write a jingle for the We Love Woking show on Radio Woking. Due to his financial situation he is given free non alcoholic refreshments which means he feels comfortable to stay and attend.

E, a 14 year old singer attends with her father. She is a highly talented singer but suffers panic attacks at school and in daily life however singing relieves this. She has spent some time with the Centre organiser working out how to write songs and put her feelings into words to express herself. This both relieves her stress and starts to gently move her onwards with her talent, matching her singing talent with the ability to write songs which will help her in her quest to attend music college in addition to improving wellbeing.

### **Cardboard Carousel**

A husband and wife duo highly talented and sought after. They released their first CD 'Into the Mire' and launched it at The Phoenix. They sought advice from the organiser on the final mixes before the CD was pressed and how to run a launch. They have been introduced to radio play and headline festival slots from the Phoenix Centre recommendations. They have taken on board industry advice and on which insurances they will require and what management model to look for to move onward. With involvement now from a major A&R and label they are writing their second CD which will have staged single releases in addition to the full album. Sadly they are unable to release this in Woking as on advice of the label without a venue it isn't a viable option to release to industry. They have been advised to seek a Guildford alternative, which as we have been supporting them with we are helping them source. Both they and we would have loved to have released the next CD into a new venue marking the development of both in a meaningful way.

### **The Sheraton**

At last years 'Our Big Gig' this young four piece band did their debut live performance having never played in front of people before. We now sell their first CD in The Phoenix Centre. The year of working with them and giving them opportunities, advice and networking has led to them being a successful regularly gigging originals band becoming more well known both in Surrey and further afield. We have now connected them with a national promoter who works with us and he is arranging more gigs and a touring schedule.

### **Theatre Reviews**

The Phoenix Centre introduced Woking Writers Circle to the Ambassadors Theatre. They are now included on the invitations to press night and write regular theatre reviews published for their readers. This gives amateur writers a chance to take part in professional writing activities which can encourage pathways to employment and/or increase wellbeing in the retired or those who wish to explore expressing themselves creatively. It also means that theatre trips for people who have a writing talent but not necessarily the funds, become accessible.

### **Radio**

We introduced We Love Woking to Radio Woking and now they have a weekly show with regular guests celebrating all that is positive about Woking. During the course of our work we often come across people with a Woking story to tell and put them in touch. They regularly attend our events and promote the Phoenix Centre via social media and radio.

Many of the presenters on Radio Woking have come via The Phoenix Centre



Rudeboy DJ's Friday Night Reggae show with Mabbs & Murph - (one of our stalwart volunteers Andrew Mabbutt runs this show)

We Love Woking

The View From Here - Sharon Galliford - a holistic practitioner runs this show

Sylvia Bryden-Stock - runs a positive thinking show on Weds eves.

Pride in Surrey

We also present ourselves covering issues of activism, community, arts & culture.

We have entered an agreement with Radio Woking that they will record our feature nights and play out on Radio Woking as well as use our premises to record some of their shows.

We invited them to be on board with Our Big Gig and they are now media partners.

Radio Woking was recently awarded DAB status by Ofcom and will now be available via digital as well as internet.

## **FUNDING & DEVELOPMENT**

### **Overall Project**

We are researching funding to apply for salaried positions that will cover core costs. The project is growing very large and needs to be run on more than a voluntary basis despite the appointment of a project manager and further volunteers. In order to keep up with the demands made on it as it reaches a pivotal point in development albeit without adequate venue space, wherein capital costs will be applied for and a mixed stream of funding.

We publish employment, and development funding opportunities via social media to encourage musicians to progress in their career

We are members of the **Music Venues Trust** and **Music Venues Alliance** which are working to promote the grass roots, small to medium venues and protect them with legislation such as Agent of Change and to expand tax breaks for these, bringing equity with theatres and orchestras. To bring recognition of the essential cultural work that small venues bring to feed a massive UK export. They have published their latest report and undertaken research on music cities. There is more detail in the national and international context for creative industries document attached.

### **Variety of Activities & Partnerships in Development**

We are working with Emma Hughes international bass player (Kate Nash/Xfactor/Echo Boom Generation) and teacher to bring her 'encouraging women in music' programme that she is designing for The Roundhouse, Camden to Woking.

We are in talks with Wishing Well - a charity that is part of Rhythmix the national charity that focuses on wellbeing through music especially with the young. Wishing Well works with dementia patients, hospices and hospitals to increase wellbeing via interaction and music. We are working out partner bids so we can reach those who are 'locked in' with dementia

We are placing musicians in care homes to entertain residents especially those with dementia and have been acting as an agency for this.

We are developing partnerships with new users who wish to use a larger space as well as current ones;

Friday morning meditations before work

Alcoholics Anonymous - lunchtime meet group attracts 23 weekly attendees

Woking Stanza Group

The Companions

Woking Project - they currently travel to Godalming and pay £10 pp to take part in music, they wish to use the centre in the day for a workshop and set up their own open mic evening.

Aspace - wish for accommodation for their Aspergers drama groups for both children and adults

Continued Digital Learning & Confidence building from JCP referrals provided by Surrey Lifelong Learning Partnership

Outside promoters running live music nights different genres

Surrey CC exploring collaboration on Community Chef Leaders courses and training others to run a community cafe

We also receive overspill booking referrals from The Maybury Centre if they are unable to accommodate. However, we have an agreement in place that should an approach be made for a repeat booking, that they are referred back to The Maybury Centre as initial booking in order to work collaboratively with other community centres in our network.

### **Outside Activities**

Street Live Woking BC busking and street entertainment programme Summer 2015

Party In The Park Stall and busking

Byfleet Parish Day managing the stage and musicians

Our Big Gig part of a national celebration of community live music, seven hours of original and covers live music in Woking Park with partners We Love Woking and Radio Woking, Caribbean Food, The Mayford Arms Bar, Have a go at an instrument sessions, songwriting workshop, singing bowls and gongs demonstrations, stalls and facepainting.

Woking Food Festival - Providing Live music for third year running

Woking Arts Hub Fair

Promoting the Phoenix via Cellar Magneval Fete De La Musique a national day in France celebrating live music, they ran an open mic all day and many Phoenix musicians played, customers donated £155

Asked to source musicians for Sutton Green BBQ day

Asked to promote music to Knaphill youth club members to inspire them to get involved with music making activities.

EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

## WRITE OFF OF SUNDRY DEBTS

### Executive Summary

Financial Regulation 12.14 requires the Executive to authorise the write off of any debt over £10,000.

Ahead of the financial year end a small number of Council Tax, Business Rates and Sundry debts are identified as irrecoverable.

All avenues have been pursued to collect these debts, following the Council's debt recovery procedures and the statutory recovery policy for Council Tax and Business Rates. This includes the use of tracing agents, enforcement agents and legal action where appropriate. Debts are only recommended for write off when there is no possibility that the income can be recovered.

Appendix 1 sets out those debts over £10,000 recommended for write off by Officers.

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### **RESOLVE That**

the debts listed in Appendix 1 to the report be written off.

### Reasons for Decision

Reason: To write off debts over £10,000.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

<b>Background Papers:</b>	None.
<b>Reporting Person:</b>	Eugene Walker, Interim Finance Director & Section 151 Officer Email : eugene.walker@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3070
<b>Contact Person:</b>	Eugene Walker, Interim Finance Director & Section 151 Officer Email : eugene.walker@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3070
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Dale Roberts Email: clrdale.roberts@woking.gov.uk
<b>Date Published:</b>	13 March 2024



### Executive Write Offs over £10,000 2023-24

#### Business Rates Write Offs >£10,000:

<u>Account No</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Amount £</u>	<u>Date recommended for write off</u>	<u>Reason</u>
306619845	Individual (name redacted)	£20,600.34	16.02.2024	Company Dissovled
306620861	Twisted Stone Ltd	£87,300.61	16.02.2024	Company Dissovled
306633883	Redpoint Ltd	£30,832.55	16.02.2024	Company Dissovled
306647274	What Tankers Ltd	£67,810.62	16.02.2024	Company Dissovled
306648206	TD Lifestyle 1803 Ltd	£36,254.28	16.02.2024	Company Dissovled
306668710	Panfon Ltd	£13,761.24	16.02.2024	Company Dissovled
306648206	Individual (name redacted)	£11,828.09	19.02.2024	Irrecoverable - Vulnerable

#### Council Tax Write Offs > £10,000

<u>Account No</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Amount £</u>	<u>Date recommended for write off</u>	<u>Reason</u>
408903380	Individual (name redacted)	£11,133.96	16.02.2024	IVA - Irrecoverable
406869791	Individual (name redacted)	£10,538.97	16.02.2024	Irrecoverable

#### Housing Benefit Overpayment Write Offs > £10,000

<u>Account No</u>	<u>Name</u>	<u>Amount £</u>	<u>Date recommended for write off</u>	<u>Reason</u>
None this period				

#### Sundry Debtors invoices to be Written Off > £10,000

<u>Debtors Ref</u>	<u>Invoice Ref</u>	<u>Company name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Org inv Date</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Reason</u>	<u>Department</u>
127119	Various	Black & Golds Coffee House	Unit 4 Middle Walk, Woking	20/10/20	£49,171.10	Liquidation	Estates
100554	Various	CMS Carpets (Woking) Ltd	Poole Road, Woking GU21 6DY	25/12/19	£225,961.02	Liquidation	Estates
121304	Various	Casual Dining Group Ltd T/A Las Iquanas Ltd	21-25 Commercial Way, Woking	03/03/20	£48,217.75	Dissolved	Estates
117453	Various	Rush Hair Ltd	35 Wolsey Walk, Woking	19/03/20	£111,012.28	In Administration	Estates
117434	Various	Harpers Group Woking Ltd	31 Wolsey Walk, Woking	28/07/20	£41,270.54	Liquidation	Estates

#### Estate Management Debts with Managing Agents

<u>Managing Agent</u>	<u>Company name</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Amount</u>	<u>Reason</u>	<u>Department</u>
None this period					



EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

## RESIDENT SERVICES PROGRAMME

### Executive Summary

This proposal provides a summary of the Resident Services Programme, as outlined in more detail in the Project Workbook attached at Appendix 1. WBC is entering a phase where it is focusing on core service delivery. The proposed investment is targeted at our critical service areas ensuring they are delivering effectively and efficiently by investing in necessary technology, skills and service redesign. Not investing will cause services to fall further behind in achieving their aims and intended outcomes.

This programme will deliver against the Woking For All Strategy 2022-25 supporting the outcomes of healthier, engaged, greener and prospering communities. It delivers against the Digital Strategy 2022-25, in particular Theme 1: Smart People and Theme 3: Smart Council, which outline the importance of excellent online services, and improved telephony and face to face for those that need it. It also contributes towards the eight Directions as part of the Improvement and Recovery Programme, in particular Direction e) An action plan to reconfigure services. It will become the key driving force behind the Organisation and Service Redesign Theme.

As a Council WBC has traditionally under resourced digital and transformation activity relative to our peers. This three-year programme aims to address this, deliver better services, and deliver a return on investment. The aim is to keep costs as low as possible, adopting what has already been built and learned in the sector, whilst making the most of recent technology innovation and meeting raised resident, partner, and customer expectations.

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### RESOLVE That

- (i) the Programme Workbook, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed, with explicit reference to the Capital Receipts budget approved for Resident Services Programme, of £700,000 capital in 2024/25 - 2025/26, to replace the current technology underpinning the web publishing platform, [www.woking.gov.uk](http://www.woking.gov.uk); upgrade telephony and contact centre offer; and upgrade the customer facing platforms, as outlined in the Resident Services Programme Workbook; and
- (ii) to note the additional £350k revenue to deliver the aims of the Workbook - £175,000 from Flexible Use of Capital Receipts, £175,000 from ICT Revenue budget over the period 2024/25 - 2025/26 as outlined in the Workbook.

### Reasons for Decision

Reason: To ensure WBC has the technology, design and delivery infrastructure and capability in order to upgrade and maintain effective resident services.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

- Background Papers:** Resident Services Programme Workbook (Appendix 1)
- Reporting Person:** Kevin Foster, Strategic Director – Corporate Resources  
Email: kevin.foster@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3198
- Contact Person:** Adam Walther, Head of Transformation, Digital and Customer Services  
Email: adam.walther@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3335  
Hannah Boneham, Improvement & Recovery Programme Consultant  
Email: hannah.boneham@woking.gov.uk
- Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Dale Roberts  
Email: cllrdale.roberts@woking.gov.uk
- Date Published:** 13 March 2024



### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The specific outcomes that the Resident Services project will deliver on are two-fold: financial savings and improved customer/resident experience.
- 1.2 This will be achieved through transformation of the customer-facing services of WBC, and a new culture and front to back operating model that supports our 'front door'. To achieve this, investment is required across people (skills and behaviours) process (end to end service design) and technology (including infrastructure and data). All three are critical, however this paper focuses particularly on how investment in new processes and technology will accelerate WBC objectives.

### 2.0 Background

- 2.1 Through the Digital Strategy 2022-25 and more recently the Improvement and Recovery Programme, the Council has committed to improving its online services, to ensure the needs of residents, businesses and communities are met as efficiently as possible. Currently, it is not possible to make changes quickly and easily to online user journeys via [www.woking.gov.uk](http://www.woking.gov.uk) and this is limiting the ability to provide effective council services. The content management system, and therefore the website, is out of support from January 2025.
- 2.2 The Council has multiple entry routes, which have an inconsistent approach to technology for publishing platforms and a lack of consistent design standards. There are multiple pages, often multiple sites with overlapping and inconsistent ways for users to resolve issues. This confusion results in failure demand (users contacting the Council unnecessarily), which reduces user satisfaction and increases cost.
- 2.3 There is no single solution that will solve this problem instantly. The Council needs to commit to an approach that brings consistency, builds capability, and strengthens governance.

### 3.0 Web publishing proposal

- 3.1 It is proposed that WBC replace the current technology underpinning the web publishing platform, [woking.gov.uk](http://woking.gov.uk) and establish a new approach to web publishing. Our current platform (Drupal 7) reaches end of life at the end of 2024, so must be replaced this year. Furthermore, by committing to a new web publishing platform for the future and consolidating a large proportion of the Council's websites, this project will form a first step in the delivery of the technology and digital strategy, by providing a single flexible, cloud-based publishing capability that will meet the needs of Woking's citizens in the long term.
- 3.2 Technology decisions were made at the time of the initial launch of the Council's website, based on the current organisational and sectoral knowledge. The applications to run the website are hosted on third-party cloud infrastructure and managed by the ICT and Digital teams. The strategy at the time was to increase the in-house software development and operations capability to support the platform. In recent years, a small and dedicated team have been working to overhaul the website but they require significant investment in the technology in order to achieve the required changes.
- 3.3 It is proposed that the Council move its web publishing technology to the [LocalGovDrupal](#), platform an open source publicly owned asset, built and maintained by a community of developers, designers and digital leaders in the UK and we will benefit from:
  - being part of a project in active development, with multiple local authorities contributing new features and updates
  - a healthy supplier market to host, maintain and support the website

- growing our internal capability and capacity to provide strategic direction and continuous improvement to the main woking.gov.uk website and other microsites

3.4 The Council will carry out a mini competition and call off from a Crown Commercial Services framework to appoint a specialist supplier to:

- work with the Transformation, Digital and Customer Services teams to migrate woking.gov.uk to the LocalGovDrupal platform
- host and maintain the Council's core LocalGovDrupal platform
- carry out development work on templating and feature implementation

3.5 The contract will cost up to £350,000 over two years. Following completion of a mini competition, the Head of Transformation, Digital and Customer Services (reporting both to the Improvement and Recovery Board; and Corporate Programme Board) will award the contract.

### 4.0 Telephony Proposal

4.1 WBC's current telephony system incurs high hardware and maintenance costs. To address this, softphone technology leveraging Microsoft Teams has been investigated as a possible best value option. It is therefore proposed that WBC replace the current technology underpinning the Council's telephony.

4.2 Softphones can eliminate the need for expensive hardware. Unlike traditional desk phones, which can be expensive, softphones require no additional hardware and have lower long term running costs. Softphones can be easily installed on existing devices, such as laptops or desktop computers, reducing the need for additional hardware or ongoing maintenance.

4.3 Softphones allow employees to make and receive calls from anywhere with an internet connection. This means that employees can work remotely, travel, or work from different office locations, without the need to forward calls or use a separate mobile phone. This improves productivity and allows for greater flexibility in scheduling and work arrangements. It also aligns with our approach to Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), as staff can take calls via Microsoft Teams on their own device once it has been enrolled in our Mobile Device Management (MDM) service.

4.4 The technology supports collaboration. It can be integrated with other communication tools such as email, instant messaging, and video conferencing. This allows employees to have all their communication tools in one place, improving efficiency and reducing the need for multiple applications. This would improve the service provided by the Contact Centre, enabling them to adopt an omnichannel approach, and to have a clearer view of cross organisation availability, more effective 'hunt groups' and higher levels of call resolution for residents.

4.5 The Council will carry out a procurement exercise to appoint a specialist supplier to:

- Work with the Transformation, Digital and Customer Services teams to upgrade the Council's telephony and contact centre functions
- Move the functions to the Cloud.

4.6 The contract will cost up to £150,000 over two years. Following completion of the procurement exercise, the Head of Transformation, Digital and Customer Services (reporting to Improvement and Recovery Board and Corporate Programme Board) will award the contract.

### 5.0 Customer facing platform proposal

5.1 In the context of local government, implementing a customer facing platform (such as a Customer Relationship Management or CRM function) offers several significant benefits (more information about which is included in the Workbook attached at Appendix 1):

- Improved customer service
- Enhanced accessibility and inclusion
- Efficient service provision
- Data-driven decision making
- Transition to a customer-centric approach
- Management of complex interfaces.

5.2 Customer facing platforms will improve our ability to manage cases and customer flow throughout customer services as well as how work is allocated, how we analyse volumes and service satisfaction.

5.3 The Council will carry out a procurement exercise to appoint a specialist supplier to work with the Transformation, Digital and Customer Services teams to help process WBC's highest volumes of queries in customer services: council tax, planning and housing.

5.4 The notion of a single CRM for all services is outdated, given the complexity of service areas and the failure of one size fits all models of technology to adequately meet user needs. However, as part of the customer facing platform aspects of the programme, the use of our key line of business applications will be better understood and suppliers challenged. Delivering improved integrations across different applications will be critical to ensuring services are delivered effectively end to end and performance and cost can be monitored.

5.5 The discovery work and contract will cost up to £200,000 over two years. Following completion of the procurement exercise, the Head of Transformation, Digital and Customer Services (reporting to Improvement and Recovery Board and Corporate Programme Board) will award the contract.

### 6.0 Organisational Design and Development

6.1 Successful implementation of the above products and services, requires whole organisation redesign and behaviour change. Without these, the benefits of digital transformation will not be delivered.

6.2 Organisational design and development focus on improving processes, structures and systems with a particular emphasis on staff engagement and development. It embraces a culture of innovation and adaptability that allows organisations to build resilience and respond effectively to changing contexts.

6.3 Service redesign will focus in the first instance on higher volume areas of customer queries: Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services and Housing, but with a view to ensuring an improved website, online services, telephony and customer relationship management benefits all service areas.

### 7.0 Expected Impact

- 7.1 Moving to a managed service model aligns with our digital strategy, increasing our resilience and growing our skills in-house. To ensure the new web platform and telephony are implemented as expected, a team comprising employees from Transformation, Digital and Customer Services teams will need to be established for the full two-year duration of the implementation phase. The majority of cost will be drawn from flexible use of capital receipts assigned to the Organisational and Service Redesign Programme as well as current revenue budgets.
- 7.2 As we progress through the work, our insights, including more detailed costs and benefits will become more measurable. Updates to the programme will be made quarterly and presented at future Corporate Programme Board meetings and reported to Full Council as appropriate.
- 7.3 Between January and April 2023 WBC engaged a partner to better understand housing management, customer services, revenues and benefits. The key findings were:

#### 7.3.1 Overarching resident services

- The need for a programme of channel shift to online
- Upgrade the website and rewrite content
- Explore and design a 'single view of debt' approach
- Redesign the 'moving to Woking' experience
- Improved telephony and IVR (Interactive Voice Response) to improve telephony offer and reduce failure demand
- Improve use of current tools including Teams and Microsoft 365

#### 7.3.2 Housing

- The need to design into end to end journeys for repairs, end of tenancy and void turnaround processes
- Greater provision of online housing advice
- Redesign applying and bidding user journeys

#### 7.4 Quick win actions already in place include:

- Content redesign to reduce confusion and failure demand (contacting WBC unnecessarily)
- Improving online forms including benefits eligibility checker
- Removing unnecessary telephone numbers and email addresses and redirecting to online forms
- Reducing customer service opening hours freeing up time to deal with casework
- Upskilling customer service staff to deal with council tax queries

- Nudges on letters including QR codes to encourage channel shift

7.5 The programme's outcomes are to improve resident satisfaction and make savings. Our ability to monitor performance against these outcomes will be limited until the implementation of the digital functionality for which this programme is responsible. However, there are certain metrics that we will be able to track from the start of the next financial year and we will use these to measure performance against the programme outcomes:

- Accessibility and Inclusivity – external audit carried out on the website at regular intervals. 1<sup>st</sup> planned for 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024, repeated when the new website goes live and then every 12 months thereafter. Note: this is in addition to ongoing, regular automated testing of the website.
- Customer Satisfaction – based on responses to electronic feedback form, that will also be completed in response to verbal feedback over the phone. Metrics include whether query was resolved first time, effort required to resolve query and satisfaction with outcome on scale of 1-5.
- Cost per Transaction – calculated based on number of transactions, length of time they take and cost of service. First sample to be take on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 and monthly thereafter.

7.6 As well as transforming services for residents, it is estimated that the project will produce revenue savings of circa £350,000 from 2025/26. The level and timing of the savings will be dependent on a number of factors. The £350,000 is the equivalent of 7FTE including on costs. This is in addition to savings of £191,000 already achieved, predominantly from staffing reductions across Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services.

## 8.0 Corporate Strategy

8.1 As referenced in the Executive Summary above, this programme will deliver against the Woking For All Strategy 2022-25 supporting the outcomes of healthier, engaged, greener and prospering communities. It delivers against the Digital Strategy 2022-25, in particular Theme 1: Smart People and Theme 3: Smart Council, which outline the importance of excellent online services, and improved telephony and face to face for those that need it. It also contributes towards the eight Directions as part of the Improvement and Recovery Programme, in particular Direction e) An action plan to reconfigure services. It will become the key driving force behind the Organisation and Service Redesign Theme.

8.2 The Improvement and Recovery Plan is a requirement of the intervention from the Secretary of State, and its primary focus is to drive the transformational change required to support recovery. It is divided into 5 Themes.

8.3 The strategic aim of Theme 4 (Organisation and Service Redesign) of the IRP, is to 'deliver a smaller, data driven organisation, where staff feel empowered, digitally confident, and delivering on key priorities.'

8.4 Within this, the Resident Service workstreams are designed to meet Objective 7, to 'move customer-facing services online to deliver further efficiencies and improved customer service.'

## 9.0 Implications

### Finance and Risk

9.1 £700k Capital Expenditure.

9.2 £350k revenue expenditure.

9.3 Revenue savings of £350k emerging from 2025/26.

Equalities and Human Resources

9.4 We anticipate that the changes to customer services will have positive impacts for groups, who will benefit from broader (and more equitable) ways to contact WBC.

9.5 The range of accessing WBC will include more traditional approaches (e.g. telephone helpline hours) for those who are less digitally confident or enabled.

Legal

9.6 This paper has been reviewed by Legal Services who have not raised any issues.

**10.0 Engagement and Consultation**

10.1 Soft market testing with over 20 suppliers and engagement with over ten local authorities on best practice and value for money was undertaken in the autumn 2023 a shaped the scope of this work.

10.2 The Project Workbook was reviewed and agreed by the Corporate Leadership Team and Commissioners in January 2024.

10.3 The approach to market was reviewed and agreed by Commercial and Finance Governance Board in February 2024.

REPORT ENDS

# WBC Project Workbook

Project Reference	Tbc
Project Name	Resident Services
Project Sponsor	Adam Walther
Project Manager	Hannah Boneham

# Introduction

This workbook has been designed to provide a standard, easy to use route through which all projects must travel. By working through the sections, answering the questions and completing the templates, the detail of the project will be identified in a step-by-step approach, thereby providing a blueprint for the project as a whole and ensuring that appropriate aspects are considered from start to finish.

Rather than having to complete and maintain several smaller documents, the workbook will mean that all project information will be located in one place, avoiding duplication and making it easier to update and apply version control. The workbook will contain all of the primary information of the project from the justification of the project to how and when it will be delivered, through to what actions have to be completed following closure.

The workbook has been split into four sections to reflect the stages outlined in the project methodology. They should be completed in order. They are:

SECTION 1: Start-Up  
SECTION 2: Initiation  
SECTION 3: Execution  
SECTION 4: Closure

- Please note that you **do not** have to complete every heading within this workbook. Some headings in certain sections may not be applicable to the project you are working on. In this instance it is ok to skip the heading as long as it is clearly marked with N/A to indicate that due consideration has been given.
- If the project has resource implications for other staff and/or areas within the Council, it is strongly recommended that prior to the completion of every section, all of the relevant parties are consulted to ensure that they are aware of, and in agreement with, any reference made to them. The finance section should also be consulted where appropriate.



# SECTION 1: PROJECT START-UP

The purpose of this section is to provide initial information about the proposed project to allow an informed decision to be made as to whether it should progress, be refined, or be abandoned. This section is mandatory for all projects although the level of detail will vary.

## 1. Background information & current situation

The Resident Services Programme is designed to improve customer services, by moving services online to become 24/7 where feasible, whilst improving telephone and end to end service design. The aim is to deliver better, cheaper services.

Woking Borough Council (WBC) is in a challenging financial position, the context of which is laid out in the [Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan](#). The Section 114 Notice stops all but essential spending, making sure the council can continue to provide vital services to all residents, especially its most vulnerable citizens.

Whilst the Section 114 Notice focuses on WBC's borrowing and investments, confidence in the council and its governance and decisions-making relies on its ability to demonstrate that it has taken all necessary steps to deliver a balanced budget and plan.

The Improvement and Recovery Plan is a requirement of the intervention from the Secretary of State, and its primary focus is to drive the transformational change required to support recovery. It is divided into 4 Themes and this area of work sits within the 4<sup>th</sup> (Organisation and service redesign - Deliver a smaller, data driven organisation, where staff feel empowered and digitally confident and are delivering on key priorities). The Resident Services programme contributes towards the eight Directions as part of the Improvement and Recovery Programme, in particular Direction e) An action plan to reconfigure services.

## 2. What are the factors driving the project?

The Resident Services Programme's projects (formerly Channel Shift workstreams) have two customer groups:

- Resident and partners of Woking – amongst the most common services for which residents and partners contact WBC are Council Tax, Planning, business rates, Benefits and Housing.
- Staff at WBC – who use the resources on the website to manage their own interactions with customers and to do their jobs.

WBC is under significant financial pressure and has a historic underinvestment in technology including website, telephony, software, service design, business analysis, and use of data to inform decisions.

In April 2023 a review of customer services and housing services was undertaken by external consultancy Impossible Ideas. This was the first review of its kind since June 2014, when outsourcing to Capita was being seriously considered, but no changes or investments were made.

Since then, a web and customer services team has been established. Key findings of the April review and since are:

### WBC Overall

- The challenges across both customer services, revs and bens and housing are significant
- There is a significant opportunity for channel shift, and for redesigning content and communications to prevent failure demand
- Self-service tools can improve

- WBC communication between teams is patchy
- Limited data to track and improve
- Residents come to WBC at a point of crisis with early intervention opportunities missed
- Pressure on staff is high

### **Additional Customer Services, Revenues and Benefits**

- Resident enquiries experience a large amount of failure demand, re-keying, complex processes and manual handling. Our Customer Relationship Management software does not allow us to track our customers' journeys.
- As of September 2023, we had 92 different telephone numbers and 106 different email addresses listed on the WBC website. By March 2024, quality assurance activities have reduced the telephone numbers to 68.
- Online forms are not user friendly; for Benefits, an estimated 10 people a week require help completing forms. In addition, we do not promote their use and openly offer an email option. This results in 70% of customers emailing, even when a suitable form exists.
- We send out approximately 4-6,000 documents a month requiring 1 staff member 2-3 hours a day.
- Council Eforms that support the website are currently not integrated; this creates inefficiencies where manual steps are required often resulting in delays and risking data quality
- Much of the service has become a switchboard, little understanding whether calls are resolved. Residents often end up in dead ends
- Pay and progression are limiting leading to high staff turnover and lack of skilled operatives
- There is a mixture of highly skilled and more transactional needs but lack of clearly delegated roles
- The team isn't set up effectively for flexible working, performance is inconsistent

### **Additional Housing**

- The service is in a firefighting state. Recent hires have helped
- The front door service, from expectation management to the tools needs improvement
- The turnaround of void properties needs review
- The contracted repairs service is not performing
- Rent collection is too low

CLT noted the report from consultants which found gaps in capacity and capability, lack of data and insights, and clear user journeys, and agreed to further investigation, leading to a Strategic Outline Case in Autumn 2023 leading to this Workbook.

## **3. Project Objectives**

The strategic aim of Theme 4 (Organisation and Service Redesign) of the IRP, is to 'deliver a smaller, data driven organisation, where staff feel empowered, digitally confident, and delivering on key priorities.'

Within this, the Resident Services Programme's projects (formerly 'Channel Shift workstreams') are designed to meet Objective 7, to 'move customer-facing services online to deliver further efficiencies and improved customer service.'

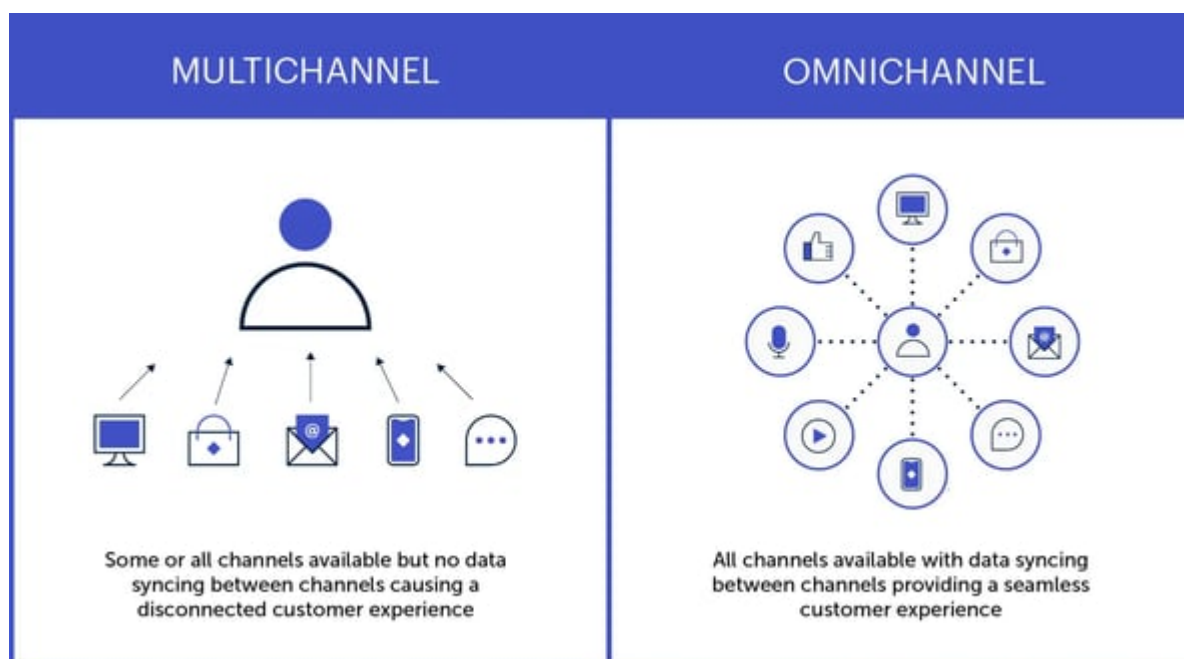
In delivering this work we are committed to the design principles set out in the Local Digital Declaration, a national commitment to best practice in digital which was signed by the Chief Executive November 2022.

The Programme will achieve its outcomes through the method of channel shift. 'Channel shift' is the process by which organisations encourage customers to change the way they choose to interact with services, from the customers' current preferred approach to a new one. In this context,

we are trying to encourage customers that can do, to move to self-service, primarily using online and digital services rather than in-person, by phone or paper forms.

Channel shift is not about asking people to adopt new technologies or habits or to make it more difficult for them to interact with us. We will be asking customers who can, to interact with the Council in ways that they already do with other businesses and organisations. This will allow us to free up staff time to continue to provide more direct services to the minority of customers who really need them. It will make it easier for all of our customers (both external and internal) to interact with the Council.

The following diagram illustrates one possible mechanism for channel shift, the move from multi-channel to omni-channel:



Successful implementation of the above, requires whole organisation redesign and behaviour change. Without these, the benefits of transformation will not manifest.

Organisational design and development focus on improving processes, structures and systems with a particular emphasis on staff engagement and development. It embraces a culture of innovation and adaptability that allows organisations to build resilience and respond effectively to changing contexts.

Service redesign will focus in the first instance on higher volume areas of customer queries: council tax, planning and housing.

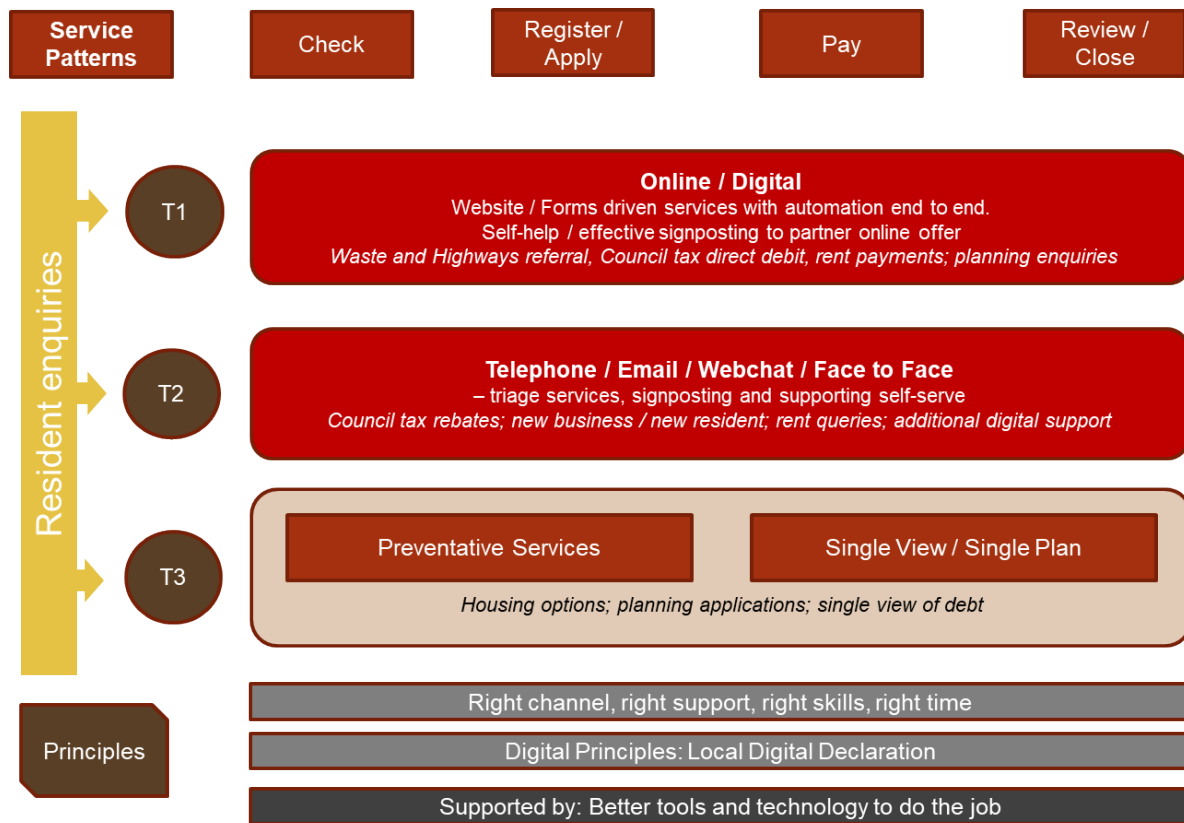
The specific outcomes that the Resident Experience Programme will deliver on are two-fold:

- **Financial savings**
- **Improved customer/resident experience**

This will be achieved through transformation of the customer-facing services of WBC, and a new culture and operating model that supports our 'front door'. The new operating model will feature 3 tiers of customer experience:

1. **Self-service** – largely delivered by a new website and with no need to interact directly with WBC staff
2. **Triage and direct support / referrals** – where those who need to can interact directly with customer service staff. Referrals will also tap into full local resources/assets including the local VCS, NHS, ICB, county/district/borough and our partners.

3. **Case management through agreed processes** – when individual customers become known to us because they are utilising an established process or service.



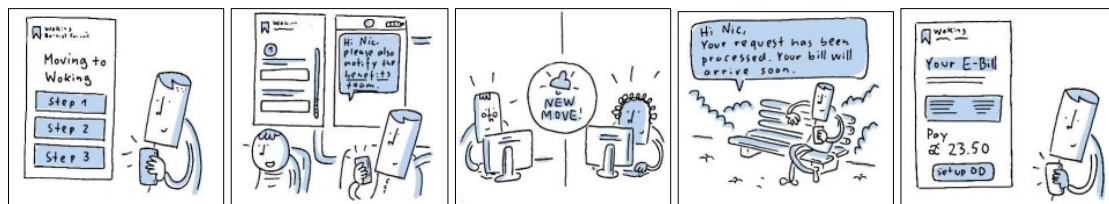
Design of the high-level operating model was based on three primary sources to date:

- Benchmarking and detailed comparison with other local authorities, particularly Lichfield, Runnymede and Sandwell, further benchmarking with Spelthorne, Northumberland, Hackney, and Manchester Councils is planned, to get a range of models from authorities at different stages of channel shift
- Input and contributions from WBC staff
- user experience research carried out by Impossible Ideas and TPX

Customers in Woking will have needs that are largely consistent with those across the country (approximately 80% consistency), however there will be a local specificity that needs to be built into our solution design. For example, examination of our users' journeys will allow us to define the specific requirements to implement technological/digital solutions that will meet our customers' needs.

As part of the user research carried out into our proposed operating model, following graphics were developed. These are based on pen portraits or personas that represent customers of WBC, and illustration:

## Moving to Woking



Nic is moving house to Woking. They Google Woking Council to find out what they need to do.

There's a **step-by-step guide** for what to do when moving to the borough.

Step 1 is to complete a move form. They **fill it in on their mobile on the way to work.**

Both the Revenue and Benefits services receive a notification of the new move.

The move is automatically processed into the system. Staff check the information and finalise the customer's bill.

Step 2 - Nic **receives an SMS notification** confirming that the council have processed the request and that the new bill will arrive soon.

Step 3 - When the bill arrives, Nic **scans the QR code** on the letter to set up a direct debit and signs up to e-billing.

It also contains **additional information about what to do if they are struggling to pay.**

## Spotting someone who needs help



The **rising cost of living** has started to affect Joella. She starts to panic about the amount of outgoing payments and **cancels her council tax direct debit.**

The **council's Welfare Officer** notices that Joella has cancelled her direct debit.

She **sends her an SMS** to check in with her and shares a link to Woking's **cost of living support options on the website.**

Joella looks through the support available and opts to **book a callback with the Welfare Officer.**

The Welfare Officer **listens to Joella's concerns.** She discovers that she also has parking fines overdue.

The Welfare Officer is **able to offer an affordable payment plan** for all Joella's debts.

After the call the Welfare Officer sends Joella follow up information and **a link to an application for food stamps** via SMS.

There are options to **contact the team again via web chat** if she needs to.

## Housing

### Get advice online



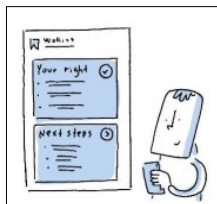
James lives in a small 1-bed flat in Woking. He's devastated because he just got a call from his landlord and was **asked leave the flat** by the end of the month.

How is he supposed to find a new flat in just two weeks?



James is really worried so he visits Woking Council's website. He goes to the housing section and opens the **Online Housing Advice Tool**.

**Step by step**, he needs to answer a few questions about his situation.



At the last step he gets **a list of his rights** as a tenant and the **options** for next steps.

James is relieved to read that the landlord needs to give him an eviction letter first. That will give him some time to look for a new flat.



He also gets advice on **where and how he can best look for properties**.

For example, there is a filter in Rightmove to find landlords who accept people who are on benefits. James decided to give this a try first before he contacts the council.



At the end James didn't need to reach out to the Housing Service because he found a flat through a friend.

However, it's good to know that he'll get **good advice from the website** and that there's also a **team he can contact** in an emergency.

## Housing

### Apply and bid for social housing

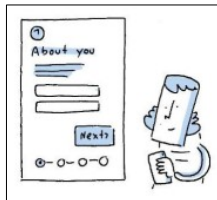


**Sarah** is a single mother to two small children. When her husband left her, she was suddenly on her own.

She has some savings but in the long run she can't afford the rent on her own with her small salary as a cleaner. A friend told her that Woking Council might be able to help her.



She visits **Woking's website** where she sees a headline 'Are you eligible for social housing?' Sarah clicks on the button and opens the **Eligibility Checker**. She puts in some info about herself, it's very easy. The result is that she is eligible and it tells her that the **estimated waiting time** for social housing for her is 4 months.



Sarah now **starts the application** for social housing. Again, it's a very straight forward **online form that guides her step by step** through the required information.

She can **upload documents** easily and can even **pause** the form and easily **return** to where she left it.



After she submitted everything she **gets regular updates** of the stage her application is at.

After a few weeks she receives the bidding number and the **log in to the bidding portal**. If she ever loses the log in details she can just request a **magic link** to login again.



Bidding is also very easy. Sarah gets **regular reminders to bid and updates** when a new property that fits her criteria is available.

### Longer term vision

Beyond resident segmentation is a wider goal capturing the role of a local authority: prevention. For those with the highest needs, WBC has a responsibility to take a holistic approach to solving complex challenges, alongside partners.

# Prevention as a common goal

## Customer Services

- Spot vulnerable people at risk
- Be the first line to resolve issues
- Guide people to the right service

## Revenues

- Spot and flag people who are in debt
- Bring support services in when needed

## Benefits

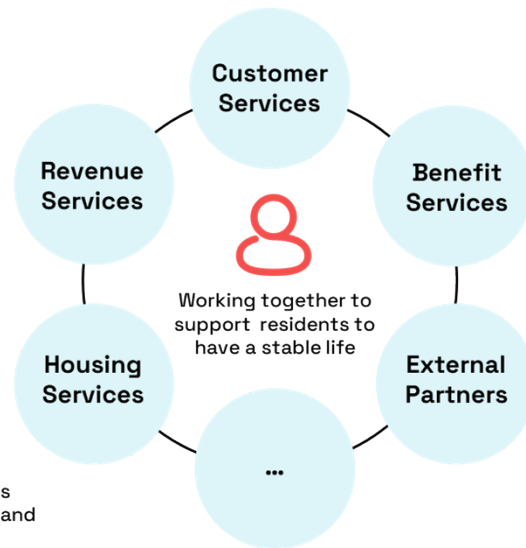
- Help people get what they're entitled to
- Bring support services in when needed

## Housing Services

- Prevent and relieve homelessness
- Make sure situations don't get worse
- Work proactively with people

## External Partners (e.g. Surrey County Council):

- Work collaboratively with adult's and children's services
- Develop a strong partnership network with community and third sector organisations



## 4. Project Benefits

### Measuring impact

It is critical to keep success measures as consistent and simple as possible, so data can be effectively analysed: across time, across service areas; relative to other inputs and events (for example CAB reducing service provision; changes in legislation).

Prior to soft market testing, we identified three impact measures:

1. **Cost savings.** for example, removing staff because an activity that took several hours a day of staff time has now been automated; or reducing the cost, after inflation, of an application contract
2. **Cost avoidance:** reducing the likelihood of a cost being incurred. For example, improved information online and self-serve reduces customer service queries via phone
3. **Improved resident satisfaction:** for example, Net Promotor Score (how likely are you to recommend the service); customer satisfaction scores.

These measures were amended following soft market testing to the below:

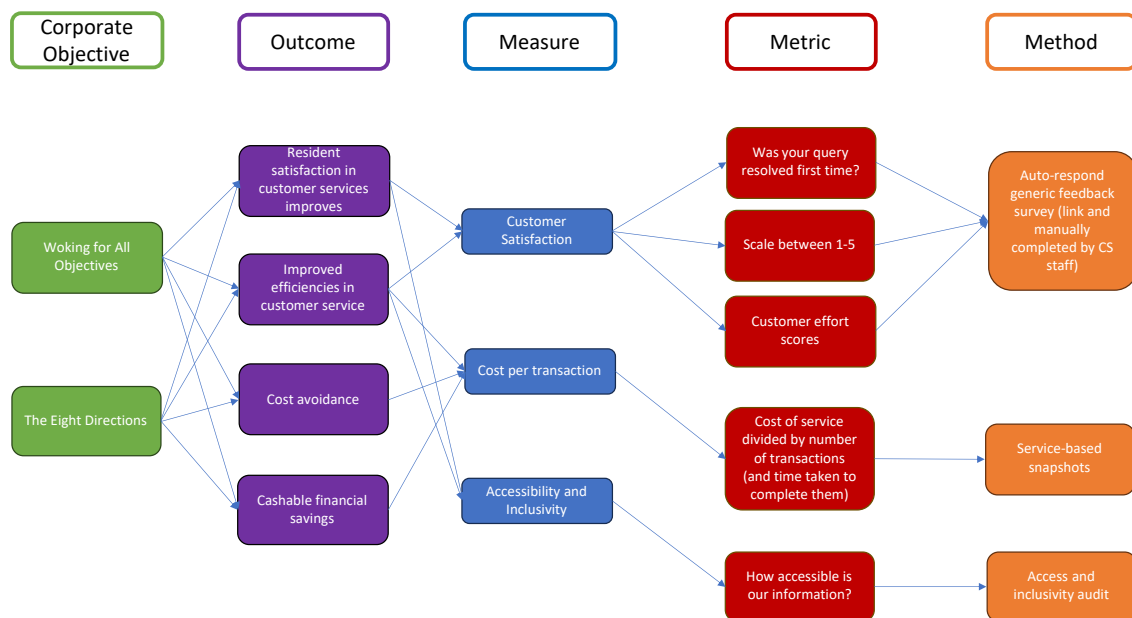
Cost Savings	Establishment reductions following natural attrition as a result of increased efficiencies. This will be based on staffing budgets in 2024/25 compared with budgets in 2026/27.
Cost Avoidance	From improved customer experience, eg reducing in failure demand based on calls through to customer services to resolve requests across departments; baseline compared with repeated exercise on completion of the project.
Improved resident satisfaction	Net Promotor Score (how likely are you to recommend the service); customer satisfaction scores (out of 10). Initial baseline in March 2024 compared with repeated exercise on completion of the project.



And they have further been refined to those outlined in below [Section 9 on Benefits](#). These measures will evolve further as the organisation’s capability around metrics improves as a result of the implementation of the digital functionality for which this programme is responsible:

- **Accessibility and Inclusivity** – external audit carried out on the website at regular intervals. 1st planned for 1st April 2024, repeated when the new website goes live and then every 12 months thereafter. Note: this is in addition to ongoing, regular automated testing of the website.
- **Customer Satisfaction** – based on responses to a feedback survey, which will be offered regardless of whether the customer has self-served online or telephoned us. Metrics include whether query was resolved first time, effort required to resolve query and satisfaction with outcome on scale of 1-5.
- **Cost per Transaction** – calculated based on number of transactions, length of time they take and cost of service. First sample to be taken on 1st April 2024 and monthly thereafter. In first instance this will be limited to services for which the required data already exists, with others will be added as the data becomes available.

The relationship looks like this:



We will continue to develop the metrics and measures, both in terms of depth of understanding, and breadth of services reviewed over time. We will regularly report back on insights through the Corporate Programme Board and Improvement and Recovery Programme, which will report to relevant Scrutiny and Executive meetings.

### Data and insight

As part of the channel shift work the use of data in the organisation needs to improve. In the first instance across three key areas but this will mature over time:

1. **What we measure:** refining Key Performance Indicators and introducing new ones, such as the three above, based on best practice, and people and technology capability



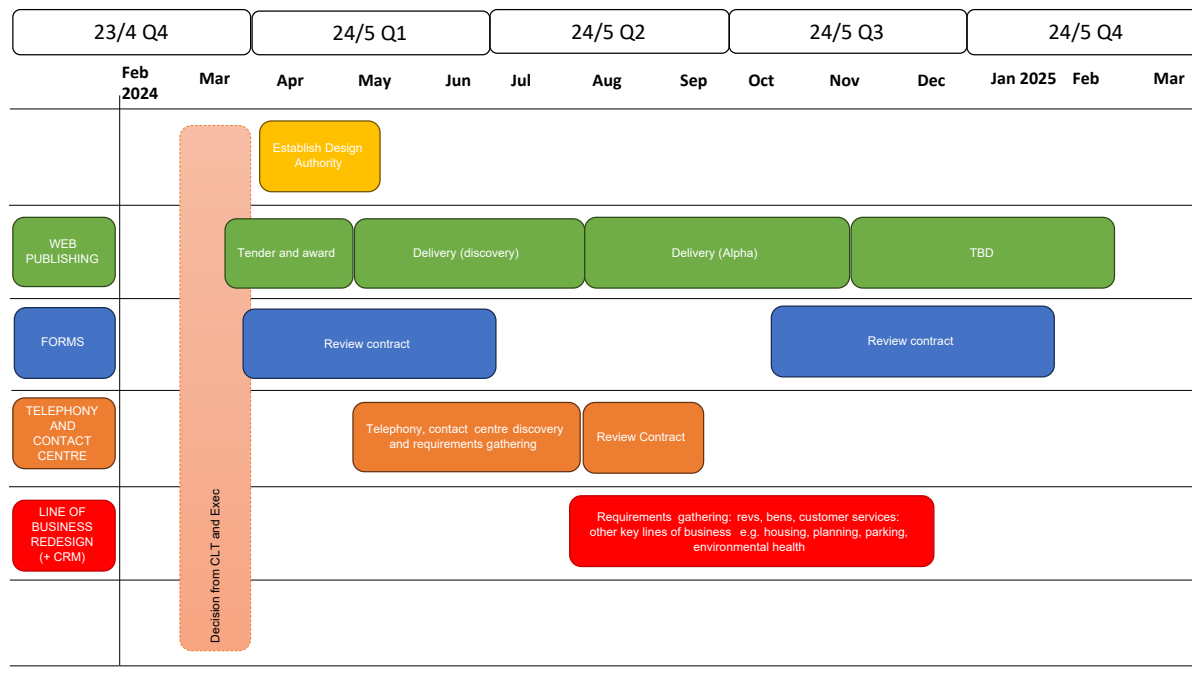
2. **How we measure:** Which teams, what frequency, with what technology and data platform (such as Microsoft's Azure cloud data services), and how this integrates across services and applications; who owns the data; data security; data literacy and skills
3. **What we do with it:** how we analyse data and how this leads to tangible improvements, which are measured to focus on continuous improvement

WBC is immature in its use of data. Short, sharp pieces of data discovery work will be presented as part of the forthcoming Digital Action Plan (DAP).

## 5. Timetable

- Project start date: October 2023
- Project end date: December 2025 (dependent on approval to proceed to market in March 2024)

The following timetable represents the six months of start up (in line with Phase 1 of the IRP). A further breakdown of key milestones from this point forward is available in the Initiation section.

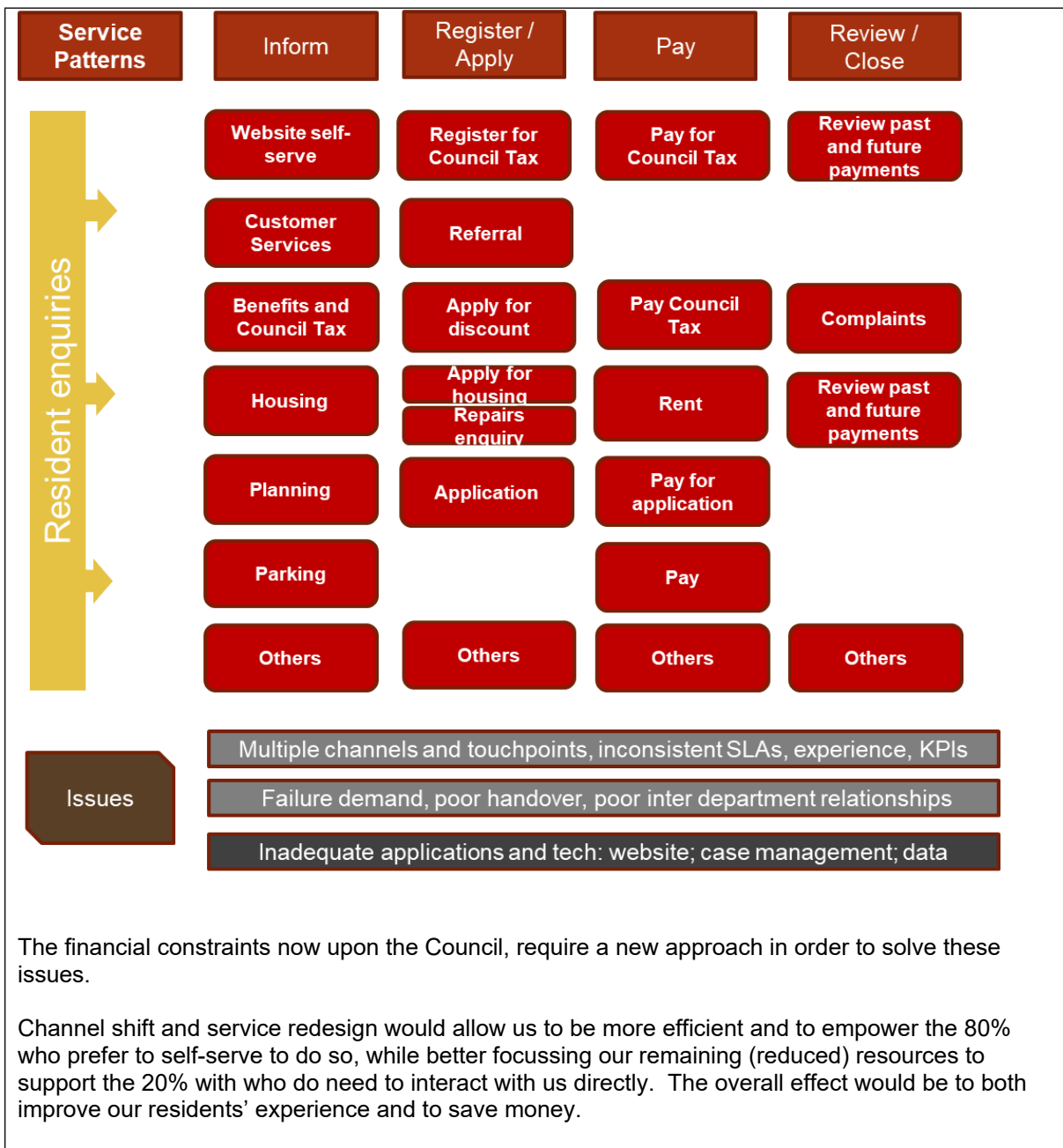


## 6. What are the implications of NOT implementing the project?

Staff are working hard under difficult circumstances, with only minor WBC led improvement programmes over the last decade. This despite significant changes in technology, structure and the pandemic itself. Investment needed to improve is significant. Both to WBC finances and resident outcomes, and in some cases our legal obligations.

The cost of doing nothing is likely to be higher than the cost moving transactional services to self-serve and more complex services to a skilled customer services team, thereby reducing complex needs services who require specialist case management.

The 'as is' operating model for customer services, revenues and benefits illustrates some of the complexities:



**7. Does this project contribute to the Councils key priorities?**

The details outlined in this workbook, align to the [Woking for All strategy](#).

**8. Does this project relate to any of the Council's strategies and/or Improvement Plans?**

Yes, Channel Shift makes up three workstreams within WBC's Improvement and Recovery Plan.

The Improvement and Recovery Plan is a requirement of the intervention from the Secretary of State, and its primary focus is to drive the transformational change required to support recovery. It is divided into 4 Themes:

1. **Financial Recovery** – Sustainable budget management, making difficult decisions whilst delivering against strategic council priorities and safeguarding future capacity.
2. **Commercial** – Release WBC from unaffordable commitments, while protecting the public purse and optimising the value of existing assets and rationalising.

3. **Governance and assurance** – Ensure risk is managed and decisions are based on data and evidence and scrutinised.
4. **Organisation and service redesign** – Deliver a smaller, data driven organisation, where staff feel empowered and digitally confident and are delivering on key priorities.

Delivery of the IRP is in two phases:

- Phase 1 – up to and including December 2023: capture and delivery of known actions and improvements possible within existing resources and design of Phase 2
- Phase 2 – from January 2024: build on Phase 1 and deliver on additional areas of improvement identified, some of which may require investment to save.

The activities within the Themes are interdependent and will be managed through a programme management approach.

All of the above, and the details outlined in this strategic outline case, align to the [Woking for All strategy](#).

This programme also delivers against the Woking For All Strategy 2022-25 supporting the outcomes of healthier, engaged, greener and prospering communities through a more user friendly front door, and improved service delivery. It delivers against the Digital Strategy 2022-25, in particular Theme 1: Smart People and Theme 3: Smart Council, which outline the importance of excellent online services, and improved telephony and face to face for those that need it.

As a Council WBC has traditionally under resourced digital and transformation activity relative to our peers. This three-year programme aims to address this, deliver better services, and deliver a return on investment. The aim is to keep costs as low as possible, whilst making the most of recent technology innovation and meeting raised resident, partner, and customer expectations.

## 9. Community Safety, Equalities and Sustainability issues

Moving away from traditional methods of service delivery, such as paper-based forms or face-to-face interactions to improved online services increases levels of accessibility and usability for residents and partners.

Online resident services can improve customer satisfaction by providing a faster, more convenient and more personalised service. Residents can access information and support anytime and anywhere, without having to wait on hold or visit a physical location; those working during traditional customer services operating hours have greater access to services. And online services can also provide more information and content in a range of formats, so customers with diverse needs can access it more easily.

All future contracts will include both a social value initiative, and an environmental/ sustainability requirement.

## 10. Data Protection

This programme will include a great deal of information gathering and data migration. This will be predominantly based around migrating existing data (both staff and resident data) from on-premise storage to cloud based storage.

The security of data forms a fundamental element of the programme, and the exact arrangements for this will be mapped as part of security workshops that will be run in conjunction with our external supplier (once appointed). Decisions around security and data protection will be presented at WBC's Cyber Security and Information Governance Working Group, which reports monthly to CLT.

## 11. Project Approach

The complexity of this solution is not to be underestimated. It requires coordination of multiple services and individuals to achieve ambitious change goals within tight timeframes and financial constraints. Many of the individuals involved will be balancing day jobs alongside their change ambitions and will be working in ways that are new and unfamiliar to them. The staff in affected services should be congratulated on their commitment and enthusiasm to engage with this process to date, despite the uncertainty it has brought to their roles.

A programme management approach is therefore crucial to success, particularly with regard to management of interdependences, proactive action to mitigate risks and any emergent issues and committed stakeholder engagement to ensure we maximise the significant skills and expertise of our workforce. Where prioritisation of activity is required recommendations will be based on a comparison of cost and volume of customer contact.

As with the IRP (series of themes that hang together in the programme), the series of three Resident Services workstreams forms a Project within which the activities (outlined in the following section) are interdependent with other areas of work (for example the Digital Action Plan).

The IRP provides a basis for a high level plan for the next 6 months which is outlined above in Section 5). However, the precise nature of the packages of work (shown in colourful arrows on the left) is not yet confirmed and may be amended to better connect with the other workstreams within Theme 4 and the Digital Action Plan.

The plan will be further refined as design and soft market testing continues, with set of milestones outlined in Initiation below.

## 12. Scope of the project

The activity required is described below.

### New operating model

The primary mechanism for delivery of this option is the implementation of the new operating model outlined above in Section 3. Each of the three tiers of the new operating model require significant enabling functionality to transform. This functionality is listed below:



#### **A: Delivering a new user-centred website**

The current web platform is not optimised to provide the type of self-service that we have ambitions to achieve through change. It should be noted that work in this area is not at a standstill; a project team is working on a backlog of 'quick wins' identified by user research to date to prepare the ground for further interventions.



#### **B: Implementing a new softphone telephony system**

WBC's current telephony system incurs high hardware and maintenance costs. To address this, we have been investigating the implementation of softphone technology leveraging Microsoft Teams.

Softphones allow employees to make and receive calls from anywhere with an internet connection. This means that employees can work remotely, travel, or work from different office locations, without the need to forward calls or use a separate mobile phone. This improves productivity and

allows for greater flexibility in scheduling and work arrangements. It also aligns with our approach to Bring Your Own Device (BYOD), as staff can take calls via Microsoft Teams on their own device once it has been enrolled in our Mobile Device Management (MDM) service.

Softphone technology can be integrated with other communication tools such as email, instant messaging, and video conferencing. This allows employees to have all their communication tools in one place, improving efficiency and reducing the need for multiple applications. This would improve the service provided by the Contact Centre, enabling them to adopt an omnichannel approach. Softphones can be easily installed on existing devices, such as laptops or desktop computers, reducing the need for additional hardware or ongoing maintenance.



## C: New Customer Management System

A new customer relationship management (CRM) system will improve our ability to manage cases and customer flow throughout customer services as well as how work is allocated, how we analyse volumes and service satisfaction.

In the context of local government in the UK, implementing a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) function offers several significant benefits:

1. **Improved Customer Service:**
  - CRM enables local councils to manage interactions with citizens more effectively.
  - It facilitates dealing with queries, complaints, and specific requests promptly.
  - Accurate information can be transmitted and received swiftly, enhancing overall customer service.
2. **Enhanced Accessibility and Inclusion:**
  - Well-organized delivery of customer service directly impacts accessibility, inclusion, and involvement.
  - Citizens receive better care when their requests are handled promptly and efficiently.
3. **Efficient Service Provision:**
  - Local government needs to complete tasks quickly and economically.
  - CRM streamlines processes, allowing for efficient service delivery.
  - Citizens also expect immediate attention to their requests.
4. **Data-Driven Decision Making:**
  - CRM captures and processes information about customers.
  - This data is made available to staff, enabling them to improve service provision.
  - Councils can analyse why customers contact them and identify areas for service enhancement.
5. **Transition to a Customer-Centric Approach:**
  - CRM encourages local councils to move from a departmental structure to a customer-centred one.
  - It aims to provide quality services in a joined-up manner, aligning with social inclusion goals.
6. **Management of Complex Interfaces:**
  - Local government interfaces with customers across various channels (face-to-face, telephone, internet, etc.). CRM helps locate information related to customer inquiries and ensures effective communication internally.

CRM empowers local councils to understand their customers better, improve services, and create a more citizen-focused approach.



## D: Soft market testing of channel shift solutions

**(to include the full range of lots)**

In order to be specific about the solutions we plan to implement, we needed to have a better understanding of the products and services available in the current market. To achieve this, we carried out soft market testing during November 2023.



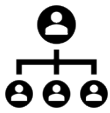
**E: Establishment of a user experience function  
(within the new Resident Experience service)**

As mentioned above, examination of our users' journeys will allow us to define the specific requirements to implement technological/digital solutions that will meet our customers' needs and the customer services team functions will be broadened to accompany these and similar functions.



**F: User Research**

The user experience research carried out by Impossible Ideas and TPX have created a sufficient baseline for this strategic outline case, in order to be specific about costs and quality for WBC, further refinement of this design must take place. This will also be critical to the embedding of a culture of continuous improvement that will form a crucial element of the new culture supporting the operating model. It will also require resident engagement to refine design and inform our Equalities Impact Assessments.



**G: New staffing structure  
(for Customer Services, Revenues and Benefits, ICT and Digital)**

The operating model and the staffing structure are different but inter-related pieces of work. The new posts, job descriptions, person specifications and structure charts that support the operating model have been developed as part of Phase 2 of the Fit for the Future Programme. It will therefore adhere to all related processes.

The aim of this activity will be to produce an enhanced resident experience function incorporating the staff who support Tiers 1 and 2 of the operating model into the same centralised service. This will also establish the staff roles that will form the new user experience function (activity F).

**Further specific activities:**

As the design of the new operating model is refined, a series of specific activities to implement these changes will commence. Three of these have already emerged from the early exploration and are listed below...



**H: New opening hours for customer services**



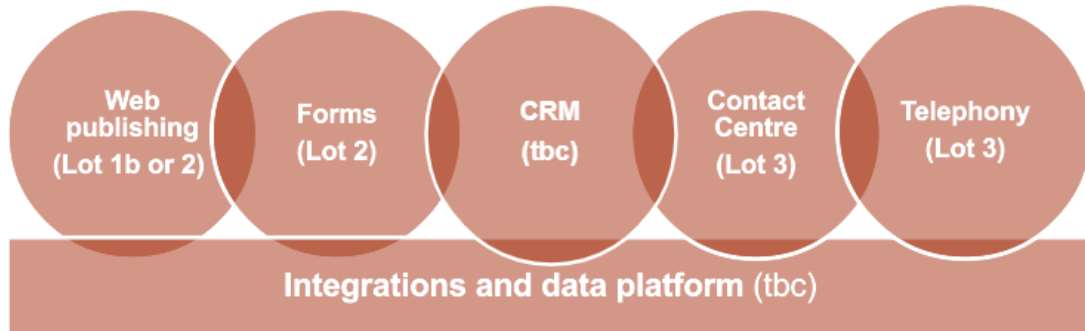
**I: Outsourcing of printing for customer services**



**J: Community Enablement to promote channel shift**



## Strategy, design, technology, integrations and data advisory (Lot 1a)



However, soft market testing helped prioritise the initial lots into a series of procurement exercises, the full details of which have not been included in this paper due to commercial sensitivities.

1. Web publishing (migrating woking.gov.uk to the LocalGovDrupal platform)- 2024
2. Forms and integration - 2024
3. Telephony and contact centre - 2024
4. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) - 2025

Any procurement exercise will start from a preference to run a mini competition and call off from a CCS Framework from the Crown Commercial Services Framework Provider to appoint one or more suppliers. Alternative approaches will be taken when commercially prudent to do so.

## 16. Training needs

Resident Experience staff will be required to undertake new roles as the new operating model comes into effect. The precise changes are not yet fully understood, but it is anticipated that there are individuals within the existing team who can share these skills with their colleagues.

Digital and ICT staff may require technical skills to work alongside third-party suppliers and maximise the benefits of any new system. This will be built into the procurement approach as part of the 'Social Value' provision of the contract; that the successful supplier initiate skills share with our teams.

## 17. Assumptions

- That resources will be made available to meet the timescales and levels of quality required to achieve the forecast benefits
- That anticipated costs (informed by soft market testing) are accurate ball park figures for the required change
- That employee skills levels and productivity are sufficient to undertake this exercise (and that where this may not be the case, additional resource can be sourced from the outlined budget for the project)
- That all risks require mitigation to reduce their level to within an accepted tolerance

## 18. Permissions and Approvals



The project reports to Improvement and Recovery Board, where the project's Sponsor is also SRO for Theme 4 – Organisation and Service Redesign.

### 19. Change Management

This project is governed by the corporate standards set out by WBC's corporate strategy team.

### 20. Alternatives / Feasibility Study

WBC have already committed to the design principles and objectives of this project (as agreed in Theme 4 of the IRP). The remaining consideration therefore is one of expediency; how quickly to deliver the channel shift, to what level of quality and to what cost.

The focus of the options appraisal carried out prior to soft market testing, was to consider at a high level only the competing merits of two ways forward (Options 3 and 4) and compared them with two undesirable options for the sake of benchmarking/comparison.

Option 3 was chosen as the preferred option. The high level analysis that led to this conclusion is included below:

1. Option 1: Reduce further: this involved seeking further rounds of savings through staff and procuring the lowest cost software. In house staff would lead on the majority of development, metrics would be focused on cost above all
2. Option 2: As Is. There is no 'do nothing' option available, given the scale of change. This would continue on the path of incremental quick wins, and a focus on cost savings in procurement. There will be no 'invest to save', but ongoing, smaller scale improvements to processes, technology and ways of working
3. Option 3: Prudent investment: This takes a case by case approach to change driven by the vision and ambitions of the Workstream. It would take a hybrid approach to consultancy and in-house staff, building up skills. Impact on returns 12-24 months from when consultants support on site.
4. Option 4: Ambitious investment: greater use of consultancies, faster website and service redesign implementation, faster customer services and telephony redesign. Impact and returns could be felt within 6-12months of consultants starting.

Option		Pros	Cons	Risks	Benefits	Disbenefits
1	<b>Reduce further</b> Cut 25% of staff in all customer-facing services to meet saving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further short term savings possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capacity, capability and morale further reduced</li> <li>Staff welfare damaged</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of organisation memory</li> <li>Day to day service provision at risk, including Revenues</li> <li>Increase likelihood of failure demand</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Immediate short term savings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Service quality declines</li> <li>WBC continues to lack necessary investment and lag nationally</li> </ul>

2	<b>As Is</b> Maintain the status quo operating model and customer experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lower cost than alternatives</li> <li>• Ongoing iterative improvements to the website and processes possible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No significant savings medium term</li> <li>• Minimal service improvements</li> <li>• Not addressing structural technology, process, or data challenges</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WBC lacks ambition in improving services, leading to internal and external reputational damage</li> <li>• Security risk: website is out of support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cheaper than alternatives, retains skills in house</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Slow, minimal return on investment</li> <li>• Minimal external expertise to upskill staff and improve services</li> </ul>
3	<b>Prudent investment*</b> Invest in new website and telephony systems and implement a new operating model for customer-facing services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enables a sustainable pace of change</li> <li>• Improved services over time</li> <li>• Brings in external capability on website build; telephony, customer services, integrations and data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Costs outstrip savings in first two years</li> <li>• Savings are difficult against rising tide of resident expectation and software cost</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing interdependencies to ensure costs and benefits measured effectively across WBC</li> <li>• Adds more complexity during a time of change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Makes up for historic underinvestment / future proofs</li> <li>• Savings, cost avoidance and resident satisfaction quantifiable over time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment required</li> <li>• Pressure on business-as-usual services during period of change</li> </ul>
4	<b>Ambitious investment*</b> Invest in above and bring in expertise to rapidly implement new operating model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enables a rapid pace of change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher cost nets of medium term benefits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rapid pace of change</li> <li>• Managing interdependencies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhanced resident satisfaction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some outsourcing of skills required</li> </ul>

## 21. Project Risk Summary

Having made the decision to proceed with Option 3, regarding the approach to risk management, the assumption at present is that all risks require mitigation to reduce their level to within an accepted tolerance.

The following table summarises the high-level risks associated with the recommended option only:

Description ('If... then...' Model)	Likelihood (/5)	Impact (/5)	Overall score (/25)	Mitigation	Accepted risk
If investment is not forthcoming (ie savings are made at the cost of improved quality of service), then increased process issues (such as failure demand) are likely to create knock-on costs that exacerbate the current financial position, not alleviate it	4	5	20	Investment requested through paper to Exec in March 2024. Savings being identified elsewhere for short-term release of pressure and medium-term benefits to be	Likelihood reduces to 2 Impact reduces to 3 = 6

				released via project delivery	
If complexity of interdependences creates slippage, then savings targets will not be achieved	4	4	16	Programme management approach, robust governance and bringing in new skills	Likelihood reduces to 2 = 8
If appropriate skills sets are not brought in to support the change, then the quality of change will be compromised and benefits not realised	4	3	12	Investment sought to go to market; recruitment plan to be devised	Likelihood reduces to 2 = 6

## 22. Supporting Evidence

This workbook builds on the recent reviews by Impossible Ideas and TPXimpact, which made recommendations for improvements to resident experience and ICT and digital, respectively. These provide a persuasive rationale for the approach to the project.

## 23. Additional Comments

N/A

## Financial Section

### 24. Funding

**This project is funded through three streams:**

1. Capital funding incorporated into the Capital Programme and drawdown requested from Exec in March 2024
2. Flexible use of capital receipts – signed off at Improvement and Recovery Board in April 2024
3. Revenue spend – built into the Medium Term Financial Statement

For a breakdown, please see the following section.

### 25. Project Cost

Prior to soft market testing, the Strategic Outline Case presented to IRP Board (October 2024) included the following estimated project costs:

#### Website

- One off capital and consultancy expenditure of £80-100k
- Ongoing annual license cost £60-80k
- Ongoing annual skills requirement of £80-120k for:
  - Content design (in proposed structure)
  - User experience design (in proposed structure)
  - Engineering and integrations (not in proposed structure)
  - Data analyst (not in proposed structure)
- Total: £80-100k initial plus £140-200k annual thereafter

#### Telephony

- One off capital and consultancy expenditure of £50-75k
- Ongoing annual license costs of £60-80k
- Ongoing annual skills requirement of £40-50k
- Total: £50-75k initial plus £100-130k annual thereafter

### Case management

Given the fact case management currently sits across multiple applications without integrations (Contact Manager; IDOX etc) the cost of change and integrations is difficult to estimate at this time. Soft market testing will help support give a clearer estimate of cost. For now, this is not in scope, but is a dependency.

Total estimates before soft market testing:

- One off: £130 - £175k
- Annual thereafter: £240 - 330k

.....

Following soft market testing, we have refined our costs to those which will be presented in Sections 26 and 27 below.

To place this in some context our ongoing license cost for Microsoft E3 license is £234k per annum. Our total rollout costs of Capita One Housing exceeded £1m.

**£700k capital spend** as outlined in the Capital Investment Programme 2024/25 – 2028/29 (two year totals):

- £350k on web publishing and forms
- £150k telephony and contact centre
- £200k on CRM

**£350k revenue costs** (estimated annual):

- on strategic design, data, project management and implementation support

This will be drawn from flexible use of capital receipts.

**We anticipate £350k revenue savings emerging from 2025/26, as shown in Section 27.**

## 26. Ongoing Revenue Costs

This will be a start and finish project, projected over two years, before becoming BAU. This will draw on capital investment programme, Digital (previously known as ICT) revenue budgets, and the flexible use of capital receipts funding.

Precisely how revenue budgets will be allocated is not possible to forecast with complete accuracy until we have been through a number of procurement rounds, as outlined above. This will determine the balance between what is classified as BAU (for example the running of a council website) and what is classified as 'transformation' under the directive (for example cost savings through improving self serve forms on the website).

There is a drop off in funding after 2025/26 for the following reasons:

- This project needs to be a start and finish piece of work, with a clear focus on transformation and channel shift as a focused infrastructural investment. There is flexibility in 2026/27 to address unforeseen challenges and opportunities
- Once the project ends, the work continues as part of Digital, the budgets fall within capital and revenue budget spend of the Digital Service. These will be reviewed annually and in light of budget pressures moving across.

Updates will go to Corporate Programme Board quarterly, with more refinement in forecast and actuals when they become available.

	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29
<b>Capital Costs</b>					
<i>Supplies and Services</i>	350,000	350,000	0	0	0
<b>Revenue Costs</b>					
<i>Supplies and Services</i>	175,000	175,000	0		
<b>Total Expenditure</b>					
<b>Additional Income</b>					
<i>Fees and Charges</i>					
<i>Grants</i>					
<i>Other</i>					
<b>Total Income</b>	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Net Expenditure</b>	525,000	525,000	0	0	0
<b>Depreciation / Replacement</b>	0	0	0	0	0

#### 27. Cashable and Non-Cashable Savings

We anticipate £350k revenue savings, emerging from 2025/26.

	24/25	25/26	26/27	27/28	28/29
<b>Cashable (Tangible)</b>					
<i>Staff Saving</i>		100,000	250,000		
<i>Equipment Saving</i>					
<i>Buildings Savings</i>					
<i>Other</i>					
<b>Non-cashable (Intangible)</b>					
<i>Reference 1</i>					
<i>Reference 2</i>					
<i>Reference 3</i>					
<b>Total Savings</b>	0	100,000	250,000	0	0

#### 28. Investment Programme Project Costs

[This section should be filled out (in addition to Appendix 1) **only** if the project is listed on the investment programme. By identifying the costs, provision can be made in the Investment Programme.]

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
<b>Project Costs</b>					
<i>Development Costs</i>					0
<i>Contractors / consultants</i>					0
<i>Equipment Costs</i>					0

<i>Hardware / Software</i>					0
<i>Implementation costs</i>					0
<b>Total Project Costs</b>	0	0	0	0	0

#### 29. Investment Programme Project Information

The section must be completed in conjunction with Financial Management.

Scoring Category Classification:	Project produces an asset
Fixed Asset Classification:	Plant and Equipment (AOVV)
VAT Implications:	No adverse effect on Council's partial exemption VAT
Project Code:	<a href="#">To be allocated and entered on authorisation of Section 2</a>

# SECTION 2: PROJECT INITIATION

Section 2 of the Project Workbook is designed to (a) identify and plan the detail of the project so that the Project Sponsor and Budget Owner can give full and final commitment and (b) act as a base against which all project stakeholders can assess progress.

## 1. Project Organisation

Improvement and Recovery Board.

Organisation and Service Redesign Board.

Resident Services Design Authority

Reference to the design authority of Technology Strategy Board and regular attendance at Technology Operation Group (these need to be established as part of ongoing digital improvements. More detail in the DAP).

## 2. Financial Control

The project budget will be managed by the Head of ICT. Escalation by exception will be to the Head of Transformation, Digital and Customer Experience.

## 3. Management of Project Outputs

The project outputs will be managed by the Resident Experience Programme Manager and their quality will be assessed by the Head of ICT and the Head of Customer Experience.

Escalation by exception will be to the Head of Transformation, Digital and Resident Experience.

## 4. Post Project Review

The benefits outlined in this Workbook will be reviewed on an ongoing basis to ensure continuous improvement.

## 5. Project Stakeholders and Communications

At this stage it is important to identify everyone who has an interest in the project. This can include individuals, groups, the users, regulatory bodies etc. Describe the quality concerns that are most important to each of the stakeholders so a full picture of the project can be achieved. It is also important to define the key communications that must occur, and with whom, throughout the project. This should include communication plans with stakeholders as well as project management communications such as regular reports to the project sponsor and/or board.

Stakeholder	Interest in the project / Quality Concerns	Nature of Communication / Frequency
Executive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responsibility for the rapid improvement in WBC's financial position</li> <li>Resident Services project is a considerable enabler to this objective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sign-off of project scope, resources and quality in January 2024</li> <li>Further updates on a regular basis</li> </ul>
Improvement and Recovery Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responsibility for Theme 4 (Organisation and service redesign), of which this project makes up 3 workstreams</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monthly updates to Board via programme dashboard</li> <li>Adam Walther (Head of Transformation, Digital and Customer Experience) is SRO for Theme 4 and Sponsor of the Resident Services Project.</li> </ul>
Adam Walther	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SRO for IRP Theme 4</li> <li>Sponsor of Resident Services Project</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly updates from Project Manager and 2 x Senior Customers/Suppliers</li> </ul>
Anita Flavell (and team)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Head of ICT</li> <li>Acts as both senior customer of any new products and senior supplier in process, technology and data required to maximise impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly updates at project board stand up</li> </ul>
David Ripley (and team)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Head of Resident Experience</li> <li>Acts as both senior customer of and new products and senior supplier of people, process and data required to maximise impact</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly updates a project board stand up</li> </ul>



Lee Danson and Pino Mastromarco	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Programme Manager for IRP – oversight of IRP deliverables and benefits</li> <li>• Corporate Strategy Manager – oversight of PMO functions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly updates at Programme stand ups</li> </ul>
Resident Services Project Working Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adam Przedzimirski – Design Lead</li> <li>• Andy Gresham – Web Manager</li> <li>• Paul Murphy – Telephony Manager</li> <li>• – Commercial Lead (tbc)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly updates at project board stand ups</li> </ul>

## 6. Equality Impact Assessment

The purpose of this assessment is to improve the work of the Council by making sure that it does not discriminate against any individual or group and that, where possible, it promotes equality. The Council has a legal duty to comply with equalities legislation and this template enables you to consider the impact (positive or negative) a strategy, policy, project or service may have upon the protected groups. For further information or guidance please contact Refeia Zaman on ex: 3479.

		Positive impact?			Negative impact?	No specific impact	What will the impact be?  If the impact is negative how can it be mitigated?(action) This section needs to be completed as evidence of what the positive impact is or what actions are being taken to mitigate any negative impacts.
		Eliminate discrimination	Advance equality	Good relations			
<b>Gender</b>	Men					X	
	Women					X	
<b>Gender Reassignment</b>						X	
<b>Race</b>	White					X	
	Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups					X	
	Asian/Asian British					X	
	Black/African/Caribbean/Black British					X	
	Gypsies / travellers					X	
	Other ethnic group					x	
<b>Disability</b>	Physical		x				Broader (and more equitable) ways to contact WBC Better accessibility of council's services and access to information. Improved usability of the website by better navigation and design will improve user experience which in turn will improve take up of online transactional services. This will require the planned improvements to the website to ensure content is accessible to all.

	Sensory		x				Broader (and more equitable) ways to contact WBC
	Learning Difficulties					x	
	Mental Health		x				Reduced stress – less need to operate within 9-5
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	Lesbian, gay men, bisexual					x	
<b>Age</b>	Older people (50+)		x				Resident services programme aims to improve access for all, and all types of need. It will improve online accessibility standards and, for those who cannot get online, telephony and face to face services. We will use our regular access and inclusivity audits to measure and monitor digital inclusion and improve our programme.
	Younger people (16 - 25)		x				Broader (and more equitable) ways to contact WBC
<b>Religion or Belief</b>	Faith Groups					x	
<b>Pregnancy &amp; maternity</b>			x				Flexibility to contact outside of 9-5 and school hours
<b>Marriage &amp; Civil Partnership</b>						x	
<b>Socio-economic Background</b>			x				Broader (and more equitable) ways to contact WBC; will include more traditional approaches for those who are less digitally enabled (see above comments under 'Age'). There will also be reduced need to travel.

## 7. Sustainability Impact Assessment

Officers preparing a committee report are required to complete a Sustainability Impact Assessment. Sustainability is one of the Council's 'cross-cutting themes' and the Council has made a corporate commitment to address the social, economic and environmental effects of activities across Business Units. The purpose of this Impact Assessment is to record any positive or negative impacts this decision, project or programme is likely to have on each of the Council's Sustainability Themes.

Theme (Potential impacts of the project)	Positive Impact	Negative Impact	No specific impact	What will the impact be? If the impact is negative, how can it be mitigated? (action)
Use of energy, water, minerals and materials	Yes			Making info more readily available on website means people won't have to travel to civic offices or work so hard to find information, thus preserving finite resources, notably energy resources (fuel from individual journeys). Transfer of data from WBC servers to the cloud will reduce electricity usage locally but this will be offset by increased energy usage at cloud storage.
Waste generation / sustainable waste management	Yes			A reduction in the use of paper as we reduce the amount of hard copy sent via post. This will reduce waste generation from printer cartridges, scrap paper etc.
Pollution to air, land and water	Yes			Less people travelling in cars, and via public transport to visit civic offices and to work in civic offices
Factors that contribute to Climate Change			Yes	Reduction in the number of servers due to implementation of softphone technology – 11 servers down to 9, so an 18% reduction in carbon footprint. However, the data usage on the cloud will still have a carbon impact so there will be a transfer of energy usage rather than necessarily a reduction. And we're not yet in a position to quantify possible increased climate impact due to people using laptops to make calls rather than hard phones (bearing in mind the laptops will almost

				certainly already be turned on) and people working from homes with heating on in addition to heating already being on in the office. Therefore, it's prudent to record only a minimal positive impact, if any.
Protection of and access to the natural environment			Yes	We do not anticipate any impacts with regard to protecting biodiversity eg habitats and species or access to these.
Travel choices that do not rely on the car			Yes	Residents will need to travel to see us much less frequently, if at all. Likewise, WBC staff will need to travel less frequently to see residents. This will be due to having made info more readily available on website. However, this will not positively support travel choices that don't rely on the car.
A strong, diverse and sustainable local economy	Yes			Putting info that is relevant and useful to local businesses to help them grow eg advice and guidance for local businesses on the website – making it more accessible than it was before. People being able to work more flexibly increases the likelihood they will work from cafes or visit their local community while working from home.
Meet local needs locally			Yes	We don't anticipate having an impact in this area
Opportunities for education and information	Yes			Social value of procurement activities – will upskill in house staff Also greater knowledge and information will be available on the website
Provision of appropriate and sustainable housing			Yes	Information on website will be more readily available and improve resident experience.
Personal safety and reduced fear of crime	Yes			We will follow cyber security best practice, GDPR principles re managing and securing data

				<p>Less opportunities for data breaches eg system temporarily down so writing things on a piece of paper and less rekeying of customer data given over the phone</p> <p>Personal safety improved because people will have less need to travel because services are available online</p>
Equality in health and good health	Yes			<p>Reduced need to travel will reduce anxiety and stress, and promotes equalities eg people with limited mobility and carers will not need to travel so much if they prefer not to.</p> <p>Less need to travel also frees up more time to be spend on other activities eg exercise.</p>
Access to cultural and leisure facilities	Yes			Improved quality and accessibility of information and signposting on the website
Social inclusion / engage and consult communities	Yes			<p>Engaging with residents re feedback on website</p> <p>Testing resident experience with people who are traditionally digitally excluded.</p> <p>However, people often also make combined trips and no longer having a need to visit the city centre may mean they are less likely to meet people (eg by going into shops).</p>
Equal opportunities for the whole community	Yes			<p>As above</p> <p>More readily able to access info</p>
Contribute to Woking's pride of place			Yes	Information relevant to Place is more readily available and accessible than it was before, benefitting both businesses and communities.

## 8. Product / Milestone List

The purpose of this template is to identify, list in order and briefly describe the products that will be required in your project. A product is an item that the project has to create as part of the requirements. This is an important first step in working out exactly what needs to be created, changed or procured in order for the project to be a success. A project can be broken down into many products which, when pulled together, will equate to the project as a whole.

<b>Product / Milestone</b>	<b>Purpose and Description</b>
October 2023	Start Date
February 2024	Permission to proceed to commercial exercise from Executive
All further milestones are contingent on the one above:	
March 2024	Negotiate new SLA re Forms (contract end date June 2024)
July 2024	Award contract for Strategic Partner
December 2024	Award contract for Web Publisher
February 2025	Award contract for CRM
December 2025	End Date

## 9. Measuring Objectives and Benefits

At Section 1 of this Workbook (Start-Up) you will have documented the objectives of this project as well as the benefits that the project is intending to deliver. In order to demonstrate if the project has been successful, it is important to state here how all of the objectives and benefits will be assessed and measured on completion. The objectives and benefits will be measured and recorded at Section 4 of this workbook (Closure) to determine the overall success of the project.

<b>Project Objective / Benefit</b>	<b>How will it be assessed / measured?</b>
Accessibility and Inclusivity	External audit carried out on the website at regular intervals. 1st planned for 1st April 2024, repeated when the new website goes live and then every 12 months thereafter. Note: this is in addition to ongoing, regular automated testing of the website.
Customer Satisfaction	Based on responses to a feedback survey, which will be offered regardless of whether the customer has self-served online or telephoned us. Metrics include whether query was resolved first time, effort required to resolve query and satisfaction with outcome on scale of 1-5.
Reduced Cost per Transaction	Calculated based on number of transactions, length of time they take and cost of service. First sample to be take on 1st April 2024 and monthly thereafter.



## SECTION 3: PROJECT EXECUTION

Section 3 is concerned with handling the day-to-day management of the project and is mainly based around creating and implementing the products that have been identified in section 2 above with a view to achieving the overall objectives of the project.

This Project Workbook is designed to provide a framework for the overall direction of the project, particularly the justification, planning and closure stages. This stage is about the delivery of the project and the project manager is free to undertake this in the most appropriate way available. General guidelines on the areas to consider at this point are contained within the methodology but for the main, the Project Manager should engage the project in line with the information contained within the Workbook.

Please note, therefore, that you **DO NOT** have to obtain authorisation at any point in this section. You should have already obtained full and final commitment from the Project Sponsor and Budget Owner at the end of section 2 and authorisation will not be required now until project closure (Section 4). In the interim, control and awareness of the project will be primarily informed by the following mechanisms:

**Project Status:** Project status should be reported and discussed at set intervals dependent on the size and scope of the project (typically on a monthly or quarterly basis). The homepage of the project's space on SharePoint displays the project status.

**Project logs and Documents:** Throughout this stage please ensure that all project information is saved within the Projects area on SharePoint. High emphasis should also be placed on recording all risks and issues within the respective logs.

## SECTION 4: PROJECT CLOSURE

A defining feature of a project is that it is finite. Formally closing a project avoids the tendency to drift into operational management. It also provides an opportunity to ensure that any unachieved goals are identified so that these can be addressed in the future.

It is recommended at this point that the Project Manager and the Project Team meet as part of the project closure review meeting. The purpose of the meeting would be to pool information and ideas with a view to completing this section of the Workbook and specifically to (a) capture and record any unfinished business (b) measure the relative success of the project by determining whether or not it has met/delivered its original objectives and proposed benefits and (c) assess other general aspects of the project to obtain an all round understanding of what worked well and what could be improved.

In addition to the completion of the templates located within this section, it is important that the Project Manager updates the project's space on SharePoint to ensure that the project is in a suitable position to be reclassified as closed on the system. This includes making documents that need to be retained into records and deleting all other documents.

Mark the following checklist to confirm that all aspects of closure have been completed:

CHECKLIST FOR PROJECT CLOSURE	COMPLETE
Have lessons learned been recorded on SharePoint?	
Have risks been recorded and closed on SharePoint?	
Have issues been recorded and closed on SharePoint?	
Are all project documents saved in the document library?	
Have all documents that need to be retained been made records?	
Have all documents that do not need to be retained been deleted?	
Have Financial Management checked the Project Closure Section has been completed?	
Has the Project Sponsor confirmed no further action regarding variations?	
Final payments have been made and project expenditure has been checked?	

Once complete, this section of the project workbook will need to be sent to the Project Support Office for review. The Project Support Office will then send it to CMG to be signed off so the project can be closed. All other interested parties should be notified when the project is closed.

## 1. Contract Final Accounts

This section should be completed as part of project closure if your project resulted in the formation of a contract. A separate template should be completed for each contract that was produced during the life of the project. If the contract will continue after closure of the project, this template should be completed to reflect the status of the contract at the point of project closure.

1. Contract Name	
2. Contractor Name	
3. Start Date / End Date	
4. Contract Manager	
5. Contract Register Ref	
6. Cost Code	
7. Initial Contract Amount Released	
8. Variations issued by budget manager (include a value and date of approval and explanation for each variation)	
9. Final Contract Payments (i.e. total amount paid, including variations)	
10. Difference between approved and actual contract expenditure (7 + 8 - 9)	
11. Explanation for any difference between approved and actual	

## 2. Follow-on Actions / Recommendations

Use this form to record any unfinished business, recommendations, or follow-on actions at project closure. This can include aspects such as remaining risks, issues and change requests that have been deferred and any ongoing problems with the project. It should be passed on to those with responsibility/authority to action.

Importance H/M/L*	Situation	Action Required	Action Owner
*Importance: H = High, M = Medium, L = Low			



## 4. Objectives and Benefits Assessment

As part of project closure it is important that the project is properly assessed against its original objectives and proposed benefits. This table is designed to record whether or not an objective/benefit has been achieved having been assessed against the measures detailed in section 2 of the Workbook. The estimates for the total cost and time spent on the project should also be recorded as an original objective. It is likely that some of the objectives and/or benefits will not be realised until well after the end of the project so please ensure that you revisit this template to record the outcome as soon as is applicable.

Project Objective / Benefit	Outcome (having measured the objective/benefit)	Has it been achieved?

## Appendix 1: Project Cost

Use this template to record the planned and costs of the project. This template builds on the initial estimates identified in the mandate. It is important that this worksheet is continually updated throughout the life of the project (unless a separate financial spreadsheet is maintained) so that a full understanding of the budget and resources used in the project can be gained.

Person or Supplier	Item e.g. Equipment, Supplies, Labour	Planned	Actual	Variance
Supplier tbc	Capital spend - CRM	£200k		
Supplier tbc	Capital spend - telephony and contact centre	£150k		
Supplier tbc	Capital spend - web publishing and forms	£350k		
Supplier tbc	Revenue spend - CRM	£90k		
Supplier tbc	Revenue spend - telephony and contact centre	£100k		
Supplier tbc	Revenue spend - web publishing and forms	£80k		
Supplier tbc	Revenue spend - strategic design, data and implementation support (where this cannot be capitalised)	£80k		
<b>Totals</b>		£1,050,000		





EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

## MONITORING REPORTS - PROJECTS

### Executive Summary

The Executive receives regular reports on the progress of projects in the interests of financial prudence and to ensure open and transparent corporate governance.

This report provides an update of progress in relation to the Council's project management arrangements, assurance, and processes.

A monitoring report detailing the status of every Council project (as at the end of January 2024), incorporating both capital and revenue projects, is attached at Appendix 1. The monitoring report provides a status update, and an assessment against project risks, issues, schedule, and budget.

There are no specific areas for concern or action by the Executive.

### Recommendations

The Executive is requested to:

#### RESOLVE That

- (i) the report be received; and
- (ii) the detailed project monitoring recorded in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

### Reasons for Decision

Reason: To monitor progress on development to the Council's project management approach.

The Executive has the authority to determine the recommendation(s) set out above.

**Background Papers:** None.

**Reporting Person:** Kevin Foster, Strategic Director – Corporate Resources  
Email: kevin.foster@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3198

**Contact Person:** Pino Mastromarco, Corporate Strategy Manager  
Email: pino.mastromarco@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3464  
Dawn George, Business Improvement Officer  
Email: dawn.george@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3407

**Portfolio Holder:** Councillor Ann-Marie Barker  
Email: [cilrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk](mailto:cilrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk)

**Date Published:** 13 March 2024

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The undertaking of projects is an integral part of Woking Borough Council business delivery, and a significant amount of Council resources are allocated to their successful completion. Project management processes have therefore been developed and maintained to bring consistency to how projects are managed, and to aid the project manager in delivering projects on time, to budget, and to the desired standard.
- 1.2 The process has been structured to be flexible and user friendly so it can meet the specific needs of the Council. It has been designed to add value to officers who are leading on projects and support the development of a common standard and capability. Every WBC project, regardless of size or type, is required to follow the corporate process.
- 1.3 In line with the Woking For All Strategy outcome 'A high performing Council' and best practice elsewhere, project management processes are subject to continuous improvement to ensure that resources are used wisely and deliver benefits from our investment into project activity.

### 2.0 Corporate Programme Board

- 2.1 All Council projects are formally reviewed by the Corporate Programme Board (CPB) which meets quarterly. The CPB provides a forum where project risks, issues, and other areas of concern are discussed; this approach facilitates clear and accountable decision-making.
- 2.2 Since the CPB was introduced in June 2021 there has been significant improvement in the management and processing of projects. Key areas of improvement include:
  - The percentage of projects with a red RAG rating has significantly reduced – down to 13% this quarter vs. 45% in 2021.
  - 77% of projects now have a green RAG rating (indicating no concern with budget, risks, schedule, or issues) vs. only 14% of projects in 2021.
  - Projects are now actively being closed on completion with lessons learned captured – there are now 30 active projects vs. 42 projects in 2021.

### 3.0 Reporting Period Update

- 3.1 The key activity since the last report to the Executive has been:
  - The Project Support Office has met with every project manager to discuss project progress and assess performance.
  - Project portfolio reports have been produced and presented to CLT as part of the quarterly Corporate Programme Board meetings.
- 3.2 Detailed project status is contained within the project monitoring report at Appendix 1. The key points to note from the monitoring report are:
  - There are 30 projects in delivery and at practical completion, of which:
    - 77% (23) projects are green.
    - 10% (3) projects are amber.
    - 13% (4) projects are red.

- There are 2 projects that have been closed in the period. Projects that have been closed during the period are not RAG rated as this rating relates to projects in delivery.

### 4.0 Financial Exception items

4.1 In accordance with Financial Regulations, projects will be highlighted where actual spend exceeds the approved budget by the greater of £10k or 5%. There are no project(s) that fall into this category for this reporting period.

### 5.0 Items of Note

5.1 None.

### 6.0 Corporate Strategy

6.1 The ongoing review and monitoring of all projects initiated within the Council, directly relates to the 'A high performing Council' outcome as listed in the Woking For All Strategy.

### 7.0 Implications

#### Finance and Risk

7.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

#### Equalities and Human Resources

7.2 There are no specific Equalities or Human Resource implications arising from this report. Additional project management training is being scoped and assessed and will be considered subject to costs and budget provision.

#### Legal

7.3 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

### 8.0 Engagement and Consultation

8.1 None.

REPORT ENDS

Page 241

Ref	Project Name	Overview	Status since last report	Overview Reason	Risks	Issues	Budget	Schedule	Project Manager	Project Sponsor	Start Date	End Date	Revised End Date	Original Planned Budget	Approved Budget	Actual Spend
20000	Sheerwater Regeneration	Amber	→	The leisure and recreational facilities in the grounds of Bishop David Brown were completed in September 2021. Eastwood Leisure Centre was officially opened in October 2021. The purple phase of the project was completed in September 2021. Red and the copper phases are nearing completion. Yellow phase is under construction. In July 2023, Council agreed that the Development Agreement with Thamesway be brought to an end after the phases currently under construction. Following submission of Thamesway's business case funding is being drawn down to complete the red, copper and yellow phases. In October 2023 Council agreed to the refurbishment of circa 100 homes (financed by Capital Receipts). <u>Project is amber whilst the rescoping of the project is undertaken, part of which will be resetting the budget to reflect the revised scheme.</u>	Green	Green	Amber	Green	Paola Capel-Williams	Louise Strongitham	22/07/2018	30/09/2027	None.	£491,657,023	£491,657,023	£228,616,837
20019	Heather Farm SANG	Green	→	Land has been leased to the Council and leased back to Horsell Common Preservation Society to manage the site as a Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG). All the original financial and legal requirements are complete. The site opened in January 2016. The Council has provided funding for the expansion of car parking spaces to support the increasing use of the SANG. The Heather Farm management plan sets out certain infrastructure items to be delivered as part of the maintenance of the SANG. The project is now in the process of being closed. Related works will be managed as part of business as usual activity.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Tracey Haskins	Beverly Kuchar	31/10/2014	31/10/2019	31/12/2025	£1,719,856	£1,850,039	£1,800,206
20067	Developing A Favourable Conservation Status Licence	Amber	↓	The project was established working closely with Natural England (NE). Habitat improvement works were completed in 2020. Surveys are undertaken periodically. Joint working with NE to share best practice is ongoing and learning between the Woking pilot and the national district level licensing roll out by NE continues. The Council's Strategic Organisational Licence from NE was renewed in March 2023. <u>The project is now complete and is in the process of being closed down.</u>	Green	Green	Green	Amber	Tracey Haskins	Beverly Kuchar	31/08/2015	31/03/2021	31/12/2023	£50,000	£181,000	£147,789
20120	Rainwater Gardens	Red	→	First pilot rain garden completed successfully in Blackdown Close, Sheerwater, in February 2019. Alpha Road rain garden is also now complete. <u>Project status is red as the project in its current form will be closed once final accounts have been settled.</u> A new project will be initiated and led by SCC.	Red	Red	Red	Red	Faouzi Saffar	Beverly Kuchar	01/06/2018	31/03/2019	31/05/2025	£50,000	£50,000	£44,711
20122	CCTV Upgrade And New Control Room	Green	→	The Control Room has been constructed and is occupied by the Woking Car Park Team. We continue to work with Virgin Media in regards the fibre-network and to finish the CCTV upgrades.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Trevor Kimber	David Loveless	24/06/2019	31/03/2020	31/03/2024	£2,175,000	£2,175,000	£1,638,353
20124	Woking Integrated Transport	Green	→	Works to public realm outside the Railway Station, Church Path, Chapel Street, and improvements along High Street are complete. The retention period for these main contracted works has expired and payments with this contractor have been settled. Outstanding project works relate to the installation of bollards at Christchurch Way and a road safety audit. Work to implement these areas is ongoing, with completion expected in September 2024. Once complete project will be closed.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Louisa Calam	Beverly Kuchar	01/06/2016	31/12/2020	30/09/2024	£24,900,000	£31,023,600	£30,813,498
20226	Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) – Woking Town Centre	Red	→	<u>Project is red because of the financial risks and the viability of the scheme. A joint decision between WBC and Homes England to close the project and close out project costs has been reached and this was reported to Executive on the 5th October 2023.</u> Work is ongoing to finalise the Deed of Termination of the contract with Homes England which will enable WBC to recover project costs incurred to-date. The project will be closed once all outstanding actions have been completed.	Red	Red	Red	Red	Louisa Calam	Beverly Kuchar	21/03/2020	15/03/2024	31/03/2027	£115,000,000	£115,000,000	£45,788,461
20229	Car Park Management Systems	Green	→	All town centre car parks are now on the new management system within budget. The only remaining work is installation of the internal variable message signs. This work has started in the Yellow car park (Victoria Place).	Green	Green	Green	Green	Mark Tabner	Beverly Kuchar	01/11/2020	30/11/2021	31/03/2024	£1,980,000	£1,980,000	£1,714,699
20233	Play Area Repairs	Green	→	The play area resurfacing works commenced in March 2022. Work at eight sites were completed in 2022/23, with further sites to be completed as part of the extended project, subject to funding. A report outlining the approach to future refurbishment was considered by Overview and Scrutiny in January 2023 and supported by Executive in February 2023. The programme of works for 2023/24 included surfacing repair/refurbishment works at five play areas which have been completed. A list of proposed priorities for 2024/25 has been developed as part of the play area provision review. Funding has now been secured through the UKSPF and a detailed package of works will be drawn up against the available funding.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Arran Henderson	Beverly Kuchar	01/09/2021	30/09/2022	31/03/2025	£100,000	£162,512	£114,726
20246	Woking Youth Hub	Green	→	The funding application was approved by DWP and following a tender exercise, Surrey Care Trust appointed. The target support group are those aged 16 -25 and on benefits, who will be mentored and supported to access employment opportunities. The target for 2023/24 is to support 115 young people through this project.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Julie Meme	Louise Strongitham	01/05/2021	31/05/2024	None.	£197,443	£197,443 (fully funded by DWP)	£197,443
20263	Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleaning Contract Retender	Green	→	This project is to re-tender the Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleaning Contract. A Grounds Maintenance and Street Cleansing consultant has been recruited to support delivery and work is underway. The contract notice was published on 7th August 2023.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Mark Tabner	Beverly Kuchar	16/08/2021	31/03/2023	31/03/2025	£80,000	£80,000	£49,304
20267	Place, Branding and Marketing	Green	→	Development of the website through amalgamation of Woking Works, Celebrate Woking and WeareWoking sites is underway. Further refinement of the place brand logo is underway and creation of a group of stakeholders (known as the Place Board) is in it's infancy.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Andy Denner	Beverly Kuchar	18/11/2022	30/06/2024	None.	£100,000	£100,000	£65,000

Ref	Project Name	Overview	Status since last report	Overview Reason	Risks	Issues	Budget	Schedule	Project Manager	Project Sponsor	Start Date	End Date	Revised End Date	Original Planned Budget	Approved Budget	Actual Spend
20272	Midas House Refurbishment (2nd and 3rd Floor)	Green	→	This project relates to the reinstatement of parts of the second and third floor following the expiry of tenant leases. The previous tenants pay dilapidation to the Council to cover these costs. The third floor tenants have paid the dilapidation sum and the works have been completed. The second floor tenant has now paid the dilapidation costs and tenders for works are currently being appraised.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Tom Bardsley	David Loveless	01/04/2022	31/08/2022	30/06/2024	£300,000	£300,000	£40,846
20280	Midas House Export House District Heat And Cooling	Green	→	This project relates to connecting Midas House and Export House to the town centre district heating and cooling networks with the objective of reducing carbon emissions and improving the properties energy performance rating. The majority of this work was funded by a central government grant. The works have been substantially completed with both buildings being supplied by the district network for the last six months. Ongoing snagging and commissioning works should be completed by the end of the current heating season (March 2024), at which point the project will enter the 12 months retention period.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Mark Ferguson	David Loveless	01/03/2021	31/03/2023	31/03/2024	£4,627,689	£4,627,689	£3,613,431
20281	Victoria Place	Red	→	The retail and leisure elements of the Victoria Place development opened in Spring 2022 and now all but three units let (97% by area). The car parks opened at the same time and are operating successfully under WBC's management. The contractual arrangements between WBC and VSWL for the car park are to be resolved based upon a management contract. The Marches residential (build to rent) is managed by Native Residential and has stabilised at over 99% letting since opening in May 2022 with rents and occupancy ahead of business plan. <u>The Hilton Hotel is planned to be open in Summer 2024, however significant risks remain to the outstanding cladding remediation works due to weather events and labour market supply which may disrupt the programme.</u> Regular meetings between the contractor Sir Robert McAlpine (SRM) and the Victoria Square Woking Limited Board are being held on this key area. SRM, contractually responsible, is fully engaged with its sub-contractor to conclude the remedial work to the cladding system. The financial implications of the hotel delay and the delayed opening of the centre from November 2021 are the subject of ongoing contract discussions as part of final account negotiations. The Council is allowed to continue to access PWLB borrowing for capital costs to enable the scheme to be fully operational which incorporates the opening of the Hilton Hotel. The business case supporting the PWLB borrowing was reported to 16th November meeting of the Executive. Business Plans for 2024 are being prepared for reporting to the meeting of the Executive of the Council on 13th June 2024.	Red	Red	Green	Green	Kevin Foster	Julie Fisher	01/12/2016	30/04/2021	30/06/2024	£700,000,000	£745,000,000	£713,779,659
20291	Redevelopment Of Garages 1 To 12 Bonsey Lane Westfield	Red	→	The project was initially undertaken by Thamesway and then reassigned to WBC and NVH to redesign and progress through planning. The project received planning permission in March 2023 and the bid for grant funding was submitted to Homes England shortly after. However, Homes England did not approve the grant application due to significant concerns over project deliverability. <u>The project is no longer viable at the current time hence the red RAG status and the project closure remains in progress.</u>	Red	Red	Red	Red	Adam Browne	Louise Strongitharm	01/12/2021	31/12/2023	None.	£2,655,000	£2,655,000	£209,876
20300	Improvement And Recovery Programme – Fit for The Future	Amber	↓	There has been significant progress during this period. Public and staff consultations on the proposed changes along with Equality Impact Assessments to support decisions on service changes to make the £8.5m savings. The company governance framework is agreed and has been used to assess all companies. Commercial Protocol is in place along with supporting governance. A draft Asset Rationalisation Strategy and plan has been produced. The 2024/25 budget has been set which includes £8.5m savings. Now moving into the ninth month of the intervention and currently in the process of reviewing the improvement journey to date and planning the next phase of the four year plan. <u>Project status is amber as the scale and pace of change and the ability for staff to cope alongside delivering business as usual remains a significant concern.</u>	Amber	Amber	Green	Green	Lee Danson	Kevin Foster	06/01/2023	31/03/2025	25/05/2027	£3,517,479	£3,517,479	£748,622
20301	EV Charging Points	Green	→	This project will enable payments to be taken for the Electric Charging points currently in the Red Car Park and the Victoria Way Car Park. In addition, the payment operator will now be responsible for charger operations. A contractor has been selected and appointed to operate the payment system. The connected curb app has been installed and tested and charging for electricity use will commence from the 4th March.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Kyle Gellatly	David Loveless	01/09/2022	31/01/2023	31/03/2024	£30,000	£30,000	£0
20319	Egley Road Barn Site	Green	↑	This project relates to obtaining a planning application on the land south of Hoe Valley School on the Egley Road. Consultants have been appointed to develop the application.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Kyle Gellatly	David Loveless	26/03/2023	31/10/2023	31/05/2024	£130,000	£130,000	£37,288
20326	Former Scout Hut - Residential Planning Application	Green	→	The planning application has been submitted. A decision in regards to planning consent is expected in March 2024, however his might delayed by the potential need for further bat surveys.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Kyle Gellatly	David Loveless	01/03/2023	31/12/2023	31/03/2024	£25,000	£25,000	£9,948
20327	Westfield Avenue Compound - Residential Planning Application	Green	→	This project is for the preparation and submission of a Planning Application for a residential development of the Westfield Avenue Compound site, which will deliver 9 houses. A public consultation has been completed and the scheme design is now being finalised. The planning application was submitted in October 2023. Unforeseen expenditure has been incurred due to the need for Public Consultation, additional consultant costs, additional surveys as requested, and tree removal costs. The estimated value of the site with planning consent is £1.8m and is in the Council's pipeline of asset disposal for 2024. It is recommended that the increase in budget can be offset against capital receipts. The project budget of £60k will equal approx. 3.5% of the estimated capital receipt.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Kyle Gellatly	David Loveless	01/03/2023	31/12/2023	30/06/2024	£35,000	£60,000	£48,632

Ref	Project Name	Overview	Status since last report	Overview Reason	Risks	Issues	Budget	Schedule	Project Manager	Project Sponsor	Start Date	End Date	Revised End Date	Original Planned Budget	Approved Budget	Actual Spend
20340	UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Programme Management	Green	NEW	The UKSPF is an external grant from Government. WBC has been allocated funding of £1,000,000 covering a period of three financial years. Work to map, track, and monitor the funds is underway to enable reporting to DLUHC and other stakeholders.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Pino Mastromarco	Beverley Kuchar	02/10/2023	31/03/2025	None.	£1,000,000	£1,000,000	£0
20346	Woking Station Secure Cycle Parking	Green	→	Project has started, a contract has been awarded and pre-start meeting is scheduled for February 2024.	Green	Green	Green	Green	George Chisenga	David Loveless	01/05/2023	31/05/2024	None.	£40,000	£40,000 (funded by South Western Railway)	£0
20348	Channel Shift	Green	NEW	The IRP Channel Shift Project is designed to transform digital services, to deliver further efficiencies and improved customer service. Full project sign off is anticipated at the Executive on the 21st March 2024 which will confirm the release of funds.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Hannah Bonenham	Adam Walther	01/10/2023	31/12/2025	None.	£1,050,000	TBC	£0
<b>Projects at Practical Completion</b>																
10206	Playground Improvements Phase 4	Green	→	The Play Strategy has been agreed and priorities for improvements and refurbishments of play areas have been determined. Funding has been agreed for the remaining three play areas at Horsell Moor, Oakfield and Sutton Green. Works at Horsell Moor and Oakfield play areas were completed and reopened in August 2023. Refurbishment of Sutton Green Play Area is currently on hold pending a review of the Council's play area provision and updated investment programme. The retention period will end on the 30th June 2024. Once retentions are paid, this project will be closed. Any remaining works will be considered under future play requirements.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Arran Henderson	Beverley Kuchar	01/08/2007	30/04/2009	31/03/2024	£883,000	£693,155	£689,908
20146	Leisure Lagoon Modernisation	Green	→	Works are complete. The project was in retention until the end of November 2022. However a defect with part of the changing room floor has been highlighted which the contractor is working to resolve. The project will be closed once the defects have been addressed.	Green	Green	Green	Green	David Loveless	Beverley Kuchar	01/06/2017	30/04/2018	30/06/2020	£800,000	£1,855,000	£1,797,746
20259	New Town Centre Signage - Wayfinding	Green	→	Nine navigational totems are in place. Project is substantially complete and has now been put into retention until 31st May 2024.	Green	Green	Green	Green	George Chisenga	Beverley Kuchar	01/10/2021	31/12/2021	31/05/2023	£250,000	£250,000	£109,126
20266	Goldsworth Park Retail Centre Car Park Works	Green	→	This project is for repairs, surfacing works and white lining to areas of Goldsworth Park Retail Centre car park. This project was in retention until August 2022. The contractor is required to return to complete a small section of work and once done, the project will be closed.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Vanessa Tabner	David Loveless	01/01/2022	30/04/2022	31/05/2022	£65,505	£65,505	£60,526
20269	Community Meals Relocation To Monument Way	Green	→	Project is now complete and was delivered within schedule and budget. The retention period ended on the 30th June 2023. A defects meeting has been held with the main contractor and final remedial works have been completed. Final payments are being processed after which the project will be closed.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Pino Mastromarco	Louise Strongitharm	01/11/2021	29/04/2022	31/08/2022	£361,000	£361,000	£359,064
20303	Dukes Court Office Suite Refurbishment	Green	→	This project relates to the refurbishment of a number of void tenant suites at Dukes Court. Works are funded by dilapidation contributions from previous tenants. Works have included new ceilings, lighting, decoration and carpets which have been completed. This project was practically completed on the 15th September 2023 and will be in retention until the 14th September 2024.	Green	Green	Green	Green	Mark Ferguson	David Loveless	01/04/2022	31/10/2022	29/09/2023	£265,000	£272,212	£272,026
<b>Projects Closed During Reporting Period</b>																
10297	Local Development Framework	N/a	N/a	Completed and now closed.	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	Jill Peet	Beverley Kuchar	01/04/2010	01/12/2014	31/10/2023	£ 389,550	£ 689,550	£ 636,513
20186	Woking Park- CCTV Installation	N/a	N/a	Completed and now closed.	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	Trevor Kimber	David Loveless	01/12/2017	31/05/2018	None.	£ 235,000	£ 235,000	£ 199,700

Page 243

KEY	
Green	Project is progressing according to agreed plans and targets and is within all tolerances.
Amber	Project contains areas of concern which are impacting on delivery and may need remedial action.
Red	Project is failing in one or more areas and is in need of immediate attention.
Blue	Project on closure, had variations previously highlighted.
↗	Overview RAG Flag has improved since the last Project Monitoring Report.
→	Overview RAG Flag is the same as the last Project Monitoring Report.
↘	Overview RAG Flag is worse than the last Project Monitoring Report.
Revised End	Indicates that CLT has authorised an extension to the schedule of a project. If a project exceeds its budget/timescale and a formal request for an extension to either is agreed, the RAG flags will be baselined against the revised budget/timescale.





By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted



By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

