



TO THE CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on Monday, 18 March 2024 at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Gloucester Square, Woking, Surrey GU21 6YL.

The agenda for the meeting is set out below.

JULIE FISHER
Chief Executive

NOTE: Filming Council Meetings

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AGENDA

PART I - PRESS AND PUBLIC PRESENT

- 1 Apologies for Absence
To receive any apologies for absence.
- 2 Minutes (Pages 3 - 8)
To approve the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday, 28 February 2024 as published.
- 3 Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes OSC24-017 (Pages 9 - 14)
To review any outstanding items from the previous minutes.
- 4 Urgent Business
To consider any business that the Chairman rules may be dealt with under Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 5 Declarations of Interest
To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other interests from Members in respect of any item to be considered at the meeting.

Matters for Scrutiny

- 6 Safer Woking Partnership - Community Safety Plan OSC24-018 (Pages 15 - 32)
Reporting Person: Camilla Edmiston
- 7 The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress - November 2023 to March 2024 OSC24-019 (Pages 33 - 92)
Reporting Person: Julie Fisher
- 8 Review of Council Meeting Structure OSC24-020 (Pages 93 - 142)
Reporting Person: Frank Jeffrey
- 9 Annual Review of Complaints - 2023 OSC24-012 (Pages 143 - 152)
Reporting Person: Gareth John
- 10 UKSPF OSC24-021 (to follow)
Reporting Person: Beverley Kuchar
- 11 Brookwood Cemetery HS2 Task and Finish Group Report OSC24-022 (to follow)
Reporting Person: Councillor Kevin Davis

Matters for Determination

- 12 Work Programme OSC24-016 (Pages 153 - 162)
Reporting Person: Councillor Josh Brown

Working Group Updates

- 13 Finance Working Group Update OSC24-023 (Pages 163 - 164)
Reporting Person: Councillor Tahir Aziz

AGENDA ENDS

Date Published: 8 March 2024

For further information regarding this agenda and arrangements for the meeting, please contact Toby Nash, Scrutiny & Democratic Services Officer, Ext 3056, Email toby.nash@woking.gov.uk



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MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

held on 28 February 2024

Present:

Cllr J Brown (Chair)
Cllr A Kirby (Vice-Chair)

Cllr H Akberali	Cllr J Morley
Cllr K Davis	Cllr L Rice
Cllr R Leach	Cllr M Sullivan

Also Present: Councillor A-M Barker

Absent: Councillors A Caulfield and A Javaid

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Caulfield and Javaid.

Apologies for absence had also been received from Councillor Roberts who had intended to attend as Portfolio Holder for items on the agenda.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on Monday, 29 January 2024 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES OSC24-010

The Chairman introduced the report on matters raised at previous meetings of the Committee, drawing the Committee's attention to actions undertaken subsequently.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

4. URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business to discuss.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made.

6. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT

Following a question raised by the Chair Officers noted that the graduate programme was supernumerary. The Council would honour the programme for existing graduates but could not continue to fund the programme for future graduates.

Officers confirmed that development of the Local Plan would not be impacted by the staff restructure as its activity had been factored into the requirements of achieving the minimum viable position.

Officers agreed to confirm separately how any backlog of planning applications was being handled.

The Committee discussed the inconsistent use of colours, brackets and negatives to represent values across the report. Eugene Walker, the Section 151 Officer and Interim Chief Finance Officer, confirmed that it was an intention to make the numbers consistent in future editions.

Officers agreed to provide an explanation as to why the inspection of food premises was significantly below target of 100%.

It was noted that within the risks several had crystallised and that it would be beneficial to separate them out as issues.

The Strategic Director of Communities confirmed that the Let's Rent scheme was an approved use of the homelessness prevention grant by Government. The Council had developed an action plan in conjunction with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in recognition of the length of time some residents spent in temporary accommodation.

There had been an increase in the demand for the Council's homelessness prevention duties due to multiple factors including the cost-of-living crisis and landlords withdrawing from the sector reducing the number of rental properties available. It was recognised that the Council lacked sufficient throughput of tenants from temporary into permanent accommodation. 68 additional affordable properties were expected within the quarter in Red phase of the Sheerwater regeneration.

It was noted that the metric for the delivery of housing was a raw number per quarter but compared to a cumulative number which did not aid comprehension. Officers suggested that information on the number of properties delivered by the Council on a longer-term basis could be included in future editions of the Performance Management.

The Council was in the process of determining which historic tenancy rental arrears would need to be written off, particularly amongst former tenants. The accrual of arrears for current tenants had stabilised. Officers recognised that there was merit in considering how a corporate approach could be taken on handling debt.

It was requested that the exact length of Council Tax break before the Council became liable for Council Tax on a void property be confirmed.

The Strategic Director of Corporate Resources confirmed that changes to car parking fees was not to be considered at the March Executive meeting and would instead be considered in the new Municipal Year.

Electoral Services was overspent due to it being underbudgeted in the previous year but Officer confirmed that it had not increased in costs.

It was requested that the executive summaries include key achievements and concerns in future editions to aid review by Members.

Following a query by Members Officers offered to provide accounts receivable at a future meeting of the Finance Working Group.

7. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS ANNUAL REPORT - 2023 OSC24-011

Frank Jeffrey, Head of Democratic Services, introduced the item, noting that a significant number of Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs) were submitted by businesses. It was suggested that future editions of the report could include a category on entities that submitted the requests.

The systems used to monitor corporate complaints and FOIs did not automatically communicate.

The system was administered by Democratic Services which did not actively analyse similar requests. However, it was considered possible that individual teams did so. It was suggested that requests could be reviewed for repeat requests which could be published proactively.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

8. CAPITAL, INVESTMENT AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND MRP STATEMENT OSC24-014

Eugene Walker summarised the intention of the reports, realigning the Council from undertaking major developments to rationalising debt.

The Council continued to carry in its budget costs from historic investments in commercial loans and its asset portfolio.

The Treasury Management report set out the Council's approach to Minimum Revenue Position and prudential indicators.

Future capital receipts would be used to pay off debt with the exception of those in the Housing Revenue Account which would be applied to undertake works in the housing stock.

In response to a question from the Chair the Chief Finance Officer confirmed that there would be quarterly reporting on treasury management to aid monitoring of adherence to it. It was to be determined whether the Committee or Audit Committee would be the most appropriate recipient of the report. There would be separate reporting on asset rationalisation and debt repayment at regular intervals, the best practice approach was to be determined.

The Section 151 Officer considered that the sale of assets was preferential long-term as opposed to retaining assets and receiving their revenue to the Council in terms of handling debt.

As previously noted, all debt interest payments from Council companies had been suspended and work would be undertaken to determine levels of interest payments that were sustainable for each.

Although the Council had achieved savings of £8.5 million for the year, due to the commercial estate burden and historic investments the savings did not equate to right-sizing.

The Chief Finance Officer noted that the amount of short-term borrowing was too high for the Council but considered that the higher repayment rates for longer term loans would cost the Council more money if switched to.

When borrowing above a threshold from the Public Works Loans Board (PWLB) a premium or discount was paid dependent on the market rates which would impact total borrowing. An approach to refinancing and repaying loans would need to be discussed with Government at an appropriate juncture. However, the Government understood the Council's need to service its £274 million in short-term loans. The premium was built into the £64 million interest payment the Council owed in 2024/25.

It was commented that parts of the report contained highly technical language and Officers agreed to produce a Glossary of Terms to aid those reading it. It was further suggested that the Council aim to develop a general Glossary of Terms.

The report had identified that training was required for both Councillors and Officers. The Committee requested that Officers submit a paper that sets out plans for the training of Officers and Councillors.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

9. GENERAL FUND BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX SETTING 2024-25 OSC24-015

The Section 151 Officer introduced the item.

The Council was expecting to receive confirmation of a capitalisation directive from Government which would allow the Council to set a balanced budget.

The Council currently had negative reserves. The General Fund Budget included provision for a reserve of £5 million for 2024/25 to help the Council respond to unexpected costs. The reserve was higher than might be set by other Councils, typically 10% of a Council's net budget, due to the relative increased level of risk facing the Council from its historic investments. There were additional earmarked reserves of £11 million.

It was a statutory requirement for the Section 151 Officer to produce a Section 25 statement indicating the robustness of the budget and adequacy of reserves.

The Government had placed an expectation on the Council to raise its proportion of Council Tax by 10%, an increase of 1.2% on a household's overall Council Tax bill. The

increase equated to £1 million additional revenue for the Council which alleviated the need to find an equivalent saving.

The Council operated a 100% Council Tax relief scheme for those on low incomes, which was not operated by all Councils. £100,000 of the additional revenue was being directed to relief schemes; £50,000 would be provided to Citizens Advice Woking to provide support to the community; £25,000 would be used to extend the Council Tax relief scheme; and £25,000 to replicate the household support fund.

The hardship fund would be carefully rationed and monitored.

In response to a query, the Strategic Director of Communities confirmed that the Service Level Agreement between the Council and Citizens Advice Woking (CAW) would be amended to ensure the additional funds were used for the purposes of hardship support. It was anticipated that CAW would operate a linking service connecting support services across the sector.

It was not possible to determine what Government would direct for Council Tax increases in future years.

If the historic debt issues were excepted from the budget, the Chief Finance Officer considered that the Council would be setting a truly balanced budget.

The Section 151 Officer confirmed that Community Infrastructure Levy funds would be honoured.

The Council received a very high amount of commercial income, relative to its overall budget and compared with similarly sized Councils. It was yet to be determined what would be an appropriate size but it was recognised that it should be reduced. This would consequentially lead to a drop in income. As such, discussions with Government would necessarily need to include sustainability of revenue as well as repayments of debt.

Historically, the Council did not operate proper profit and loss accounts for its commercial assets, this was now being brought in. A provision of £20 million had been approved at the previous Council meeting under the Capital Programme.

The Committee requested that recommendation (xviii) have the wording 'per annum' added to make clear that the £26.31 Council Tax increase for a Band D property was the additional cost for the whole year and not monthly. The recommendation was accepted by Officers who undertook to disseminate the wording most appropriately outside of the meeting.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

10. WORK PROGRAMME OSC24-009

The Committee agreed to remove the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee item from the Work Programme for the March meeting.

A vote was held and carried with unanimous support in which the Committee reiterated its intention to have the Commissioners join a future meeting and extended an invitation for the March meeting.

An item on Member Training, considered for a previous meeting of the Committee and dropped due to workload, was agreed to be readded to the suggested additions to the Work Programme.

It was agreed that an approach be considered for potential scrutiny of Community Asset Transfers be considered for the Work Programme.

A vote of thanks was recorded for the work of the outgoing Section 151 Officer, Eugene Walker, in recognition of the considerable work put into items at the Committee and at the Finance Working Group.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.02 pm
and ended at 9.37 pm

Chairman: _____

Date: _____

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18 MARCH 2024

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on matters arising from the previous meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The details summarise the progress made on achieving the desired outcomes from decisions taken by the Committee and requests from individual Elected Members. Once an action has been closed and the outcome reported to the Committee it will be removed from future reports.

Actions arising from the Committee are managed through the Council's Action Management system which was developed to capture and monitor the actions arising from (i) meetings of the Council and (ii) Internal Audit Reviews.

This is a regular report that is brought the Committee and covers the actions identified at the previous meetings. The next version of this report, listing any actions previously identified together with the progress achieved shall be brought to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 June 2024.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the report be noted.

The Committee has the authority to determine the recommendation set out above.
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Background Papers: None.

Reporting Person: Councillor Josh Brown
CllrJosh.Brown@woking.gov.uk

Date Published: 8 March 2024

Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes

Update on Actions Arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 29 January 2024.

Minute 3		Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes
3.1	Action	Biannual Review of Complaints
	Progress	<i>From the meeting of the committee on 20 November 2023.</i> Officers were requested to explore the possibility of bringing a report on complaints to the November Committee meeting. It has not been possible to bring a report to the meeting due to Officer resource and time constraints. Officers will endeavour to bring a report at the earliest opportunity and will engage with Members on its content.
	Responsible Person	Gareth John / Kevin Foster / Toby Nash
	Status	Ongoing
3.2	Action	The ThamesWey Group information to be updated to a more readable format, in line with that provided at Member briefings.
	Progress	<i>From the Committee meeting – 20 November 2023.</i> As part of the company governance framework the performance indicators are being reviewed.
	Responsible Person	Pino Mastromarco
	Status	Ongoing
3.3	Action	Development of a new Fees and Charges report with more contextual information in was added to the work programme of the Finance Working Group. The Group was requested to provide an update, including indicative timescales to the February meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
	Progress	<i>From the Committee meeting – 20 November 2023.</i> Due to the work programme of the FWG and resources required to deliver the various budget and capital items this has necessarily been delayed. It will form part of the Medium Term financial update to the Executive in the first quarter of 2024/25.
	Responsible Person	Eugene Walker / Democratic Services
	Status	Ongoing

Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes

3.5	Action	Inclusion of voter registration information in future editions.
	Progress	<i>From the Committee meeting – 11 December 2023.</i> Officers continue to review the content of the Performance Monitoring Information and can include such information in future editions.
	Responsible Person	Julie Fisher / Emera Chown
	Status	Ongoing
3.7	Action	The Committee recommended several areas for improvement and increased clarity for the Performance Monitoring Information including consistent use of red, amber, green for figures.
	Progress	Officers have taken on board all feedback from the Committee as well as continuing to review the information and would update the next edition.
	Responsible Person	Pino Mastromarco
	Status	Ongoing
3.8	Action	Table headings to carry overpage.
	Progress	<i>From the Committee meeting – 29 January 2024.</i> This will be reflected in the next edition.
	Responsible Person	Kevin Foster
	Status	Ongoing

Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes

Minute 6		Performance Management
6.1	Action	How the backlog of planning applications was being handled.
	Progress	Government funding for additional resources specifically designed to clear the backlog of planning applications has been secured.
	Responsible Person	Beverley Kuchar
	Status	Completed
6.2	Action	The Committee requested that consistency over the use of colour, brackets and negatives for values be applied.
	Progress	Feedback has been taken on board and Officers will endeavour to use consistent formatting.
	Responsible Person	Eugene Walker / Pino Mastromarco
	Status	Completed
6.3	Action	The Committee requested an explanation for why the inspection of food premises was significantly below target.
	Progress	<p>The number of inspections completed in Q1, Q2 and Q3 appears below target due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Health is a very reactive service with approximately 2000 complaints per annum which can fluctuate seasonally, so we typically complete a higher proportion of our inspections in Q4. • We currently have a large quantity of overdue inspections from the Covid pandemic period, when we also lost a contractor who carried out 100 inspections per year. We are catching up with these but prioritising high risk and non-compliant businesses. • We have found that since the Covid pandemic, Brexit and cost of living increases, businesses are struggling to comply with food hygiene legislation. This becomes significantly more time consuming for officers who are spending more time per business during inspections, then completing revisits, re-inspections, enforcement actions and responding to complaints from members of the public. We have been prioritising these as they have the highest public health risk, and the Food Standards Agency support this approach. • We expect to complete all due inspections by 31st March 2024 and have submitted a programme of overdue inspections (all lower risk D and E rated businesses) to the Food Standards Agency so that we catch up by 31st March 2025 which they have approved.
	Responsible Person	Emma Bourne / Beverley Kuchar
	Status	Completed

Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes

6.4	Action	It was requested that issues be separated from risks.
	Progress	Officers have taken the feedback on board and will consider.
	Responsible Person	Kevin Foster
	Status	Completed
6.5	Action	Officers offered that information on the number of properties delivered by the Council on a longer-term basis could be included in future editions of the Performance Management.
	Progress	The Performance Management Report continues to be updated to include information requested by Members and this will also be considered.
	Responsible Person	Beverley Kuchar
	Status	Completed
6.6	Action	It was requested that the exact length of Council Tax break before the Council becomes liable for Council Tax on a void property be confirmed.
	Progress	Officers have been requested to provide the information.
	Responsible Person	Louise Strongitharm
	Status	Ongoing
6.7	Action	Officers to provide accounts receivable at a future meeting of the Finance Working Group.
	Progress	This has been added to the Work Programme of the Finance Working Group.
	Responsible Person	Kevin Foster / Eugene Walker
	Status	Completed

Matters Arising from the Previous Minutes

Minute 9		Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategies and MRP Statement
9.1	Action	Glossary of Terms for technical language in the reports.
	Progress	A Glossary of Terms has been produced.
	Responsible Person	Eugene Walker
	Status	Completed
9.2	Action	General Glossary of Terms used in Council reports.
	Progress	Officers intend to develop this over time and will incorporate definitions where helpful when writing reports.
	Responsible Person	Julie Fisher
	Status	Completed
9.3	Action	The Committee requested that recommendation (xviii) have the wording 'per annum' added to make clear that the £26.31 Council Tax increase for a Band D property was the additional cost for the whole year and not monthly.
	Progress	The recommendations with the additional wording were published prior to the Council meeting.
	Responsible Person	Eugene Walker
	Status	Completed

END OF REPORT

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18 MARCH 2024

SAFER WOKING PARTNERSHIP – COMMUNITY SAFETY PLAN

Executive Summary

This report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise the draft Safer Woking Partnership Plan 2024-27.

The plan for 2024-27 remains very similar to previous plans with 5 key priority areas of: Anti-Social Behaviour; Crime; Drugs and Alcohol, Reducing Reoffending and Preventing Violent Extremism.

The draft plan proposals were considered by the Community Safety Partnership Group at its meeting on 6 March 2024 where it was approved in principle for publication subject to scrutiny by this Committee. The Joint Committee has previously agreed to delegate approval, in consultation with the Chair of the Community Safety Partnership Group, to make any minor amends as a result of scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee so that the Partnership Plan may be published as promptly as possible after this meeting. Should the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have any significance issues of concern, the matter will be referred back to the Community Safety Partnership Group to consider prior to publication.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the Safer Woking Partnership Plan 2024-27 be noted.

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

Background Papers: Crime and Disorder Act 1998 [Crime and Disorder Act 1998 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk)

Reporting Person: Camilla Edmiston, Community Safety Manager
Email: Camilla.Edmiston@woking.gov.uk, Extn: 3080

Contact Person: Camilla Edmiston, Community Safety Manager
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Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ellen Nicholson
Email: CllrEllen.Nicholson@woking.gov.uk

Date Published: 8 March 2024

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides the Committee with the opportunity to scrutinise the draft Safer Woking Partnership Plan 2024-27. A local assessment supported the decision making on the priorities for the plan, as well as other data, such as crime and anti-social behaviour, Surrey and officers' knowledge and experience. Public consultation information was also taken into consideration.
- 1.2 The Police and Justice Act 2006 gave local authorities responsibility for considering crime and disorder matters. On 6 December 2010 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed a recommendation in a report on a suggested scrutiny agreement. This agreed that each new Safer Woking Partnership Plan would be brought annually to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for appropriate scrutiny.

2.0 Development of the Safer Woking Partnership Plan

- 2.1 The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 placed a new duty on the police and local authorities to work together to develop and implement three-year strategies to tackle crime and disorder. These strategies are now based on an annual strategic assessment which aims to provide partnerships with intelligence and evidence of the priorities and problems for their partnership that will inform effective and responsive delivery structures.
- 2.2 Annual assessment work identifies current and possible future crime, disorder and substance misuse issues from sound evidence and analysis of data obtained via Surrey and relevant agencies. Locally officers have considered appropriate data and information which, when coupled together with their knowledge and experience, has led us to agree to carrying forward the current key priorities, for the production of the draft Safer Woking Partnership Plan 2024-27 Priorities and Action Plan (see Appendix 1). The background information regarding the partnership and legislation has now been separated from the action plan for simplicity and can be found attached (see Appendix 2).
- 2.3 The plan has 5 key priority areas as follows:
 - Anti-Social Behaviour - includes identifying and supporting victims and addressing key hotspot locations and problem individuals;
 - Crime - targeting crime prevention for fraud, domestic abuse, child exploitation (a national and local priority), hate crime and serious organised crime, while supporting victims appropriately;
 - Drugs and Alcohol - addressing the priorities contained in the Surrey Substance Misuse Strategy;
 - Preventing Violent Extremism - awareness raising and training for frontline staff; and
 - Reducing Reoffending - focusing on the support and development of the current multi-agency approaches with suitable interventions targeted at the most prolific offenders.
- 2.4 Following scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the final plan will be published on the Woking Borough Council web site, unless there is a significant issue in which case the matter will be referred back to the Community Safety Partnership Group for further consideration. The implementation of the plan will be monitored by the Community Safety Partnership Group.²⁵⁸

3.0 Corporate Strategy

3.1 This partnership plan contributes to the current Woking for All strategy across three of the four themes:

- Healthier communities
- Engaged communities
- Prospering communities

4.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

4.1 It is anticipated that the work on the implementation of the partnership plan can be accommodated within existing resources and funding, but it may include bidding for funding for specific projects.

4.2 There are no known implications for risk.

Equalities and Human Resources

4.3 There are no known equality implications.

4.4 It is currently anticipated that the implementation work can be accommodated within existing staffing resources.

Legal

4.5 The production of the strategic assessment and the publication of the partnership plan fulfil some of the statutory requirements of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

4.6 Much of the work within the plan supports our responsibilities under Safeguarding.

5.0 Engagement and Consultation

5.1 The community engagement platform was used to carry out a survey of residents on crime, anti-social behaviour and community safety. This was the third year that this has been undertaken. In total 258 questionnaires were completed from residents across the borough. This was used to inform the decisions on priorities and the action plan for the Safer Woking Partnership Plan.

REPORT ENDS

Safer Woking Partnership Priorities

Note: The priorities below are listed alphabetically not in a priority order

Priority	Detail
1	<p>Antisocial behaviour (ASB)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and support repeat and vulnerable victims of ASB and tackle the anti-social behaviour of individuals and families through the CHaRMM process and the Family Support Programme (FSP) • Identify and address hotspot locations of ASB, particularly repeat locations, reported and actioned as appropriate through the JAG process and, if involving Serious and Organised Crime (SOC), through the SOC JAG • To safeguard public spaces through the removal of disorder by appropriate use of Dispersal Orders, PSPOs and other appropriate ASB legislation. • Take steps to address key anti-social behaviours as identified through consultation.
2	<p>Crime</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educating young people around dangers of carrying knives. • Tackling domestic abuse is a key priority recognised county wide; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Raise awareness of domestic abuse, how to report it and how to get support; ○ Work with our local specialist domestic abuse service, Your Sanctuary, in the provision of support to survivors of domestic abuse living in our community; ○ Work with the Domestic Abuse Management Board to implement the Surrey Domestic Abuse Strategy and support local and county wide campaigns. • Promote partnership resilience and awareness of Serious and Organised Crime, including County Lines, Cuckooing, Child Exploitation (Criminal and Sexual), Modern Slavery, fraud and Organised Crime Groups through partnership and community/business training and joint responses to local problems, such as the Risk Management Meeting (RMM). • Tackle and raise awareness of Hate Crime across the Borough and build up community confidence in reporting incidents. • Work with Partners to ensure that victims, where appropriate, receive a multi-agency approach to safeguarding.

Priority	Detail
3	<p data-bbox="256 241 523 282">Drugs and Alcohol</p> <ul data-bbox="256 297 1469 790" style="list-style-type: none"> • Support appropriate partnership work that will assist with the implementation of the Woking Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Action Plan • Development and implementation of suitable activity to tackle issues of concern in the town centre, particularly around the night time economy, which includes supporting the PSPO, town centre dispersal orders and Woking Street Angels • Support the local implementation of the Surrey Substance Misuse Strategy • Tackle local issues through local operations, including test purchasing and licencing reviews • Partnership support to proactive Police led operations to tackle drug supply and exploitation of the vulnerable • Treatment pathways - to support and monitor Woking offenders in accessing and engaging with the treatment pathway for drug and alcohol misuse
4	<p data-bbox="256 819 671 860">Preventing violent extremism</p> <ul data-bbox="304 875 1469 916" style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together on the implementation of relevant aspects of local agency Prevent plans
5	<p data-bbox="256 990 564 1030">Reducing reoffending</p> <ul data-bbox="256 1046 1453 1650" style="list-style-type: none"> • To work in partnership in assessing, managing and implementing Court sentences for those convicted offenders who have the greatest impact on the community in Woking through MARAC, Integrated Offender Management (IOM) and MAPPA • To contribute to the assessment and action planning of offenders who present a detrimental impact upon the community in Woking via the CHaRMM process • To continue to support the work of the Women's Support Centre Surrey • To work with Surrey Family Support Service in successfully managing the transition of young adult offenders into the adult Probation system • To support and monitor Woking offenders in accessing and engaging with the treatment pathway for drug and alcohol misuse • Community Payback - to empower people on probation to complete their community payback hours whilst learning new skills and improving their employment prospects and developing confidence in those harder to reach people. • To work with community partners to deliver the order of the Court through projects that benefit the local community.

Action Plan for 2024/25

Area	Delivery	Success measures	Target	Monitor/leads
Anti-social behaviour	PSPO monitored through agreed enforcement strategy, reporting at JAG.	Accurate recording of breaches. Referrals made from identified repeat offenders FPN / Court outcomes	Throughout duration of action plan.	WBC ASB Officer
	Partnership ASB locations and themes reporting at JAG	Number of relevant referrals received / number of referrals completed	JAG meetings (every 6-7 weeks) SOC JAG meetings (every 6-7 weeks)	WBC Community Safety Manager Surrey Police Borough Inspector
	Partnership ASB week July 2024	Successful running of media/awareness raising event Specialist operations as appropriate	July 2024	WBC ASB Officer Surrey Police Borough Inspector
	Engagement to Woking community in understanding ASB and tools used to tackle it: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebrating success in ASB • Consult with residents where appropriate • Attend Community events / engagement stands 	Record of articles produced/disseminated Promotion of ASB week Retain any consultation undertaken Record events attended designed to target identified issues	Throughout duration of action plan.	WBC ASB Officer Surrey Police Borough Inspector

Area	Delivery	Success measures	Target	Monitor/leads
Crime - Knife Crime - Domestic - Violence - Hate Crime - Serious and Organised Crime (SOC)	Knife Crime – specifically around young people carrying knives	1-1 engagement with any identified young person Intelligence led targeting Monitor reoffending levels	Throughout duration of action plan.	Surrey Police Borough Inspector
	DA awareness week White Ribbon campaign	Promotion of week with online support to county campaign Social media campaign and staff awareness sessions	June 24 25 th Nov – 10 th Dec 2024	WBC Community Safety Manager
	Support Hate crime awareness week 12th-19th October 2024, including case study	Successfully run media / awareness raising of event.	12th-19th October 2024	Surrey Police Borough Inspector WBC ASB Officer
	Support the county lines intensification weeks	Support the county delivery mechanism	Throughout duration of action plan	Surrey Police County Lines Coordinator National Crime Agency
	Promote awareness of Child Exploitation and how to identify it. Encouraging submission of partnership intelligence forms.	Promote through CHaRMM / SOCJAG and record forms submitted	Throughout duration of action plan.	Surrey Police Borough Inspector WBC Community Safety Manager

Area	Delivery	Success measures	Target	Monitor/leads
Drugs and alcohol	Support Surrey Substance Misuse Strategy	Support the county delivery mechanism	Throughout duration of action plan.	Smart Group Women's Support Centre Police Checkpoint
	Continue with Test Purchasing operations locally	Record results of pre-planned operations Respond to any intel around premises suspected of selling unlawfully	Throughout duration of action plan.	Surrey Police Licensing Officer
Preventing Violent Extremism	Awareness raising and information sharing	Promote through multi agency meetings. Support the county delivery mechanism	Throughout duration of action plan.	Surrey Police Borough Inspector WBC Community Safety Manager
	Monitoring for future training opportunities	Disseminate any national training packages to all staff.	Throughout duration of action plan.	Surrey Police Borough Inspector WBC Community Safety Manager
Reducing Reoffending	Scoping of partnership prevention visits of top offenders	Identify prolific offenders and visit with relevant organisations outside of Police	Throughout duration of action plan.	Surrey Police Borough Inspector
	Promotion of the Women's Support Centre	Promote through multi agency meetings.	Throughout duration of action plan.	Women's Support Centre Manager
	Utilise opportunities within Probation, such as the Community Payback scheme	Delivery of unpaid work requirements eg Spring Clean	Throughout duration of action plan.	Probation Community Payback Officer



Safer Woking Partnership

Partnership Plan

2024-2027

Aims

The Safer Woking Partnership has the following aims:

- To identify, protect and support the most vulnerable people and areas in our communities, and tackle offenders who are involved in criminal and/or antisocial behaviour
- To promote crime prevention to maintain the low levels of crime and disorder
- To promote reassurance
 - to involve the public and work with all communities to reduce the fear of crime and provide people with a sense of safety and reassurance
 - to improve education/knowledge for the public to support their own feelings of safety

The partnership will:

- Work jointly with other statutory and voluntary agencies
- Build capacity within the neighbourhoods and communities to enable them to contribute to the delivery of the aims of this plan.

Key Priorities for the Safer Working Partnership

The priorities that were identified through a local assessment and agreement are set out in the Priorities and Action Plan document. They were identified by an analysis of key data sets, a review of national and regional targets and draw on the knowledge and experience of local partnership officers. In addition to information provided by statutory partners consultation with local residents was undertaken through the Woking Borough Council Engagement platform.

For each priority issue, we will use the following methods to address them:

1. Established partnership delivery mechanism, including:
 - JAG: The Joint Action Group (JAG) is a multi agency problem solving group which deals with problem locations in the borough and meets every six or seven weeks. They consider issues including antisocial behaviour, rough sleeping and arson.
 - SOC JAG: This is a meeting that discusses problem areas related to Serious Organised Crime (SOC), such as County Lines, cuckooing, modern slavery and human trafficking. It meets every six or seven weeks before JAG.
 - CHaRMM: The Community Harm and Risk Management meeting (CHaRMM) is a multi agency problem solving group which supports victims and deals with problem individuals or families in the borough and meets on a monthly basis.
 - PPYP - Prioritising Prevention for Young People. This is a multi-agency approach to being pro-active regarding young people in Surrey that need help and support.
 - PPOMP: Priority and other Prolific Offenders Management Panel meets monthly, works with prolific offenders and fast tracks them through the Criminal Justice System.
 - MAPPA: Multi Agency Public Protection Agreement meets monthly and monitors dangerous individuals, including sex offenders.
 - MARAC: Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference where high risk domestic abuse cases are assessed and appropriate actions agreed on a monthly basis.
 - RMM: Risk Management Meeting meets weekly to monitor and risk assess missing and exploited children.
 - Surrey Youth Offending Family Support - To work with Targeted Youth Support/Surrey Youth Offending Service in successfully managing the transition of young adult offenders into the adult Probation system.
 - MASH: The Surrey Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is the initial point of contact that aims to improve the safeguarding response for children and adults at risk of abuse or neglect through better information sharing and high-quality and timely responses.
 - MEAM – Surrey Probation are linking in with Surrey Adult Matters – our local version of the making every adult matter. This is a wraparound support service for those people with multiple disadvantage, not just for those with criminal convictions; but here there is often a significant overlap.
 - Domestic Abuse Management Board meets quarterly and oversees county wide domestic abuse work, including any campaigns.
 - The Family Support Programme is a programme of intensive support offered to the most vulnerable and/or chaotic families in the Borough to help them achieve positive changes in their lives.
 - Surrey Family Safeguarding team – Probation specialist domestic abuse workers will work alongside mental health and substance misuse workers in this team. To engage in work with these three key issues of mental health, substance misuse and domestic abuse including with families who are not in the criminal justice system.

- Youth Engagement Scheme (YES) run by Surrey Fire and Rescue Service, which is aimed at addressing anti social behaviour, youth crime, low self esteem and low motivation for those aged 14-17.
- Firewise Scheme run by Surrey Fire and Rescue Service which offers counselling for juvenile fire setters.
- Voluntary organisation networks, including Woking Neighbourhood Watch, Residents Associations and Woking Street Angels.

2. Mainstream agency work

Where the issue identified is the core responsibility of one of the partner agencies this will be dealt with through those particular agencies business processes. This includes the local authority's plans, relevant ICB plans, the Surrey Fire and Rescue Local Station Plan for Woking and the Local Policing Plan.

3. Support to victims

To ensure that victims are at the heart of every investigation and that the Victim Code is applied in every case to promote confidence in crime reporting and every police response.

Promote and encourage the use of the Anti Social Behaviour Case Review (formerly known as the Community Trigger) where victims of anti social behaviour indicate they are not happy with any previous attempts to resolve the ASB. Ensure that opportunities are taken to raise awareness of this process through websites, events and campaigns such as ASB week.

Promote the use of the online reporting of anti social behaviour via Woking Borough Council's website by using existing networks such as Neighbourhood Watch and social media.

Women - To continue to support the work of the Women's Support Centre Surrey. To support positive engagement in community sentences.

Background

The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act gave local agencies shared responsibility for developing and introducing strategies to reduce crime and disorder in their area. The agencies come together as the Community Safety Partnership (CSP), known locally as the Safer Woking Partnership. Statutory members include:

- Surrey Police
- Woking Borough Council
- Surrey County Council
- Surrey Fire and Rescue Service
- HM Prison and Probation Service
- North West Surrey Clinical Commissioning Group

Data Collection

Annually the CSP conducts an assessment of crime and disorder and consults with the community regarding areas of concern. Following the assessment emerging partnership priorities and action plans are agreed. They are identified by an analysis of key data sets, a review of national and regional targets and draw on the knowledge and experience of local partnership officers.

The data, which forms the basis of this analysis, has been drawn from a variety of sources and partner agencies across Woking and the broader Surrey area. These include:

- County Council data and intelligence

- Borough Council data and intelligence
- Police crime and incident data, intelligence and tactical assessment
- Health data

Safer Working Partnership

Locally the Community Safety Partnership is called the Safer Working Partnership. The group consists of members of the statutory agencies plus additional representatives, such as the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner. This group reviews actions and monitors progress over the year against the plan. Currently the meeting arrangements are under review.

Health and Wellbeing Board

A merger of the Community Safety Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board was agreed in March 2020 with the aspiration of identifying and designing longer-term, innovative initiatives that address the needs of vulnerable people and those living in deprived communities and/or families. As part of their governance, the Health and Wellbeing Board is responsible for the development and delivery of a Community Safety Agreement (CSA). The Agreement's aim is to set out how the responsible authorities will work together to identify and address shared priorities in relation to reducing crime and disorder.

Surrey Community Safety Agreement

Two tier authorities such as Surrey are required, under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (as amended by the Police and Justice Act 2006), to have a County Community Safety Agreement (CSA). It sets out how responsible authorities will work together to identify and address shared priorities to reduce crime and disorder. There is also a requirement on two tier authorities to have a County Strategy Group. Following a merger of the Community Safety Board and the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) in March 2020, the HWBB now performs this function.

Community Safety Priorities

Surrey's shared community safety priorities have been incorporated into the [Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) as follows:

- Domestic Abuse (Priority One: Helping People Live Healthy Lives)
- Drug and Alcohol Abuse (Priority One: Helping People Live Healthy Lives)
- Prevent (Priority Three: Supporting People in Surrey to Fulfil their Potential)
- Serious Youth Violence (Priority Three: Supporting People in Surrey to Fulfil their Potential)
- ASB Strategy Group (Priority Three: Supporting People in Surrey to Fulfil their Potential)
- Tackling High Harm Crime will be delivered by the Serious and Organised Crime Partnership

The Board refreshed the strategy in early 2022 in response to COVID-19, to ensure it had a greater focus on reducing health inequalities so no-one is left behind. In the refreshed Strategy there is also a commitment to the following principles for working with communities and an acknowledgement that applying these will be crucial to their success:

- Community capacity building: Building trust and relationships
- Co-designing: Deciding together
- Co-producing: Delivering together
- Community led action: Communities leading, with support when they need it.

Delivering the Strategy continues to play a crucial role in achieving the 'Community Vision for Surrey in 2030'. The Health and Wellbeing Board aims to work closely with Community Safety Partnerships to support and guide them. The Agreement is not a document to hold the local partnerships to account but reflects their local priorities. It is expected the local Community Safety Partnerships' plans will echo the agreement but maintain their localism.

Find out more here: <https://www.healthysurrey.org.uk/community-safety/in-surrey>

Communication

The partnership needs to ensure that local residents feel well informed about the steps being taken to deal with the priority issues. This will be done via media coverage (local paper, the Woking Magazine, local radio), awareness campaigns such as Domestic Abuse Awareness Week (June), through existing Woking Neighbourhood Watch and Residents Associations communication, emails, newsletters and social media etc.

Serious Violence Duty

The Serious Violence Duty started in January 2023. This Duty places a requirement for the named specified authorities to focus their activities on working together to reduce serious violence. It is required that we do this by sharing information, intelligence and data to build a strategic assessment and then develop a strategy to implement a preventative programme.

The full guidance can be found here - [Serious Violence Duty - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/serious-violence-duty)

Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

The term 'violence against women and girls' (VAWG) refers to acts of violence or abuse that we know disproportionately affect women and girls.

Crimes and behaviour covered by this term include rape and other sexual offences, domestic abuse, stalking, so-called 'honour'-based abuse (including female genital mutilation, forced marriage, and 'honour' killings), as well as many others, including offences committed online.

VAWG in Surrey will protect woman and girls through 4 key priorities:-

- Objective One - Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls
- Objective Two - Supporting Victims & Survivors
- Objective Three - Partnership Working
- Objective Four - Perpetrators are held to account.

Child Exploitation

Types of Child Exploitation include; Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE).

Child Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity in exchange for something the victim needs or wants; For the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator; through violence or the threat of violence.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) is a form of abuse which involves children under 18, male and female, of different ethnic origins and of different ages, receiving something, usually food, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, gifts and/or money, in exchange for sexual activity. It can occur through the use of technology without the child's immediate recognition, for example, being persuaded to post images on the internet or mobile phone without immediate payment or reward. Child Sexual Exploitation involves children being groomed into a relationship where they are forced or coerced into sexual activity in return for something and it can occur on the internet without the child's immediate recognition or gain. Violence, coercion and intimidation

are common. Involvement in exploitative relationships is characterised by the child's or young person's limited availability of choice as a result of their social, economic and emotional vulnerability. A common feature of CSE is that the child or young person does not recognise the coercive nature of the relationship and does not see themselves as a victim of exploitation.

Surrey Safeguarding Children's Board has produced Child Sexual Exploitation leaflets for children signposting them to the www.surreycc.gov.uk/cse for support and advice and there are posters for children and parents.

There are weekly Risk Management Meetings to discuss those children that have been identified at risk and to ensure that appropriate safeguarding measures are put in place to protect the child.

Child Sexual Exploitation is a hidden crime, victims are often too afraid to come forward and do not always see themselves as a victim of crime. Therefore it is essential that partners work together to try and prevent this abuse.

The Partnership needs to educate everyone, professionals and members of the public, on what Child Exploitation is, the risk indicators and warning signs in order to protect children by spotting it and reporting it. Children and young people also need educating to ensure they know what a healthy relationship looks like and what exploitative behaviour looks like.

Hate Crime

Hate crimes are crimes committed against someone because of their disability, gender-identity, religion or belief or sexual orientation. It covers a wide range of crime types and often is committed against vulnerable members of the community who for a wide variety of reasons do not report them. The partnership will look to scope what type of incidents take place in the Borough, working with organisations and voluntary groups that support victims of hate crime to do this. The partners will also look to educate everyone about hate crime to highlight the issues, build up confidence in the community to report incidents of hate crime, look at how to reduce incidents and support victims.

Serious Organised Crime

Serious Organised Crime (SOC) costs the UK at least £37 billion per year, comprising of about 70,000 people (LGA webinar Feb 2022). SOC overlaps with many other issues, because it largely describes a mode of operating, rather than a particular offence. For example, OCGs can be actively engaged with facilitating modern slavery or CCE. OCGs in Surrey are mainly associated with drugs criminality, specifically drugs supply, but are also engaged in the following:

- counterfeit goods
- Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)
- cyber-crime (ransomware, software support scams, phishing)
- large scale high volume fraud/financial crimes
- modern slavery (car washes, nail bars, construction workers, farm workers, restaurant staff)
- organised acquisitive crime
- organised illegal immigration
- trafficking people and firearms

Communities vulnerable to SOC may include (but are not limited to):

- looked after children and children at risk of CCE
- new communities
- prolific drug and alcohol users

- vulnerable and elderly adults

Preventing Violent Extremism

The Government's Prevent strategy aims to challenge the ideology that supports terrorism and those who promote it, protect vulnerable people from being drawn into terrorist-related activity and to support sectors and institutions where there are risks of radicalisation.

Surrey Police has a team of Prevent Officers who work with the public and partner agencies to prevent terrorism and violent extremism from taking root in our communities. These officers aim to safeguard individuals and institutions from all forms of terrorist ideology and work closely with partner agencies such as local authorities, schools, universities and health institutions, to ensure communities in Surrey are well placed to report and respond to terrorist related concerns.

The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 requires all partners to consider local implementation and each agency develops its own annual action plan.

Substance misuse: Drugs and Alcohol

Addressing the harm caused by alcohol and substance misuse on individuals, families and communities remains a priority for Woking. We will be supporting the objectives of the County's Drugs and Alcohol strategies with a particular focus on:

- Prevention and education;
- Early identification and referrals into specialist treatment services;
- Safer communities;
- Support to local treatment providers in enabling and sustaining recovery among clients.

Locally work in Woking is ongoing through the JAG, SOC JAG and CHaRMM where appropriate.

Delivery and Review Mechanism

The Safer Woking Partnership has established delivery mechanisms through a series of multi agency problem solving groups, such as CHaRMM and JAG (as detailed on page 2). Delivery is monitored through regular meetings, as set out on page 2, and will be reported to the Safer Woking Partnership.

New legislation, policy and guidance

Over the last few years there has been a significant amount of new legislation, policy and guidance which all impacts on the work of the Community Safety Partnership.

The Home Office carried out a review of Community Safety Partnerships in 2023. They have recently provided the following update:

Phase One

- Phase One of the CSP Review ran from March to November 2023. Proposals were tested via a public consultation and on 14 November 2023, the Government response to the CSP Review and ASB Powers consultation was published. The response sets out a package of measures being taken forward in legislation and guidance to improve ways of working between CSPs and PCCs and, enable better strategic oversight and alignment of local crime prevention priorities.
- The Criminal Justice Bill will take forward two of these measures in relation to CSPs: (1) A new power for PCCs to make recommendations on the activity of CSPs and (2) A new duty for CSPs to take those recommendations into account, though a CSP is not mandated to implement a recommendation.

- Alongside the Bill we will bring forward secondary legislation that will introduce new statutory requirements for CSPs to: (1) set out in their annual strategic assessment how it has had due regard to the police and crime objectives set out in the PCC's police and crime plan; (2) to send a copy of their strategic assessment to the PCC and (3) publish the executive summary of their strategic assessment.

Phase Two

- Phase Two of the CSP Review commenced in November 2023, and undertook a more comprehensive assessment of the current state of play for CSPs, considering their role and remit within the current local partnership landscape given the significant changes to local crime reduction structures since CSPs' inception.
- As part of this we carried out a series of wide-reaching evidence gathering and stakeholder engagement activities, including targeted surveys for CSPs, PCCs and other agencies, to help inform Phase Two recommendations.
- Phase Two will seek to complement the changes following Phase One of the CSP review and help enable further improvements to CSPs' effectiveness in reducing crime and ASB.

Funding

Previously there was a small amount of funding provided by some of the local partners into a joint fund to support the priorities contained within this plan. Unfortunately this is now longer available so work is supported by core funding from the various partner organisations or funding bids are made, for example to the Police and Crime Commissioner's grant scheme.

Police and Crime Commissioner

Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) were introduced in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011. They are responsible for overseeing the work of the Police, holding the Chief Constable to account, setting the budget and helping to tackle the crime issues. The PCC has responsibility for reducing crime and disorder and the PCC office works with CSPs and criminal justice partners to achieve their objectives. The PCC is able to call CSP chairmen to meetings, request reports and commission services.

The legislation provides a scrutiny system in the form of a Police and Crime Panel (PCP) to look at how the PCC exercises their statutory functions and effectiveness. The panel is made up of councillors from each of the 11 local district and borough councillors (one from each), a county councillor and two independent co-opted individuals.

The PCC has also made available funding to commission services that improve community safety in Surrey. Local organisations, community and voluntary groups can apply for grants which meet the PCCs priorities.

More information on the role and work of the PCC can be found here - <https://www.surrey-pcc.gov.uk/>

The current PCC is Lisa Townsend. Details of her Police and Crime Plan and her priorities can be found here - <https://www.surrey-pcc.gov.uk/plan/>

Elections take place every four years with the next election due in May 2024.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18 MARCH 2024

IMPROVEMENT AND RECOVERY PROGRAMME PROGRESS – NOVEMBER 2023 – MARCH 2024

Executive Summary

Attached is the Improvement and Recovery Programme Progress November 2023 – March 2024 and appendices as included on the agenda of the Executive meeting 21 March 2024.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the report be noted.

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

Background Papers: None.

Reporting Person: Julie Fisher, Chief Executive
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Contact Person: Lee Danson, Senior Programme Manager
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Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ann-Marie Barker
Email: cllrAnn-Marie.Barker@woking.gov.uk

Date Published: 8 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 month's 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.

Reporting Person:

Julie Fisher, Chief Executive
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Contact Person:

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

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Ann-Marie Barker
Email: cllAnn-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, however, 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 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.

Theme 2: Commercial

8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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.
11. 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

12. 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 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 proposal has been consulted on with Officers and Members and

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

is being reported to the 21 March 2024 meeting of the Executive. If approved the changes will be implemented for the next municipal year.

13. 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

14. 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.
15. 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.
16. 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

17. 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.
18. 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

19. 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.
20. 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

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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 March 2025 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 cover progress of the actions and milestones within the delivery plan, and management

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of risks and issues. An overall report is also provided, which outlines the dependencies and overall 'health' of the programme in a dashboard format. This suite of documents is shared with the Executive monthly.

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

10.0 Corporate Strategy

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

11.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

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

Equalities and Human Resources

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

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

Legal

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

12.0 Engagement and Consultation

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

Staff and Members

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

Residents

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

Partners and stakeholders

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

REPORT ENDS

The Secretary of State Directions

The Directions include requirements for the following:

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

The Directions and Success Measures

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

Risk Register

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

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

Flexible use of capital receipts update

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

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

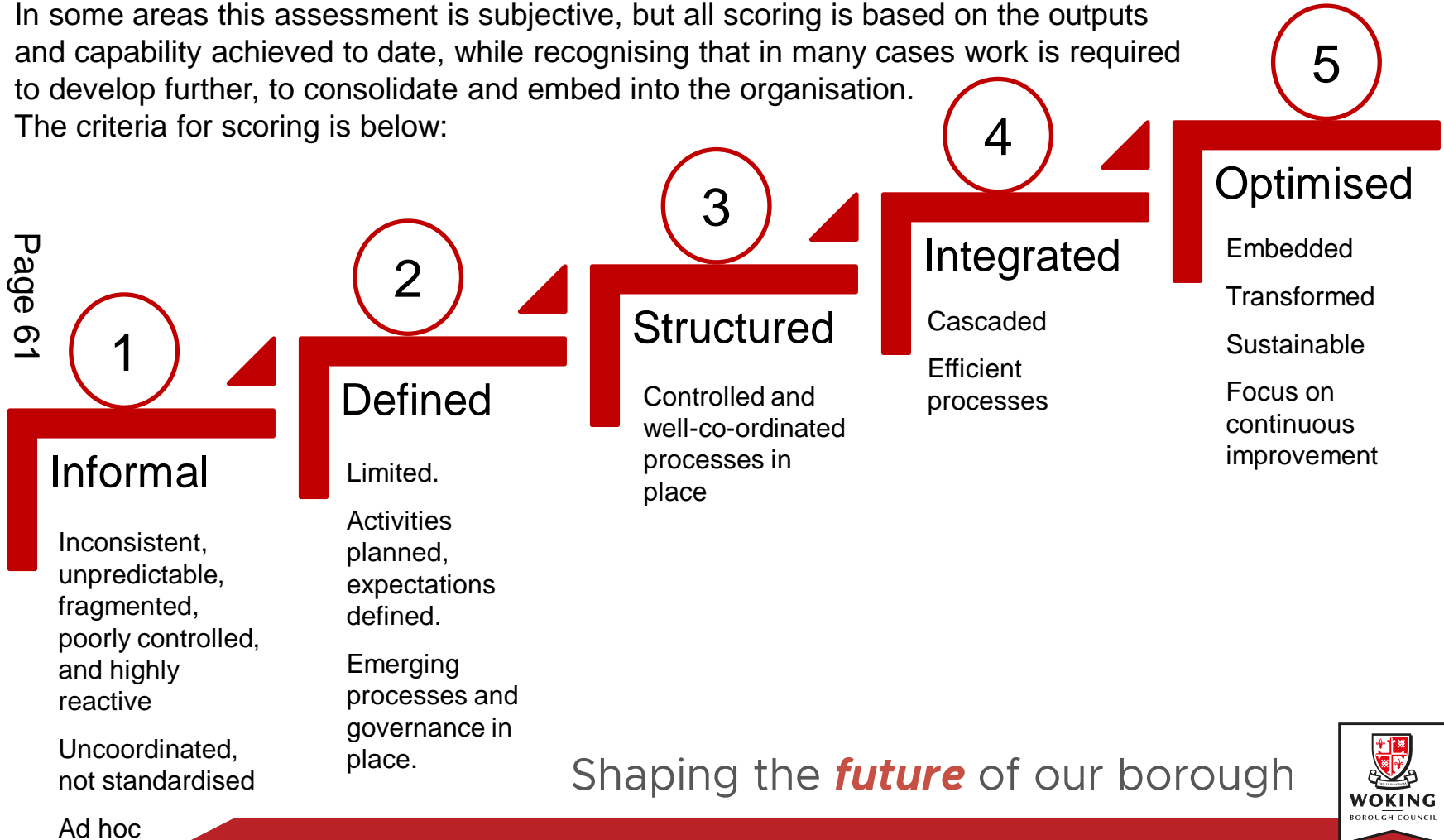
(1) Summary of the IRP and maturity assessment:

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

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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.

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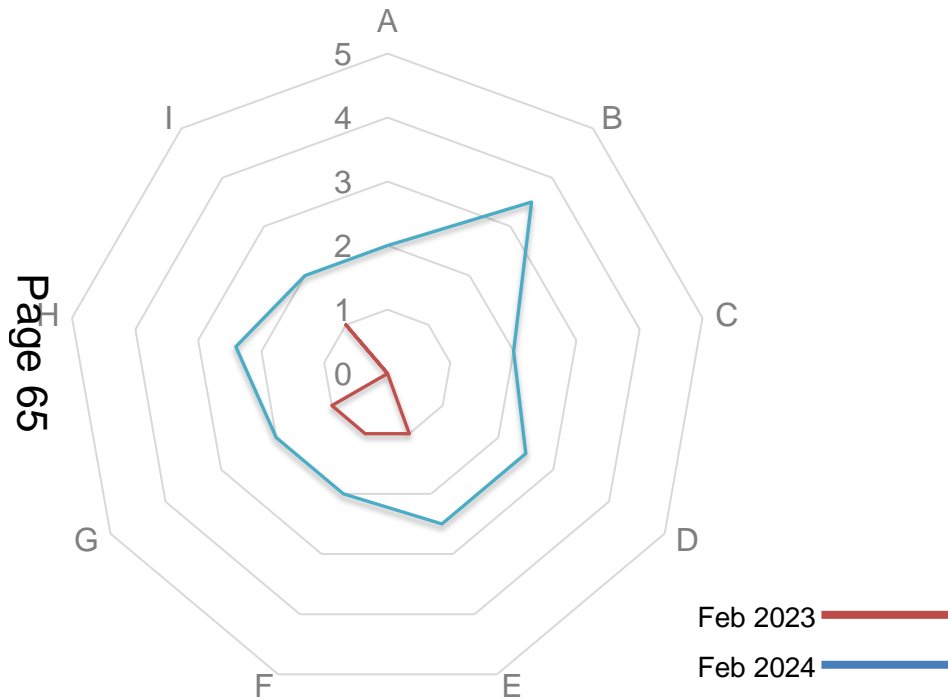
Directions – Activity – Success Measures

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

Direction	Activity underway or planned to deliver the Direction	Maturity	Success measure
(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 81 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

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18 MARCH 2024

REVIEW OF COUNCIL MEETING STRUCTURE

Executive Summary

Attached is the review of Council Meeting Structure and annexes as included on the agenda of the Executive meeting 21 March 2024.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the report be noted.

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

Background Papers:	None.
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Date Published:	8 March 2024

REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S 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

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;**

Review of the Council's Committee Structure

- (iv) annual training on audit and governance be made mandatory for the Members of the Committee;
- (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.

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Review of the Council's Committee Structure

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Date Published: xx March 2024

1.0 Introduction

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

2.0 Proposal

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

3.0 Purpose and Outcome

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

3.2 Success will be measured by:

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

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

3.2.3 Council business and policy is better coordinated and monitored.

4.0 Background and Process

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

Alternatives

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.0 Implications

Finance and Risk

5.1 There are no known financial implications from this report.

Equalities and Human Resources

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

Legal

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

6.0 Engagement and Consultation

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

REPORT ENDS



Proposals Paper

**Review of
Council Meeting Structure**

Woking Borough Council

2024

Version 3.5

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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, Governance and Audit Committee and other Committees as well as promote greater dialogue between the Executive and Committees.
- Removal of the now redundant Appeals Committee.
- Establishment of a 'Chairs' Group' to encourage cross-committee discussions and ensure the business of Council is considered holistically.
- The proposals, if adopted from May 2024, be reviewed after twelve months to ensure the ambitions and outcomes of these proposals are realised.

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

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

Introduction

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

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

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

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

The start time of Committees has not been altered.

2. Outcomes

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

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

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

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

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

3. The Constitution

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

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

4. Review of Changes

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

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

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

5. Timeline

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

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

6. Elected Member Workshop

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

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

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

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

7. The Improvement and Recovery Plan

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

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

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

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

8. Governance and Assurance

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

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

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

Overview and Scrutiny Committees

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

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

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

9. New Scrutiny Committee Structure

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10. Allocation of Service Scrutiny Responsibilities

Summarised below is an indication of where the scrutiny responsibilities would lie under the proposed three Committee structure, together with an indication of the associated working group under the current structure.

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 Military Covenant Advisory Panel Safer Woking Partnership Group Sheerwater Regen Oversight Panel Woking Wellbeing Group

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

11. Intervention

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

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

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

12. Overview and Scrutiny / Executive Protocol

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

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

13. Scrutiny

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

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

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

14. Performance and Financial Management

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

** The month of August each year is formal recess during which meetings of the Council are not held; the earliest that meetings of the Executive and the Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee can

take place to consider the Q1 Performance and Financial Management information is therefore early September.

The Standards and Audit Committee

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

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

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

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

15. CIPFA Guidance

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

The Council should ensure that the Committee:

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

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

16. Training

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

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

17. Strengthening Function

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

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

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

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

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

18. Review of Governance and Audit Function

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

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

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

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

Employment Committee

19. Proposal

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

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

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

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

Chairs' Group

20. Proposal

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

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

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

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

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

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

Council, the Executive and Remaining Committees

21. Full Council

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

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

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

22. Decision Making Responsibilities

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

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

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

23. The Executive

No significant changes are proposed to the Executive.

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

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

24. Licensing Committee and its Sub-Committees

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

25. Appeals Committee

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

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

26. The Shareholder Executive Committee

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

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

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

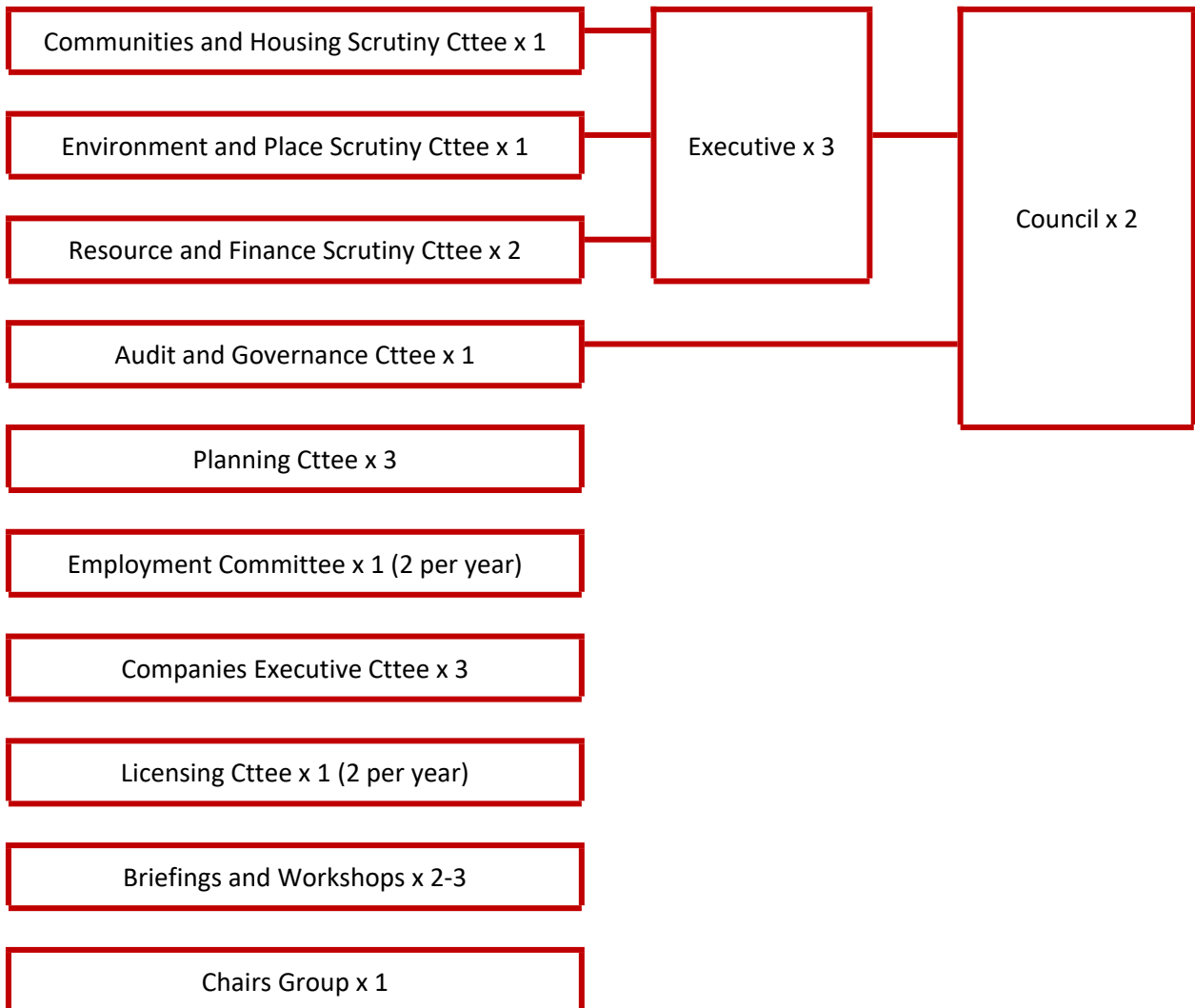
Review of the Annual Calendar of Meetings

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

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

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

January-April example



Calendar of Meetings Comparison

27. In-Year Comparison

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy Working Group

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

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

Proposals Paper - Review of Council Meeting Structure

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

Task and Finish Groups

29. Proposal

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

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

30. Scrutiny Toolkit

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

Key elements of a successful Task and Finish Group include:

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

31. Resourcing and Prioritisation

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

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

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

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

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

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

Briefing / Workshop Programme

32. Proposal

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

33. Mandatory (Essential) Training

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

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

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

34. Briefings (regular, informal, online)

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

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

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

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

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

Clearer Communication of Proposals and Decisions

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

36. Report Writing Review

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

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

37. Communication of Proposals and Decisions

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

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny

38. Feedback

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

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

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

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

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

Proposals Paper - Review of Council Meeting Structure

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

Proposals Paper - Review of Council Meeting Structure

Establishment of Task and Finish groups not fleshed out	Explained that this had already been developed through the Constitution review last year and not included on the working paper seen by CfGS.	Accepted. Guide to Task and Finish Groups drafted to provide clarity and consistency in the role of the Task and Finish Group (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 O&S Committees and with Governance and Audit and the Executive.	Accepted. (Note: suggestion now to establish a Chairs' Group.
Concern that not all Working Groups etc can be shuttered.	Agreed, will meet with stakeholders of each Group to determine which should be shuttered and which closed.	Accepted
Improvements to the scheduling of meetings.	Agreed and will continue to refine the calendar of meetings to ensure it meets the needs of the Council.	Accepted
Consider increasing Executive to meet more regularly than proposed.	Accepted, will explore with senior Officers.	Accepted.
Consider increasing each O&S Committee meetings to 4pa.	Agreed, will explore.	Accepted.

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

1. Scope

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

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

2. Status of the position statement

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

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

3. Purpose of the audit committee

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

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

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

4. Independent and effective model

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

The committee should:

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

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

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

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

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

5. Core functions

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

The specific responsibilities include:

Maintenance of governance, risk and control arrangements

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

Financial and governance reporting

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

Establishing appropriate and effective arrangements for audit and assurance

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

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

6. Audit committee membership

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

7. Characteristics of audit committee membership:

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

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

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

8. Engagement and outputs

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

To discharge its responsibilities effectively, the committee should:

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

9. Impact

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

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

Task and Finish Group Guidance

1. What is a Task and Finish Group?

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

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

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

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

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

2. Purpose and Duties

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

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

3. Membership/Roles/Leadership

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Resources

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

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

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

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

5. Planning.

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

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

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

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

The key elements of a plan are:

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

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

6. Evidence Gathering

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

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

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

7. Meetings

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

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

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

8. Monitoring

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

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

Employment Committee – Draft Terms of Reference

1. Membership

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

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

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

2. Procedure Rules

Meetings of the Committee

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

Chair and Vice Chair

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

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

3. Terms of Reference

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Overview and Scrutiny Member Session

Analysis and insight from workshop, 24 January 2024

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

1. Review of scrutiny findings

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Key areas for future focus

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

Three main themes for future focus were identified by Members:

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

3. CULTURE

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

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

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

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

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

4. BEHAVIOURS

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

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

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

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

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

5. IMPACT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. Recurring themes across CULTURE, BEHAVIOURS and IMPACT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- e) Other recurring and crossing themes included:

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

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

7. Ideas for taking the themes forward

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

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

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

Embrace cross-party co-operation.

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

More conversations/communication with Executive.

Relationships building with Commissioners.

People and Place Holistic.

Members and Officers joint training support.

Please scrutinise CAT Policy and consequences (social impact).

Structural review.

Lots of training and support for Members and officers.

Meetings of SCR with SSO and Commissioners.

Work programmes facilitated externally.

2024 / 2025 Year Planner

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

OVERVIEW OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED - ANNUAL UPDATE

Executive Summary

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that it would be helpful to receive a regular report giving brief details of formal complaints received by the Council. This would enable the Committee to identify whether there are any common themes arising from the complaints. If so, the Committee could then consider whether it should scrutinise the area(s) of activity identified.

This report sets out brief details of complaints received between 1 January 2023 and 31 December 2023. Appendix 1 details the complaints received by Woking Borough Council.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the report be noted.

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

Background Papers: Council's Complaints Procedure.

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Date Published: 8 March 2024

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 It has been agreed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should have a regular report giving brief details of formal complaints received by the Council. This would enable the Committee to identify whether there are any common themes arising from the complaints. If so, the Committee could then consider whether it should scrutinise the area(s) of activity identified.
- 1.2 Officers report corporate and housing complaints in the Performance Management report that the Committee receives. The report is published on the Council's website.

2.0 The Council's Complaints Procedure

- 2.1 A copy of the Council's Complaints Procedure can be found at:

<https://www.woking.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/customer-care-and-feedback>

- 2.2 A complaint is an expression of dissatisfaction. It could relate to:

- a failure to deliver a service;
- a delay in providing a service;
- a poor quality of service;
- a failure to comply with Council policies; or
- the conduct or behaviour of a member of staff.

- 2.3 Not everything is considered a complaint. For example, a first-time request for a service. The complaints procedure will not apply to any correspondence received in respect of planning applications and the merits of the application. These will be treated as objections to the planning application in question.

- 2.4 The Complaints process was reviewed in 2023 and the process was amended. When a complaint is received, it is allocated to a manager within the relevant service. This is called Stage 1. The complaint is acknowledged within five working days' of receipt, and details of the Officer who will investigate it are provided to the complainant. Subject to any exceptional complexity about the complaint, the target date for a response to be provided is twenty (20) working days. If this is not possible, the complainant will be advised of the date by which he/she will receive a full reply.

- 2.5 There is a right of appeal to Stage 2 if the complainant has reasons to believe that the complaint should be reconsidered. In order to proceed to Stage 2 the reasons for a reconsideration must be specified Stage 2 criteria. The following now applies:

- The complainant has twenty-eight (28) days (from the date of the Council's final letter response to the original complaint) to submit the Right of Appeal (Stage 2)
- The review will be undertaken by a member of the Corporate Leadership Team.
- The criteria for a Stage 2 appeal must meet at least one of the following criteria:
 - we made our decision based on inaccurate facts that could change our decision;
 - the complainant has new and relevant information that was not previously available and which might change our decision:

Overview of Complaints Received - Annual Update

- we overlooked or misunderstood parts of the complaint or did not take account of relevant information which could change our decision.

- 2.6 If the complainant remains dissatisfied with the outcome under the Council's Complaints Procedure, he/she can refer the matter to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or Housing Ombudsman (as appropriate).
- 2.7 If a complaint relates to a service provided by a contractor, the complainant must submit it to the contractor under the contractor's complaints procedure. Once this process has been completed, the complainant can request a review under the Council's Complaints Procedure as outlined above.

3.0 Complaints received by the Council in 2023

- 3.1 Corporate complaints are reported in the quarterly Performance Management report that the Committee receives. The report is published on the Council's website.
- 3.2 A table containing a summary of the complaints can be found at Appendix 1.
- 3.3 In the period of 1 January 2022 to 31 December 2023, the Council received 74 complaints through its Complaints Procedure. The previous year the Council received a total of 81 complaints. A general downward trend is noted (2021 there was a total of 93 complaints).
- 3.4 Of the above complaints a total of 14 complainants have made a request for a review of the original response to their complaint since January 2023; each was reviewed by a member of the Corporate Leadership Team for consideration. In 2022 the total request for reviews was 17.
- 3.5 It should be noted that it would not be appropriate for the Committee to review the circumstances of, or decisions reached in respect of, individual complaints. The purpose of submitting this report is to assist the Committee in identifying possible topic areas for future scrutiny.
- 3.6 It is pleasing to report that there was a decrease in Corporate complaints during 2023.
- 3.7 Ombudsman complaints are reported to the Standards and Audit Committee annually.
- 3.8 In accordance with the Constitution, the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Chief Executive, will settle any compensation payments for alleged or actual maladministration found against the Council as determined by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman and Housing Ombudsman.

4.0 Contractor Complaints/ Key Performance Indicators

- 4.1 Joint Waste Solutions have provided an overview of the complaints received in 2023 which is set out for information in Appendix 2.

5.0 Housing Complaints

- 5.1 The Council's Housing complaints are reported quarterly in the Performance Management Report.
- 5.2 An overview of the complaints received in 2023 can be found in the Q3 Performance Management report considered by the Committee at its meeting on 28 February 2024. The report sets out information by quarter and in Q4 of 2022/23, Q1, Q2, and Q3 of 2023/24 there were 71 housing complaints received.

6.0 Corporate Strategy

- 6.1 This report supports the Corporate Plan and emerging Corporate Strategy. This report into the Council's Corporate Complaints supports both openness and transparency in the Council's governance procedures.

7.0 Implications

Financial

- 7.1 None.

Legal

- 7.2 Whilst there are no specific legal implications, it is noted that the Monitoring Officer reviews and assesses the annual complaints and as such is able to ensure the council's powers are being exercised within the required legal parameters.

Equalities and Human Resources

- 7.3 There are no human resource or training and development implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

8.0 Engagement and Consultation

- 8.1 It would not be appropriate to undertake a consultation or engagement exercise on the content of this report.

9.0 Conclusions

- 9.1 Submitting an annual report to the Committee on complaints received will enable the Committee to identify whether there are any common themes arising from the complaints. If so, the Committee could then consider whether it should scrutinise the category or area of activity identified through the data.

REPORT ENDS

Date of Complaint	Summary	Area
04.01.23	verbal assault by parking enforcement officer	parking
09.01.23	communication from Planning Dept not received, plus given different fees for discharging planning conditions	planning
06.01.23	parking fine received and subsequent treatment by Parking Team	parking
10.01.23	planning application which was approved but resident feels planning cttee was given misleading and inaccurate info	planning
18.01.23	Conduct of Parking Dept after paying a PCN but payment not allocated correctly	parking
20.01.23	Complaint against attitude of Housing Options Officer	housing
24.01.23	No response from housing	housing
25.01.23	incident in Red car park and rude attendant	parking
31.01.23	Parking Enforcement Officer parking illegally	parking
31.01.23	handling of issue reported by resident to EH team	environmental health
10.02.23	Difficulties in appealing PCN having already paid	parking
08.02.23	Accusation of incorrectly handling benefit claim	benefits
11.02.23	lack of communication and consultation about Surrey Half Marathon 2023	leisure
14.02.23	did not receive a response from Housing to an enquiry re windows in his leased house after more than 3 weeks	housing
16.02.23	Council Tax Dept not updating property records with correct information	benefits
21.02.23	closure of Heatwaves at Woking Leisure Centre	leisure
23.02.23	issues with installation of glazing on property, impacting on enjoyment of property due to noise	environmental health
27.02.23	Parking Wardens in Windlesham finishing at 6pm, meaning cars park illegally after this time	parking
27.01.23	Not happy with Housing staff conduct	housing

09.03.23	Issue with staff working from home and not able to get through on the phone	HR
22.03.23	Victoria Way car park not issuing paper receipt	parking
28.03.23	length of time taken to deal with Planning Application submitted nearly a year ago	planning
03.04.23	Not able to get in touch with social prescribing team, no-one has replied to his voicemails	social prescribing
01.04.23	parking payment system not working, and unable to speak to any member of staff	parking
13.04.23	Does not believe planning permission should have been granted	planning
17.04.23	Problems with property not being dealt with promptly	housing
08.05.23	not happy with change of design from original planning application	planning
10.05.23	Concerned that proper planning procedures have not been followed regarding planning application	planning
15.05.23	confused by parking ticket time at Woking Park and no-one called her back	parking
15.05.23	not happy with visits from bailiffs and enforcements after receiving PCN	parking
31.05.23	dissatisfied with communication and competence of Council Tax staff	benefits
07.06.23	concern with process of Planning Committee and how an application was handled at a meeting	planning
06.06.23	not happy that Business Rates dept send letters asking for rates on property he is not responsible for	business rates
07.06.23	alleged bullying and biased behaviour witnessed at the planning meeting committee on 6th June 2023	planning
12.06.23	concerned about how the planning meeting was conducted	planning
14.06.23	not happy that neighbour's planning app was approved and she was not informed at the time	planning
14.06.23	not happy with way Council Tax discount claim has been handled	council tax

23.06.23	delay in communication of planning application decision	planning
19.07.23	billed for issues with property, and comments made by staff in private sector lettings team	housing
12.10.22	Unhappy with how the planning team dealt with a breach of planning query	planning
04.08.23	car is parked on double yellow lines	parking
04.08.23	think the Council is discriminating them and not helping prevent homelessness	housing
07.08.23	not happy with FOI response	legal
08.08.23	planning permission granted	planning
22.08.23	possible data breach as c/tax demand letter was sent in open envelope	council tax
24.08.23	adjustment for disabilities	housing
30.08.23	unhappy with DSAR was handled	legal
06.09.23	concerned that the draft accounts for 2021-2022 have not been published, and website is not up to date	finance
08.09.23	no progress has been made on their planning application since January 2023	planning
11.09.23	not treated professionally by Council tax team and given wrong information	council tax
14.09.23	Finds the blue / white badge system for discounted parking unfair	parking
12.09.23	Council Tax DD was withdrawn with no notice. Phoned to speak to Dept, was told to email	council tax
12.09.23	Could not get hold of anyone in C/Tax dept to set up payment plan to pay arrears	council tax
21.09.23	travellers on St Johns Lye	neighbourhood
18.09.23	housing benefit claim	benefits
25.09.23	Benefit team lack of understanding and contradictory letters	benefits
30.09.23	no clear signage re blue badge requirements for parking in Brewery Road car park	parking
05.10.23	the decision making within WBC Planning and Building Control in relation to the development at 21 Oak Tree Road, Knaphill	planning
20.10.23	Complaint about an incident at 35 Ferney Court	housing

26.10.23	Time delays with business rates team and not actioning requests promptly	business rates
31.10.23	Closure of Church Street East blocking access to Barclays car park - no response to emails/calls over several months	neighbourhood
01.11.23	Business rates dept lack of response and not updating records correctly	business rates
10.11.23	Mike Ferguson demeanour and behaviour towards me whilst he is investigating whether there has been a breach of town and planning regulations	planning
09.11.23	noise nuisance from neighbour - does not feel that Council have taken seriously	environmental health
16.11.23	lack of response from Planning Officers and delays in communication	planning
14.11.23	behaviour and assessment from the OT re suitable housing	housing
17.11.23	Payment system at Heathside Car park	parking
15.11.23	Concerns over disability not being thought of during development/purchasing	neighbourhood
21.11.23	Dangerous Trees	planning
13.11.23	Housing Department who completed the LPE1 form	housing
12.11.23	PLAN/2023/0732 - doubts regarding this and other planning development proposals	planning
21.11.23	feels has been treated unfairly re housing bidding	housing
13.12.23	attempt to collect council tax from old property	council tax
21.12.23	planning permission	planning

Joint Waste Solutions Complaints recorded for the Period 1 January to 31 December 2023

Subject of Complaint	Numbers
Assisted Collections	51
Bulky Collections	36
Crew Behaviour	104
Customer Service	172
Damage to Property	38
Deliveries / Removals	199
Invoicing / Payments	76
Missed Collections	845
Waste Spillage	14
TOTAL	1535



Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

This Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme is published with the purpose of assisting the Council in its overview and scrutiny role. The Work Programme covers the following areas:

- Items for consideration at future meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Scrutiny Review Topics proposed by Members of the Council for inclusion on the Work Programme.
- Topics identified for pre-decision scrutiny.
- The draft forward programme of work for the Executive.
- Details of the current Task and Working Groups under the Committee’s remit.

The Work Programme is designed to assist the Council with its overview and scrutiny role by providing Members with an indication of the current work, topics to be considered for review, and items which the Executive expects to consider at its future meetings, so that matters can be raised beforehand and/or consultations undertaken with a Member of the Executive prior to the relevant meeting.

Any changes to the Work Programme since it was last published have been highlighted in green.

The Committee	
Chairman: Councillor Josh Brown	
Vice-Chairman: Councillor Adam Kirby	
Councillor H Akberali	Councillor A Caulfield
Councillor K Davis	Councillor A Javaid
Councillor R Leach	Councillor J Morley
Councillor L Rice	Councillor M Sullivan
2023/24 Committee Dates	
05 June 2023	10 July 2023
14 August 2023 (Extraordinary)	11 September 2023
16 October 2023	20 November 2023
11 December 2023 (Extraordinary)	29 January 2024 (was 22 January 2024)
28 February 2024 (was 19 February 2024)	18 March 2024

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the report be noted.

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

Background Papers: None.

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Date Published: 8 March 2024

REPORT ENDS

Suggested Additions to the Work Programme

Following the last meeting of the Committee, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman provided Officers with a list of items for consideration over the coming year. Where possible, these have been added to the Work Programme. Set out below are any ideas which have been suggested or requested but are yet to be included against a specific meeting of the Committee.

Topic	Proposed by	Officer Comment
Biannual Overview of Complaints Report	Chair and Vice-Chair (2021/22)	Following the meeting of the Committee on 21 February 2022 it was expressed by Members that the possibility of having this report appear at the Committee twice a year, as opposed to once a year would be beneficial.
Invite Thames Water	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	In recognition of the Work Programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year and the position of Thames Water the item has been delayed for consideration until the next Municipal Year.
Invite Commissioners	Chair and Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Invite the DLUHC-appointed Commissioners to a future meeting of the Committee.
Scrutiny of definitions of statutory and non-statutory services	Chair and Overview and Scrutiny Committee	The Committee is interested in considering how Officers determined statutory and non-statutory services.
Review of Member Development	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	At its meeting on 28 February 2024 the Committee requested a report on Member development.
Plan for Member and Officer Finance Training	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	At its meeting on 28 February 2024 the Committee requested a report on plans to for financial training for Members and Officers.
St Johns Footbridge	Overview and Scrutiny Committee	The Chair and Vice-Chair agreed to put onto the Work Programme consideration of inviting Network Rail to discuss plans to replace the St Johns Footbridge.

The Draft Executive Work Programme

The following list sets out the draft forward programme of work for the Executive over the coming year. The programme is subject to additions and alterations and will be updated for future meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The purpose of the list is to enable the Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to identify those items they would like to scrutinise under the Committee's function of pre-decision scrutiny. The list includes those items for recommendation to Council as well as those for determination by the Executive.

Executive – 21 March 2024

Matters for Consideration

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 1) | Review of Council Meeting Structure |
| 2) | Companies Governance Framework – Shareholder Executive Committee |
| 3) | The Improvement and Recovery Plan Progress - November 2023 to March 2024 |
| 4) | ThamesWey Central Milton Keynes Limited offer to market |
| 5) | Victoria Square Woking Ltd – Share Purchase |
| 6) | Asset Disposal |
| 7) | Asset Disposal |
| 8) | Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 – Annual Monitoring Report |
| 9) | CIL – Application for Funding – Phoenix Cultural Centre CIC |
| 10) | Write off of Sundry Debts |
| 11) | Resident Services Programme |
| 12) | Monitoring Reports - Projects |
| 13) | Asset Disposal (PART II) |
| 14) | Asset Disposal (PART II) |

Executive – 13 June 2024

Matters for Consideration

- 1) Council Vision
- 2) ThamesWey and Victoria Square Business Plans
- 3) Fees and Charges 2024-25 Review for Car Park Tariffs
- 4) 30 Year Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan
- 5) Climate Change Strategy
- 6) Woking Environment Action (WEAct) – Recommendations and Responses
- 7) General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
- 8) Risk Management and Business Continuity Annual Report
- 9) Performance Management Report
- 10) Financial Monitoring Report – Budget Monitoring and Forecast 2023-24 – Quarter 4
- 11) Monitoring Reports - Projects

Executive – 11 July 2024

Matters for Consideration

- 1) Equalities Annual Report 2024 including Pay Gap Report
- 2) Treasury Management Annual Report 2023-24

Executive – 12 September 2024

Matters for Consideration

- 1) Improvement and Recovery Plan
- 2) Performance Management Report
- 3) Financial Monitoring Report – Budget Monitoring and Forecast 2024-25 – Quarter 1
- 4) Monitoring Reports - Projects

Executive – 17 October 2024

Matters for Consideration

- 1)

Executive – 14 November 2024

Matters for Consideration

- 1) Review of Fees and Charges 2025-26
- 2) Calendar of Meetings 2025-26
- 3) Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and General Fund Budget 2025-26
- 4) Draft Housing Revenue Account Budget Update 2025-26
- 5) Draft Capital Programme 2024-25 to 2028-29
- 6) Performance Management Report
- 7) Financial Monitoring Report – Budget Monitoring and Forecast 2024-25 – Quarter 2

Current Working and Task Groups Responsible to the Committee

The table below provides a list of current Working and Task Groups established by the Committee, including an indication of the resource requirements and the anticipated completion date. Any updates on the progress of individual Working and Task Groups are included elsewhere on the Committee's agenda.

Economic Development Working Group	
Remit:	<p>The Economic Development Working Group shall comprise seven Members of the Council representing all Groups on the Council based on proportionality. The Elected Members to be appointed annually by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in May.</p> <p>Members of the Working Group will be expected to gain the views of Councillors/ Officers/ other representatives with a view to reporting those views to the Working Group.</p> <p>Members of the Working Group may also be charged with specific areas to research and report back on to the Working Group.</p> <p>Members of the Working Group may be expected to present proposals to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and, where necessary, prepare written reports.</p>
Membership:	Councillors Barker, Davis, Javaid, Morley, Mukherjee, Oades, Roberts.
Resources:	Officer and Councillor time.
Date Established:	11.03.09

Finance Working Group	
Remit:	<p>The Working Group has been established as a Standing Working Group to review financial issues as identified either by itself or the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Working Group will receive financial information, including reports to the Executive, to enable it to undertake effective scrutiny of the financial performance of the Council.</p> <p>The Working Group will receive reports on areas such as Treasury Management, Budget Process and Financial Forecast, Statement of Accounts, Investment Programme, Review of Fees and Charges, General Fund Budget, Update on Commercial Rents, Update on Irrecoverable Debt, and matters arising from the Green Book. Its Work Programme will be received at each Working Group meeting.</p>
Membership:	Councillors Akberali, Aziz, Davis, Kirby, Oades, Rice, Roberts.
Resources:	Officer and Councillor time.
Date Established:	25.05.06

HIF Working Group	
Remit:	<p>The HIF Working Group has been established following the decision on 23 May 2022 to taking on the responsibilities of the Aggregates Site Working Group and the HIF Oversight Panel.</p> <p>The Working Group shall comprise seven Members of the Council representing all Groups on the Council based on proportionality. The Elected Members to be appointed annually by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>Members of the Working Group will be expected to gain the views of Councillors/ Officers/ Portfolio Holder / External Advisors and other representatives with a view to reporting those views to the Working Group.</p> <p>Members of the Working Group may also be charged with specific areas to research and report back on to the Working Group.</p> <p>Working Group Members may be expected to present proposals to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and, where necessary, prepare written reports.</p>
Membership:	Councillors Akberali, Boote, Cosnahan, Dorsett, Johnson, Lyons, Sullivan.
Resources:	Officer and Councillor time.
Date Established:	23.05.22

Housing Working Group	
Remit:	<p>The Housing Working Group shall comprise seven Members of the Council representing all Groups on the Council based on proportionality. The Elected Members to be appointed annually by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p>Members of the Working Group will be expected to gain the views of Councillors/ Officers/ Portfolio Holder / External Advisors and other representatives with a view to reporting those views to the Working Group.</p> <p>Members of the Working Group may also be charged with specific areas to research and report back on to the Working Group.</p> <p>Working Group Members may be expected to present proposals to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and, where necessary, prepare written reports.</p>
Membership:	Councillors Aziz, Boote, Cosnahan, Dorsett, Johnson, Lyons, Sullivan.
Resources:	Officer and Councillor time.
Date Established:	25.05.06

Brookwood Cemetery HS2 Task & Finish Group	
Remit:	<p>The Brookwood Cemetery HS2 Task & Finish Group was established to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the purpose of the funding provided. • Determine the status of the funding that was provided through the HS2 scheme. • Review what funding is required to support the HS2 reburials at the cemetery.

The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Understand the obligations on the Council towards the HS2 reburials at the cemetery.• Understand the treatment of these funds under S114 status, if applicable.• Understand the steps taken to date to ensure that funding will be available for the full duration of the original period identified by HS2.• Seek views and make recommendations on the sustainable running of the HS2 reburials at the cemetery.
Membership:	Councillors Davis and Rice
Resources:	Officer and Councillor time.
Date Established:	16.10.23

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 18 MARCH 2024

FINANCE WORKING GROUP UPDATE

Executive Summary

Since the last update received by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its January 2024 meeting, two meetings of the Finance Working Group have been held.

Meeting held on 30 January 2024

Draft Asset Rationalisation Strategy

The Group received the draft Asset Rationalisation Strategy which set out an approach to asset rationalisation over the next three years, with the aim of realising the maximum beneficial capital investment return from the Commercial Investment Portfolios. It was noted that the Council was looking to mitigate as far as possible any loss for the public purse. It was felt that asset prices should start to increase over the coming years due to the country's current economic position and the cost of borrowing, which could benefit the Council in its disposals. The intention was for the document to exist alongside the Thamesway and Victoria Square business plans once agreed.

Debt Reduction Plan

The Group received a confidential update on the Council's Debt Reduction Plan.

Meeting held on 22 February 2024

General Fund Budget and Council Tax setting 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Plan

The Group received a summary of the content of the General Fund budget report to be received at the Council meeting on 4 March. The report would include the ongoing costs and implications of debt repayment; the Council's reserve position; the s25 statement by the s151 officer and Finance Commissioner; recommendations for budget related matters; and a formal recommendation on Council Tax for 2024/25. Following approval of the budget by Full Council, the next step would be to work on the MTFs with regard to 2025/26 for the General Fund and the 30 year plan for the HRA.

Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategies and MRP Statement

The Group noted the draft Capital, Investment and Treasury Management Strategies and MRP Statement report due to be received by Council at its meeting on 4 March.

Recommendations

The Committee is requested to:

RESOLVE That the report be noted.

Background Papers: None.

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