



COUNCIL

28 March 2024

To: The Mayor and Members of
WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL

SUMMONS TO A MEETING

You are hereby summoned to attend an ORDINARY MEETING of the COUNCIL to be held in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Gloucester Square, Woking on THURSDAY, THE TWENTY EIGHTH DAY OF MARCH 2024 at 7.00 pm to transact the business specified in the agenda overleaf.

JULIE FISHER
Chief Executive

Civic Offices,
Woking

NOTE: Filming Council Meetings

Please note the meeting will be filmed and broadcast live and subsequently as an archive on the Council's website (www.woking.gov.uk). The images and sound recording may also be used for training purposes within the Council. 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.



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AGENDA

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST. (Pages 7 - 8)

- (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 9 - 38)

To approve the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 8 February and 4 March 2024, as published.

4. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS.

5. URGENT BUSINESS.

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

6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF PUBLIC. (Pages 39 - 40)

To receive questions from Members of the Public of which due notice has been given.

7. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL.

To deal with written questions submitted by Members of the Council. Copies of the questions and of the draft replies (which are subject to amendment by the Leader of the Council) will be published shortly before the meeting.

8. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE.

In accordance with Standing Orders, the Council to receive any announcements from the Leader of the Council (or their nominated spokesperson), Committee Chairmen and/or the Chief Executive.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE. (Pages 41 - 42)

To receive and consider recommendations from the Executive.

9a. The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress - November 2023 to March 2024 EXE24-009 (Pages 43 - 100)

9b. Companies Governance Framework - Shareholder Executive Committee EXE24-025 (Pages 101 - 112)

10. REVIEW OF COUNCIL MEETING STRUCTURE WBC24-019 (Pages 113 - 162)

11. ANNUAL REPORT BY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES WBC24-015 (Pages 163 - 176)

12. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WBC24-016. (Pages 177 - 182)

13. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ELECTIONS AND ELECTORAL REGISTRATION REVIEW PANEL WBC24-014. (Pages 183 - 196)

14. ANNUAL REPORT ON MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT WBC24-013. (Pages 197 - 210)

15. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024-25 WBC24-003. (Pages 211 - 216)

16. NOTICES OF MOTION.

To deal with any motions received from Members of the Council in accordance with Standing Orders.

16a Councillor P Graves - Climate and Ecology Bill.

This motion proposes that Woking Borough Council notes that:

The Climate and Ecology Bill was last introduced in the House of Commons 10 May 2023.

The Bill is backed by **130** cross-party MPs and Peers, **237** local authorities.

The CE Bill requires the Government to:

1. Deliver an environmental plan for the climate and nature;
2. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 1.5°C to ensure emissions are reduced in line with the best chance of meeting the UK's Paris Agreement obligations;
3. Halt and reverse the decline in nature and set it measurably on the path to recovery by 2030;
4. Take responsibility for our overseas carbon and industrial footprint
5. Prioritise nature in decision-making and end fossil fuel production and imports as rapidly as possible;
6. Provide re-training for those people currently working in fossil fuel industries; and
7. Give the British people a say in finding a fair way forward via a temporary, independent and representative *Climate & Nature Assembly*, as part of creating consensus.

And that Woking Council therefore resolves to:

1. Support the Climate and Ecology Bill;
2. Inform residents and inform local media of this decision.
3. Write to **our MP** to inform him that this motion has been passed, and urge him to sign up to support the CE Bill;
4. Write to Zero Hour, expressing **WBC's** support.

AGENDA ENDS

Date Published - 20 March 2024

Note: At the close of the meeting the Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor Raja, would like to invite the following to join him in the parlour:-

Councillors Aziz, Akberali, Barker, Boote, Caulfield, Davis, Dorsett, Forster, Hussain, Jordan, Leach, Lyons, Morales, Morley, Oades together with Officers attending the meeting.

Agenda Item 2

Schedule Referred to in Declaration of Interests

Council-appointed directorships

Kevin Foster, Strategic Director – Corporate Resources	
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	

Louise Strongitharm, Strategic Director – Communities	
Rutland Woking (Carhouse Lane) Limited	Rutland Woking (Residential) Limited
Rutland (Woking) Limited	

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

Council 08 February 2024

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
BOROUGH COUNCIL OF WOKING

held on 8 February 2024

Present:

Cllr M I Raja (Mayor)
Cllr L Morales (Deputy Mayor)

Cllr H Akberali	Cllr D Jordan
Cllr T Aziz	Cllr A Kirby
Cllr A-M Barker	Cllr R Leach
Cllr A Boote	Cllr L Lyons
Cllr J Brown	Cllr C Martin
Cllr G Cosnahan	Cllr J Morley
Cllr K Davis	Cllr S Mukherjee
Cllr S Dorsett	Cllr E Nicholson
Cllr W Forster	Cllr S Oades
Cllr P Graves	Cllr L Rice
Cllr S Greentree	Cllr D Roberts
Cllr S Hussain	Cllr T Spenser
Cllr A Javaid	Cllr M Sullivan
Cllr I Johnson	

Absent: Councillor A Caulfield

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Caulfield.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

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 companies were listed in an attached schedule. The interests were such that Mr Foster could advise 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 companies were listed in an attached schedule. The interests were such that Mrs Strongitharm could advise on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Head of Transformation, Digital and Customer, Adam Walther, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which he was a Council-appointed

director. The companies were listed in an attached schedule. The interests were such that Mr Walther could advise on those items.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor I Johnson declared an interest in item 9b – 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.

3. MINUTES.

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 30 November 2023 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

4. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS.

The Mayor reported on recent events he had attended across the Borough. These had included an evening with Grayson Perry at the Lightbox for an exhibition of his artwork, a lunch with the Chobham Rugby Club Supporters Group and the launch of the United Reform House Project, a community interest company created to serve the community. The Mayor had also attended the annual young musician of year competition, hosted at St Johns Church, and the Woking Street Angels Commission Service at the Woking United Reform Church.

Forthcoming events included the Mayor's Ball which would be held on 27 April 2024.

5. URGENT BUSINESS.

No items of Urgent Business were considered.

6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF PUBLIC.

Two questions had been received from a member of public. The questions, together with the replies from the Leader of the Council, were presented as follows:

Question 1 – Nikki Roberts on behalf of Surrey Coalition of Disabled People

"Many of the proposed service cuts or reductions will have an impact on Disabled People. These proposals will disproportionately affect this population.

Please confirm if Woking Borough Council have asked central government to make up the financial shortfall that disabled people will face by the proposed Woking Borough Council service cuts?

If not, how can we be assured that Disabled People living in Woking won't have to pay the additional costs they potentially face? Surrey Coalition of Disabled People are happy to collaborate with Woking Borough Council to discuss solutions to ensure that Disabled People aren't disproportionately affected."

Supporting Statement

“Disabled People in Woking will be disproportionately affected by the potential threat of closure or changes to the following services:

- community transport scheme
- community centres and pavilions
- swimming pool
- citizen’s advice

Without the community transport scheme which offers a reduced rate of travel, the independence of Disabled People will be significantly reduced as the cost of taxis, in particular wheelchair accessible taxis, are unaffordable for some.

The community centres, pavilions and swimming pool are a lifeline to some, providing social contact and keeping people mobile.

Without citizen’s advice, Disabled People will not be able to access support with completing forms such as PIP. Being unable to access benefits, will have a detrimental impact on finances and wellbeing.

It’s well known that life costs more for disabled people. Disabled households with at least 1 disabled adult or child, face extra costs of £975 - £1122 a month on average. (Source Extra Costs | Disability charity Scope UK) The disability pay gap is 13.8% and has been fairly consistent for a long time Disability pay gaps in the UK - Office for National Statistics (ons.gov.uk) with only 7% of disabled workers earning over £30,000 in 2022 compared to 54% of non-disabled workers.

Our Cost-of-Living report published last year showed the disproportionate effect that it is having on Disabled People. 76% of Disabled People surveyed didn’t turn on their heating last year as they couldn’t afford to and 45% went without food. <https://surreycoalition.org.uk/cost-of-living-crisis/>”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“I’d like to start by thanking Surrey Coalition of Disabled People for the question and recognising their important work across Woking and beyond.

The Council faces a critical financial shortfall owing to its historic investment strategy. On Wednesday 7 June 2023, our Section 151 Officer issued Woking Borough Council (WBC) with a Section 114 Notice in response to the unprecedented financial challenges facing the authority. The 114 notice sets out how the Council faces a budget deficit of £1.2bn.

The Council is in discussions with Government around the handling of its historic debt, with further detail around these arrangements due for consideration at the next Council meeting. However, a key principle of seeking support from Government is that the Council must take all possible steps to manage budget pressures and restore long term financial stability, and that the Council should, wherever possible, mitigate the impacts on those least able to pay.

Restoring long-term financial stability means that the Council needs to learn to live within its means and that it can no longer fund non-statutory services. However, the Council has been working hard to find alternative solutions for such services which avoids closure wherever possible. For example:

- Pool in the Park – the Council is proposing to increase fees, bringing them in line with neighbouring pools, so that the facility can better cover its costs and remain open.
- Community Centres/Sports Pavilions – the Council is introducing a Community Asset Transfer scheme to enable these facilities to be transferred to local groups, enabling important services to be maintained. The Council has also allocated UK Shared Prosperity Funding to support these transitions.
- Citizens Advice Woking (CAW)– Whilst the Council can no longer grant fund voluntary organisations, funding will still be available for specific projects such as the Court Desk Service and Refugee Hub. The Council has also allocated £30k UK Shared Prosperity Funding to support CAW to change its operating model, supporting its transition away from local authority funding so that it can continue to provide advice services. The Council is also looking at how it can utilise the Government’s Hardship Fund to support signposting to the range of advice services throughout Woking, including those provided by local faith groups.
- Woking Community Transport (WCT) – the Council is working with WCT and Surrey County Council to find a solution where WCT can continue to provide some level of Dial-a-Ride service. The Council will also signpost users to alternative providers, including but not limited to:
 - Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service run by the NHS.
 - A new White bus service that provides services to St Peters and Ashford hospitals.
 - The Good Neighbourhood scheme that provides free transport to St Peters.
 - Local taxi providers that provide wheelchair access.

I hope this response, and the corresponding Equalities Impact Assessments, provides assurance that the Council has looked to mitigate the potential negative impacts of its budget proposals wherever possible. However, the Council does recognise that, in light of the severity of its financial position, it cannot mitigate against all negative impacts.”

Question 2 – Nikki Roberts on behalf of Surrey Coalition of Disabled People

“Following the publication of the Equality Impact Assessments (EIA), will Woking Borough Council be fulfilling its duty under the Care Act 2014 if the proposals are approved?”

The Care Act 2014 states people are entitled to:

1. receive services that prevent their care needs from becoming more serious, or delay the impact of their needs
2. can get the information and advice they need to make good decisions about care and support

3. have a range of provision of high quality, appropriate services to choose from.”

Supporting Statement

“Community Transport

The mitigation in the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) only cites hospital visits and negates to include GP appointments, mental health support, or community/social activities.

The additional cost and difficulty in sourcing wheelchair accessible transport has not been considered. Of those (over 2,000) people who needed extra support to use the transport, there will not be a service to help them. Additionally, will the current community transport users meet the criteria for hospital transport?

Removing the transport (approx. £42 per person per year) will cost more in the longer term. For example, missed medical appointments, reduced footfall in the town centre.

By removing community transport with no direct replacement the council are in jeopardy of not fulfilling their duties under the Care Act 2014.

Citizen’s Advice

The EIA states that 63% of Citizen Advice clients are disabled or have a long-term health condition. Disabled people can not access the information and advice they need to make good decisions about their care as outlined in the Care Act.

The mitigation covers a provision for debt advice but there are other reasons people contact Citizen Advice. For example, housing.

Pool in the Park

Pool in the Park is increasing costs as well as reducing the length of the Disabled Swimming Session will be reduced by 33%.

Many of the mitigations suggest the voluntary sector will provide additional support with less money. This will not be possible particularly as it’s proposed the community grants programme is withdrawn in Woking.”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“Again, I would like to thank Surrey Coalition for the Disabled for this question.

Woking Borough Council continues to meet its statutory obligations. Whilst the Council recognises that leisure services and community centres are highly valued by residents, these are discretionary services. There is also no statutory requirement for District Councils to provide funding to voluntary groups.

The provisions of the Care Act will continue to be met in Woking by Surrey County Council, who have responsibility for the delivery of Adult Social Care in Surrey. Woking Borough Council will also continue to do all it can to support the Act and ensure wellbeing, advice, and preventive services are retained in Woking.

The response to question one details the actions that the Council has taken to ensure that, wherever possible, such services can continue to operate without Council funding. This includes working with local interested parties to enable important assets, such as community centres and sports pavilions, to be transferred to community ownership. The Council is also allocating part of the Government's Hardship Fund to ensuring that advice services are retained for vulnerable people, whether that be through Citizens Advice Woking or other local providers. The Council is also committed to working with Woking Community Transport, so that some provision for Dial-A-Ride services can be maintained across Woking, whilst at the same time signposting residents to alternative provision."

7. PETITION - ST MARY'S COMMUNITY CENTRE, BYFLEET WBC24-010.

The Council was presented with a petition which asked the Council to reject the proposed plan to relocate the Elderly Day Care Facilities and fully consult with local residents on any future proposals regarding to St Mary's Community Centre, Byfleet. The number of signatures exceeded the threshold required for a petition to be referred to a meeting of Council and accordingly the Petitioner had been invited to present the petition at the meeting of Council.

The petition had been submitted in the following terms:

"St Mary's Community Centre in Byfleet has been a haven for our elderly, frail, and vulnerable residents. The day care facilities include care and assistance from support staff, hot drinks and a hot midday meal, social and gentle exercise activities, and a return journey on the accessible Bustler bus.

The services are vital in ensuring their well-being and social integration in our multigenerational community space. In addition, the community centre is more than just a facility; it represents familiarity and comfort for its users who have built relationships with staff members and other users of the building including families and children over the years.

A sudden change in environment can be detrimental especially for those suffering from cognitive and physical impairments such as dementia and visual impairments. We, the undersigned, are opposed to the proposed relocation of the Elderly Day Centre Facilities away from St Mary's Community Centre, Byfleet. We call on Woking Borough Council to:

- 1. Reject the proposed plan to relocate the Elderly Day Care Facilities; and*
- 2. Fully consult with local residents on any future proposals regarding to St Mary's Community Centre, Byfleet"*

The Petitioner spoke in support of the services currently provided at St Mary's Centre, arguing that the plans to relocate services were insufficient and that the users did not want to use other venues. The proposed date of 31 March 2024 for changes to the Centre was considered unreasonable and it was emphasised that the Centre was at the heart of the local community.

The Members of the Council were invited to ask questions of the Petitioner to provide clarification on the concerns and proposals of those who had supported the petition. It was noted that a number of community groups had expressed an interest in running services from the Centre including a café based on the current service. However, it was felt that the

deadline of 31 March 2024 was too short and that a longer transfer period would be needed, allowing time for the community to raise funds and apply for grant schemes.

The Mayor thanked the Petitioner for her presentation.

The Council moved to the debate, with the Portfolio Holder explaining the background to the position the Council was in and the direction that the Authority could not continue to fund non-statutory services, including the Borough's community centres. The Council was seeking to mitigate the impact on residents and was working with partners including Byfleet United Charities and local Churches. Reference was made to the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy which the Council had been quick to draw up and the Portfolio Holder confirmed that funding of £140,000 had been committed to ensure the Centre could remain open while the CAT arrangements were put in place.

A number of Members expressed sympathy with those who would be affected by the proposals, suggesting that the Council should allow more time for the community to develop proposals to retain services at the Centre in the future. With this in mind, Councillor Boote moved and Councillor Brown seconded a motion to have the effect of excluding St Mary's from the proposals before the Council or providing an additional three months from 31 March 2024 onwards to enable the Community to put in place new arrangements. Councillor Boote suggested that the cost of the proposal would be in the region of £25,000 together with utility costs.

The Members debated the motion, with the Leader of the Council drawing attention to the fact that the proposals had been considered at a Member briefing, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive, at which concerns had not been raised. The point was made that further information would be required before the Council could make a decision such as retaining the services for an additional three months.

Before moving to the vote, the Chief Executive clarified that the Council would need to vote on whether they welcomed the ambition of the petition. If supported, a proposal would be brought to the next meeting of Council, on 4 March 2024, which would include the implications of extending the services at St Mary's beyond 31 March 2024.

On this basis, the Mayor advised that, in accordance with Standing Order 10.8, the motion to support the petition and bring a proposal to the next meeting of Council would be put to a vote. The names of Members voting for and against were recorded as follows:

In favour: Councillors H Akberali, T Aziz, A Boote, J Brown, G Cosnahan, K Davis, S Dorsett, S Hussain, A Javid, D Jordan, L Lyons, S Mukherjee, S Oades and T Spencer.

Total in favour: 14

Against: None

Present not voting: The Mayor and Councillors A-M Barker, W Forster, P Graves, S Greentree, I Johnson, A Kirby, R Leach, C Martin, L Morales, J Morley, E Nicholson, L Rice, D Roberts and M Sullivan.

Total present not voting: 15

The motion were therefore carried by 14 votes in favour and no votes against.

RESOLVED

That the petition be welcomed and a proposal be brought to the meeting of Council on 4 March 2024 exploring the possibility of extending the services of St Mary's Centre beyond 31 March 2024 to provide additional time for local community organisations interested in providing future services at the Centre.

8. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE.

The Leader of the Council made an announcement around her decision to become a Councillor, and her desire to support the local communities and residents. The last year had, however, challenged what she and fellow Councillors set out to do as elected Members. The Government intervention and Section 114 statement had led to a series of difficult decisions. Later on the agenda, the Council would be asked to agree the General Fund Budget and savings proposals, recognising that it had been necessary for the Council to reduce services and staffing levels.

Despite the need to find savings of £8.4m, the Council had managed to retain some services and provide some funds for service changes, including funding for Citizens Advice Woking. It was further confirmed that Woking Bustler would be able to provide a limited service in the future and that, subject to the General Fund Budget being agreed, the Pool in the Park would remain open.

The Chairs of the Committees were invited to indicate whether they wished to make a statement. Councillor Brown, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, highlighted the importance of good scrutiny, good governance and transparency. Councillor Brown referred to the decision of the Executive on 18 January 2024 to agree the distribution of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), and advised that both residents and Councillors had expressed questions about the process that had led to the decisions made, including the decision to provide one organisation with funding of £130,000 whilst another organisation only received £30,000, with many organisations receiving no funding. Concern was also expressed that organisations had not been consulted on the opportunity to apply for funds.

In view of these concerns, Councillor Brown advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would undertake post-decision scrutiny of the process followed for the distribution of the UKSPF.

Councillor Brown referred to past reports and investigations which had found that the Council had wrongfully agreed policies without effective scrutiny, and expressed concern over an amendment to the General Fund Budget proposals which had only been published on the previous day. Councillor Brown therefore intended to refer the decisions of the Council to support Citizens Advice Woking for post-decision scrutiny.

No further announcements were made.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE WBC24-005.

The Council had before it a report on the recommendations from the Executive, setting out the extracts from the minutes of the meetings of the Executive held on 18 January 2024

and 1 February 2024. In accordance with the Constitution, the recommendations were deemed to have been moved and seconded.

9A. COMMUNITY ASSET TRANSFER POLICY EXE24-012.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Centres, Councillor Nicholson, introduced the recommendations of the Executive for the adoption of the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Policy. The CAT Policy had been drafted with support from Local Partnerships and the Local Government Association (LGA).

The policy would enable local community organisations to run facilities which were not considered statutory services by the Government such as community centres and sports pavilions. The measures would enable the Council to create savings whilst retaining those assets for social benefit. Included with the proposals was the creation of a resource to allow the Council to work closely with local groups and help them through the CAT process. The resource would be funded under proposals outlined in a report later on the agenda.

The proposals for the policy were generally welcomed by the Council. The Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee advised that the policy would be discussed by the Committee which would seek to monitor the performance of the Centres which had been transferred. In response to concerns raised, the Portfolio Holder explained that only community groups would be able to apply to run the facilities; the policy did not allow for private enterprises to become involved. It was added that a number of community groups had already expressed interest in the opportunities the policy would provide.

RESOLVED

That the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Policy, as attached at Appendix 1 to the Executive report, be adopted.

9B. GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2024-25 AND PROPOSED SAVINGS EXE24-001.

Councillor Roberts, Portfolio Holder for Finance, introduced the recommendations of the Executive in respect of the General Fund Budget for the coming year which identified service savings of £8.4m. In doing so, the Portfolio Holder drew attention to an amendment by Councillor Forster which had been published on the previous day.

It was noted that, despite the savings, the Council still had a deficit on its business-as-usual services, even before the debt issue was taken into account. The deficit in the coming year was £12.4m, though most of this could be attributed to interest on debt and the deficit on the commercial estate.

Further savings would have to be identified for the remainder of the five-year Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) period and significant work had been undertaken with the Government on how the Council could set a legal budget given the scale of its debt problem. Without the support of the Government, the Council's budget deficit could reach up to £785million. The size and complexity of the debt was such that the Council would have to push back its final decisions on setting the budget and Council Tax to an Extraordinary meeting of Council on 4 March 2024. Details of the Government's support, which would include capitalisation and the treatment of the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP), would be presented to the Council at the Extraordinary meeting.

Following the introduction by the Portfolio Holder, Members discussed the implications of the proposals, noting that the scale of the debt was such that all services of the Council had to be reviewed. The measures proposed would however take the Council to a position where it was able to operate within its means. The Leader of the Council referred to the funding proposal for Citizens Advice Woking which would provide support going forward, and to Woking Community Transport which would continue to provide a transport service to the community centres and a reduced dial-a-ride service. It was further confirmed that the Pool in the Park and the Lightbox would remain open.

Councillor Will Forster moved and Councillor Barker seconded an amendment, details of which had been published on the previous day. The amendment proposed the addition of two new recommendations as set out below:

- “(iv) in accordance with paragraph 12.4, a hardship co-ordinator post is proposed. Subject to final agreement with Citizens Advice Woking the role will be employed by them. This post would be employed by CAW and funded by the Council. It would support the transition of CAW’s business model and create a network of support and advice, utilising the voluntary capacity in other charities and voluntary organisations across the borough. This will be funded to the value of £50,000 for 2024/25 from the provision made for hardship as a result of the level of Council Tax increase proposed.
- (v) this Council agrees to ask residents to voluntarily contribute to the Woking Community Fund to support the Borough’s voluntary sector. The Woking Community Fund is managed independently by the Community Foundation for Surrey and works closely with the Council to understand resident needs. Residents will be asked to indicate whether their donation should go to particular priorities such as hardship advice, transport for the vulnerable or more general priorities.”

Councillor Forster spoke in support of his amendment, highlighting the importance of the role of hardship co-ordinator and the opportunity for residents to contribute to the Woking Community Fund which provided financial support for the Borough’s voluntary sector. The amendment had been discussed with both Officers and Citizens Advice Woking before being submitted.

The amendment was debated by the Council and it was noted that, whilst the proposals would not solve all the issues faced by Citizens Advice Woking, it was an innovative approach which would help both the Charity and residents.

The ambition to support the Charity was welcomed although it was noted that no funding provision had been identified for other key charities such as the York Road Project. Concern was expressed that Members had not been given sufficient notice of the amendment to fully consider the implications and reach a decision. The funding for the post of hardship co-ordinator would be ringfenced and would be provided through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. As part of the debate, it was suggested that the use of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund should be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Mayor advised that, in accordance with Standing Orders, a vote would need to be taken on whether the meeting should continue beyond 10.30pm. Accordingly, the Mayor invited Members to indicate whether they supported the extension and the names of Members voting were recorded as follows:

In favour: Councillors H Akberali, T Aziz, A-M Barker, G Cosnahan, S Dorsett, W Forster, P Graves, S Greentree, S Hussain, A

Kirby, L Lyons, C Martin, L Morales, J Morley, S Mukherjee, E Nicholson, L Rice, D Roberts, T Spenser and M Sullivan.

Total in favour: 20

Against: Councillors A Boote, J Brown, K Davis, A Javaid and D Jordan.

Total against: 5

Present not voting: The Mayor and Councillors R Leach and S Oades.

Total present not voting: 3

The proposal to extend the meeting beyond 10.30pm was therefore carried by 20 votes in favour and 5 votes against.

Before returning to the debate on the amendment, the Mayor advised that a five minute adjournment would be held.

On returning to the debate, the Leader of the Council outlined the background to the amendment and the different options which had been considered. Councillor Forster was offered the right of reply and responded to the many points raised during the debate, highlighting the benefits of the amendment and recognising the role Citizens Advice Woking had in supporting vulnerable residents of Woking.

Following the right of reply, the Mayor advised that, in accordance with Standing Order 10.8, the amendment – to include two additional resolutions (iv) and (v) – would be put to a vote. The names of Members voting for and against the amendment were recorded as follows:

In favour: Councillors T Aziz, A-M Barker, G Cosnahan, W Forster, P Graves, S Greentree, A Javaid, A Kirby, R Leach, L Lyons, C Martin, L Morales, J Morley, S Mukherjee, E Nicholson, L Rice, D Roberts, T Spenser and M Sullivan.

Total in favour: 19

Against: Councillors H Akberali, J Brown, K Davis, S Dorsett and S Hussain.

Total against: 5

Present not voting: The Mayor and Councillors A Boote, D Jordan and S Oades.

Total present not voting: 4

The amendment was therefore carried by 19 votes in favour and 5 votes against.

The Councillors returned to the debate on the substantive recommendations before the Council. Further concerns over the extent of the service cuts were raised, highlighting the impact on the most vulnerable residents of the Borough. Reference was also made to the extent of cuts within the Authority, noting that in region of sixty staff were being made redundant.

The Portfolio Holder responded to the points raised during the debate and explained the background to the position the Council found itself in. The proposals before the Council would be a step towards the recovery of the Authority, recognising that substantial ongoing support from the Government would be required for many years.

In accordance with Standing Order 10.8, the substantive recommendations, including the two additional recommendations, were put to a vote. The names of Members voting for and against the recommendations were recorded as follows:

In favour:	Councillors A-M Barker, G Cosnahan, W Forster, P Graves, S Greentree, A Kirby, R Leach, L Lyons, C Martin, L Morales, J Morley, S Mukherjee, E Nicholson, S Oades, L Rice, D Roberts, T Spenser and M Sullivan.
Total in favour:	18
Against:	Councillors T Aziz, J Brown, K Davis, S Dorsett, S Hussain and A Javid.
Total against:	6
Present not voting:	The Mayor and Councillors H Akberali, A Boote and D Jordan.
Total present not voting:	4

The recommendations were therefore carried by 18 votes in favour and 6 votes against.

RESOLVED

- 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;
- (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;
- (iv) in accordance with paragraph 12.4, a hardship co-ordinator post is proposed. Subject to final agreement with Citizens Advice Woking the role will be employed by them. This post would be employed by CAW and funded by the Council. It would support the transition of CAW's business model and create a network of support and advice, utilising the voluntary capacity in other charities and voluntary organisations across the borough. This will be funded to the value of £50,000 for 2024/25 from the provision made for hardship as a result of the level of Council Tax increase proposed; and

- (v) this Council agrees to ask residents to voluntarily contribute to the Woking Community Fund to support the Borough's voluntary sector. The Woking Community Fund is managed independently by the Community Foundation for Surrey and works closely with the Council to understand resident needs. Residents will be asked to indicate whether their donation should go to particular priorities such as hardship advice, transport for the vulnerable or more general priorities.

9C HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGETS 2024-25 EXE24-002.

Councillor Roberts, Portfolio Holder for Finance, introduced the recommendations of the Executive in respect of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budgets 2024-25. Under the proposals, the rent levels would increase from 1 April 2024 by 7.7% based on September CPI of 6.7% and in line with the advice of the Government. Total rental income was forecast to increase by circa £1.79 million to circa £20 million, excluding void losses.

It was noted that the HRA was forecast to make an estimated surplus of some £960,000 in the coming year, the first step towards the sustainable maintenance of the housing stock. The budget included an increase in interest costs that would be incurred from borrowing an additional £2.5 million to support the capital programme for housing. This would be necessary to fund high risk fire safety remedial works, along with a number of Decent Homes improvements.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Johnson, spoke in support of the recommendations, highlighting the positive outcomes the proposed measures would deliver. It was noted that a survey of tenants would be sent out on the following day, seeking their views on the level of services provided.

A few concerns were raised during the debate over the company responsible for housing repairs and its response to tenants requiring essential repairs. However it was acknowledged that the historic issues were being addressed and that tenants were starting to see improvements come through. Councillor Johnson responded to the points raised, acknowledging that the new housing repairs team had taken on a large number of issues when awarded the contract.

The recommendations were agreed nem con.

RESOLVED

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

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

9D CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023-24 TO 2027-28 EXE24-003.

The recommendations of the Executive in respect of the Capital Programme 2023-24 to 2027-28 were introduced by the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Roberts. The programme set out the investments required to deliver the Council's key strategies and objectives over the period, with focus shifting to housing and putting in place a plan of work to address fire safety remedial work in the Council's housing stock.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Johnson, reiterated the need for the works and the benefits the programme would deliver.

The proposals were welcomed and the recommendations of the Council were agreed nem con.

RESOLVED

- 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.

9E FUTURE OF BROCKHILL EXE24-017.

The Executive had considered a report on the future of Brockhill Extra Care Housing which had set out the results of a recent consultation. The Portfolio Holder for Community Centres, Councillor Nicholson, introduced the proposals of the Executive, which recommended the closure of Brockhill in view of the significant capital expenditure required on fire safety remedial works, a full heating system replacement and limited investment over the years. An estimated capital investment of £5.8m was needed over the coming ten years and the building no longer met 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.

Each of the twenty-two residents currently housed at Brockhill would have a bespoke support package as part of the closure and would have opportunities to view and consider alternative accommodation opportunities. Several residents were already in the process of moving to new accommodation.

The recommendations were debated and it was noted that the possibility of Surrey County Council taking on the building had been explored. However, as the Centre did not meet current standards, the County Council had not been able to take on Brockhill.

The Portfolio Holder responded to points raised during the debate, following which the proposals were agreed nem con.

RESOLVED

- 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.

10. DESIGNATION OF POLLING PLACE - WARD OF HEATHLANDS WBC24-009.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Barker, introduced a report which proposed a change to the designation of a polling place for the Barnsbury polling district (D5) in the Heathlands Ward. The existing polling place – the Lighthouse Barnsbury – was not accessible to electors with a disability and efforts to install a permanent ramp had been unsuccessful.

The Council was therefore asked to agree the designation of Woking Sportsbox as the polling place, to take effect in advance of the 2024 Woking Borough Council, Police and Crime Commissioner and Parliamentary General elections.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the Council's appreciation be expressed to The Lighthouse Barnsbury for its assistance in recent years; and
- (ii) the Woking Sportsbox be designated as the polling place for the Barnsbury polling district (D5) in the Heathlands Ward.

11. APPOINTMENT OF DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND SECTION 151 OFFICER WBC24-004.

The Council was invited to confirm the appointment of a Chief Finance Officer (Strategic Director for Finance) for the Authority, responsible for a number of statutory duties and the proper administration of the Council's finances. It was noted that a cross-party Member Appointments Panel had been established to oversee the appointment. The Member Appointments Panel had met on Friday, 2 February and had unanimously resolved to recommend to Council that Mr Stephen Fitzgerald should be appointed to the position of Strategic Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer). A summary of Mr Fitzgerald's background was included in the report.

The Members noted the comprehensive appointments process and welcomed the recommendations of the Appointments Panel.

RESOLVED

- That Mr Stephen Fitzgerald is appointed as Strategic Director for Finance (Section 151 Officer)

12. APPOINTMENT OF RETURNING OFFICER WBC24-008.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Barker, introduced a report proposing the appointment of a Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer, roles normally held by the Chief Executive or a member of the Corporate Leadership Team.

In light of the recent resignation of the Chief Executive, Julie Fisher, who currently held the positions, it was proposed that the Director of Legal and Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer, Gareth John, took on the roles.

RESOLVED

- That (i) Gareth John be appointed Electoral Registration Officer under Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 with effect from 9 February 2024; and

- (ii) Gareth John be appointed Returning Officer for local government elections under Section 35 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 with effect from 9 February 2024.

13. AMENDMENT TO CALENDAR OF MEETINGS WBC24-006.

The Council was invited to agree an amendment to the 2024/25 Calendar of meetings which has been proposed as part of an overall review of the Council's Committee arrangements, the full outcomes of which would be reported to Council in March 2024.

In view of the need to make suitable arrangements in advance of the meeting of Council in March, Councillors were asked to agree that the meeting of Council scheduled for 16 May 2024, at which the Mayor and Deputy Mayor would traditionally be appointed, was cancelled and that the items of business were transferred to the first business meeting of Council at which the appointment of Committees was confirmed. In doing so, the meeting of Council on 20 May 2024 would formally become the 'Annual Meeting'.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the Calendar of meetings for 2024/25 be amended with the removal of the Council meeting on 16 May 2024, with the items of business to be taken at the meeting on 20 May 2024; and
- (ii) the change be incorporated in subsequent calendars of meetings.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 0.35 am

Chairman: _____

Date: _____

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
BOROUGH COUNCIL OF WOKING

held on 4 March 2024

Present:

Cllr M I Raja (Mayor)
Cllr L Morales (Deputy Mayor)

Cllr H Akberali	Cllr A Javaid
Cllr T Aziz	Cllr I Johnson
Cllr A-M Barker	Cllr A Kirby
Cllr A Boote	Cllr R Leach
Cllr J Brown	Cllr L Lyons
Cllr G Cosnahan	Cllr C Martin
Cllr K Davis	Cllr S Mukherjee
Cllr S Dorsett	Cllr E Nicholson
Cllr W Forster	Cllr S Oades
Cllr P Graves	Cllr L Rice
Cllr S Greentree	Cllr T Spenser
Cllr S Hussain	Cllr M Sullivan

Absent: Councillors A Caulfield, D Jordan, J Morley and D Roberts.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Caulfield, Councillor Jordan, Councillor Morley and Councillor Roberts.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

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 companies were listed in an attached schedule. The interests were such that Mr Foster could advise 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 companies were listed in an attached schedule. The interests were such that Mrs Strongitharm could advise on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Head of Transformation, Digital and Customer, Adam Walther, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which he was a Council-appointed director. The companies were listed in an attached schedule. The interests were such that Mr Walther could advise on those items.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor I Johnson declared an interest in items 5 – Questions from Members of Public, 7 – General Fund Budget and Council Tax Setting 2024/25 and 9b – Notices of Motion – Councillor Hussain in respect of the reference to Citizens Advice Woking arising from his wife's employment by the charity. The interest in items 7 and 9b was such that Councillor Johnson would leave the Council Chamber at point item 7 was reached and would not return to the meeting.

3. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS.

The Mayor had attended numerous functions following the previous meeting of the Council. These had included an event for young performers and an invitation by the Horsham Hospital Welfare Trust. The annual charity pancake race organised by Woking ShopMobility had been held in Jubilee Square and there had been a celebration of the Chinese New Year in Woking Town Centre.

Future engagements included the Mayor's Ball on 27 April and the Mayor's bowling tournament on 5 May 2024.

4. URGENT BUSINESS.

No items of Urgent Business were considered.

5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF PUBLIC.

Six questions had been received from members of public. The questions, submitted by Ellie George and Kay Riley, together with the replies from the Leader of the Council and the Deputy Leader of the Council, were presented as follows. The Mayor welcomed Ellie George to the meeting and advised that Kay Riley had been unable to attend.

Question 1 – Ellie George, Citizens Advice Woking

“A huge amount of my work at CAW goes towards preventing and dealing with homelessness. We help clients with housing benefit applications, negotiate repayments for rent arrears to avoid evictions and navigate those facing or experiencing homelessness through the process of securing new accommodation. This includes a large number of vulnerable clients who struggle to engage with their landlord and relevant authorities. How will the council deal with increased demand for housing and homelessness support with the likely reduction in the services CAW will be able to offer?”

Supporting Statement

“From November 23rd, 2023, to February 15th, 2024, Citizens Advice Woking helped 146 clients either threatened with homelessness or experiencing actual homelessness and 46 clients going through the Local Authority Homelessness process. Furthermore, we advised 65 clients on dealing with rent arrears. We also assisted 54 clients with Housing Benefit issues and applications, with 35 of those cases specifically related to Local Authority housing.”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“Firstly, I’d like to thank volunteers from Citizens Advice Woking (CAW) for their questions. The Council has worked in partnership with CAW for many years and value the important services that their staff and volunteers provide.

I want to begin my response by reiterating Woking Borough Council’s (WBC) financial position and the reasons why we’ve needed to review funding to CAW.

The Council is in an extremely vulnerable financial situation which is so significant that it will need substantial and ongoing support from the Government in 2024/25 and for the foreseeable future. It is in this context that the Council has had to agree significant service savings for 2024/25 of over £8.5m.

Going forward, the Council will only be able to provide non-statutory services (discretionary services) where they can be provided without any subsidy from the Council. Unfortunately, grant funding to voluntary organisations is a non-statutory service.

The Council has been working with CAW since September 2023 to understand the potential impact of its proposed funding reductions and to discuss what mitigations could be put in place. This has included support to find alternative funding streams, with WBC brokering a meeting between CAW and the National Lottery.

Whilst the Council is no longer able to provide core funding to CAW, through these discussions, we have been able to agree several areas where we will continue to work in partnership and provide alternative funding streams. They include:

- £10,000 funding to provide the Court Desk Service from the Government’s Homelessness Prevention Grant.
- £24,500 funding for the Ukrainian Hub and Syrian and Afghan Refugee Support.
- £30,000 funding from UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UK SPF) to support CAW to transition to a new business model.
- £50,000 from the Council’s Hardship Fund for a Hardship Support co-ordination package. The full details of what will be delivered under this funding have been agreed with the CEX of CAW and are included within this meeting’s [budget papers](#).
- WBC will also continue to allow CAW to use office space at Provincial House, alongside covering service charges and providing discretionary business rates.

I hope that this package of funding (which totals approximately £229,000) combined with CAW’s alternative fundraising efforts, will enable the organisation to continue to offer much valued services to Woking residents.

The Council is confident that CAW will be able to adapt its business model, supported by UK SPF and alternative funding streams, and continue to provide some volunteer-led housing advice services. In recognition of the preventative work of CAW, the Council will also continue to fund CAW to provide the Court Desk service from its Government Homelessness Prevention Grant. Our Housing Options Team will continue to offer a statutory Homelessness service. The Council has a performance management system where we monitor performance against spend and we take decisions regarding our

statutory responsibilities in the context of our financial position, to ensure that our resources continue to be allocated towards our strategic priorities.”

Supplementary Question

“If we don't, if citizens advice Woking, don't find alternative funding streams in a short period of time and Woking Borough Council officers and team members find themselves overwhelmed with people coming for support, how would you propose we pick up again how to offer support for our vulnerable without delay.”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“Thank you Ellie for your supplementary question. If I may, I will take it in two parts. This Council is working very hard with Citizens Advice Woking to ensure you do get alternative funding, whether that's putting a request in with our Council Tax demand to encourage people to donate to good causes, whether that's supporting citizens advice on crowdfunding, whether that's setting up the National Lottery meeting, so I have a lot of confidence that we will raise money and help to raise money for Citizens Advice, but setting that side this Council will continue to meet its homelessness statutory responsibilities.

“We've put in motion support and training to Council staff to ensure that they can signpost people that are vulnerable straightaway without relying on Citizens Advice advice going forward.”

Question 2 – Ellie George, Citizens Advice Woking

“Much of my volunteer work involves housing issues directly related to Local Authority properties which Council employees manage. I help a range of vulnerable clients, who find it difficult to engage with relevant parties, to address a range of problems with their Local Authority housing – arrears, mould, repairs, emergency heating and more. What is the council's plan to address some residents' additional needs for support with Local Authority housing given Citizens Advice Woking's future diminished service provision?”

Supporting Statement

“In the period November 23rd, 2023, to February 15th, 2024, Citizens Advice Woking helped 94 clients to solve issues specifically related to Local Authority housing.”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“As set out in the answer to question one, the Council has still committed significant funding to Citizens Advice for 2024/25, even though there has been a reduction from previous years. As part of the Hardship Support co-ordination package, the Council and CAW will look to strengthen the advice offer offered by alternative voluntary, community and faith sector (VCFS) providers (such as Christian's Against Poverty, The Lighthouse etc). If alternative organisations can increase their capacity for providing general advice services, it is hoped that this could allow CAW to continue to deal with more complex queries. The Council also trusts that CAW will be able to prioritise its services so that the most vulnerable residents with additional needs can still access support. As a Council, we are implementing a comprehensive Housing Improvement Programme, which we expect to make the service more customer-focused and proactive in dealing with the issues you have mentioned.”

Supplementary Question

“Thank you, Councillor Forster. You mentioned that the aim is to strengthen the advice offer with other voluntary organisations, what indication do you have at the moment that they are able to increase their offer?”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“So particularly the Churches in Woking have been very enthusiastic about stepping up to the plate and helping the most vulnerable in our community, particularly on this issue. There's been several meetings, some of which I've attended, that the Council is facilitated between the Churches and the Council about wider Council matters, but particularly about Citizens Advice and debt issues. So I'm confident these organisations are willing to step up to the plate.”

“I do think, as I said in my answer, that the future, I think, the most vulnerable, the most detailed advice queries, I think, should and would be handled by CAW, but more basic level advice, I think, can be handled by other organisations stepping up to the plate and we can work with them to improve their capacity.”

Question 3 – Ellie George, Citizens Advice Woking

“Many of my clients, coming to Citizens Advice Woking, require additional support with ensuring they pay their Council Tax, reducing the number of lengthy Court processes that the Council is required to initiate. I negotiate payment plans for my clients to pay back their Council Tax arrears, and many of them need help applying for Council Tax Reductions, Discounts and Exemptions. How does the Council plan to mitigate an increase in Council Tax queries and arrears that will inevitably come as a result of Citizens Advice Woking's expected limited service provision?”

Supporting Statement

“In the period November 23rd, 2023, to February 15th, 2024, Citizens Advice Woking advised 73 clients on their Council Tax arrears and 80 clients regarding a Council Tax Deduction.”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“The Council's 100k Hardship Fund will provide support to those residents who may have difficulty paying their Council Tax. For those who are able to go online, we have redesigned Council Tax pages. Descriptions and guidance are now easier to understand and supports personal budgeting. Residents can more easily set up payment plans, choose payment methods and make payments online than they were previously. We have already seen increased use and more upgrades to the website and Council Tax services are planned to improve accessibility. We realise some residents cannot use online services, or need additional advice and support. This is why staff members in the customer services team are being given additional training to deal with Council Tax queries, in order to advise and resolve queries more effectively.”

Supplementary Question

“It's a tricky one because, as you say, Councillor Barker, there are many residents in Woking that are digitally excluded.”

“What’s the plan in the reception area of Woking Borough Council if people come knocking on the door for that kind of support because they physically can’t get themselves online or understand what is available online?”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“We do find that the majority of the support the Council is asked for currently does tend to be an online option or a telephone, obviously lots of telephone calls. Clearly, if there are more people coming into the Council offices, then we would have to work to deal with that, and that will be done via the customer service staff who’ve had the additional training who will get that support.

“But I guess the aim of having more online is that those that cope with that can go and do that. It’s easier, hopefully, more of a proactive approach for some people, realising they can set up their budgeting plans so that reduces down the workload overall, but do recognise that there may be, there will be a group who are still struggling very much and that might be impacted because, sadly, we just can’t fund Citizens Advice to the same level any more, which is hugely disappointing, but that’s the situation we’re in.”

Question 4 – Kay Riley, Citizens Advice Woking

“A major concern of mine is the additional support required by a considerable proportion of CAW clients. Our clients often have language issues, literacy issues, limited digital skills, mental health conditions or learning disabilities. They need help understanding their situation, engaging with relevant authorities, and taking action to improve their circumstances. The most vulnerable clients require home visits as, due to severe disability and lack of support, they are unable to leave their homes. What plan does the Council have in place to accommodate the complex additional needs of so many of CAW’s clients if CAW must limit its services?”

Supporting Statement

“Between April and September 2023, 63% of people CAW saw had a disability or long-term health condition. 20% of these clients also have a long-term mental health condition. CAW’s specialist caseworkers and trained volunteers undertake a range of actions for vulnerable clients, including negotiating and advocating for clients with relevant authorities, filling in forms and working closely with support and social workers. Critically, many of our advisers have developed the long-term, trusting relationships with vulnerable clients that are needed for these clients to engage openly. Additionally, approximately 25% of our clients do not have English as a first language and cannot read or write in English. Citizens Advice Woking are able to provide face to face support in 15 different languages, often at the first visit from the client.”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“As stated above, as part of the Hardship Support co-ordination package, the Council and CAW will look to strengthen the advice offer offered by alternative VCFS providers (such as Christian’s Against Poverty, The Lighthouse etc). If alternative organisations can increase their capacity for providing general advice services, the Council is confident that this could allow CAW to continue to deal with more complex queries. The Council also trusts that CAW will be able to prioritise its services so that the most vulnerable residents with additional needs can still access support. The Council continues to offer floating support to homeless clients as well as supporting digital inclusion for the most vulnerable.”

Question 5 – Kay Riley, Citizens Advice Woking

“Anticipating a reduction of services at Citizens Advice Woking after 1st April, what plans do the council have to provide extra staffing for the increased footfall to the council offices? Council Staff often direct residents over to Citizens Advice Woking for help. What plans have the Council put in place if this option is not open to them?”

Supporting Statement

“Citizens Advice Woking currently opens to the public from 10am to 4pm for drop in clients. For many this is the first point of contact as many clients are unable to go on-line to use the on-line enquiry form and prefer face to face engagement. Many bring in forms for completion, letters from the council that they are unable to read or understand. Receptionists are on duty throughout that period, often able to support clients for whom English is not their first language. There is often a queue even with two receptionists and if CAW have to adopt a no drop in service clients will see the council offices as the place to go too for help in the first instance.”

Reply from Councillor Will Forster

“Whilst the Council is focussed on continuing to improve its customer services offer, it does not have any plans to increase staffing numbers. Footfall currently makes up less than 1% of the queries WBC gets a month, the vast majority being online or over the phone. WBC offices will remain open to residents with access to relevant staff members, as is the case today. We recognise that CAW may not be able to offer the same level of provision as in the past. We anticipate the Hardship Support co-ordination package will develop the capacity of other organisations to provide alternative advice.”

Question 6 – Kay Riley, Citizens Advice Woking

“At the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Monday 29th January, the Council set out a New Council Vision in the accompanying slides. The Council has stated unambiguously that it is unable to spend money on services that residents value and want to keep, (e.g. Citizens Advice, Bustler, St Mary’s day care centre) and is unable to spend on anything other than essential services. Will the Council be amending the new Vision and Mission to clarify that it cannot in fact deliver any new services that make a difference to people?”

Supporting Statement

“Vision Statement: A financially and environmentally sustainable Council, delivering services that residents value in every part of the borough.

Mission Statement: A trusted and transparent Council that:

Lives within its means

Is focused on services that make a difference to people in the Borough

Works in partnership with the community to deliver positive outcomes

Continually engages with residents to design more efficient and effective services

Invests in talent to deliver for Woking’s future”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“In 2024/2025 the Council will continue to spend money on some non-statutory services, such as careline, community meals, leisure services, Bustler and Citizens Advice but these services must be self-financing in future. This is in line with the Council’s draft vision and mission which outlines that, in future, the Council will live within its means.”

6. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE.

The Leader of the Council provided an update on a number of issues affected by the Council’s financial situation. This included land at Brookwood Lye, on which the Leader had recently chaired a public meeting for the residents of Brookwood and Knaphill. The long-standing intention had been to provide Traveller pitches and new homes with a high proportion of affordable homes. Enforcement action had now been taken against those illegally living on the traveller site, ensuring that only those legally entitled to live on the site were there. In addition, Thameswey Housing had presented plans for 65 homes on the site half of which would be affordable with the potential to add more homes in future if land became available.

A further development was proposed at West Hall in West Byfleet. It had been agreed that the site would be removed from the Green Belt and developed to meet local housing need. Developers were now proposing the construction of 461 homes at West Byfleet, with half being affordable, and fifteen Traveller pitches. In recognition of residents’ concerns over traffic levels and the infrastructure necessary for developments of such a size, an infrastructure study had been carried out with a focus on the east of Woking. In addition, Surrey County Council had a project for active travel improvements which would seek to make improvements to safety and congestion. Though the project had not progressed for a number of years, the Leader advised that she would encourage them to move the scheme up their priority list.

In regard to Sheerwater, the Government had enabled the Council to borrow money to complete the phases of the development that were currently underway. In addition, around 100 homes which had been due to be demolished were now to be brought back into use following refurbishment.

Other areas covered included the review being undertaken by Grant Thornton which was currently being finalised in advance of being published. The cladding repairs to the Victoria Square Hotel development were due to be completed in the summer, and 98% of the apartments in The Marches had now been rented. Finally, it was reiterated that the Pool in the Park would remain open.

Following the statement by the Leader, the Chief Executive made a statement in respect of the business appearing later on the agenda to ensure the debate led to decisions that had due consideration of the legal and financial implications. In preparation of the debate, Members had been invited to submit any proposed amendments in advance of the meeting to enable the statutory officers to fully consider the implications and risks.

The Chief Executive emphasised that the budget proposed later in the evening had only been balanced with the Government’s package of support which came with an expectation of a 10% increase in Council Tax. The Council was under a legal obligation to set a lawful, balanced budget and failure to do so would have significant financial, legal, reputational

and operational impacts on the Council and its residents, threatening the Council's ability to perform its statutory responsibilities.

7. GENERAL FUND BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2024-25 WBC24-002.

Councillor Forster, Deputy Leader of the Council, introduced the report on the General Fund Budget and Council Tax for the coming years, noting that the Portfolio for Finance, Councillor Roberts, who had led on the work, had unfortunately been unable to attend. The exceptional support recently confirmed by the Government, without which the Authority would not have been able to achieve a balanced budget, was highlighted. The support represented a package of up to £785million for the following year.

Attention was drawn to a recent letter from the Minister for the Department of Housing, Levelling Up and Communities (DHLUC) which provided additional context around the proposals before the Council. A copy of the letter had been published on the Council website. It was clear that the Council's assets were not worth more than the debts held by the Authority.

In regard to Council Tax, the budget proposed an increase of 10% on the Borough Council's element of Council Tax bill for residents, a level that was to be expected of a Council under Government intervention. Efforts to negotiate a lower increase had been made with the Government but the Council's arguments had not been supported. Although the Borough Council's element of Council Tax would increase by 10%, the impact on the overall Council Tax level would be 1%, representing approximately 50p per week increase for a Band D property.

Support would be provided to residents hardest hit and the sum of £50,000 had been set aside to provide hardship advice in the community. A further £25,000 would be available through the household support fund.

Reference was made to second and empty homes. Within the report, it was noted that, under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, from 1 April 2024 the Council would be able to apply a 100% premium (i.e. double charge) on unoccupied and unfurnished (empty) properties after one year, updated from two years. This was estimated to generate an additional £42,000 in the coming year. The same Bill, from 1 April 2025, would allow the Council to apply a 100% premium to unoccupied and furnished properties second homes, generating an additional £68,000 each year.

The Housing Infrastructure Fund project, which would have required additional borrowing of £55m, had been ended, and the Sheerwater Regeneration Scheme had been revised and would be aimed at delivering what the residents wanted.

The Mayor thanked the Deputy Leader for his introduction and invited comments from Members of the Council. Although it was noted that efforts had been made to negotiate a lower increase in Council Tax, concern was expressed over the impact the increase would have on local residents. However, the Council was advised that the support package from the Government hinged upon the Council agreeing a 10% increase in Council Tax. Despite this, a number of Councillors advised that they would not be able to support the proposed Council Tax increase.

The Leader of the Council took the opportunity of the Right to Reply to thank the Councillors for the debate around the proposals, and recognised that some people would struggle with the increase in Council Tax. The increase, however, was part of a package of

measures offered by the Government to enable the Authority to achieve a legal budget for the coming year. The package was the best option the Council had and the Authority was not in a position at this stage to agree a lower level of increase.

Questions around the sale of assets were responded to, and the Leader explained that the Council was not undertaking a fire sale; a couple of developments had been sold recently, including Victoria Gate which had been purchased by Surrey County Council.

Before moving to the debate, the Leader reiterated the importance of the recommendations before the Council and the consequences of not supporting the proposed increase in Council Tax.

In accordance with Standing Order 10.8, the recommendations, including the addition of the words 'per annum' to recommendation (xviii), were put to a vote. The names of Members voting for and against the recommendations were recorded as follows:

In favour:	Councillors A-M Barker, G Cosnahan, W Forster, P Graves, S Greentree, A Kirby, R Leach, L Lyons, C Martin, L Morales, S Mukherjee, E Nicholson, L Rice, T Spenser and M Sullivan.
Total in favour:	15
Against:	Councillors H Akberali, T Aziz, J Brown, S Dorsett, S Hussain and A Javid.
Total against:	6
Present not voting:	The Mayor and Councillors A Boote, K Davis and S Oades.
Total present not voting:	4

The recommendations were therefore carried by 15 votes in favour and 6 votes against.

RESOLVED

- That (i) Council considers and acknowledges the Section 151 Officer's s25 report on the robustness of the proposed budget and the adequacy of the Council's reserves, as set out in Appendix 8 to the report, including the factors which underpin the budget and specifically the need for exceptional financial support to balance the budget;
- (ii) it be noted that the financial position has been based on the final Local Government Finance Settlement announced on 5 February 2024 together with any further announcements at that date;
- (iii) it be noted that the Council was granted permission to raise council tax by an extra 9.99% without the need for a local referendum and that the report assumes a council tax increase of 9.99%;
- (iv) it be noted that the net cost of services position includes previously agreed savings and pressures included in the

'Business as Usual Budget' approved by Council on 8 February 2024, as updated in the report (link provided in background papers);

- (v) the final changes to the budget set out in paragraphs Section 5 and Table 4 of the report, be approved;
- (vi) the flexible use of capital receipts to support transformation activity under the Improvement and Recovery Plan set out in Appendix 7 be approved;
- (vii) the position of the Business Rates and Council Tax Collection Fund, and the Council Tax and Business Rates bases for 2024/25 as set out in Section 11 be noted;
- (viii) it be noted that Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) is required to balance the 2023/24 budget and that discussions with Central Government are ongoing, as per Appendix 2 to the report;
- (ix) it be noted that the budget has been set based on the assumption that the request for Exceptional Financial Support in respect of the 2024/25 budget deficit is granted;
- (x) it be noted that the projected revenue impact of the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) historic and 2024/25 requirements under the revised MRP policy agreed as part of the Treasury Management report elsewhere on the agenda and that the draft MRP guidance has been applied to the treatment of MRP in the report as set out in Appendix 2;
- (xi) the Council's position on Reserves, recognising the unique situation the Council faces, be noted;
- (xii) it be noted that work on the budget will continue during 2024/25 on a medium-term financial position, with more savings likely to be required to Council services;
- (xiii) the full net cost of services requirement for 2024/25, including the impact of the historic borrowing position is £189m as per Table 3, be agreed;
- (xiv) the revised Business Rates Discretionary Policy and its application for 2024/25 as set out in Appendix 4 to the report, be approved;
- (xv) the overall Hardship Policy and associated costs as set out in Appendix 5 to the report, including the revised Council Tax Hardship scheme, which is set out in Appendix 6 to the report, be approved;
- (xvi) the changes to the level of council tax premium applied to second and long-term empty homes as set out in paragraphs 11.21 and 11.22 of the report, be approved;

- (xvii) it be noted that a Council Tax Base of 42,255.5 is the amount calculated by the Council, in accordance with the Regulations;
- (xviii) the Council increases its share of Council Tax for a Band D household by £26.31 per annum (9.99%), with other bands increased in line with the formula, be agreed;
- (xix) an amount of Council Tax be set for each valuation band in accordance with Section 30 of the Local Governance Finance Act, 1992 as set out in the Council Tax Resolution in Appendix 10 to the report, be agreed; and
- (xx) quarterly updates on progress against the delivery of the Improvement and Recovery Plan including the budgeted savings on the revenue and capital monitoring position be required.

8. CAPITAL, INVESTMENT AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND MRP STATEMENT WBC24-001.

The Deputy Leader of the Council introduced the report on the Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategies and MRP Statement. The Council was advised that local authorities were required by statutory guidance and under the CIPFA Prudential and Treasury Management codes to produce a series of reports as part of their annual budget approval. The reports included a Capital Strategy setting out the overall strategy for capital expenditure and finance for the coming year, an Investment Strategy for all investments other than those held for treasury management purposes, a Treasury Management Strategy on borrowing needs, and a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) Policy Statement.

The reports provided a comprehensive picture of the Council's capital, borrowing and investment position and included the prudential indicators, limits and investment indicators required under the respective codes and guidance.

The Leader of the Council summed up the proposals following a brief debate before the Council unanimously agreed to support the recommendations outlined in the paper.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategies for 2024/25, including the prudential indicators, be approved;
- (ii) the 2024/25 MRP policy statement set out in Appendix A to the Treasury Management Strategy be approved;
- (iii) the 2023/24 MRP policy be amended to align it with the MRP approach for 2024/25 in order to comply with MRP guidance in the current financial year (i.e. 2023/24); and
- (iv) the Debt Reduction Plan Principles set out in Appendix E to the Treasury Management Strategy be approved.

9. NOTICES OF MOTION.

9A. Councillor Anila Javaid - Taxi Licensing.

The following motion had been submitted by Councillor Javaid.

“The motion is being raised to consider and update the current licensing practice for service providers that facilitate the taxi sector.

These companies provide licensed taxis that are maintained and insured and are ready to be driven by licensed taxi drivers to rent or as replacement courtesy vehicles. The public hire vehicle license is usually issued in the company name, which then assigns a licensed taxi driver to that vehicle, which is then informed to the council. This practice helps taxi drivers and the taxi business/trade.

Over the last few years, the council (Local Licensing team) has been insisting that only a licensed taxi driver can hold the vehicle license, which is causing multiple issues for drivers and service providers.

This practice is not well thought out and is limiting the options for our local drivers to work. We host a large number of taxi drivers who live in our borough and work in the neighbouring borough.

I propose the council to look into some of the highlighted issues created due to this practice and consider this matter from all angles and conclude a workable solution for service providers by letting them have the licenses in the company name (Service Provider). This update will make the process practical for such operators/service providers.”

The Mayor advised the Council that Councillor Javaid and Officers had discussed the motion and, in view of the technical nature of the motion, it had been agreed that the issue would benefit from further discussions with Officers. If any reconsideration of the Council’s current Licensing Policy was considered appropriate, a meeting of the Licensing Committee would be convened. Councillor Javaid had therefore agreed to withdraw the motion.

RESOLVED

That the motion be withdrawn.

9B. Councillor Saj Hussain - Funding for Non-Statutory Services.

The following motion had been submitted by Councillor Hussain.

“Council urges the commissioners to negotiate with The Public Works Loans Board or such bodies that the interest payments on WBC repayment be deferred for one week, together with the drastic cuts already achieved this will enable Woking Borough Council to continue to provide much needed funding to the Non-statutory services to our residents such as Citizen Advice Woking, Community Transport and other essential community organisations which support the most vulnerable residents of Woking, the deferment will also give those organisations breathing space to plan for the future.”

Councillor Hussain moved and Councillor Akberali seconded the motion. Councillor Hussain spoke in support of the motion, advising that he was seeking to protect the most vulnerable residents in the local community.

Concern was expressed that the motion would give false hope to voluntary organisations, recognising that the Council had earlier in the meeting set a legal and robust budget. It was explained that the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) did not enter into negotiations with Authorities, and that all discussions to-date had taken place with the Department for Housing, Levelling Up and Communities (DHLUC). DHLUC would not allow the Council to renegotiate the arrangements. At the request of the Mayor, the Council's Section 151 Officer confirmed that the Council's negotiations had been with DHLUC and that it would not be realistic to open discussions with the PWLB.

Several Councillors suggested that the motion had some merit in seeking to identify ways in which non-statutory services could be funded going forward, supporting both charities and residents.

Following the debate, Councillor Hussain responded to the points raised and urged the Council to support the motion, simply to explore the potential of the proposal outlined in the first instance.

In accordance with Standing Order 10.8, the motion was put to a vote. The names of Members voting for and against the motion were recorded as follows:

In favour: Councillors H Akberali, T Aziz, A Boote, J Brown, S Dorsett, S Hussain, A Javaid and S Mukherjee.

Total in favour: 8

Against: Councillors A-M Barker, G Cosnahan, W Forster, P Graves, S Greentree, A Kirby, R Leach, L Lyons, C Martin, L Morales, E Nicholson, L Rice, T Spenser and M Sullivan.

Total against: 14

Present not voting: The Mayor and Councillors K Davis and S Oades.

Total present not voting: 3

The motion was therefore lost by 8 votes in favour and 14 votes against.

RESOLVED

That the motion be not supported.

10. DEPUTY MAYOR.

The Leader of the Council announced that Councillor Amanda Boote had been nominated for the position of Deputy Mayor for the coming year. The appointment would be confirmed by Council on 20 May 2024.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 9.52 pm

Chairman: _____

Date: _____

COUNCIL – 4 MARCH 2024

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF PUBLIC

Executive Summary

The following question has been received from a Member of Public. The individual who raised the question has been invited to attend the meeting. The relevant Portfolio Holder will be asked to provide a formal response.

Question – James Gordon

“Following clarification of central government’s financial support package, when can we expect WBC to reengage with the challenge presented by the climate emergency and plot a new course to net zero by 2050 as outlined by Climate Change Strategy 2050?”

Supporting Statement

“We write to you as a concerned residents of Woking and as members of Woking Environment Action (WEAct). We appreciate the difficult financial situation WBC is currently in, and the priority given to maintenance of statutory services, however, the challenge presented by climate change remains the most pressing issue of our time and WBC must play its part in meeting that challenge. Ultimately delaying climate action is a false economy that results in increased costs for reaching net-zero. We therefore urge the council to reengage with climate change and identify positive actions that would incur no or minimal costs. We have previously shared with WBC a list of actions that could advance its climate response at no or little cost. These include but are not limited to-

1. Including carbon mitigation and climate adaptation in the risk register and embed carbon and resilience impact assessments in all Council decisions,
2. Implementing a programme of climate literacy amongst council employees and Councillors. This can be provided on a ‘Train the Trainer’ basis so as not to incur undue costs.
3. Promoting awareness of climate change to residents and local businesses and the actions that they can take to help reduce carbon emissions.
4. Using the Council restructuring opportunity to improve departmental collaboration on the cross-cutting issue of climate change.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss how these and other measures could be incorporated into revised net-zero planning.”

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

Date Published: 20 March 2024

COUNCIL – 28 MARCH 2024

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Executive Summary

The Council is invited to consider the recommendations from the meeting of the Executive held on 21 March 2024. The extracts from the reports to be considered at the meeting of the Executive are set out below. The minutes of the meeting will be published in due course.

THE EXECUTIVE – 21 MARCH 2024

A. The Improvement And Recovery Plan Progress – November 2023 To March 2024

The Executive is requested to:

RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL That the third Improvement and Recovery Plan progress report to Commissioners be approved.

B. Companies Governance Framework – Shareholder Executive Committee

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.**

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.

Recommendations of the Executive

Background Papers: None.

Reporting Person: Julie Fisher, Chief Executive
Email: julie.fisher@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3333

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

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

Date Published: 20 March 2024

REPORT ENDS

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

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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

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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).

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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

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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

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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

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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

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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

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improving the way services are delivered through channel shift¹ 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

¹ '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.

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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

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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.

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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	
	TOTALS		£1,266,420	£2,123,490	£110,091

£3,500,000

Improvement Programme journey so far

March 2024

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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:

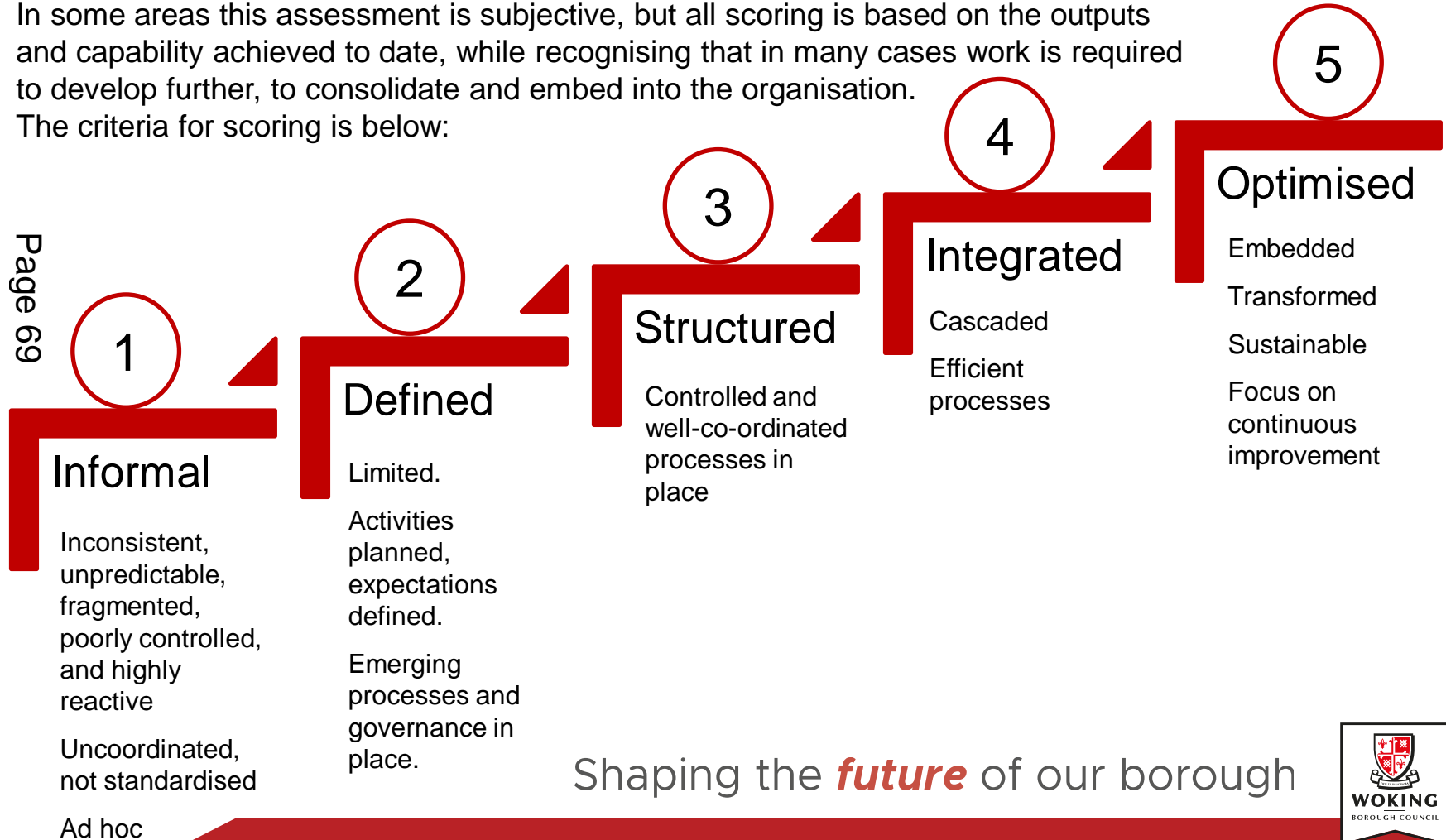
(1) Summary of the IRP and maturity assessment:

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.

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:



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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	■ Finance workplan and capacity	• 1	The Council has a balanced revenue budget and a sustainable Medium Term Financial Strategy.
	■ Financial assurance and cost control	• 4	
	■ Borrowing and cashflow	• 3	
	■ Annual accounts and crystallisation of debt	• 0	
	■ Debt reduction plan	• 2	
	■ 2024/25 MTFP & revenue savings	• 4	
	■ Financial reporting	• 1	
	■ Engagement with DLUHC	• 5	
	■ HRA accounts	• 3	
	■ HRA Business Plan	• -	
	■ Asset Rationalisation Plan	• 3	
(b) An action plan to ensure the Authority's capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable and affordable	■ Treasury management strategy	• 4	The Council's capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable.
	■ 2024/25 budget	• 3	
	■ Commercial protocol	• 4	
	■ Capital programme	• 3	
(c) A strict debt reduction plan	■ Commercial strategy	• 1	The Council's debt position has been improved.
	■ Debt reduction plan	• 2	
	■ Valuations	• 4	
	■ Asset Rationalisation Plan	• 3	
	■ Property profit and loss trading accounts	• 2	
	■ Strategic Options for TW and VSWL	• 2	
(d) Compliance with Financial Management guidelines – updated Minimum Revenue Position policy	■ Updated MRP policy	• 4	The Council's functions are operating in line with the appropriate rules, guidance and good practice. The Council has a compliant Housing Revenue Account.
	■ HRA accounts	• 3	
	■ HRA Business Plan	• -	

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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"> ■ Service offer change and associated savings ■ Resident engagement, public consultations and impact assessments ■ Vision for smaller organisation ■ Channel shift programme ■ Savings implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 • 4 • 2 • 2 • 1 	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"> ■ Vision and mission ■ Woking for All corporate strategy review ■ Staff restructure ■ Job evaluation review and implementation ■ Channel shift programme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 • 1 • 4 • 1 • 2 	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"> ■ Scrutiny function review ■ Standards and Audit review ■ Governance (e.g. Commercial and Finance Governance Board) and reporting ■ Committee restructure ■ Commercial protocol ■ Commercial strategy ■ Contracts and procurement review ■ Orbis plan ■ Finance team restructure ■ Commercial team requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 • 2 • 3 • 4 • 4 • 1 • 3 • 2 • 1 • 0 	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.

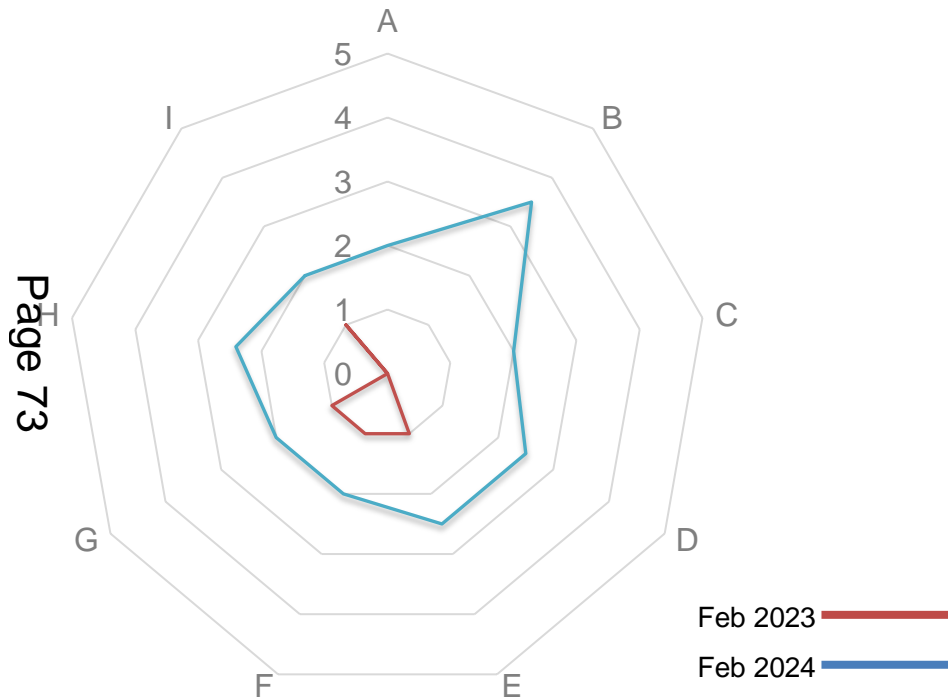
Directions – Activity – Success Measures

- 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"> ■ Company assurance review ■ Company governance framework ■ Companies review – implementation ■ Commercial strategy ■ Commercial protocol ■ Company business plans ■ Strategic Asset review and plan ■ Profit and loss ■ Asset management system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4 • 4 • 1 • 1 • 4 • 2 • 3 • 2 • 1 	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"> ■ Service improvement (process, systems, people) ■ Performance management – process and governance ■ Organisational Development strategy and plan ■ Overview and Scrutiny Committee improvements ■ Electoral cycle review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 • 2 • 1 • 4 • 2 	<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

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

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"> Debt collection policy review Improved process for monitoring collection fund (decisions and returns) Holistic approach to debt collection and recovery
Debt reduction (process and quantum)	Reduce the level of debt for the council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quarterly reports to scrutiny/audit Monitoring of borrowing cashflow and Capital Financing Requirement Ensure receipts are correctly accounted for and a debt reduction plan is developed, monitored and reported to Commercial and Finance Governance Board
Delivery of MTFP and savings	To close budget gap as per priority 1 in the directions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial benefits monitoring Financial savings tracking
Page 89 Financial reporting	To support the production of meaningful financial monitoring information and meet the requirements for government returns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement improved monthly financial reporting to leadership Implement quarterly financial reporting to members To include a new capital programme monitoring process Training for budget holders Tracker to monitor completion of all government returns M and A account review M and A account implement changes M and A account training and awareness Revenue outturns and all other statutory financial returns complete
Housing Revenue Account	Deliver a balanced Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium term HRA budget projections Correction of historic issues (and accounting for reserves)
Set a balanced budget for 2025/26	Set a balanced budget for 2025/26 (excluding impact legacy debt)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop budget timetable (CLT/ Executive/ O&S/ Council) Process for opposition amendments at budget setting Draft of full suite of budget documents – MTFP, Capital Strategy, Treasury Management Strategy
Engagement with DLUHC	Deliver the requirements for the package of financial support from central government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain ongoing discussions with DLUHC regarding the government support requirements

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"> 1. Develop a long term commercial strategy to develop an asset strategy to support the delivery of a debt reduction programme 2. Implement appropriate governance framework for each company and within the council 3. Review the 24 council owned companies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Commercial Strategy • Commercial and Financial Governance board • Governance review of companies • Implementation of changes required • Adopt new Shareholder Executive Governance • Company loan deferrals • Company Business Plans • Appoint WBC investor advisor • Recruit to boards
ThamesWey and subsidiaries	Develop strategic options for ThamesWey Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Strategic Options for TW through 2024: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic cases • Outline cases • Full cases
Victoria Square Woking Ltd.	Develop strategic options for Victoria Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of Strategic Options for VSWL through 2024: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic cases • Outline cases • Full cases
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"> • Meet resourcing requirements to operate the strategy, and meet governance requirements effectively • Assessment of existing commercial asset information, and creation of rectification plan as required to ensure complete asset information is available • 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

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

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"> • CLT approval to gauge member support • Carry out gauge of member support for moving to all out elections • 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 • 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
Overview and Scrutiny function	Review and implement improvements to Scrutiny	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the Overview and Scrutiny action plan, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements to work programming • Improvements to the quality of scrutiny carried out • Improvements to transparency and communication • Improvements to the training of committee members • Review the need for ongoing support and training requirements
Democratic process review	Review and implement improvements to the council's democratic process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement internal and external comms plans for improving understanding of and engagement with the Executive and Council, pre and post decision making • Introduce updated report template for committee reports for better quality report writing and more transparent decision making • Complete Council meeting structure review prior to 2024/25 Municipal Year • Update members' induction programme to address the impact of being a council under government intervention and promote the member/officer protocol • Initiate and complete consequential constitutional amendments
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"> • Assurance mapping carried out by the Local Government Association • Recruit and train new independent member(s) as necessary • Implement improvements to the monitoring process to feed into the AGS • Review the need for ongoing support and training requirements
Legal capability and capacity	Right-size the legal team capability and capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review legal team requirements following staff restructure and review of companies • Implement new 'right-sized'/skill matched legal team

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"> EIA action plan implementation Communicating service changes to residents Community Asset Transfers Working with partners to support their transformation (CAW, Lightbox)
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"> Channel Shift (phase 1): delivery of identified 'quick wins' and improvements. Design of a new operating model and wider improvements for Phase 2 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 Channel Shift: consistent Resident Experience, other service areas. Same remit as above in, for example housing, planning, parking, environmental health
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"> Organisational development strategy & Plan Vision and values Working for All refresh HR policies review
Communications and engagement	Improved internal communication and engagement with staff to support the new organisation and culture change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications and engagement plan Staff surveys and temperature checks
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"> Pre-discovery piece of work to establish our position and shape the project

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
Homes and safety	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"> • Fire risk assessment actions • Compliance monitoring system • Carbon monoxide and smoke detection • Lakeview estate – cladding • Sheerwater refurbishment • Decent homes stock condition survey and 30 year plan • Annual rolling asset management strategy and capital investment programme • Brockhill risk mitigation and closure • Repairs contract reprocurement
Data and insight	Improve all housing services through the greater use of performance data, benchmarking data and resident feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that our data is available to demonstrate our performance and compliance • Benchmarking with peers to learn and improve via Housemark • Improve internal performance monitoring and utilisation of data in service delivery
Tenants and communities	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"> • Assessment against regulatory standards and development of action plan • Delivery of DHLUC Homelessness Advice Support Team recommendations • Review of safeguarding policies and procedures • Income collection improvement plan • Void turnaround improvement plan • Update tenancy agreement and handbooks • Review end to end customer journey
Resident engagement and consultation	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"> • Tenant satisfaction survey • Resident communications on fire safety • Complaints improvement plan • Resident engagement plan

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"> • Process mapping across the service • Implement Capita system upgrade and asset management module • Policy review across housing • Channel shift and improvements to online resources
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"> • Set balanced 2024/25 budget • Recharge review and budget structuring • Develop a 30 year Housing Revenue Account business plan • Housing Private Finance Initiative (PFI)
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"> • Create vision and ways of working with housing managers • Roll out to all housing staff • Culture shift programme of activities within the service

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.

COUNCIL – 28 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 Council 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 Council Meeting Structure

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ann-Marie Barker
Email: 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.

3.3 The intention is to bring a revised version of the Constitution to the meeting of Council on 20 May 2024 for agreement. The revised Constitution will be based on the decisions taken by Council on 28 March 2024 in respect of the new arrangements; recognising that changes may be made by Council following review by both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive, the Constitution cannot be updated until the Council has agreed the new structure.

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

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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, Audit and Governance 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 endorsing them for 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 Recovery and Improvement (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.

Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee Responsibilities	
Service Areas	Relevant Working Groups
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

Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee Responsibilities	
Services Areas	Relevant Working Groups
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 Board 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 Biodiversity 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 Audit and Governance 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 practice 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 Audit and Governance 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 Governance Committee and the Scrutiny Committees is 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, in particular the Section 151 Officer, on formulating and maintaining the yearly Work Programme.

18. Review of Audit and Governance 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 Audit and Governance 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 and the 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 for 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.

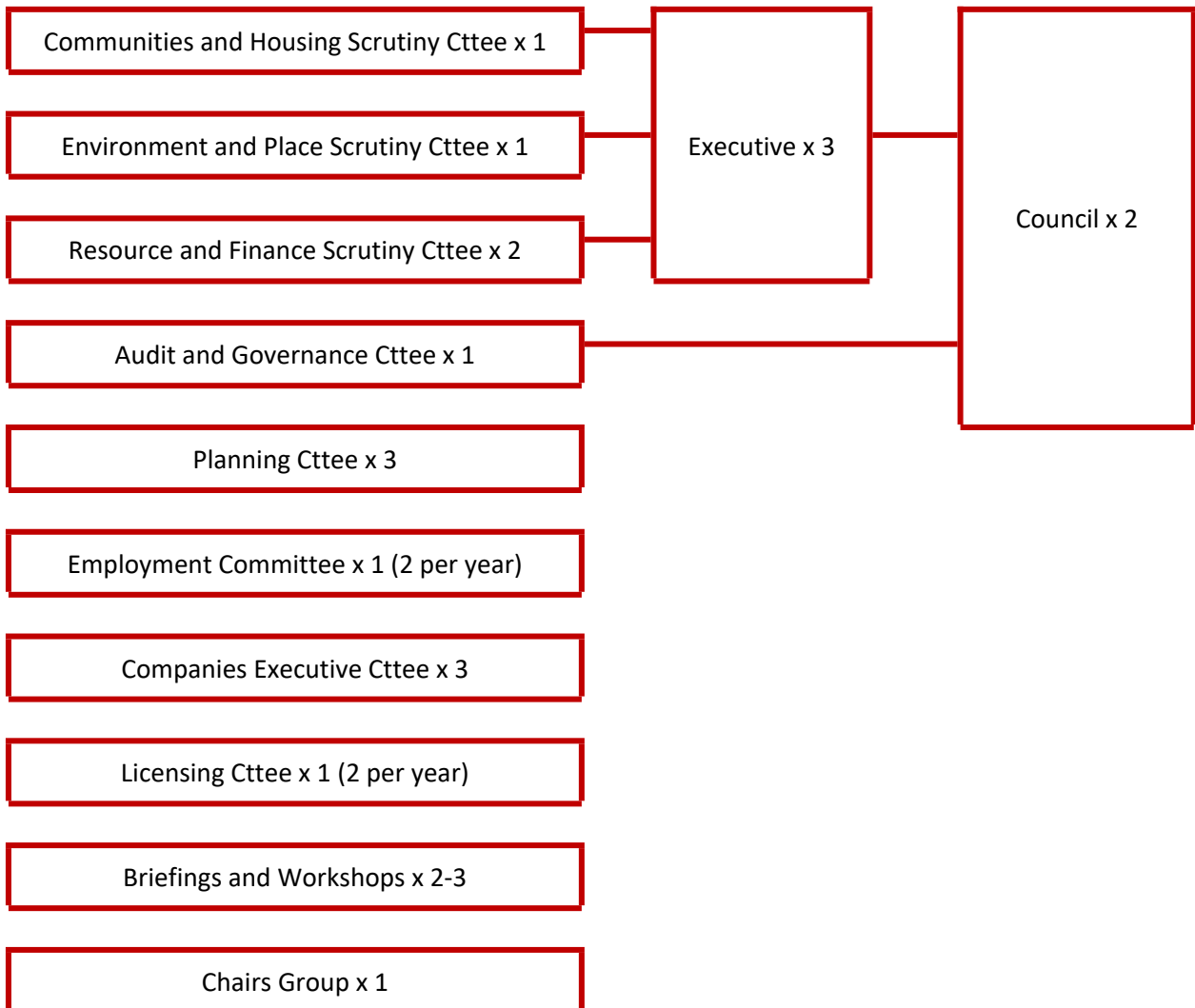
Review of the Annual Calendar of Meetings

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 the 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 Committee	8	-
Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee	-	5
Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee	-	3
Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee	-	3
Planning Committee	11	10
Licensing Committee	2	2
Employment Committee	-	2
Audit and Governance Committee	4	4
Totals	57	53

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 Consultative Panel.

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 A&G 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 (Appendix 2).
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 Scrutiny Committees and with the Audit and Governance Committee 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 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.

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 elected 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 (a 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 Finance Train	1 LGA Conf	5	2 Term Start	7	4	2	6 Term Start	3	3	7	5 B Holiday
Tue	7	4 1 Plann'g Cttee	2 1 C&H S Cttee	6	3 3 Plann'g Cttee	8 2 C&H S Cttee	5 3 R&F S Cttee	3 2 E&P S Cttee	7 3 C&H S Cttee	4 4 R&F S Cttee	4 3 E&P S Cttee	8 #	6
Wed	8 CLT Ind'n	5 1 Finance WG	3	7	4 2 Chairs WS	9	6	4	8 3 Chairs WS	5	5	9	7 CLT Ind'n
Thu	9 DemServ Ind'n	6 Licensing Train	4 2 Finance WG	8	5 3 Finance WG	10 #	7 4 Finance WG	5 6 Executive	9 #	6 5 Finance WG	6 5 R&F S Cttee	10 #	8 DemServ 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 H & Safety Train	8	12	9	14	11	9	13	10	10	14	12 Eq & D'ty Train
Tue	14 1 Select Panel	11 1 R&F S Cttee	9 #	13	10 2 R&F S Cttee	15 4 Plann'g Cttee	12 5 Plann'g Cttee	10 6 Plann'g Cttee	14 7 Plann'g Cttee	11 8 Plann'g Cttee	11 9 Plann'g Cttee	15 10 Plann'g Cttee	13 Select Panel
Wed	15	12	10	14	11	16	13	11	15	12	12	16	14
Thu	16	13 1 Executive	11 2 Executive	15	12 3 Executive	17 4 Executive	14 5 Executive	12 4 Council	16 7 Executive	13 7 Executive	13 9 Executive	17 8 S Exec Cttee	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 1 Council	17	15	19	16	21	18	16	20	17	17	21 B Holiday	19
Tue	21 Planning Train	18 Safeg'ing Train	16 2 Plann'g Cttee	20	17 1 Licens'g Cttee	22 #	19 1 E'mnt Cttee	17 #	21 2 E'mnt Cttee	18 #	18 2 Licens'g Cttee	22 # / T Start	20 1 Council
Wed	22 1 Chairs WS	19	17	21	18	23	20	18	22	19 Half Term	19	23	21 Planning Train
Thu	23 Scrutiny Train	20 1 A&G Cttee	18 #	22	19 2 A&G Cttee	24 #	21 3 A&G Cttee	19 #	23 #	20 4 A&G Cttee	20 6 Council	24 #	22 Scrutiny Train
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 CoC/PIP Train	25 1 E&P S Cttee	23 2 SEC / T End	27	24 3 S Exec Cttee	29 #	26 #	24 #	28 #	25 #	25 #	29 #	27
Wed	29 Half Term	26	24	28	25	30 Half Term	27	25 B Holiday	29	26	26	30	28 Half Term
Thu	30 #	27 1 S Exec Cttee	25 2 Council	29	26 3 Council	31 4 S Exec Cttee	28 5 S Exec Cttee	26 B Holiday	30 6 S Exec Cttee	27 5 Council	27 7 S Exec Cttee		29
Fri	31 27 - 31 May	28	26	30	27	28 Oct - 1 Nov		29	31	28	28		30 26 - 30 May
Sat		29	27	31	28		30	28			29		31
Sun		30	28		29			29			30		
Mon			29		30			30			31		
Tue			30 #					31 #					

Key

Code	Meeting	No.
Chairs WS	Chairs Workshop (virtual)	3
C&H S C	Communities & Housing Scrutiny Committee	3
E&P S C	Environment & Place Scrutiny Committee	3
R&F S C	Resource & Finance Scrutiny Committee	5
Finance WG	Finance Working Group	5
Select Panel	Selection Panel	1
Plann'g Cttee	Planning Committee	10
A&G Cttee	Audit & Governance Committee	4
Executive	Executive	9
S Exec Cttee	Shareholder Executive Committee	7
Council	Council	6
Ind'n	Induction/Training	10
Licens'g Cttee	Licensing Committee	2
E'mnt Cttee	Employment Committee	2
#	Date for extra meetings	29
	Recess/Bank Holiday	

2024/25 Revised Calendar of Meetings

Meeting	2024/25 Dates
Council (6) 7pm on Thursday evenings.	20 May 2024 (Monday) 25 July 2024 26 September 2024 12 December 2024 27 February 2025 20 March 2025 20 May 2025 (Tuesday)
Executive (9) 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
Audit and Governance Committee (4) 7pm on Thursday evenings.	20 June 2024 19 September 2024 21 November 2024 20 February 2025
Planning Committee (10) 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
Communities and Housing Scrutiny Committee (3) 7pm on Tuesday evenings.	2 July 2024 8 October 2024 7 January 2025
Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee (3) 7pm on Tuesday evenings.	25 June 2024 3 December 2024 4 March 2025
Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee (5) 7pm on Tuesday evenings.	11 June 2024 10 September 2024 5 November 2024 4 February 2025 6 March 2025 (Thursday)

Meeting	2024/25 Dates
Employment Committee (2) 7pm on Tuesday evenings.	19 November 2024 21 January 2025
Licensing Committee (2) 7pm on Tuesday evenings.	17 September 2024 18 March 2025
Shareholder Executive Committee (8) 7pm on Thursday evenings.	27 June 2024 23 July 2024 (Tuesday) 24 September 2024 (Tuesday) 31 October 2024 28 November 2024 30 January 2025 27 March 2025 17 April 2025
Chairs' Group (Elected Members and Officers only) 7pm on Wednesday evenings.	22 May 2024 4 September 2024 8 January 2025
Selection Panel (Elected Members and Officers only) 7pm on Tuesday evenings.	14 May 2024
Finance Task Group (Elected Members and Officers only) 7pm on Thursday evenings.	5 June 2024 (Wednesday) 4 July 2024 5 September 2024 7 November 2024 6 February 2025
Planned Training (Elected Members and Officers only) Corporate Leadership Team Induction for Members Democratic Services Team Induction for Members Equality and diversity training for Members Planning training for Members Scrutiny training for Members Code of Conduct / Probity in Planning training for Members Licensing training for Members Health and safety training for Members Safeguarding training for Members Corporate Leadership Team Induction for Members Democratic Services Team Induction for Members Equality and diversity training for Members Planning training for Members Scrutiny training for Members	8 May 2024 (Wednesday) 9 May 2024 (Thursday) 13 May 2024 (Monday) 21 May 2024 (Tuesday) 23 May 2024 (Thursday) 29 May 2024 (Wednesday) 6 June 2024 (Thursday) 10 June 2024 (Monday) 18 June 2024 (Tuesday) 7 May 2025 (Wednesday) 8 May 2025 (Thursday) 12 May 2025 (Monday) 21 May 2025 (Wednesday) 22 May 2025 (Thursday)

COUNCIL – 28 MARCH 2024

ANNUAL REPORT BY COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Executive Summary

Each year, Woking Borough Council appoints elected Councillors to outside bodies as representatives for the Council. The appointments were reviewed by a Member Task Group in 2014 which presented a series of recommendations to the Executive for determination by Council. In June 2014, the Council adopted the recommendations which had the effect of reducing the overall number of appointments made. This was in line with the Council's objective of rationalising all positions held by Councillors by 2016, to take into account the change in the size of the Council from 36 Councillors to 30 Councillors.

The Council also adopted a formal reporting process for those Councillors appointed to Outside Bodies, with an annual report to be presented to Council. This paper sets out the reports provided by the Council's representatives for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

Recommendations

The Council is requested to:

RESOLVE That the report be noted.

The Council has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.

Background Papers:	None.
Reporting Person:	Julie Fisher, Chief Executive Email: julie.fisher@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3301
Contact Person:	Frank Jeffrey, Head of Democratic Services Email: frank.jeffrey@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3012
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Ann-Marie Barker Email: cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk
Date Published:	20 March 2024

Annual Report by Council Representatives on Outside Bodies

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 In February 2022 the Members appointed to Outside Bodies were asked to complete a report on the activities of the Body to which they had been appointed. Details of the appointments for 2022/23 to Outside Bodies and to Ex Officio positions are set out in Appendix 1 to this report. (Note: Whilst representatives were appointed to the Woking Youth Council, the body is no longer active and no meetings have been held over the past year.)
- 1.2 A template was provided to assist the Councillors. The following reports have been completed and are attached in the order submitted:
- [Appendix 2 – The Maybury Centre](#)
 - [Appendix 3 – Fair Oaks Airport Consultative Committee \(FACC\)](#)
 - [Appendix 4 – Basingstoke Canal Joint Management Committee](#)
 - [Appendix 5 – Surrey Police and Crime Panel](#)
 - [Appendix 6 - Surrey County Playing Fields Association](#)
 - [Appendix 7 – Ashford and St Peters NHS Foundation Trust](#)
- 1.3 In considering the reports, it should be noted that the comments have been made by the Councillors appointed to the Outside Bodies and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Council.

2.0 Corporate Strategy

- 2.1 The Council's Corporate Plan identifies the ambition to achieve a healthy, inclusive and engaged community ("People"). The representation of Elected Members on a range of community organisations contributes towards this ambition, enabling direct engagement and representation.

3.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 3.1 There are no finance or risk implications arising from this report.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 3.2 There are no equalities or human resource implications arising from this report.

Legal

- 3.3 Legal Services have reviewed this report and have not raised any issues.

4.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 4.1 The reports that form Appendix 2 onwards were drawn up by the Elected Member representatives on the outside bodies. The reports may have been completed with the assistance of other Members or the body to which the Council has been appointed.

REPORT ENDS

Appointments to Outside Bodies 2023/24

ASHFORD & ST PETERS HOSPITAL NHS TRUST
(One representative appointed every 3 years) Councillor Ellen Nicholson (Retires May 2025)
BASINGSTOKE CANAL JOINT MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
(Two representatives appointed annually plus substitute) Councillor Rob Leach (Sub: Councillor Swati Mukherjee) Councillor Kevin Davis (Sub: Councillor Daryl Jordan)
CORPORATE TRUSTEE – FRIENDS OF WOKING PALACE
(One representative appointed for one year) Councillor Ann-Marie Barker
COUNTRYSIDE PARTNERSHIP BOARD
(One representative appointed annually plus substitute) Councillor Peter Graves (Sub: Councillor Kevin Davis)
FAIROAKS AIRPORT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
(One representative appointed annually plus substitute) Councillor John Morley (Sub: Councillor Martin Sullivan)
FARNBOROUGH AERODROME CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE
(One representative appointed annually plus substitute) Councillor Ann-Marie Barker (Sub: Councillor Martin Sullivan)
MAYBURY CENTRE TRUST
(Two nominated trustees appointed for 4 years) Councillor Tahir Aziz (Retires 2027) Councillor Peter Graves (Retires 2026)
NATIONAL PARKING ADJUDICATIONS SERVICE JOINT COMMITTEE
(One representative appointed every two years plus substitute) Councillor Ann-Marie Barker (Retires 2025) (Sub: Councillor Dale Roberts)
POLICE & CRIME PANEL
(One representative appointed annually) Councillor Ellen Nicholson

Annual Report by Council Representatives on Outside Bodies

EX-OFFICIO APPOINTMENTS	
<p>Armed Forces Champion Appointed by Council in May annually.</p>	<p>Councillor Guy Cosnahan Sub: Councillor Amanda Boote</p>
<p>Surrey Climate Change Partnership Members Group Portfolio Holder for Climate Change</p>	<p>Councillor Peter Graves</p>
<p>Surrey Waste Partnership Portfolio Holder for Waste and Recycling</p>	<p>Councillor Peter Graves</p>
<p>Woking Chamber of Commerce Leader of the Council or their nominee</p>	<p>Councillor Dale Roberts</p>
<p>Woking Community Fund Panel Portfolio Holder for the Voluntary Sector</p>	<p>Councillor Will Forster</p>
<p>Woking Palace Consultative Panel Ward Members for Hoe Valley and Portfolio Holder for Planning</p>	<p>Councillor Andy Caulfield Councillor Will Forster Councillor Liam Lyons Councillor Louise Morales</p>

Annual Report by Council Representatives on Outside Bodies

Appendix 2

Outside Body:	Maybury Trust
Councillor(s):	P Graves
Date Completed:	27.2.24
Meetings Attended:	Monthly
Description of Outside Body:	Community facility, providing event, education, and meeting spaces.
Update on Recent Activities	The centre has completed a radical overhaul of procedures and has been able to move into a positive position with regards to its P and L. Lettings are up and we have managed to move almost entirely to a cash free organisation. There is an investigation taking place into Philip Goldenberg for actions allegedly not in keeping with a Trustee.
Future Activities:	Aim to complete the investigation without a negative impact on the centre. It is taking a lot of time which could be better directed in improving the centre for the community.
Matters of Note or Concern:	See above – discord amongst trustees and a time sapping investigation.

Annual Report by Council Representatives on Outside Bodies

Appendix 3

Outside Body:	Fairoaks Airport Consultative Committee (FACC)
Councillor(s):	Cllr John Morley
Date Completed:	27 th February 2024
Meetings Attended:	October 2023, February 2024
Description of Outside Body:	<p>All UK airports are required by law to have a consultative committee. The Civil Aviation Authority describes the purpose of the committee:</p> <p><i>The role of the Consultative Committee is to help provide a forum for discussing airport-related issues with all those who may be affected.</i></p> <p>The committee is made up of representatives from the airport management, local residents' groups and local councillors from Woking, Surrey Heath and Runnymede</p>
Update on Recent Activities	<p>The committee has discussed various complaints from residents. These are considered carefully, and action is taken by airport management in the few cases where noise rules have been contravened. The vast majority of complaints appear to come from one or two residents.</p> <p>Fairoaks Airport sits within the Surrey Heath constituency. Surrey Heath is undertaking its next Local Development Plan which will, amongst other things, determine appropriate sites for housing. The plan is yet to go through consultation, but as it stands the Fairoaks site is not one of those being allocated for residential development.</p> <p>A plan for a new helicopter hangar is ongoing.</p>
Future Activities:	The committee will continue to monitor any complaints from residents and act as a channel of communication between the airport and local residents.
Matters of Note or Concern:	No concerns with the FACC.

Annual Report by Council Representatives on Outside Bodies

Appendix 4

Outside Body:	Basingstoke Canal Joint Management Committee
Councillor(s):	Kevin Davis & Rob Leach
Date Completed:	17/03/2024
Meetings Attended:	07/06/2023 – 20/11/2023
Description of Outside Body:	<p>Body responsible for the management and maintenance of the Basingstoke Canal which is owned jointly by SCC and HCC.</p> <p>All boroughs provide funding on a pro-rata basis depending on the length of the canal running through the borough.</p>
Update on Recent Activities	<p>07/06/2023 – Final accounts presented and agreed. A higher than anticipated use of reserves was required.</p> <p>The canal manager employed since 2012 gave notice to leave.</p> <p>An update was received on the pollution incident in Woking.</p> <p>The Basingstoke Canal Society presented its report for the volunteer operations delivered for the canal.</p> <p>20/11/2023 – The Risk Register was scrutinised.</p> <p>Budget work for this year examined.</p> <p>The funding sources are drying up as borough councils are no longer able to meet their responsibilities. By no means is WBC the only borough no longer paying its way and others have been persistent offenders for years.</p> <p>The canal is having to look at new ways of working and the decision was taken to include Member involvement in the JMC by the land-owner representatives (HCC & SCC). As such WBC and other boroughs will no longer have a right to sit on the committee.</p>
Future Activities:	None for WBC.
Matters of Note or Concern:	Funding and how WBC now influences the management of the canal.

Outside Body:	Surrey Police and Crime Panel
Councillor(s):	Cllr Ellen Nicholson
Date Completed:	20/03/2024
Meetings Attended:	29 th June 2023 28 th September 2023 24 th November 2023 2 nd February 2024
Description of Outside Body:	<p>The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 underpins new governance and accountability arrangements for policing in Surrey, which include the formation of a police and crime panel.</p> <p>The role of the Panel is to examine the actions and decisions of Surrey's Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and to make sure information is available for the public so that they can hold their Commissioner to account.</p> <p>The Panel is a committee of Surrey County Council, and consists of one elected councillor from each of Surrey's twelve local authorities and two co-opted independent members.</p>
Update on Recent Activities	<p>At its public meeting of 2 February 2024, the Panel reviewed the Commissioner's proposed precept for 2024 to 2025 and voted on whether or not to endorse the proposal to increase the precept for a Band D property by £13 to £323.57. The majority of the Surrey Police and Crime Panel (which included the Chairman's casting vote) did not approve the PCC's proposal. However, the requirement for a veto to be agreed by two-thirds of the Panel membership (which equates to 10 Panel members) was not met. Therefore,</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Panel accepted that the PCC's proposal to increase the Band D Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner Precept by £13 to £323.57 would come into effect. 2. The Panel expressed disappointment at the government settlement and the unfair funding formula which places a disproportionate burden on Surrey residents to fund the Force. This lack of appropriate level of government funding should be resolved and is a more appropriate way to meet Surrey's needs in the long term. <p>Panel letter Letter - PCP Chairman to Commissioner reporting Panel Precept Decision (surreycc.gov.uk)</p> <p>At previous meetings residents questions and member concerns have been raised on issues such as shop lifting,</p>

Annual Report by Council Representatives on Outside Bodies

	<p>violence against women and girls, anti-social behaviour, speeding, community policing.</p> <p>29th June 2023</p> <p>Panel members considered the draft Annual Report 2022/23 on 29 June 2023 and sent a letter with its recommendations to the Police and Crime Commissioner for Surrey. The Commissioner accepted the majority of the Panel's recommendations.</p>
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Future Activities:	Next Meeting - 18 th June 2024
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Matters of Note or Concern:	<p>Over the course of the year the Panel has also debated with the OPCC the findings of the Surrey PEEL Assessment 2023–2025 - His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (justiceinspectors.gov.uk) and raised the HM Inspector of Constabulary concerns about the performance of Surrey Police in keeping people safe, reducing crime and providing victims with an effective service.</p> <p>Surrey has a lower-than-average number of 999 calls and a comparatively low number of 101 calls. But despite this, the force doesn't always answer emergency and non-emergency calls in a timely way. A high number of callers to its non-emergency 101 facility abandon their call. Some of these callers will contact the force by another means, such as through its online platform. Other callers will simply give up. So, crime will go unreported and vulnerable people will not be safeguarded. This was highlighted as an area for improvement during the last PEEL inspection in 2021/22, but performance has deteriorated.</p> <p>Both the panel and the HM Inspector of Constabulary recognise that Surrey had a change of Chief Constable at the in Spring 2023, who has set out his priorities for improvement.</p>
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Annual Report by Council Representatives on Outside Bodies

Appendix 6

Outside Body:	Surrey County Playing Fields Association
Councillor(s):	Cllr Ellen Nicholson
Date Completed:	20/03/2024
Meetings Attended:	Meeting in 2023 and 15 th February 2024
Description of Outside Body:	Surrey County Playing Fields Association is an independent charity operating within Surrey. They work with other organisations to ensure that there are high quality facilities for sport and play in the county. The charity reviews applications for grants and planning schemes to ensure there are appropriate comments on strategies and planning applications.
Update on Recent Activities	<p>Attended a meeting to discuss grant applications. There were no applications from Woking.</p> <p>Following the meeting I highlighted to Woking councillors that the charity had grants for sporting activities.</p> <p>For Woking applications please use the contacts on the website contact page.</p> <p>Surrey Playing Fields Home Page - Surrey Playing Fields</p>
Future Activities:	Meetings are twice a year.
Matters of Note or Concern:	None

Annual Report by Council Representatives on Outside Bodies

Appendix 7

Outside Body:	Ashford and St Peters NHS Foundation Trust
Councillor(s):	Cllr Ellen Nicholson
Date Completed:	20/03/2024
Meetings Attended:	<p>7th June 2023 – Council of Governors 27th June 2023 - Quality Account Assurance Group Meeting 11th July 2023 - Council of Governors 27th September 2023 – Staff Awards ceremony 5th October 2023 – Governors Meeting 11th /16th October 2023 – NED Meetings part 1 & 2 6th November 2023 – Annual Report and Accounts 22nd January 2024 - Council of Governors 21st February 2024 – Council of Governors 7th March 2024 - Council of Governors 14th March 2023 - Council of Governors</p>
Description of Outside Body:	<p>Ashford and St Peters NHS Foundation Trust have a Board of Directors that is legally accountable for running the Trust. It has a Chairman, seven Non-Executive Directors (appointed by the Council of Governors for three year terms) and seven Executive Directors (who are employees).</p> <p>In addition to this Board of Directors, Foundation Trust members have elected a Council of Governors. The Council is important and influential in the way that it represents workforce colleagues and the community, giving their views to the Board of Directors on the organisation’s future direction. It does not run the Trust or get involved with the day-to-day operational issues.</p> <p>There are currently 24 members of the Council of Governors - 14 public governors, five staff governors, and five appointed governors from the local councils and universities.</p> <p>Governors have two main duties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To hold the Non-Executive Directors, individually and collectively, to account for the performance of the Board and Directors; and • To represent the interests of the members of the Trust as a whole and the interests of the public.

Annual Report by Council Representatives on Outside Bodies

Update on Recent Activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A major project to increase surgical capacity at Ashford and St Peter’s Hospitals (ASPH) is underway to create a new dedicated elective centre at Ashford Hospital, Surrey. The elective centre at Ashford will see the development of two new ophthalmology theatres and two new main Laminar flow theatres and will provide increased capacity for elective orthopaedic procedures, including hip and knee replacement surgery and ophthalmology eye surgery. 2. Woking Community Hospital Diagnostic Centre Plans developed and approved in conjunction with stakeholders, work commenced in March 2024 due for completion June/July 2024. 3. Ashford and St Peter’s Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust jointly launched a new secure patient information portal called MyCare in February. This is linked to the joint electronic patient record system. MyCare is a secure online platform that enables users to view their hospital appointments and other information from their hospital record, in a similar way to the NHS App and many of the online services offered by GP surgeries. Difficulties with the internal patient record – Cerner are in the main resolved, but ongoing work happening. 4. New Chairman appointed in 2023 – Caroline Warner The Trust Chief Executive resigned in February 2024. Work underway to find an interim Chief Executive with Surrey Heartlands ICB and NHS England assistance.
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Future Activities:	Recruitment and appointment of the chief executive, interviews will involve governors
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Matters of Note or Concern:	<p>We have received notification from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) that the results for the 2023 Maternity Survey will be published on Friday 9 February. The survey will give insight into the experiences of women and birthing people who gave birth in February 2023. It covers care provided before giving birth (antenatal care), during labour and delivery, and in the six to eight week period following birth (postnatal care).</p> <p>The CQC will also be publishing a separate report which will look at the results at a Trust level. Ashford and St Peters were disappointed to see that Ashford and St Peter’s Hospitals have been identified as performing ‘Worse than expected’, but understand that the survey was undertaken at a challenging time for maternity as this took place just one month after our unannounced CQC inspection for maternity.</p> <p>Background:</p> <p>In January 2023, Ashford and St Peter’s Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust were visited by the CQC (Care Quality Commission), who carried out an unannounced focused inspection at St Peter’s Hospital as part of the national</p>
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Annual Report by Council Representatives on Outside Bodies

	<p>maternity inspection programme. The inspection was to look at how safe and well-led maternity services were.</p> <p>Following the inspection, the CQC published a report on 29 March 2023. Our maternity service has been rated Inadequate.</p> <p>Ashford and St Peter's Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust have made significant improvements to the service in response to the CQC's findings (report from CQC in link).</p>
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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18 MARCH 2024

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Executive Summary

Each year, the Chairman of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee prepares a report outlining the activities undertaken by the Committee. This year, the Committee has reviewed a wide range of topics and has primarily completed both scrutiny and pre-decision scrutiny of the work of the Executive and the Council as a whole. The three long-standing Working Groups of the Committee – the Economic Development, Finance and Housing Working Groups – have continued to monitor and review these three core areas of the Council's activities.

The Work Programme of the Committee is regularly reviewed and updated to take account of issues affecting the Borough at the time.

Recommendations

The Council is requested to:

RESOLVE That the report be noted.

The Council has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.

Background Papers:	None.
Reporting Person:	Councillor Josh Brown Email: CllrJosh.Brown@woking.gov.uk
Contact Person:	Toby Nash, Scrutiny and Democratic Services Officer Email: Toby.Nash@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3056
Date Published:	20 March 2024

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This is the 16th Annual Report made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to the Council in accordance with its constitutional provision. The report sets out the work undertaken by the Committee and its working groups over the last year.

2.0 Summary of Work Undertaken

- 2.1 The Committee undertook overview and scrutiny of many varied topics throughout the year. The work of the Committee aided the decision-making of both the Council and Executive to ensure key decisions taken, even if not actively scrutinised by the Committee, benefitted from a critical eye not connected to those making the decision.

Pre-Decision Scrutiny and Governance & Scrutiny

- 2.2 Throughout the year, the Committee received several items on the theme of scrutinising Council activity.
- 2.3 Members were keen to ensure that guidance on scrutinising commercial risk and company governance was utilised by both Officer and Member.
- 2.4 As part of the improvements introduced to Overview and Scrutiny at the Council several years ago, the Executive - Overview and Scrutiny Protocol has encouraged the Chairman to meet at regular intervals with the Leader of the Council to discuss upcoming decisions of the Executive. The meetings have brought several (but not limited to) items of Pre-Scrutiny to the Committee, as laid out below.

Pre-Decision Scrutiny: Town Centre Masterplan

- 2.5 The Committee discussed the expenditure on the consultation and what outcomes were drawn from it. It was confirmed that the Council had spent £160,000 on the consultation with £60,000 having been received as a grant. The cost also included expenditure on preparations ahead of the consultation. The responses to the consultation could be used to inform the Local Plan and its three consultations which were required by law. The Committee indicated that any scrutiny of the money spent on the consultation was born of a concern for the Council's wider finances.
- 2.6 Two Members raised concern that there could be unforeseen consequences on the Borough villages derived from the Town Centre Masterplan proposing height limits for buildings and the extant Local Plan limiting green belt construction. The Committee discussed potential impact from the new Town Centre Masterplan and the Local Plan on construction across the Borough. There was particular concern from the two Members that an intensification of construction, particularly multi-storey, would occur in the Borough's villages to offset limits in building high-rise buildings in the Town Centre.

Pre-Decision Scrutiny: Improvement and Recovery Plan

- 2.7 As part of the directions from the Secretary of State the Council was required to develop an Improvement and Recovery Plan ('the Plan'), to be agreed by the Commissioner team appointed by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and DLUHC. Once agreed it would be necessary for the Council to update Commissioners and DLUHC on the Council's progress against the Plan after three months, six months, and every six months thereafter.
- 2.8 The Improvement and Recovery Plan has had extensive discussion since first presented to the extraordinary meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in August 2023, and the

Annual Report of the Overview And Scrutiny Committee

Committee members have raised important and challenging questions about the Plan's progress to Council officers.

- 2.9 The Committee reviewed the plan and updates in August 2023, December 2023 and March 2024.

Scrutiny Topic Proposal: Community Infrastructure Levy

- 2.10 Following the suspension of the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Fund, the Overview and Scrutiny saw an update from Brendan Arnold, the Interim Chief Finance and Section 151 Officer.
- 2.11 It was confirmed that the Council would honour all commitments under the CIL scheme including financial liabilities. There were, therefore, no legal ramifications from the current CIL financing situation. Officers considered that the developers would have no justification to apply to reclaim their money. It was necessary, due to the Council's finances, to take a measured approach to CIL funding. Officers emphasised that such an approach did not equate to a pause or freeze of the CIL scheme. It was not yet possible to determine how much cash would be available to fund CIL applications.
- 2.12 A view was expressed that direct communication on the matter between the Council and neighbourhood forums should take place. The Committee agreed to request that Officers engage with neighbourhood forums on the subject. Councillor Lyons, Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regulatory, was committed to engaging with the neighbourhood forums.
- 2.13 The Committee agreed that it would be helpful for Officers to publish a clear, digestible position statement on the Council website to summarise the position of the CIL scheme and the anticipated direction of its funding. Officers accepted the recommendation.

Pre-decision Scrutiny: Medium Term Financial Strategy: Citizens Advice Woking and Woking Community Transport

Citizens Advice Woking

- 2.14 Lorraine Buchanan, Laurence Oates, and Jakki Mimms, representatives of Citizens Advice Woking (CAW), provided a presentation on the organisation's work in the Borough.
- 2.15 Councillors and CAW officials discussed Citizens Advice Woking's work and progress. CAW had been applying for grants from other organisations but there was concern that the loss of Council funding could not be wholly replaced. Citizens Advice advised that Council Officers routinely signposted residents to the organisation or engaged directly for its expertise. In addition to the core funding received from the Council through the Service Level Agreement, CAW also received financial support for its work with refugees, paid by the Council from government funding for resettlement programmes. Lorraine Buchanan noted that the number of people seeking support from CAW had increased steadily over the previous several years. Citizens Advice noted that the core funding from the Council had reduced by five percent in the previous year and had been due to be reduced by the same again in each of the next two years prior to the Council's proposal to remove funding.

Woking Community Transport

- 2.16 Guy Padfield-Wilkins of Woking Community Transport (WCT) provided a presentation on the history and work of the organisation at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 December 2023. There existed a service-level agreement between Woking Borough Council and WCT which required provision of seven vehicles per day, 52 weeks of the year. WCT had been setup by Woking Borough Council and Surrey County Council. The dial-a-ride and day care passenger services were only available to its 3986 members. The membership had

Annual Report of the Overview And Scrutiny Committee

increased by 1618 members over the previous seven years. The service users of WCT included the elderly, disabled and vulnerable.

- 2.17 The proposed removal of funding from Woking Borough Council would also include ending the office and garage leases. Guy Padfield-Wilkins estimated the required replacement funding to be £270,000 per year. WCT paid a peppercorn for the office space, business rates and a commercial rate for the garage. The Committee extensively discussed the impact of any potential closure on the users of this important service.
- 2.18 Whilst the Committee did not make any formal recommendation on the basis of these presentations, the information discussed gave a useful insight into the impact of the Council's decisions on its residents and will certainly provide important context and information ahead of any further decisions.

Scrutiny Topic Proposal: HS2 Funding at Brookwood Cemetery

- 2.19 The establishment of a task and finish group to review the financial agreement between HS2, the Council and Brookwood Cemetery for the management of the HS2 funds for the HS2 reburials at the Cemetery. The task group had been proposed by Councillor Davis who expressed concerns over the financial agreement. The task group would review the contract and seek to understand the obligations of the Council, the status of the funding, the impact, if any, of the S114 Statement and the arrangements to ensure the continued annual transfer of funds to the Cemetery for the duration adopted in the agreement.
- 2.20 At the meeting held on 18th March, the Task and Finish Group report authored by Cllr Kevin Davis and Cllr Leslie Rice came to committee for discussion. Following the fact-finding period, it was determined that WBC has sufficient provisions in place to ensure the sustainable funding of the HS2 burial site for the contract period. The Task and Finish Group was satisfied that the appropriate funding is available, and the corporate memory of this agreement will last for the duration of the contracted 100 years. Therefore, there was no formal recommendation to the Overview and Scrutiny.

3.0 Further Areas of Scrutiny

- 3.1 In addition, the Committee monitors financial and other indicators included in the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information which is a monthly set of management information and also looks at the treasury management mid-year review as well as the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account Outturn. The Committee has also discussed Asset Disposals, Freedom Leisure Annual Review, amendments to the Constitution, the Council's Capital Investment Programme, committee meetings restructure, annual review of complaints, alongside having extensive oversight and scrutiny of the Council's budget and the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

4.0 Acknowledgments

- 4.1 As Chair I would like to thank all Members of the Committee for their participation and contributions through the year and particularly the Vice-Chair, Cllr Adam Kirby, who has ably supported the Chair and the Committee to ensure true and effective scrutiny.
- 4.2 I would like to give my sincerest thanks and my enormous sense of gratitude to the outstanding support from Officers throughout the year, in particular the Scrutiny Officer, Toby Nash, and also to the Committee's Legal Representative, Kuldip Channa.
- 4.3 I would also like to thank the Strategic Directors, Interim Directors of Finance, and Julie Fisher for attending our often-lengthy meetings.

Annual Report of the Overview And Scrutiny Committee

- 4.4 The Committee would like to thank the guests who have attended the meetings through the year and enabled a more in-depth approach to the topics covered. They provided significant information and insight for further scrutiny.
- 4.5 I would also like to thank those Portfolio Holders who attended Committee meetings to support and to add insights, in particular Cllr Ann-Marie Barker and Cllr Dale Roberts who attended the majority of meetings throughout the year.

5.0 Conclusions

- 5.1 This Committee has continued to make a significant contribution to the governance of the Council and providing robust scrutiny and challenge which will result in change to Council processes. The increased governance and support of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee itself which was put in place this year is very welcome and enables the Committee a greater capability to scrutinise topics in more detail.

6.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 6.1 There are no known financial implications arising from this report.
- 6.2 There are no known risks arising from this report.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 6.3 There are no known equalities implications arising from this report.
- 6.4 There are no known resource implications arising from this report.

Legal

- 6.5 There are no known legal implications arising from this report.

7.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 7.1 No engagement was considered necessary on the report.

REPORT ENDS

COUNCIL – 28 MARCH 2024

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ELECTIONS PANEL

Executive Summary

Attached to this report is a paper outlining the annual review undertaken by the Elections Panel. The Annual Report sets out the work carried out by Electoral Services in 2023/24 to maintain the integrity of the Electoral Register and the security of the electoral process in Woking.

The report has been considered by the Panel and is commended to the Council.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the Annual Report of the Elections Panel be received.

The Council has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.

Background Papers:	None.
Reporting Person:	Councillor Ann-Marie Barker Email: cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk
Contact Person:	Emera Chown, Electoral Services Manager Email: emera.chown@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3215
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Ann-Marie Barker Email: cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk
Date Published:	20 March 2024



Elections Panel Annual Report 2023

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Woking Borough Council Election – 5 May 2022

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Electoral Registration 2022-2023

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The revised Register was published on 1 December 2022. The total number of residential addresses at publication of the revised register was 44,451.

2.0 Registration Activity

- 2.1 To ensure that electors had as much time as possible to change or update their registration details, an elector leaflet which provided full details of the Borough election being held on 4 May 2023 was included in the Annual Council Tax mailing in March 2023. The leaflet also set out the new requirement for voters to show photo ID when voting at polling stations, the provisions in place to assist blind, partially sighted and other disabled voters at polling stations and changes to the format of poll cards.
- 2.2 In January 2023, Headteachers of seven local schools in the Borough were contacted to promote 'Welcome to Your Vote Week 2023' which was held between 30 January to 5 February 2023. The Electoral Commission led campaigns to raise awareness that 16 and 17 year olds can register as an attainer and are entitled to be included on the register of electors. A free resources pack, including presentation slides, social media graphics and posters was made available to the schools.
- 2.3 Several press releases were also issued by the Council encouraging registration within the Borough in the months leading up to the election.
- 2.4 The deadline to register for the Borough election was Monday, 17 April 2023. Electors who had submitted their applications had until Wednesday, 26 April 2023 to be verified to be included on the election register. If any new applicants could not be verified automatically, they were contacted to provide supporting evidence during this period. There were no problems with the Government Digital Service (GDS) and the online registration system for these elections.

3.0 Maintenance of the Register

Absent Vote Refresh

- 3.1 In January 2023, all absent voters with a personal identifier which was more than five years old were contacted to update their signature. Electors had six weeks to respond to the request and if no response was received after six weeks, the absent vote for the elector was removed.
- 3.2 1,954 electors were contacted with a new absent vote application form to obtain updated details. After three weeks, a reminder was sent to those electors who had not responded. 251 electors did not respond to either the initial request, or the reminder and the postal vote for these electors was removed accordingly. These electors were given the opportunity to re-apply for their postal vote when they were notified that the existing postal vote arrangement had been cancelled.

Data Checking

- 3.3 The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) uses Council sources to identify new electors to add to the Register. Regular updates from Council Tax are received, which lists the details of properties where the person liable for the Council Tax has changed. This information is cross referenced with the Electoral Register, and an Invitation to Register

(ITR) is sent out, to encourage the new occupants to register and confirm which electors can be removed from the Register. Changes to tenancy arrangements for WBC owned properties is also used to maintain the Register.

- 3.4 The Electoral Register is updated regularly with property updates from the Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG), and once it is verified that the new properties are occupied, ITR's are sent to obtain the new occupier details.

Electoral Reviews

- 3.5 The ERO reviews entries for electors where there is reason to believe that they are no longer resident at a property on a regular basis. Reasons for reviewing electors include notification of new residents at a property and post being returned from an elector as being undelivered.
- 3.6 Reviews are carried out when the ERO has received notification that an elector is no longer living at a property, but does not have secondary, collaborating information, such as Council Tax data, which is required to remove the elector from the Register.

4.0 Polling Places

- 4.1 The Council is required to review its Parliamentary polling districts and polling places before 31 January 2025. The Council carried out a review in October and November 2023 of the existing arrangements and invited comments and proposals for alternative arrangements.
- 4.2 Prior to the start of the review, Officers noted the majority of the existing arrangements were suitable and they would not be proposing any changes. Officers would be focussing attention on the St John's West polling district, with the view to changing the polling district boundary to include an alternative accessible polling place to the Sutton Avenue Common Room. In addition to this, Officers would be concentrating on the Barnsbury Polling District in identifying an alternative polling place to The Lighthouse Barnsbury if accessibility issues could not be resolved.

5.0 Annual Canvass

- 5.1 The canvass commenced on 17 July 2023 with the electoral register being disclosed to the Minister for the Cabinet Office as part of a data matching exercise known as national data matching and was carried out by using the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data. Once the results were received a further data matching exercise was undertaken at a local level using Council Tax and Housing and Benefits data known as local data matching.
- 5.2 The national data matching results were received on 19 July 2023 which gave a clear indication of the matched and unmatched properties in the Borough. The total number of matched properties and allocated to Route 1 after DWP matching was 31,209. The total number of unmatched properties and allocated to Route 2 was 13,278. The accuracy of the DWP dataset was 92.62%.
- 5.3 The local data matching was undertaken on 3 August 2023. The results confirmed that the total number of Route 1 properties was 36,917 and the total number of Route 2 properties was 7,694. The accuracy of the Council Tax dataset was 97.63%.

- 5.4 The total number of Route 3 properties was 47. These properties were exempt from data matching as they were primarily care homes, where a 'responsible person' could provide information on the residents.
- 5.5 All properties were contacted on 22 August 2023 with Route 1 properties receiving a Canvass Communication A (CCA) form or an E-Communications setting out who was registered at the property. 24,586 Route 1 properties were contacted by E-Communications this year. For those properties in receipt of a Canvass Communication A (CCA) a response was only required if the information was incorrect. These properties were only in receipt of the one canvass form and were not followed up. For those properties in receipt of an E-Communication a response was required, and a subsequent Canvass Communication A (CCA) form was sent to all non-responding properties.
- 5.6 Route 2 properties received a Canvass Communication B (CCB) form followed by two further contact attempts for non-responding properties. At the first reminder stage some electors received an E-communication and where no email address was held a subsequent Canvass Form was sent on 26 September 2023. At the final stage all non-responding properties received a personal visit carried out by the Council's canvassers.
- 5.7 All Route 3 properties were individually contacted by the Electoral Services Team.
- 5.8 15 canvassers carried out the second reminder, personal visit stage of the canvass from 28 October 2023, visiting all other properties that had not responded to the previous correspondence (either by email or by post). In total, 3,277 properties were included in this stage with each property receiving one contact attempt.
- 5.9 A breakdown of the returns by the individual routes is set out below.

Route 1 Properties	Responses Received
Number of responses received	13895
Number of responses reporting a major change	1774
Number of responses reporting no change or minor change	2365
Number of responses reporting no change	9790
Number of Additions within households	1110
Number of Deletions within households	966

Route 2 Properties	Responses Received
Number of responses received	5451
Number of responses reporting a major change	2097
Number of responses reporting no change or minor change	595
Number of responses reporting no change	2767
Number of Additions within households	1281
Number of Deletions within households	1294

Route 3 Properties	Responses Received
Number of individual responses received	47
Number of responses reporting a major change	36
Number of responses reporting no change or minor change	11
Number of Additions within households	272
Number of Deletions within households	126

- 5.10 A total number of 3111 Invitation to Register (ITR's) forms were issued to newly identified electors which were identified as part of the Canvass. A total number of 4886 new applications were received during the canvass period.
- 5.11 A total of 17,772 responses were received via the automated response services. This equates to 39.60% of all properties.
- 5.12 Prior to the publication of the register additional checks were carried out in October and November to ensure its accuracy.

Duplicate Entry Checks

- 5.13 Possible duplicate entries were analysed, checking against Council Tax records, to highlight where entries have been duplicated. Where Council Tax records show that electors have moved from one property to another, they were removed from the previous address and an Invitation to Register (ITR) was sent out.

Empty Property Check

- 5.14 The details of new developments in Woking, in particular the Sheerwater Regeneration and Town Centre developments were analysed, and cross referenced against Council tax records to ascertain which properties were empty or had been demolished.

Publication of the Revised Register

- 5.15 The revised register was published on 1 December 2023. The overall response rate to the annual canvass was at 94.85%.
- 5.16 At the start of the canvass a total number of 44,554 residential addresses were on the electoral register. The total number of residential addresses at publication of the revised register was 44,657.
- 5.17 The following information is given as a comparison of the register as at 1 September 2023, (the last publication of the rolling registration updates before the canvass) and the register as published on 1 December 2023.

Register	1 September 2023	1 December 2023
No. of Electors	75,235	75,736
Attainers (16 and 17 year olds)	407	317
Over 76s	7479	7509

Postal Voters	14,118	13975
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- 5.18 The number of electors increased during the canvass. Registration forms are sent to newly identified electors who register separately.
- 5.19 Electors who turn 18 in the course of the year (1 December – 30 November) are included in the attainer figures. Also included in the attainer figures are 16 year olds, who will turn 17 in the same period. As the newly identified attainer electors complete their registrations, the attainer numbers will increase.

Borough Election 4 May 2023

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides a comprehensive overview of the Borough Election 2023. It outlines the processes put in place from the initial publication of the Notice of Election to the declaration of the result, to comply with legislation and ensure the integrity of the election process.
- 1.2 The Elections Act 2022 introduced a new requirement for voters to show an accepted form of photo identification (ID) to vote in person at a polling station. In addition to this, changes were required to be made in terms of what help is available to people voting in a polling station. This legislation were implemented for the May 2023 Poll.

2.0 Photo Identification (ID)

- 2.1 A local Voter ID public awareness campaign commenced on Monday 9 January 2023 to coincide with the Electoral Commission’s national campaign at each stage up until the Borough Election on 4 May 2023. The campaign promoted key messages around the requirement for voter ID to vote at a polling station and how to apply for a Voter Authority Certificate. Resources such as social media channels, press releases, roadshows and the distribution of an elections leaflet to every property within the borough were used to raise awareness amongst electors. Posters were placed on borough and community boards around the borough and at key locations including the Town Centre, Woking Leisure Centre, Eastwood Leisure Centre and Woking Sportsbox. Leaflets were also distributed to community centres, places of worships and community groups/organisations.
- 2.2 Tailored information to help support vulnerable residents, traveller communities, disabled, older, trans and non-binary people to understand and meet the new voter ID requirements was circulated to over 477 charities/organisations within the borough.
- 2.3 Engagement sessions were held with the residents of the York Road Project in April 2023 to promote electoral registration and the Voter Authority Certification application process. These sessions resulted in six residents being added to the register of electors and the successful application for the Voter Authority Certificate.

2.4 An elector who did not have or did not wish to use one of the accepted forms of photographic ID, could apply for a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC). The Voter Authority Certificate application service went live on 16 January 2023. Electors could make an application online via the governments new ERO Portal, request a paper application or apply in person at the Civic Offices. Over 70 electors applied for the Voter Authority Certificate at the deadline for receipt of applications on 25 April 2023.

3.0 Accessibility of Polling Stations

3.1 A meeting was held with Members of the Woking Access Group on 18 November 2022 to discuss the new legislation regarding accessibility of polls ahead of the borough election. Feedback was sought on the range of support for voters with disabilities currently available in polling stations and the proposals to be implemented to make our polling stations more accessible to all.

3.2 Provisions to further assist blind, partially sighted and other disabled voters at polling stations was implemented for the borough election on 4 May 2023. Polling stations were provided with the following additional equipment to help all electors to vote independently and in secret:

- Notice of the range of help and support available to electors
- Pencil grips
- Large A5 magnifying devices
- LED touch sensor light in disabled polling booth
- Polling station staff name badges
- Yellow ballot box slot highlighters

3.3 The Council's online polling station finder tool was updated to include a function whereby electors could view the accessibility facilities and support available at our polling stations prior to Polling Day.

4.0 Notice of Elections

4.1 The Notice of Elections was published on Friday, 24 March, on the instruction of the Returning Officer.

5.0 Election Staff

5.1 The Returning Officer appointed seven Deputy Returning Officers (DROs). They were appointed with full powers and their role included adjudication of returned postal vote statements, inspecting polling stations and the oversight of individual count teams.

5.2 The election was managed by the Electoral Services Manager, with support from the Electoral Services Officer, Interim Director of Legal and Democratic Services and Head of Democratic Services.

5.3 The opening of postal votes was managed by the Head of Democratic Services supported by the Democratic Services Team.

5.4 Polling station and count staff were recruited, where possible, from Council employees and previous election staff. Staff were notified that, when accepting an offer of employment to work in a polling station they were consenting to work during the hours of poll without a rest break and in excess of the maximum working hours provided by the Working Time Directive.

6.0 Staff Training

6.1 All staff working in a polling station undertook training. The training was undertaken on-line and received positive feedback.

6.2 Additional training was provided and delivered by the Electoral Services Manager specifically in relation to the new Voter ID requirements.

6.3 A Returning Officers Briefing was held via Microsoft Teams on 2 May to emphasise the key points and priorities ahead of Polling Day.

6.4 Count supervisors and assistant count supervisors received full guidance on the verification and count process in advance. Additionally Count supervisors and assistant count supervisors were briefed prior to the start of the verification and count process.

7.0 Nominations

7.1 Nominations for Borough election were dealt with by the Electoral Services Manager.

8.0 Poll Cards

8.1 Poll cards were printed and issued after the Notice of Election was published on 28 March 2023.

8.2 One further poll card mailing was sent on 25 April 2023, to ensure all eligible electors received official notification.

9.0 Postal Votes

The management in the printing and production of the postal ballot packs was outsourced to a commercial supplier, Civica Election Services for this election. The fusion pack design was selected which fuses the postal voting statement and the ballot paper together, prior to printing. The Fusion pack therefore eliminates the risk of ballot paper mismatch. The Electoral Services Manager retained oversight of the process and attended Civica's offices to inspect the packs before they were distributed.

Issue of Postal Vote Packs

9.1 The first stage issue of postal votes was on Friday, 14 April 2023. A further postal vote issue was despatched on 24 April 2023, these were for electors who registered to vote after 17 April 2023 (registration deadline) and those who applied for a postal vote by 18 April 2023 (postal vote deadline). In total, 14,289 postal votes were issued which equates to 19% of the electorate being sent a postal ballot.

9.2 37 replacement ballot paper packs were issued up until the deadline of 5pm on Election Day. Packs are reissued in cases where the elector advised that they had spoilt their ballot papers, lost their postal ballot papers, or had not received them. In such circumstances, the original postal vote ballot paper was cancelled, and a new postal vote pack was issued.

Opening of Postal Votes

The opening of all postal votes was held at Export House on the third floor.

- 9.3 Opening sessions started on Monday 24 April 2023. As in previous years, the DROs adjudicated the postal vote scanning. Agents were advised in advance of the dates of the opening sessions.
- 9.4 In total five opening sessions were held. The final opening session was held on Thursday, 4 May which dealt with those postal votes arriving in the post on the day of the election, those handed in at either the Civic Offices or polling stations and those returned by the Post Office through the final sweep.
- 9.5 The post box at the Civic Offices was checked at 10.00pm and a final 'sweep' was undertaken by the Royal Mail at their delivery office, which resulted in further postal votes being received.

Returns Analysis

- 9.6 71.4% of postal vote packs were returned, representing a total of 10,201 envelopes returned.

Process Followed

- 9.7 Postal votes are opened, and the contents checked prior to the scanning of the postal vote statement. At this stage, a postal vote can be provisionally rejected for the following reasons:
- Ballot Papers Numbers do not match – ballot papers cannot be accepted where the number on the ballot paper envelope does not match the number on the postal vote statement.
 - Ballot Paper Envelope and Ballot Papers are missing.
 - Postal Vote Statement is absent.

Verification of Postal Vote Statements

- 9.8 After the initial checks, postal vote statements are verified by a DRO, to ensure the signature and date of birth provided on the statement matches those on the original postal vote application.
- 9.9 The reasons for rejecting a postal vote at this stage are:
- Date of Birth Rejected – either the date of birth has not been entered on the postal vote statement, or it does not match the date of birth provided on the postal vote application.
 - Signature Rejected – either the signature has not been entered on the postal vote statement, or it does not match the signature provided on the postal vote application.

- Signature and Date of Birth Rejected - either the voter did not complete the postal vote statement, or both the signature and date of birth provided on the postal vote statement did not match the signature and date of birth provided on the postal vote application.

Rejected Postal Votes

9.10 The table below sets out the number of postal votes rejected through the scanning process. Postal votes are recorded as provisionally rejected in those instances where there is a possibility of reconciling the issue (such as a missing Statement). Any provisionally rejected postal votes which cannot be reconciled are deemed rejected at the close of poll.

Category	2021	2022	2023
Rejected	261	277	208
Provisionally Rejected	285	122	168
Reconciled	16	98	148
Total Rejected	530	301	228
Missing Ballot Papers	58	9	4

9.11 Set out below are the number of postal votes rejected as part of the signature and date of birth verification process.

Reason for Rejection	2021	2022	2023
Date of Birth Rejected	74	84	49
Date of Birth Missing	0	23	39
Signature Rejected	168	115	68
Signature Missing	0	14	18
DOB and Sig Rejected	11	12	19
DOB and Sig Missing	0	26	11
Lost, Spoilt and Cancelled	8	3	4

Post - Scanning Checks

9.12 Following the scanning of the postal vote statements, the contents of the ballot paper envelope are checked. A postal vote can be rejected at this stage for the following reasons:

- Ballot Papers Numbers do not match – ballot papers cannot be accepted where the number on the ballot paper does not match the number on the ballot paper envelope.
- Ballot Papers were absent.

9.13 Any errors relating to personal identifiers were recorded at the scanners. Where electors needed to update their identifier, they were contacted following the election. Any clerical errors were also corrected.

10.0 Polling Stations

- 10.1 45 polling stations were used for the elections in 29 venues, 11 of which were dual stations and 2 were triple stations.
- 10.2 All polling equipment was delivered prior to polling day and Presiding Officers were asked to record any issues that occurred or were reported on polling day in a log book. This included possible errors on the register, visits from Police Officers and cases where electors were marked as an absent voter and claimed not to have asked for a postal vote. This information has been analysed and, where appropriate, electors have been contacted.
- 10.3 Seven representatives from The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DHLUC) observed the poll at various polling stations and attended the postal vote opening session on 4 May 2023 and Count as Electoral Commission Observers. Feedback received was extremely positive in the efficient running of the borough election.
- 10.4 Polling station data was provided to Democracy Club to be included in the voting tool, polling station finder. Between Monday 1 May and Thursday 4 May a total of 3056 residents in the Borough used this tool to find their polling station.

11.0 Voter Identification Data

- 11.1 All polling stations were provided with documents to capture and record information relating to the voter identification requirements. The Ballot Paper Refusal List (BPRL) and Voter ID Evaluation Form (VIDEF) notes sheet were used throughout polling day.
- 11.2 Woking was one of a few local authorities selected by the Electoral Integrity Programme at DHLUC to provide early voter ID response data from the May Poll. The data would be used to address issues raised by local and national media, politicians and others with an interest in the implementation of voter identification. Woking's data was provided to DHLUC after the close of poll at midnight on 4 May.
- 11.3 The data shows that 99.7% of electors voting in the borough's polling stations brought photo ID that met newly introduced voter ID requirements.
- 11.4 Collated figures across the borough show 17,377 electors voted at our 45 polling stations on 4 May.
- 11.5 The figures show while 154 electors were initially turned away, 110 returned with acceptable ID and were able to vote. This means 71.4% of those initially turned away returned and were issued with a ballot paper.
- 11.6 At the end of polling day, 44 electors who tried to vote in a polling station were not given a ballot paper because they did not meet the new voter ID requirements – 0.3%.

12.0 Verification and Count

- 12.1 All polling station documentation and ballot boxes were returned to Woking Leisure Centre on Thursday, 4 May following the close of polls. Following the completion of the final postal vote opening session the postal ballot papers were stored alongside in the Main Hall overnight with two security guards' presence.
- 12.2 The verification of the Borough election was held on Friday, 5 May at Woking Leisure Centre from 9.30am. There were five count teams consisting of a count supervisor, an

assistant count supervisor and fourteen count assistants. Four count teams were located in the Main Hall and one in the Wurlitzer.

- 12.3 The count of the ballot papers for the Borough Election commenced from midday. Following the confirmation of the Borough results, all count teams were released at 4.00pm. SERCO removed all documentation and equipment from Woking Leisure Centre to the secure store.
- 12.4 During the count, security staff were in place in the Main Hall and Wurlitzer. CCTV cameras were installed in the Main Hall which covered the document sorting area, the counting areas and the entrances to the room.
- 12.5 Colour coded wrist bands were issued to all attendees, to differentiate between levels of security access for all those in attendance.

Storage of Documents

All documents returned from polling stations and counted ballot papers were sorted into crates in the Main Hall and these were sealed and removed to a secure store at the Civic Offices on Friday, 5 May.

Turnout

- 12.6 The turnout for the elections was 37%.

13.0 Electoral Integrity

- 13.1 The Returning Officer and DROs were available to investigate and deal with any matters reported from Polling Stations, Candidates and Agents on Polling Day. No significant issues were reported, and no issues were reported to Surrey Police.
- 13.2 There are no concerns in respect of electoral integrity to report.

14.0 Conclusion

- 14.1 The election was a success. The process ran smoothly and efficiently. The elections team have invited feedback from those involved to continue to review and improve its practices and procedures where possible.

REPORT ENDS

COUNCIL – 28 MARCH 2024

ANNUAL REPORT ON MEMBER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Executive Summary

Each year the Council puts in place an extensive programme to support the learning and development of Elected Members. This report seeks to give a comprehensive picture of the activities of the past year, as well as looking forward to the coming Municipal Year.

In addition, the Policy for Member learning and development is reviewed annually by the Lead Members responsible for promoting learning and development amongst Councillors, and is now before the Council for approval.

Recommendations

The Council is requested to:

RESOLVE That

- (i) the Elected Member learning and development activities of 2023/24 be noted; and
- (ii) the Policy for Elected Member Learning and Development, as set out in Appendix 2 to this report, be noted.

The Council has the authority to determine the recommendations set out above.

Background Papers:	None.
Reporting Person:	Councillor Rob Leach Email: cllrob.leach@woking.gov.uk
Contact Person:	Frank Jeffrey, Head of Democratic Services Email: frank.jeffrey@woking.gov.uk , Extn: 3012
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Ann-Marie Barker Email: cllrann-marie.barker@woking.gov.uk
Date Published:	20 March 2024

Annual Report on Member Learning and Development

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report seeks to provide an overview of the learning and development opportunities provided for Elected Members over the past Municipal Year.

2.0 The Lead Member

- 2.1 Councillor Leach acts as Lead Member for Woking Borough Council on Elected Member learning and development.
- 2.2 A protocol for the Lead Member has been previously adopted by the Council to set out the roles and responsibilities of those Members appointed to the position.
- 2.3 A copy of the protocol is attached at Appendix 1.

3.0 The Council's Learning and Development Policy

- 3.1 The Council's Learning and Development Policy for elected Members was comprehensively reviewed in 2015 by the Member Development Panel, before being agreed at Council. At the time, it was agreed that the Policy would be presented to Council annually in order to ensure that it remains relevant and continues to underpin the Council's approach to Member learning and development.
- 3.2 In their discussions on the policy, the Member Development Group highlighted the need to raise and maintain awareness of the policy. Towards this end, the policy has been integrated in induction sessions for new Councillors and forms part of the new Members' pack. A copy of the updated Policy is attached at Appendix 2 to this report; no substantial changes are proposed.

4.0 Member Learning and Development Programme 2023/24

- 4.1 Each year a programme of training events, briefings and engagement sessions is arranged for Borough Councillors and typically involves Council Officers, external trainers and other agencies and bodies. This section summarises the events held over the past Municipal Year.
- 4.2 The majority of these events were led by Council Officers and were thus free of cost to the Council. The number of those attending has not been recorded in all cases, largely in cases where the event was held online.

Session	Date	Attendance
CLT Induction	10/05/23	5
ICT & Dem Services Induction	11/05/23	8
Equality and Diversity	17/05/23	7
Code of Conduct / Probity in Planning	23/05/23	10
Planning Cttee Induction	25/05/23	8
O&S Induction	30/05/23	9
Member Briefing: Section 114 Notice	07/06/24	<i>Figure not available</i>
Member Briefing: Section 114 Notice	08/06/24	<i>Figure not available</i>
Licensing Cttee Induction	19/06/23	4
Health and Safety	22/06/23	5

Annual Report on Member Learning and Development

Member Briefing: MTFS	04/07/24	<i>Figure not available</i>
Finance	27/07/23	8
Member Briefing: Fibre Installation	01/08/24	12
Member Briefing: MTFS	06/09/24	<i>Figure not available</i>
Member Briefing: Grant Thornton	21/09/24	<i>Figure not available</i>
Member Briefing: Public Consultation	02/10/24	<i>Figure not available</i>
Member Briefing: IRP Update	15/11/24	<i>Figure not available</i>
White Ribbon & Violence Against Women	27/11/23	9
Member Visioning Workshop	07/12/24	<i>Figure not available</i>
Member Briefing: MTFS	11/12/24	<i>Figure not available</i>
Member Briefing: MTFS	11/01/24	<i>Figure not available</i>
Member Briefing: Budget	17/01/24	17
O&S Committee Informal Finance Workshop	17/01/24	12
CfGS/LGA O&S Member Workshop	25/01/24	14
Member Briefing: Meet the Commissioners	13/02/24	<i>Figure not available</i>
Safeguarding	21/02/24	11
Member Briefing: Budget	28/02/24	19
Member Briefing: Council Meeting Restructure	29/02/24	9
Member Briefing: Council Meeting Restructure	07/03/24	14

- 4.3 The Council holds membership to the Local Government Association which provides a comprehensive programme of training sessions at no additional cost. Officers routinely identify and promote such training as may be of interest to Members. Members are able to review and book these briefings themselves and this facility is also promoted by Officers.

Annual Budget

- 4.4 As part of gateway savings, the Member Development budget was identified and approved for elimination. Consequently, there has been no expenditure on training for 2023/24.

5.0 Member Learning and Development Programme 2024/25

- 5.1 The programme for the coming Municipal Year is being developed and currently includes the following:

Event	Date
Members Induction (CLT)	08/05/24
Members Induction (ICT & Dem Services)	09/05/24
Equality and Diversity	13/05/24
Planning Cttee	21/05/24
O&S	23/05/24
Code of Conduct / Probity in Planning	28/05/24

Annual Report on Member Learning and Development

Finance	05/06/24
Licensing Cttee	06/06/24
Health and Safety	10/06/24
Safeguarding	18/06/24
White Ribbon & Violence Against Women	TBC

5.2 During the coming months and the year itself, additional briefings and training events will be arranged. These may include briefing sessions involving partners (for example Police, ThamesWey, Surrey County Council departments, etc). As in past years, briefing sessions on current issues will be arranged as necessary.

5.3 In the meantime, all Members of the Council are encouraged to submit suggestions for future training or briefing opportunities which could help them in their roles. Officers will be proactive in seeking these suggestions, communicating regularly with Members.

6.0 Mandatory Training

6.1 At its meeting in October 2017, the Council resolved to introduce a programme of mandatory training for Elected Members be introduced as part of the Council's Learning and Development Programme for Councillors from May 2018. The training for each committee was mandatory for those members sitting on it however other members were able to attend the training if it were of interest to them.

6.2 Topics included in the programme are:

- Code of Conduct
- Diversity and Equalities
- Finance Training
- Health and Safety
- Induction Training
- Licensing Training (for members of the Licensing Committee)
- Planning (for members of the Planning Committee)
- Safeguarding
- Scrutiny (for members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee)

6.3 At its meeting on 10 February 2022 Council resolved that the Council host annual awareness training for Members on White Ribbon.

6.4 Group Leaders will be encouraged to monitor the attendance of their Members and if necessary review their membership of Committees if they have not attended the relevant mandatory training.

7.0 Corporate Strategy

7.1 Woking Borough Council's Corporate Plan is a document about values and how these shape the future of the Borough. Ensuring that Elected Members have the skills and knowledge to serve the Borough to the best of their abilities is key to ensuring the delivery of the Council's Corporate Plan.

8.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report. The Council allocated a budget (£7,500) for Member learning and development over the past year which is used to employ external trainers and enable Members to attend events away from the Borough. Going forward, the budget has been removed in light of the financial position of the Council. In-house training will continue to be provided, together with free online opportunities provided by agencies such as the Local Government Association.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 8.2 This report sets out the extent of the Council's programme of learning and development offered to Councillors and provides an update on the Authority's policy for Member learning and development.
- 8.3 There are no equalities issues arising from this report.

Legal

- 8.4 This report has been reviewed by Legal Services who have not raised any issues.

REPORT ENDS



Protocol for Cross Party Engagement in the Development of the Learning and Development Programme for Elected Members.

2024/25

This Protocol has been drawn up to define the role of the Lead Member and put in place measures to ensure that a cross-party approach is maintained. Expectations of the roles played by Group Leaders are also referred to in the Protocol. Officers will work with the Lead Member for Elected Member Development over the year on managing and further developing the Council's approach to Member Learning and Development.

-
- The Lead Member to work with Officers in developing and taking forward new initiatives and approaches in Member learning and development.
 - The Lead Member to lead on the annual review of the Member Learning and Development Policy and to present the Policy to Council on an annual basis.
 - The Lead Member to oversee the continuing development of the Member Learning and Development Framework, presenting the Framework to the Executive and/or Council if necessary.
 - The Lead Member to champion Member learning and development across the authority, including opposition Members.
 - Cross-party support to be sought for all elements of the Council's Learning and Development Policy.
 - The Lead Member to ensure that opportunities for learning and development are available to all elected Members, regardless of political affiliation.
 - The Lead Member to ensure that the Council ensures the equality of the Learning and Development Programme, with timing of events to take into account cultural and personal circumstances.
 - The Lead Member to champion a wide range of delivery methods to meet the learning styles of Councillors.
 - Opposition Groups to be consulted on new learning and development initiatives before their introduction.

Annual Report on Member Learning and Development

- Group Leaders to be consulted on specific requests or proposals for training opportunities received from elected Members, the Lead Member or Officers.
- The Lead Member to review the feedback received from post event questionnaires, the Member Surveys, the surveys of newly elected Councillors and the surveys of recently retired Councillors.
- Group Leaders to promote learning and development opportunities amongst the Members of their political group.
- Group Leaders to review the learning and development needs within their political group and identify any gaps in the programme of events.
- Group Leaders to promote the Council's Learning and Development Framework and the Roles and Responsibilities of Councillors to the Members within their political group.
- The Lead Member to promote and support the 'Could You Be A Councillor' event targeting individuals interested in seeking office as a Borough Councillor.
- The Lead Member to monitor Member attendance at the learning and development events, raising any concerns with the relevant Group Leaders if necessary.

Member Learning and Development

Contact Details

The Council's Learning and Development Programme is managed by the Democratic Services Officer, Telephone 01483 743012 or email member.services@woking.gov.uk



Woking Borough Council

Member Learning and Development Policy 2024/25

Reviewed March 2024

Introduction

Woking Borough Council is committed to the training, development and learning of the elected Members throughout their terms of office, from the point at which they first express an interest in standing as a Borough Councillor to their retirement from public office. Elected Members are integral to achieving the Council's aims and strategic objectives and to the delivery of high quality services.

The Council recognises that Members have different skills and expertise gained through employment and life which can all be used for the benefit of the Council and the community as a whole. As such, Woking Borough Council is keen to enable Members to access as many development opportunities as possible to make them effective in their ever changing role as a Councillor.

Member development can have a significant impact on the performance of the organisation. Well-equipped Members are able to contribute to the running of the Borough, and can deal with the challenges and changes faced by the organisation.

The Member Development Policy applies to all elected Members. It also applies to any co-opted Members, including the Independent Co-Opted Member of the Standards and Audit Committee and the Council's Independent Person. The implementation of this Policy is being led by the Lead Members for Member learning and development.

The Role of Members

The locally elected Councillor has a key role in achieving improved outcomes in the community. As Elected Members (Members) of the Council they have to perform a multi-faceted role of Community Leader, Community Representative and Community Champion.

In these roles Members have a key part to play in achieving the Council's Service and Performance Plan and in helping it make its contribution to the Community Strategy. The participation by Members in learning will help them reach their full potential and equip them to fully contribute to the delivery of the Council's objectives and key priorities.

The purpose of the Member Development programme is to provide a supportive environment to enhance the knowledge, capabilities, and experiences which individual Members identify are required to enable them to perform the Members' role.

All Members have individual responsibility to:

- Identify their own learning and development needs and to seek opportunities to improve their effectiveness and increase their potential.
- Share their knowledge and skills with the peers.
- Review and evaluate learning and development activities so as to apply increased knowledge, skills and personal qualities developed through those activities.

Group Leaders are responsible for ensuring that their Members have the necessary skills, knowledge and competencies to carry out their Council and community responsibilities. They are primarily responsible for ensuring that Members participate in the training and development activities which are necessary to enable them to do so, and to achieve the Council's aims and objectives.

The Council's Commitment to Member Development

The Council has a clear commitment to improving and sustaining the standards of Member development within the Council. In support of the development of all its elected Councillors to ensure that they are able to meet all the challenges that face them through the wide range of roles and responsibilities they hold, Woking Borough Council is committed to ensuring that:

- all Councillors have access to appropriate learning and development activities to enable them to acquire the skills and knowledge required to be an effective elected Member.
- a planned and structured approach to elected Member learning and development is taken.
- access to learning and development activities is equitable to all.
- learning and development should be linked, wherever possible, to the roles and responsibilities of Members.
- Members are supported in developing their roles as Ward Representatives and as Community Leaders.
- Members' capacity is developed to formulate and keep under review the Council's Policies and Strategies.
- a Member led strategic approach to development is adopted through the Lead Members for learning and development.

Annual Report on Member Learning and Development

- citizenship and a good work-life balance is promoted.
- Member learning and development activities should be adequately resourced and within available budgets.
- Members should be encouraged to identify their own development needs and participate fully in learning and development activities.
- all Members are provided with a development framework to help identify learning and development needs.

In furthering these objectives the Council will ensure that:-

- Member development will take place within a structured process, having regard to the needs of the individual and to corporate objectives;
- Members will be offered equal access to development opportunities regardless of their physical circumstances, ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, age or religion;
- Member development will be provided and monitored in a way that is respectful to the dignity and privacy of individual Members;
- Member development opportunities will promote work/life balance, community engagement and good citizenship;
- development resources, activities and processes will give Members the knowledge, capabilities, opportunities, networks and experiences they need to fulfil their role as effectively as possible; and
- development resources, activities and processes will be regularly monitored by Members and officers to ensure effectiveness.

Mandatory Training for Elected Members

In October 2017 the Council agreed to introduce a programme of mandatory training for Elected Members, to be made available online where possible. Topics identified for the programme, together with their frequency and the target Members, are outlined below.

Training	Code of Conduct
Frequency	Once during each four year term of office.
Required	All Members.
Delivery format	In-house training session.

Training	Diversity and Equalities
Frequency	Once during each four year term of office.
Required	All Members.
Delivery format	In-house training session.

Training	Finance Training
Frequency	Once during each four year term of office.
Required	All Members.

Annual Report on Member Learning and Development

Delivery format	In-house training session.
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Training	General Data Protection Regulation
Frequency	Once, at the start of the Councillor's first term of office.
Required	All Members.
Delivery format	Online.

Training	Health and Safety
Frequency	Once during each four year term of office.
Required	All Members.
Delivery format	In-house and/or external training provider.

Training	Induction Training
Frequency	Once.
Required	Newly elected Members. Re-elected Members to be encouraged to attend.
Delivery format	In-house training.

Training	Licensing Training
Frequency	Annual, as part of the agenda for the first meeting of the Committee.
Required	All Members of the Licensing Committee and Portfolio Holder and Shadow Portfolio Holder for Licensing Services.
Delivery format	In-house and/ or external training provider.

Training	Planning
Frequency	Annual.
Required	All Members of the Planning Committee, Portfolio Holder and Shadow Portfolio Holder for Planning Services.
Delivery format	In-house and/or external training provider.

Training	Safeguarding
Frequency	Once during each four year term of office.
Required	All Members.
Delivery format	In-house and/or external training provider.

Training	Scrutiny
Frequency	Annual, as part of the agenda for the first meeting of the Committee.
Required	All Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
Delivery format	In-house and/or external training provider.

Policy Implementation

The Council has appointed Elected Members to take forward the Council's programme of Member learning and development. These Lead Members for Member Learning and Development are charged with the responsibility of undertaking and maintaining a self-assessment and developing and keeping under review a Learning and Development Plan for Members.

Support for the Lead Members is provided by the Council's Democratic Services Team.

The Lead Members are responsible for monitoring the Council's Member Development programme and identifying any new development opportunities. The Lead Members promote Member Development amongst the political groups. Furthermore, any feedback received on the development programme, whether from serving Councillors, newly elected Councillors or recently retired Councillors, is reported to the Lead Members, with any matters of concern or improvement highlighted. The majority of the work on Member Development is undertaken in consultation with the Lead Members by email or telephone; however, meetings would be arranged when necessary.

The responsibilities of the Lead Members include:

- Helping their peers to identify and find opportunities to meet their learning and development needs.
- Creating an environment that encourages self-development and continuous learning and the sharing of knowledge and skills amongst the Members in the political groups.
- Evaluating investment in learning and development and participation by Members.
- Monitor feedback from Members on the learning and development programmes provided by the Council.
- Regularly review the Council's Member Development Policy.

Member Development Support and Resources

Core support for the Member Development programmes of the Council is provided by the Officers within the Council's Democratic Services Team, in consultation with the Lead Members.

The Democratic Services Team is responsible for:

- supporting the Lead Members for learning and development.
- preparing the annual Learning and Development Programme and report as required by the Lead Members for learning and development.
- organising, and in some cases providing, learning and development as identified in the Learning and Development Plan.
- maintaining the Councillors role descriptions and responsibilities, the Councillors Development Framework and the Council's 'Could You be a Councillor' document.
- making the necessary arrangements for the booking of courses and other development events.
- liaising with Corporate Management Group and Business Managers to identify future development topics.

COUNCIL – 28 MARCH 2024

PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024-25

Executive Summary

Pay Policy

Sections 38 to 43 of the Localism Act 2011 require local authorities to prepare an annual pay policy statement for each financial year.

The statement must specifically cover the authority's policies relating to:

- the remuneration of its chief officers;
- the remuneration of its lowest-paid employees, and
- the relationship between – the remuneration of its chief officers, and the remuneration of its employees who are not chief officers
- the definition of 'lowest-paid employees' adopted;
- the level and elements of remuneration for each chief officer;
- remuneration of chief officers on recruitment;
- increases and additions to remuneration for each chief officer;
- the use of performance-related pay for chief officers;
- the use of bonuses for chief officers;
- the approach to the payment of chief officers on their ceasing to hold office or to be employed by the authority;
- the publication of and access to information relating to remuneration of chief officers; The statement may also cover the authority's policy relating to:
- policies for the financial year relating to the other terms and conditions applying to the authority's chief officers.

Chief Officer is defined to include:

- the head of its paid service designated under section 4(1) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989;
- its monitoring officer under section 5(1) of that Act;
- a statutory chief officer under section 2(6) of that Act; - a non-statutory chief officer under section 2(7) of that Act; - a deputy chief officer in section 2(8) of that Act.

The pay policy statement has to be approved by a resolution of the authority. Following approval, the statement must be published as soon as possible on the authority's website. The Council may amend the pay policy statement in-year and this also requires a resolution.

The Act specifies that the functions relating to pay accountability are not executive functions and that section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972, which gives local authorities powers to arrange for the discharge of their functions by committees, officers or other local authorities, does not apply to these functions. This means that the resolution must be approved by full Council.

Recommendations

The Council is invited to approve the Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2024/25 and in so doing comply with the provisions of the Localism Act 2011.

RESOLVE That the Pay Policy Statement be approved for publication.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.

Background Papers: None.

Reporting Person: Julie Fisher, Chief Executive
Email: julie.fisher@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3333

Contact Person: Amanda Jeffrey, Head of Human Resources
Email: amanda.jeffrey@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3904

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

Date Published: 20 March 2024

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Pay Policy Statement is provided in accordance with Sections 38 - 43 of the Localism Act 2011.
- 1.2 This Pay Policy Statement sets out Woking Borough Council's policies relating to the pay of its workforce for the financial year 2024-25.
- 1.3 This Statement relates to employees of the Council and therefore does not apply to colleagues employed by a third party contracted to work for the authority (although the comments under the sections below on interim support and preventing tax avoidance should be noted).

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Council has developed its own local terms and conditions including pay. The local pay scale covers all employees of the Council.
- 2.2 As required by law, the Council provides all its employees with the opportunity to join the Local Government Pension Scheme.

3.0 Definitions

- 3.1 For the purpose of this pay policy the following definitions will apply:

'Remuneration', in addition to salary this includes taxable earnings and non-taxable benefits (and is more particularly defined in section 46 of the Localism Act 2011).

'Chief officer' refers to the following statutory and non-statutory roles within Woking Borough Council as follows:

- Chief Executive, as Head of Paid Service
- Strategic Directors
- Section 151 Officer/Chief Finance Officer and Monitoring Officer
- Senior Managers who report directly to those listed above

- 3.2 'Lowest paid Employees' refers to employees employed within grade W1 of the Council's current pay grading structure, other than apprenticeships or traineeships. This definition for the 'lowest paid employees' has been adopted because grade W1 is the lowest grade on the Council's grading structure on which employees are paid. The bottom point on this pay scale is £21,029. This will increase to £23,088 from 1 April 2024 in line with the Real Living Wage. To enable meaningful comparison the Council uses employees on full time contracts for this definition.

4.0 Determining pay

- 4.1 Remuneration needs to be adequate to secure and retain quality employees dedicated to fulfilling the Council's business objectives and delivering services to the public. This has to be balanced by ensuring remuneration is appropriate within the financial context we are operating in. The Council has responsibility for balancing these factors. The overall pay bill is controlled within a staffing budget agreed at least annually.
- 4.2 It is essential for good governance that decisions on pay and reward packages for chief executives and chief officers are made in an open and accountable way. Our policy is to pay appropriately to attract competent and experienced senior employees to lead the organisation.

Our aim is to be regarded as competitive as compared to the level of pay locally and neighbouring local authorities.

- 4.3 All Woking Borough Council employees are on local conditions. The pay and reward structure and the performance management process apply to all employees including chief officers. Targets for both objectives and behaviours are set and performance against those targets is assessed at least annually.
- 4.4 The Authority has a salary and grading structure for all employees which includes the grades and salaries applicable to chief officers. The grade allocated to a post is determined by the duties, level of responsibility and behaviours required as outlined in the job description, person specification and role map.
- 4.5 The grade framework comprises of 12 grades. Outside the main framework there are 4 trainee grades. All employees are placed within the grade framework on a fixed salary based on an assessment of the job role. Progression through a grade is based on an assessment of performance, skills and behaviours following the outcome of an annual performance and development review (PDR).
- 4.6 Indexation (cost of living) is considered annually for all employees in consultation with the Executive and UNISON.
- 4.7 The Council has previously made provision to progress employees through pay grades based on meeting performance expectations set and reviewed through the PDR (performance development review) process.
- 4.8 An Employee Committee will be established in 2024/25 which will review local terms and conditions of employment for employees and make recommendations regarding pay issues and the annual local pay award.
- 4.9 Given the Council's current financial position, there will be no cost of living or performance based pay awarded for 2024/25 other than for colleagues on the lowest point of W1 in line with the Real Living Wage.
- 4.10 The Council recognises that maintaining this pay position indefinitely is not sustainable. It is therefore proposing that alongside the position that has to be taken for 2024/25, the Council will make some pay and reward commitments from 2025/26 as follows:
 - The Council will align with the National Employers formal collective agreement pay award for local government services (Green Book) employees. This will mean that the Council will keep pace with the nationally agreed pay awards for local government employees.
 - Review the Council's Performance Development Review process so that it recognises staff performance and better supports performance-based progression through pay scales.
- 4.11 In addition to basic pay all chief officers and employees are eligible to receive the following benefits:
 - If the officer is a member of the Local Government Pension Scheme, the employers' contribution.
 - Payment of an annual subscription to one professional institution where this has a clear benefit or is a requisite to the job.
 - A flexible benefit paid in monthly instalment. This can be used to purchase a public sector season ticket or as a cash alternative. Normal tax and national insurance rules apply.

4.12 The Council does not have a lump sum performance related pay or bonus scheme.

5.0 Policy on the lowest paid employees

5.1 When determining any pay award the Council considers the needs of the lowest paid and matches the Real Living Wage (outside London rate) as determined by the Living Wage Foundation. As in previous years, for 2024/25 the lowest point on the Councils pay framework will align to the Real Living Wage, this is currently set at £12 per hour.

5.2 The Council is supportive of the principle of equal pay in employment and has made a commitment to involve and work positively with UNISON to develop and maintain an open and transparent process and dialogue.

6.0 Pay ratios

6.1 Our policy is that the ratio is broadly in line with comparator authorities.

6.2 The average (median) chief officer remuneration is £85,598; the average (median) remuneration for employees other than the chief officers is £38,422. Therefore the ratio of average chief officer remuneration to the average remuneration of other employees is 2.22.

6.3 The ratio between the highest paid earner, the Chief Executive, to the average (median) remuneration of the whole workforce is 4.61.

7.0 Recruitment and retention

7.1 Our policy is to take into account the relevant skills and experience of the person appointed. Appointments at chief officer level below Chief Executive are made by more senior officers with Member involvement as appropriate. On occasion the Council will request input from neighbouring authorities or other experts in the recruitment process particularly when the post requires specialist knowledge. Appointments to the post of Chief Executive are made by the leading Members and approved by the Council.

8.0 Interim support

8.1 Where the Council is unable to recruit officers, or there is a need for interim support to undertake essential work or provide cover for a substantive post, the Council will engage individuals on a temporary basis.

8.2 The Council has implemented all the necessary steps required to assure compliance with the rules in relation to off-payroll working in the public sector (IR35).

9.0 Approach to the payment of officers in the event of their ceasing to hold office or be employed by the authority

9.1 The Council's redundancy framework sets out a consistent method of calculating redundancy pay which is applied to all redundant employees. The level of redundancy pay is calculated using the statutory system with no cap on weekly earnings. The payment is intended to recompense employees for the loss of their livelihood and provide financial support whilst they seek alternative employment.

10.0 The publication of and access to information relation to remuneration of chief officers

10.1 The annual Pay Policy statement will be published on the website where it can be easily accessed. Information about senior officer remuneration has been published on the Council's website as part of transparency agenda. The grade framework for all employees is published on the Council's website.

11.0 Additions to remuneration for chief officers

- 11.1 One or more chief officers will be eligible for payments for election duties (e.g. as Returning Officer or Deputy Returning Officer/s) which is calculated based on the number of electors in each ward in the election. There is an agreed Surrey wide scale of fees and charges which sets out the amounts used to calculate this.
- 11.2 Fees for borough, county and Police Commissioner elections vary according to the size of the electorate and number of postal voters. Payments for General and European elections are set by central government and are not paid by the Council as the money is reclaimed.

12.0 Policy on employing someone who has taken redundancy from another authority

- 12.1 If there is less than a 4 week gap between someone being made redundant from another council and joining Woking Borough Council they will be required to repay their redundancy payment to their previous employer. If the gap is longer than 4 weeks they can retain their payment but their continuous service is broken, which means that they would have no eligibility for redundancy payments until they have 2 years continuous service with this authority.

13.0 Policy on employing someone who is also drawing a pension

- 13.1 The Council will consider all requests from employees who wish to draw their pension but continue working.

14.0 Policy on additional employments

- 14.1 The Council's Conditions of Service provide for employees to have one or more employments with the Council, in which cases the arrangements outlined above apply. Private employment or outside activity is conditional upon such employments or activity not prejudicing their main employment with the Council.

15.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

- 15.1 To foster a transparent pay and reward policy which is accountable and managed appropriately.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 15.2 To train and brief managers appropriately.

Legal

- 15.3 Ensure compliance with current legislation with particular regard to equal pay.

16.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 16.1 Unison and workforce.

REPORT ENDS