

Improvement and Recovery Programme

September 2024

Shaping the *future*
of our borough



Foreword



**Councillor Ann-Marie Barker
Leader of Woking Borough Council and
Richard Carr, Managing Director
Commissioner**

In response to the serious difficulties faced by Woking Borough Council, which culminated in Government intervention and the appointment of Commissioners, the Borough Council has developed this Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP).

Based around five themes, the Plan details the actions we must take, together with milestones and delivery targets, to deliver rapid and sustainable improvements in governance, finance and commercial functions, and organisational effectiveness.

A year on from approval of our Plan, we reflect on the progress to date. Within each theme of the Plan we have laid important foundations which are essential to the Council's recovery and without which further progress would be compromised. However, a significant amount of work remains to be done and there can be no grounds for complacency.

Financial recovery

Enhanced financial reporting has enabled us to better understand the budget envelope with which the Council needs to operate in the future. This has revealed further pressures and indeed errors in budget setting. Without this insight, our ability to tackle in year challenges and plan for the medium-term would be constrained.

Commercial

We have improved governance arrangements to enable the Council to effectively manage its relationship with the companies in which it is the shareholder and lender. Alongside this we have developed an asset rationalisation plan that outlines our approach to investment properties.

Housing recovery and improvement

This theme was added to the IRP in December 2023, following a Housing Regulatory Notice. A cohesive plan has been developed outlining the improvements required to enable us to manage our housing stock in a way that meets the needs of our tenants and is financially sustainable.

Governance and assurance

The Council has restructured its governance arrangements, in line with best practice. These new arrangements are being supported by quality reporting, disciplined agenda planning and greater oversight by the Corporate Leadership Team. In addition, the investment by senior management in guiding and supporting scrutiny is being well received.

Organisation and service redesign

A major organisational and staff restructure in April 2024 has created a leaner council focused on statutory core service delivery.

With these important foundations now in place, our emphasis is about delivering process and technology improvements that will drive best service delivery to residents and working towards financial stability.

Key to this success is developing a strong organisational culture embedding these principles.

With the support of Commissioners, councillors, officers and partners, we are confident that we are committed to delivering the change needed to achieve best value to residents and the public purse.

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Section 1: Introduction

Improvement and Recovery Plan

In line with the Secretary of State's Directions, and in recognition of the scale of the task faced, WBC developed this Improvement and Recovery Plan around five themes, each with a strategic aim. The first four themes were approved at Council in August 2023, as the first version of the Improvement and Recovery Plan. A fifth theme, Housing Recovery and Improvement was added to the plan in December 2023 as part of the Council's response to the regulatory notice. The strategic aims of each theme are:-

1. Financial Recovery

Sustainable budget management, making difficult decisions whilst delivering against council strategic priorities and safeguarding future capacity.

2. Commercial

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

3. Governance and Assurance

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

4. Organisation and Service Redesign

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

5. Housing Recovery and Improvement

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.

Delivering the Plan

The Directions, as outlined in the Government intervention will be delivered by one or more of the themes and are monitored by the Improvement and Recovery Board, chaired by Lead Commissioner, Sir Tony Redmond. Progress is reported to the Secretary of State every 6 months. Each theme has a

set of objectives, workstreams and activity, with milestones used to track progress against expected timescales and achievements.

In recognition that there are elements of activity that require further design before confirming the Council's approach, and that there will be other issues arising that will feed into the Improvement and Recovery Plan, a phased approach has been taken to developing the plan.

- **Phase one (September 2023-May 2024)** – captured known actions and deliverables to date and provides a foundation for the Council's improvement.
- **Phase two** – We are now in phase two which aims to build on phase one, clarify the delivery of certain workstreams and identify additional areas for improvement where they have arisen.

The plan is a three to five year plan, recognising the journey that WBC needs to take and reflecting the intervention timescale.

Section 2: Phased approach

The diagram shows the stages of development for each theme to drive towards improvement. This represents the progress of the improvement journey. In the first year the focus has been on recovery – identifying the issues, ‘fixing the mechanics’, making significant savings and efficiencies, at pace.

Year 2 to 3 will build on these foundations and start to demonstrate improvement – the council operating effectively as a smaller organisation with strengthened financial and legal capability and capacity and reducing demand on frontline services by moving more services online.

The ambition over a longer term (3-5 year period) is to be a council managing finances with a sustainable budget. Services will be provided more efficiently and online where appropriate, and there will be improved customer satisfaction. The commercial estate will be smaller, and the debt reduced. We will be a council driven by data and evidence to inform better, more rounded decision-making. We will have rebuilt trust from residents and regained confidence from government.

Theme	Year 1 to 2	Year 2-3	Year 3--5
Financial Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fix the plumbing/ mechanics Review budgets, reducing complexity, budget lines, budget codes Increase short term capacity Reduce the cost base 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refine the nature of central gov't finance support Strengthen long-term capability, capacity Clear budget position, controls, monitoring Accounting treatment for MRP 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balanced budget set annually Clear, transparent accurate budgets and forecasts
Commercial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review assets including Sheerwater Develop commercial land and asset disposal strategy Review the 24 council-owned companies Strengthen Shareholder governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen governance and constitution Property reviewed, upgraded, disposed Companies reviewed, disposed, restructured Effective risk management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Right-size the estate to be financially and operationally more efficient Fewer companies, better risk management, reduced debt
Governance and Assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councillor mentoring to support member-led scrutiny Audit and Standards committee work programme Annual governance statement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scrutiny of budget setting Member training Regeneration scrutiny panel Constitution updated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decisions made based on evidence
Organisation and Service Redesign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation restructure Discover and baseline; understand value for money Design deliver quick wins. Cost benefit analysis Align customer services and Digital 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organisation and service redesigns Organisation development and ways of working investment Technology investments to drive out cost and improve services; website, telephony and ways of working 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Efficient, lower cost council, high levels of collaboration Employer of choice 80% of transactions online High resident satisfaction levels
Housing recovery and Improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capital investment in homes and fire safety works Build councils relationship with tenants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> System and process improvements HRA 30 year business plan Reduced voids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financially sustainable housing service safe and well-maintained homes

Section 3: Measuring the improvement journey

Vision

The council established the vision for the organisation as part of the budget setting process in early 2024.

The vision for the council is –

A financially and environmentally sustainable council, delivering services that residents value.

Mission

A trusted and transparent that Council that:

- *Lives within its means.*
- *Focuses its energy on services that make a difference to people in the borough.*
- *Works in partnership with the community to deliver positive outcomes.*
- *Continually engages with residents to design more efficient and effective services.*
- *Invests in talent to deliver for Woking's future.*

In delivering the Improvement and Recovery Plan the organisation will look very different to how it was ahead of the intervention. It is important to describe the change that the plan will bring about in a set of outcomes.

Programme Outcomes

The Improvement and Recovery Plan will achieve these outcomes: -

- 1) A council managing finances with a sustainable 'rightsized' budget.
- 2) Focussed on resident needs.
- 3) Our companies aligned to the council's priorities.
- 4) Reduced levels of debt.
- 5) Improved financial transparency and decision making leading to resident trust.

Importantly, the IRP will deliver outcomes for the services it provides described in the Woking for All Strategy. Progress is reported in the quarterly performance monitoring of the key performance indicators supporting the Strategy.

Success Measures

In the context of the Directions of the Intervention, Commissioners have sought to define the outcomes they would expect to result from the delivery of this Plan.

The success measures cover governance, finance, culture, service delivery and commercial. The success measures are aligned to, and being delivered by one or more of the workstreams described in the Theme Plans.

Monitoring of the improvement is evidenced at each of the Improvement and Recovery Boards on a monthly basis.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

As well as monitoring milestones met against the Plan at the Improvement and Recovery Board, the improvement is measured by a set of KPIs within the quarterly Performance Monitoring reporting to the Leadership. These include, for example:

- Resident satisfaction
- Number of queries raised online
- Capital receipts, debt reduction

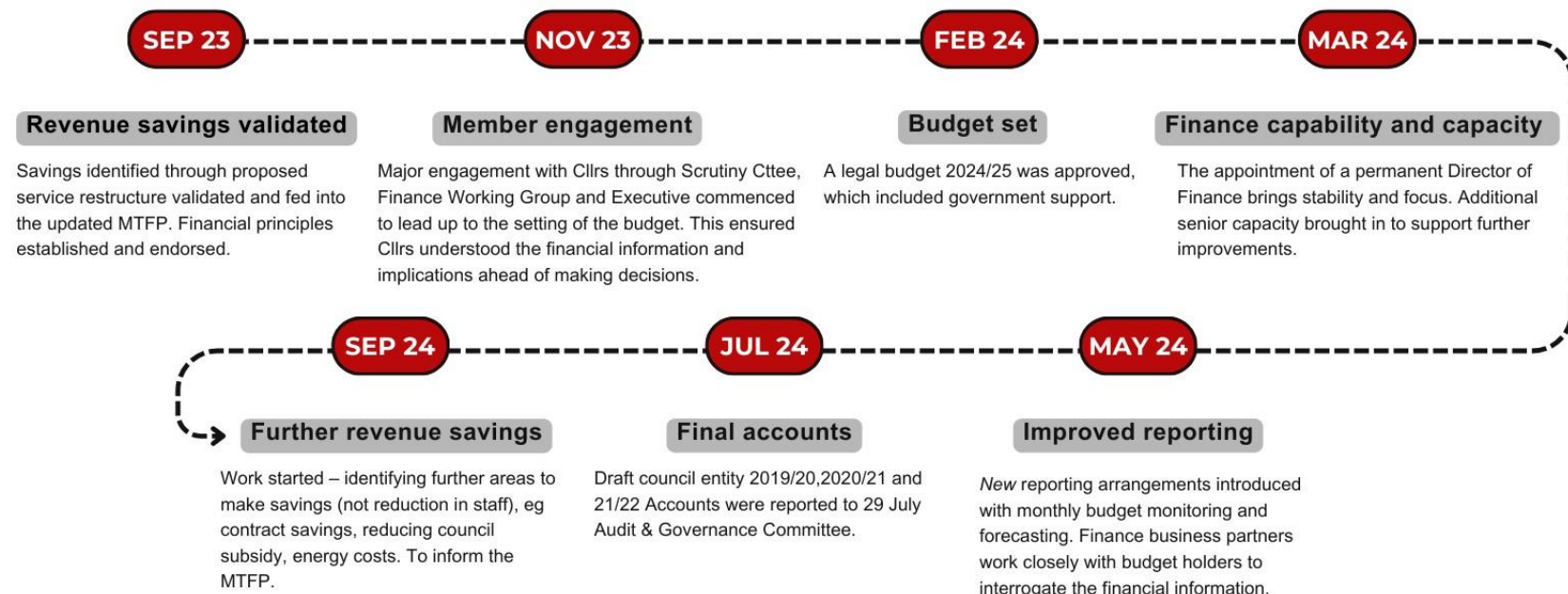
The performance reports are available online.

Section 4: Updated theme plans



Theme 1: Financial Recovery – the road so far

The council faces an extremely serious financial shortfall owing to its historic investment strategy that has resulted in unaffordable borrowing, inadequate steps to repay that borrowing and high values of irrecoverable loans. The focus of this Theme is about putting in place basic financial processes, systems, and the skills to manage and monitor the budget, including being certain that the financial information decisions are made on is accurate. This theme also includes the establishment of a medium-term financial strategy and appropriate supporting financial strategies, alongside the development and implementation of a debt reduction plan. Steps made in year 1 focussed on identifying the issues and starting to lay the solid foundations: -



Financial Recovery Theme Summary

Introduction

The Financial Recovery theme remains core to this plan. Accurate and timely financial information is key to the delivery of the recovery plan priorities, and it is essential that the council manages its finances in a sustainable way.

In the first year of the IRP the council made revenue savings of £8.4m, and with Government support, set a legal budget in March 2024.

With increased capacity within the Finance function, improvements to budget monitoring processes and reporting have been implemented leading to a better grip on the Council's financial position. This has, however, identified further budget gaps that need to be addressed in-year. Workstreams to identify the required level of savings over the medium term are being led by Corporate Leadership Team.

The council will reduce its level of debt through rationalisation of assets and by restricting future borrowing to what is essential. Sufficient provision will be made for the repayment of debt.

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

Success measures

- F1** – The whole workforce, and all Councillors, recognising the Council's fiduciary duty in all financial business, to use public resources responsibly on behalf of citizens.
- F2** – A 'right sized' budget and council tax for the council focussed on delivering to citizens.
- F3** – Robust financial, budgeting and accounting systems.
- F4** – A detailed asset management plan with timescales for disposals consistent with value for money criteria, aligned to the debt reduction plan and the operational needs of the Council.
- F5** – A balanced Housing Revenue Account and a sustainable Housing service.

Theme workstream objectives – 2024/25

People and skills	Financial systems
Support having a short term and a medium to longer term finance function with the right skills and capacity in place	Review and implement a new financial management system and links to other systems
Control framework and budget monitoring	Housing Revenue Account
Ensure basic governance is in place to underpin financial decision making and rebuild the commercial decision - making frameworks and support the production of meaningful financial monitoring information	Deliver a balanced Housing Revenue Account over the short and medium term
Annual accounts	Savings delivery (2024/25)
Finalise accounts to meet statutory reporting requirements	Close the budget gap in year
Reviewing policies	2025/26 budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy
Review specific finance policies and associated processes to ensure they are fit for purpose	Set a balanced budget for 2025/26 and over the medium term (excluding impact legacy debt)
	Debt reduction (Commercial Finance workstream)
	Produce a debt reduction plan and provide finance input and validation to the Commercial Theme

Financial Recovery next steps

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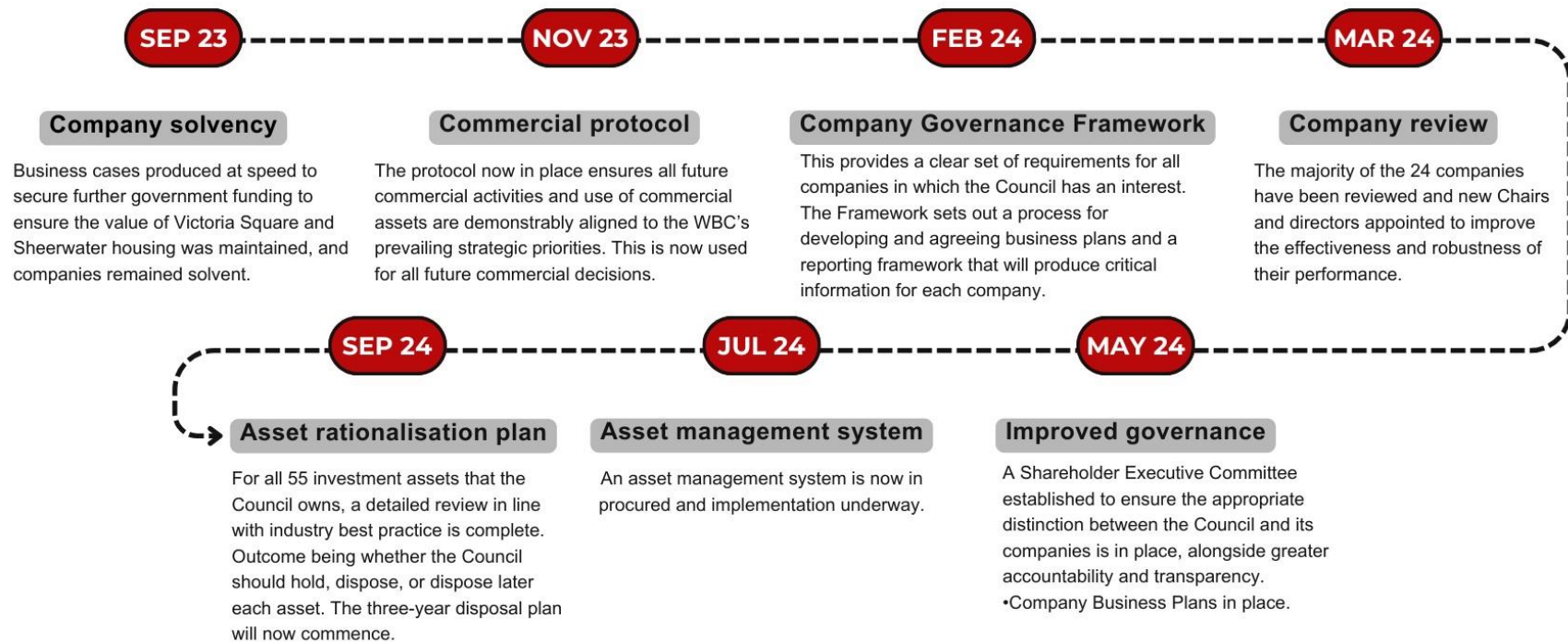
Workstream	Activity	Due
People and skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction of new permanent Section 151 Officer and appointment of Deputy Section 151 Officer • Service plans and team objectives • Improved processes and procedures • Restructure of the finance team • Budget Managers and Business Partners training & development (Financial Regulations, financial reporting) 	July 2024 September 2024 October 2024 November 2024 January 2025
Control framework and budget monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review processes for monitoring collection fund and benefit overpayments, and build into reporting • Implement improved monthly financial reporting to leadership and monthly financial reporting to Members • Work to ensure an effective internal audit service with routine reporting to Audit and Governance Committee • Financial Control Panel – incorporate procurement and review Financial Control Panel effectiveness • Financial Management Code assessments updated and finalise update of financial regulations (follow on from Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) work) • Review the recharges account, streamlining of cost centre and coding structure, setting up a proper staffing establishment where staff are coded to the right cost centres 	July 2024 July 2024 September 2024 October 2024 November 2024 December 2024
Annual accounts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft council entity 2020/21 and 21/22 accounts to • Tracker to monitor completion of all government returns; Revenue outturns and all other statutory financial returns complete • Draft 2022/23 council entity to Audit Committee • Draft 2023/24 accounts to Audit Committee 	July 2024 August 2024 Autumn 2024 Autumn 2024

Workstream	Activity	Due
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparation of consolidated accounts in line with new advice (22/23 and 23/24) for Audit Committee 	Autumn 2024
Reviewing policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Debt collection policy review - holistic approach to debt collection and recovery Strengthen new arrangements for anti-fraud and corruption and training for managers 	September 2024 January 2025
Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Systems strategy and potential retender or upgrade Review and implement financial management systems and links to other 'feeder' systems e.g. housing, new property system Changes to workflow and processes and implementation (including training) 	October 2024 April 2025 April 2025
Housing Revenue Account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Correction of historic issues (and accounting for reserves) Medium term HRA budget projections Capital spend requirements updated 30 year Business Plan 	August 2024 October 2024 December 2024 December 2024
Delivery of MTFS and savings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial savings tracking and monitoring of savings delivery (£8.4m) Financial monitoring and mitigation of emerging pressures 	July 2025 March 2025
Set a balanced budget for 2025/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop budget timetable (CLT/ Executive/ O&S/ Council) Identify appropriate financial envelope to work to as part of a three year MTFS informed by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> bottom up work on budgets and pressures, determining appropriate level of debt and associated costs benchmarking with statistical nearest neighbours. Draft of full suite of budget documents – MTFP, Capital Strategy, Treasury Management Strategy Support delivery of three year programme to reduce costs and deliver savings based on the four strategic themes agreed at CLT 	July 2024 August 2024 January 2025 March 2025
Debt reduction (Commercial	Activity streams in this workstream include: Governance; Company assets; WBC assets; Borrowing and cashflow; Debt reduction (finance lens); Treasury management and financial accounting; Engagement with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.	Ongoing

Workstream	Activity	Due
Finance workstream)		

Theme 2: Commercial – the road so far

This Theme is focussed on addressing the issues arising because of the Council's historic investment strategy, ensuring the Council's estate is the right size and that the remaining companies objectives align to the Council's. The theme also included a review of Council assets to generate greater yields and ensure optimum capital receipts are delivered from the disposal of surplus assets. Year 1 saw the review of all council-owned companies, with new chairs and directors brought in and trained and the start of developing new business plans. The journey in year one is summarised below.



Commercial Theme Summary

Introduction

The purpose of this theme is to generate greater yields from assets the council retains and optimise capital receipts from the disposal of assets that are surplus to WBC requirements.

Historically the council has embarked on an ambitious regeneration programme, funded through Public Works Loan Board borrowing. This was used to fund the acquisition of commercial properties within the borough, to support the regeneration of Woking town centre and, through its wholly owned ThamesWey subsidiaries, to fund sustainable energy and housing (including the Sheerwater regeneration). Financing these schemes accounts for most of the council's debt.

This year governance covering the effective management of the Council's relationship with its companies has been strengthened, including to provide greater accountability and transparency. Initial Company Business Plans produced to ensure each company has a clear purpose and strategic direction, alongside a set of performance measures.

A major review of company-owned and council-owned assets to determine how rationalisation can be delivered (considering valuation) is now complete and has led to the production of an asset rationalisation plan for council-owned assets (to dispose of, retain, or develop property).

The next phase will focus on implementing the asset rationalisation plan, implementing the changes to company structures, and embedding the new asset management system. Internally, improvements to procurement and contract management will be implemented following a major review of all contracts.

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

Success measures

CL1 – Commercial protocols which are applied universally across the Council.

CL2 – Commercial business cases which are clear and sufficient for well informed decision making.

CL3 – Procurement policies and practices which are consistent across the council.

CL4 – Robust commercial governance arrangements which enable officers and members to challenge commercial proposals in order to secure best value.

F4 – A detailed asset management plan with timescales for disposals consistent with value for money criteria, aligned to the debt reduction plan and the operational needs of the Council.

G3 – Effective oversight and monitoring of all key decisions made by the Council, Executive, Boards, Committees, and LA companies.

Theme workstream objectives – 2024/25

Commercial strategy	Commercial estate and commercial options
Prepare a long-term commercial strategy that describes how the Council approaches commercial activity	Develop strategic options for the Council's wider commercial estate
ThamesWey and subsidiaries	Commissioning and procurement
Develop strategic options for the ThamesWey Group	Embed improved procurement and commissioning processes and contract management
Victoria Square Woking Ltd.	
Develop strategic options for Victoria Square Woking Ltd.	

Commercial workstreams next steps

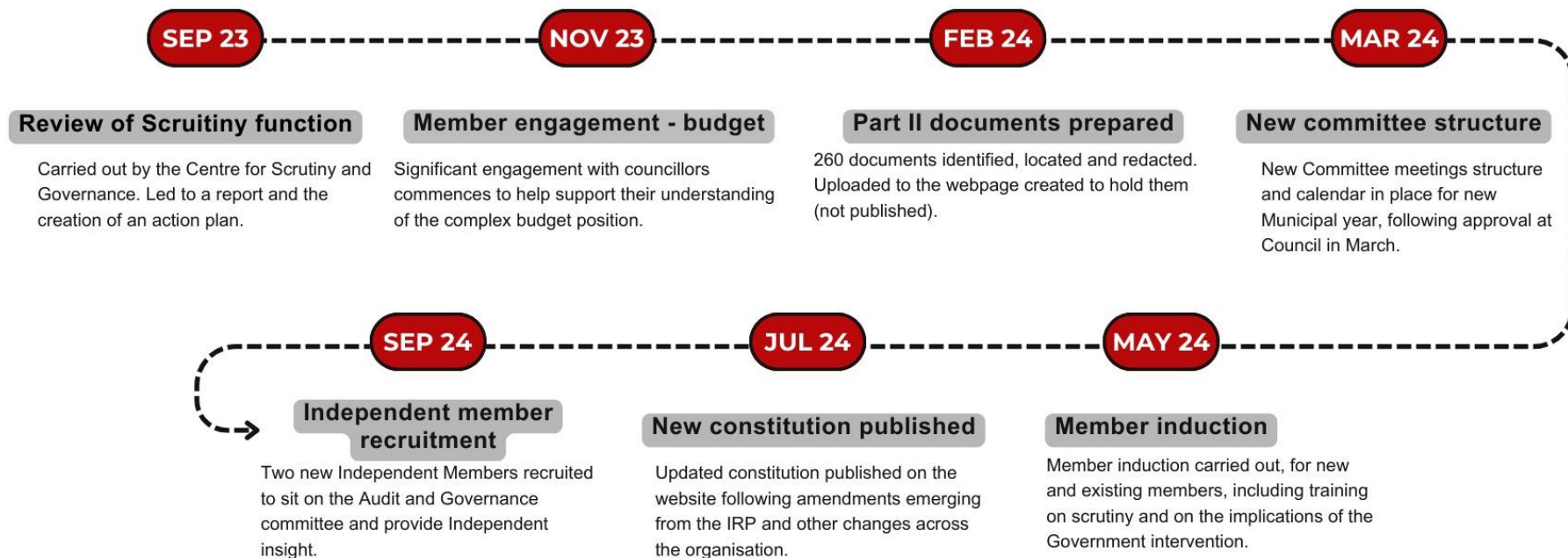
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Workstream	Activity	Due
Companies and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement the requirement for company Business Plans and monitor at the Shareholder Executive Committee Undertake a review of all 24 companies Adopt new Shareholder Executive Governance Commercial Governance board established to ensure all commercial decisions are made based on robust business cases Commercial Protocol produced to ensure all commercial decisions adhere to robust process and evidence (Nov '23) - reviewed Develop strategic options for ThamesWey and Victoria Square Woking Ltd: outline business cases and full business cases 	May 2024 May 2025 June 2024 August 2023 December 2024 December 2024 and May 2025
Commercial estate and commercial options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Business cases for all WBC Property Investment assets – Net Present Value Analysis (July '24); Agree investment portfolio plans Agree the 'To be' property portfolio for the council Asset Management System procured and implemented to enable effective management of all asset information and data Business cases for all WBC operational assets Car parking strategy to agree future of assets and fees & charges 	September 2024 September 2024 September 2024 December 2024 March 2025
Commissioning and procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish in-house Commercial Services function to lead procurement; contract management; corporate strategy and performance and shareholder Liaison service (initially from within existing resources) Proposals for response to the Procurement Act 2023 	July 2024 September 2024

Workstream	Activity	Due
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commissioning and procurement training plan for all contract managers and senior managers Contract register reviewed and improved Introduction of supplier spend controls and monitoring 	September 2024 September 2024 October 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of contract segmentation to classify contracts as Gold, Silver, or Bronze, and identify follow-on actions including: assigning appropriate training to officers, determining the monitoring and governance arrangements to be applied, and outlining expectations for contract management Procurement workstream within the Medium Term Financial Strategy Develop Commercial Strategy 	October 2024 February 2025 February 2025

Theme 3: Governance and Assurance - the road so far

Addressing the governance that enabled poor decision making of the past was a priority in year one of the plan. Improvements to committee structures, support and training for the Scrutiny function and additional governance for commercial and officer-decision making are all now in place.



Governance and Assurance Theme Summary

Introduction

The first year of the Governance and Assurance theme has focussed on improving our decision making processes, including a review of the Council meeting structure to ensure a greater focus on pre-decision scrutiny. These developments have been supported by work to improve the quality of scrutiny undertaken and a review of the entire constitution to bring it up to date with the organisational changes being made and in line with best practice.

Also in the first year, all previously confidential committee papers since 2016 have been identified and redacted, ready for release in coordination with the Grant Thornton Value for Money review.

The second year of this theme will focus on the execution of changes set out in year one, and a review of their effectiveness. In addition, an improved committee report template will be introduced, new Independent Members will be introduced to sit on the Audit and Governance Committee to provide external expertise on finance and audit matters, and the Councillor and Officer Relationship Protocol will be promoted to support effective working relationships between staff and councillors.

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

Success measures

G1 – The respective roles of members and officers in decision making being fulfilled in practice.

G2 – The application of the member/officer protocol.

G3 – Effective oversight and monitoring of all key decisions made by the Council, Executive, Boards, Committees, and LA companies.

G4 – Clarity about the roles of Audit and Governance and Overview and Scrutiny Committees in delivering effective oversight of the Council's operation.

G5 – Robust governance processes underpinning all Council activity.

G6 – Regular review of Council's governance in practice.

G7 – The application of these elements leading to rounded decisions being made by the Council at all levels in a way that is underpinned by sound rationale in considering options, risks and evidence.

Theme workstream objectives – 2024/25

Scrutiny function	Democratic process review
Review and implement improvements to the scrutiny function	Review and implement improvements to the Council's democratic process, including the Council meeting structure and calendar, report writing and communications
Audit and Governance and the Annual Governance Statement	Constitution review
Review and implement improvements to the Audit and Governance committee and the monitoring process for producing the Annual Governance Statement	Review and update the constitution, making necessary amendments as a result of the Improvement and Recovery Plan

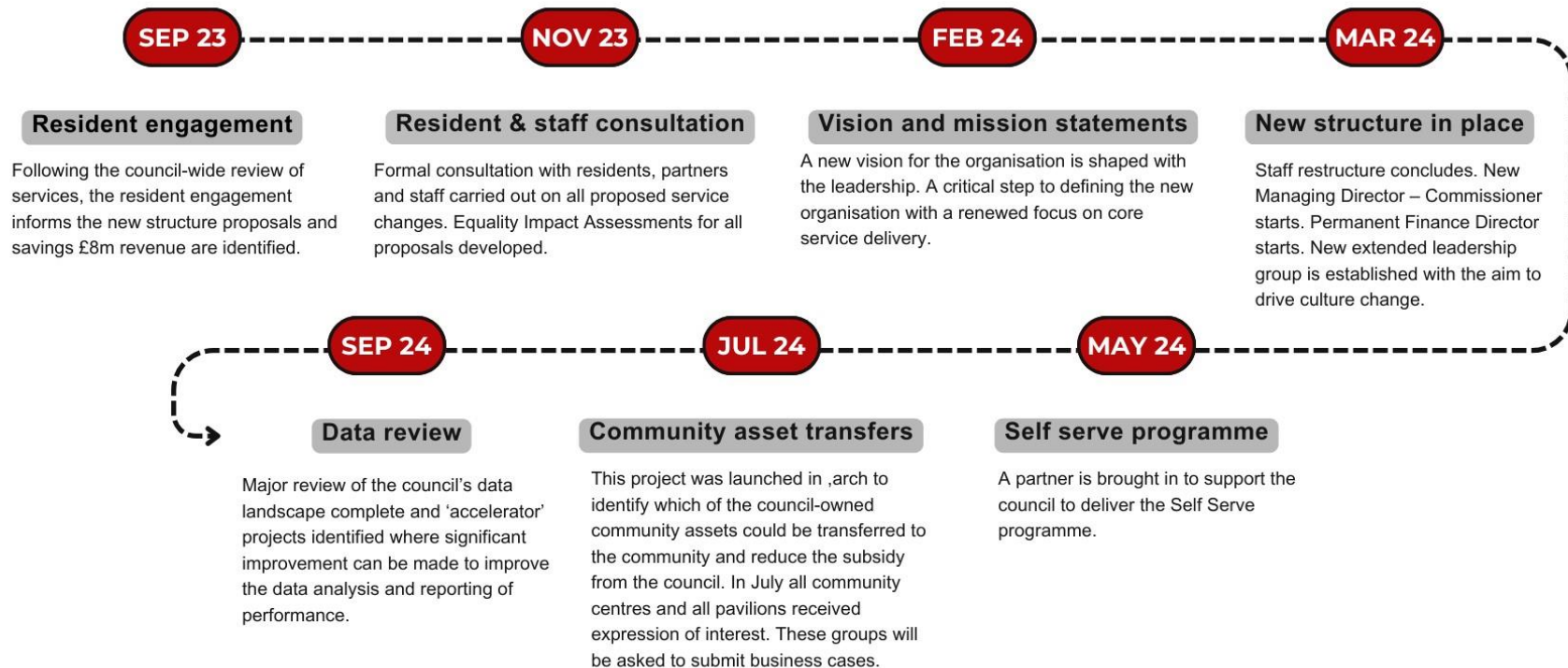
Governance and Assurance workstreams next steps

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Workstream	Activity	Due
Scrutiny review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement the scrutiny improvements action plan, as written with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements to the work programming for the scrutiny committees Improvements to the quality of scrutiny carried out Improvements to the transparency and communication surrounding scrutiny Improvements to the training of committee members 	September 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the improvements made, and the need for ongoing support and training 	December 2024
Audit and Governance and the Annual Governance Statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assurance mapping training from the LGA 	June 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit and train new Independent Member(s) 	September 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish training and support offer from LGA for Audit and Governance committee 	September 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce 2023/24 AGS for approval at November Audit and Governance committee 	November 2024
Democratic process review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review the improvements made, and the need for ongoing support and training 	December 2024
	<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 	September 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce updated report template for committee reports for better quality report writing and more transparent decision making 	October 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement the Council meeting structure as approved at March 2024 Council Embed member-officer protocol into training guidance 	Ongoing December 2024
Constitution review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate and complete consequential constitutional amendments as a result of the Improvement and Recovery Programme 	May 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete review of whole constitution and make amendments as necessary 	July 2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Publish the updated constitution 	August 2024

Theme 4: Organisation and Service Redesign – the road so far

To balance the budget, the Council was required to significantly reconfigure services, taking 25% out of the revenue budget to live within the resources available. The focus for year 1 was to establish the core statutory services required to be delivered by a borough council and establish a vision for the organisation. A major resident engagement exercise, followed by formal consultation with residents and staff on proposals, led to a service restructure. Where possible non-statutory services were transferred to partners to continue their delivery but reducing the subsidy from WBC. To support the future operating model of the Council, significant investment is needed in technology and systems improvements. A business case for investment has been approved and work has now commenced to improve online services to residents.



Organisation and Service Redesign Summary

Introduction

The Organisation and Service Redesign theme is focussed on delivering a smaller, more efficient, and more resident focussed council, driving us to become the most improved council in the country.

Resident services will be accessed online by default with support for those who need it; better insights will be gathered to drive improvement; and modernised staff tools and processes will increase efficiency and collaboration.

During the first year, a major review of services was undertaken. Following a staff and public consultation, services were restructured and £8.4m revenue savings were identified.

This year the focus will be on improvements to technology and processes to improve how services are delivered. This will lead to greater productivity and improved resident satisfaction. A major focus on organisational development will improve staff morale and productivity.

Following the review of the council's data, a programme will be implemented to provide automated data reporting beginning in a few key service areas. This will reduce manual data handling and inform decision making, whilst preparing the council for reaping the benefits of AI.

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

Success measures

S1 – A clear and appropriate set of service outcomes, which are validated and communicated to Woking's citizens in a timely way.

S3 – A focus on residents' needs and choices.

R1 – The concept of risk and application of sound risk management policies and practices being deeply embedded in the whole organisation.

C1 – Embedded ways of working, which are efficient, effective and deliver service outcomes which represent best value.

C2 – A robust performance management and accountability system.

C3 – A transformation planning process which enables the integration of strategic, service and financial plans.

Theme workstreams – 2024/25

Community asset and service changes

Ensure the effective delivery of agreed service changes to realise financial savings

Self-service programme

Move customer-facing services online, improving processes and platforms in order to deliver further efficiencies and improved customer service

Data, insights and AI

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

Organisational development

Have skilled people delivering good quality services, focusing on delivering organisational priorities and improving organisational performance

Communications and engagement

Improved internal communication and engagement with staff to support the new organisation and culture change

Organisation and Service Redesign workstreams next steps

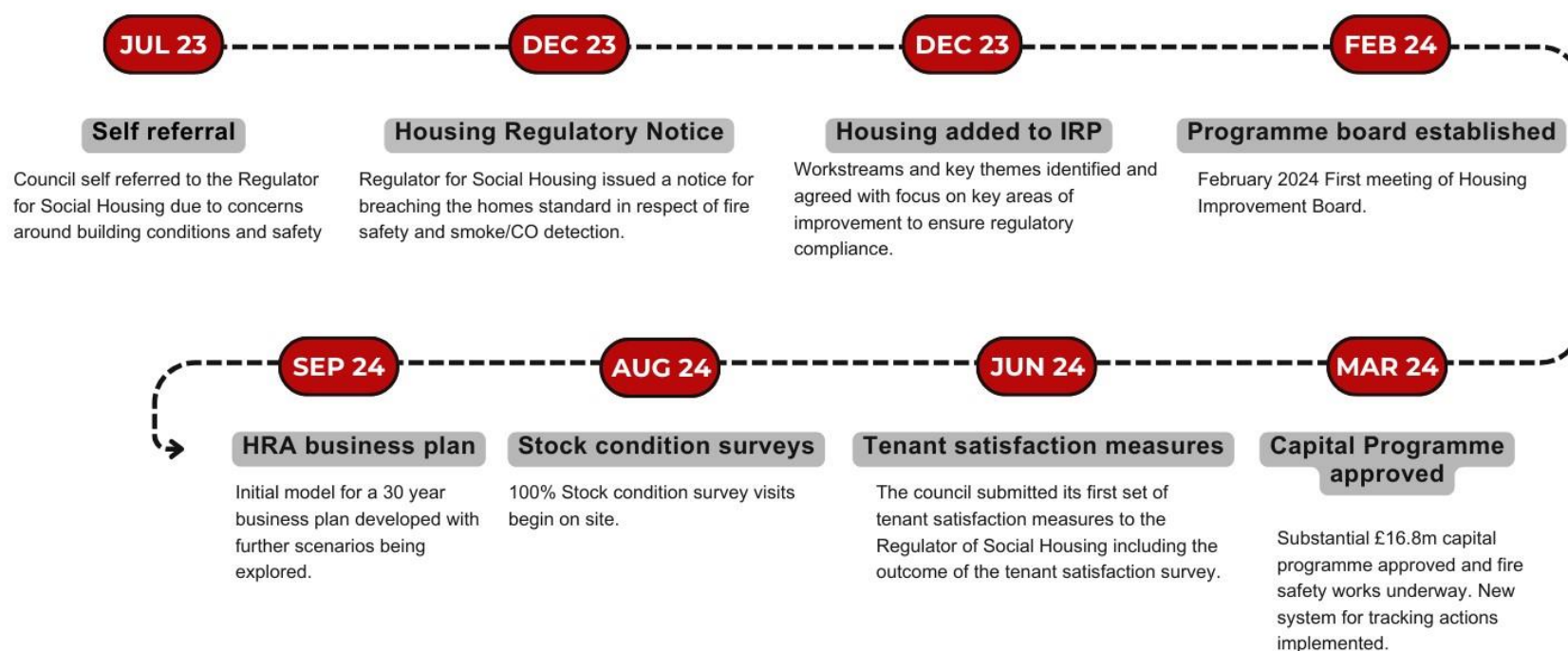
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Workstream	Activity	Due
Community Asset transfers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Assets transferred to the community to release subsidy from the council and ensure the assets remain serving the community (commencing with community centres) Working with partners to support their transformation (Citizens Advice Woking, Lightbox) Community Asset transferred to Pavilions Phase 2 of CAT process for remaining assets planned (eg public toilets and remaining community assets) 	March 2025 March 2025 November 2025 March 2025
Self-service programme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital Design Authority in place to support a centralised, digital and design approach to decision making, supported by sector experts and the lead member Digital partner procured and in place to support self serve and website redesign Requirements gathered for building new website Content and design upgrades for key service areas complete. Alpha (internal) testing New forms and integrations built and website tested in Beta (with residents) for key service areas including housing, council tax, revenues and benefits Further service areas integrated and tested on Beta website Up-skilled internal web team to reduce reliance on external resource 	May 2024 June 2024 September 2024 December 2024 April 2025 September 2025 Ongoing
Organisational development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current issues facing staff are identified and a plan in place to address Organisation development plan developed Pay progression business case is agreed and implemented and Job evaluation is carried out to address discrepancies in pay 	September 2024 December 2024 February 2025
Communications and engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Internal communications and engagement plan agreed Staff surveys and temperature checks, 'Show and asks', newsletters, 	July 2024 Ongoing
Data, insights and AI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial output from discovery stage 	July 2024

Workstream	Activity	Due
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baseline understanding of how WBC does and does not use data, its potential, and the risks to inform the data delivery programme. Outline case for further investment shared Statutory services benchmarked against statistical neighbours to inform further efficiencies Programme established with timescales, resourced and clarity of outcomes 	November 2024 October 2024 January 2025

Theme 5: Housing Recovery and Improvement – the road so far

Housing Recovery and Improvement is a new Theme brought into the IRP and under the oversight of the Improvement and Recovery Board, as part of the Council's response to a Housing Regulatory Notice. The Improvement Programme and supporting governance was established and significant progress has been made to address the issues identified. A major drive on tenant engagement is receiving positive feedback and resulting in greater transparency and scrutiny amongst tenants. The 30-year Housing Revenue Account Business Plan is well underway and due for approval in December '24. Key steps taken this year include: -



Housing Recovery and Improvement summary

Introduction

Due to the need for significant improvements to the housing stock to meet the required standards, officers self-referred to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) in July 2023. Plans were immediately initiated to work on the required improvements. Housing Recovery and Improvement was introduced as a Theme to the IRP in December '23.

The programme incorporates the HRA 30 year business plan and the capital programme to ensure compliance with regulatory standards.

The Service improvements incorporate improvements to processes, systems, staffing and data management and reporting – ensuring staff are equipped to do their jobs effectively.

Resident engagement is a major workstream in the programme with the aim of building the council's relationship with its tenants and improving satisfaction levels.

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.

Success measures

F5 – A balanced Housing Revenue Account and a sustainable Housing service.

S2 – A high quality housing service, underpinned by a single plan, which meets the regulatory requirements for the service.

Theme workstreams – 2024/25

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

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

Data and insights

Improve all housing services through the greater use of performance data, benchmarking data and resident feedback

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

Resident engagement

Build the Council's relationship with its tenants and leaseholders and increasingly involve and seek their views in shaping its service offer

Tools and ways of working

Modernise tools and practice across the housing service, including digital tools, upgrades, and channel shift to online applications and information

Staffing and culture

Deliver the cultural change across the housing service to deliver the Housing Improvement Programme and achieve compliance with all regulatory standards

Housing Recovery and Improvement workstreams next steps

The following actions represent steps taken since the end of the IRP Theme Plans (April 2024) in the original IRP and planned activity to May 2025 to ensure a full picture since the first Plan.

Workstream	Activity	Due
Homes and safety	• Decent homes stock condition survey and 30-year plan	March 2025
	• Annual rolling asset management strategy and capital investment programme	December 2024
	• Brockhill risk mitigation and closure	December 2024
	• Compliance monitoring system	December 2024
	• Carbon monoxide and smoke detection implementation complete	December 2024
	• Lakeview estate – Plan in place for cladding replacement	March 2025
	• Sheerwater refurbishment complete	October 2026
	• Responsive repairs contract extended	November 2024
Data and insight	• Ensure that our data is available to demonstrate our performance and compliance	August 2025
	• Benchmarking with peers to learn and improve via Housemark	October 2024
	• Improve internal performance monitoring and utilisation of data in service delivery	Ongoing
	• Complete actions arising from the Rent Review	March 2025
Tenants and communities	• Assessment against regulatory standards and development of action plan	March 2025 December 2024 March 2025 Ongoing
	• Delivery of DHLUC Homelessness Advice Support Team recommendations (Catherine)	
	• Income collection improvement plan	
	• Void turnaround improvement plan	
	• Update tenancy agreement and handbooks	
	• Review end to end customer journey	
Resident engagement and consultation	• Tenant satisfaction survey	February 2025
	• Resident communications on fire safety	Ongoing
	• Complaints improvement plan	September 2024

Workstream	Activity	Due
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Resident engagement strategy 	February 2025
Tools and ways of working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Process mapping across the service Implement Capita system upgrade and asset management module Policy & Procedure review across housing Channel shift and improvements to online resources 	March 2025 August 2025 March 2025 August 2025
Finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recharge review and budget structuring Develop a 30-year Housing Revenue Account business plan Housing Private Finance Initiative 	September 2024 December 2024
Staffing and culture	<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 	December 2024 January 2025 March 2025

Section 5: Glossary

- **Channel shift** – Channel shift is the process by which organisations encourage customers to change the way they choose to interact with services, from the customers' current preferred approach to a new one. For example, encouraging customers that can do to self-serve, primarily using online and digital services rather than in-person services, by phone or paper forms.
- **Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS)** – A national charity, founded to help councils implement transformative governance following the Local Government Act 2000.
- **Commercial strategy** – A plan to optimise the returns from the council's company assets, in part through disposal of them.
- **Commissioning team** – A team of three individuals appointed by government to intervene in certain functions within the council following its 'best value duty' failings. They provide support in areas such as financial and commercial governance and strategic decision-making.
- **Discretionary services** – Services that the council is not legally obliged to offer.
- **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)** – Ministerial department responsible for housing, communities and local government.
- **Financial Control Panel (FCP)** – A panel consisting of at least four senior employees chaired by the Director of Finance (or their deputy) whose responsibility is to approve council spend before it is committed, or anything is ordered.
- **Fit for the Future (FFTF)** – The staff restructure programme taking place as part of the Organisation and Service Redesign theme.
- **Gateway process** – A fundamental part of the FFTF programme, the gateway process is a three-stage process which has systematically reviewed all service areas across the organisation and identified the minimum level of service provision and where savings can be made.
- **Housing Revenue Account (HRA)** – Housing Revenue Account. Records expenditure and income on running a council's own housing stock and closely related services or facilities, which are provided primarily for the benefit of the council's own tenants.
- **Local Government Association (LGA)** – The national membership body for local authorities who work on behalf of its member councils to support, promote and improve local government.
- **Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP)** – The minimum amount of funding that a council must set aside to use towards capital expenditure as financed through either borrowing or debt. Accounting standards guide local authorities to determine what that minimum amount is.
- **Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)** – The council's approach and delivery plans to managing its budgets.
- **Public Works Loan Board (PWLB)** – Local authority lending facility operated by the UK Debt Management Office (DMO) on behalf of His Majesty's Treasury. This borrowing is for capital projects.

- **Regulator of Social Housing (RSH)** - RSH is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities Regulator of Social Housing - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).
- **Section 114 (S114) Notice** – S114 refers to section 114 of the 1988 Local Government Finance Act which specifies that a S114 Notice must be issued when a council cannot balance its budget. Issuing a S114 Notice restricts all but essential spending.
- **Section 151 (S151) Officer** – The Chief Finance Officer for a council. S151 refers to Section 151 of the 1972 Local Government Act which specifies that each council must employ a responsible finance officer within the authority who has certain powers, including issuing S114 notices.
- **Shareholder Advisory Group (SAG)** – Provides a clear focus for councillors to set out policy, strategy and control for the companies that it funds. Separates the roles of Council Directors on company boards and the Shareholder interest.
- **Shareholder Liaison Service (SLS)** – An officer group, containing experts, set up to support the SAG.
- **Statutory services** – Services that the council is legally obliged to offer.
- **ThamesWey Ltd. (TW)** – A public-private joint venture to spearhead delivery of the councils' ambition for Woking to meet the UK's 2050 carbon reduction targets. TW has sustainable energy centres in Woking and in Milton Keynes.
- **Victoria Square Woking Limited (VSWL)** – A joint venture company to oversee the development of the Victoria Square project.