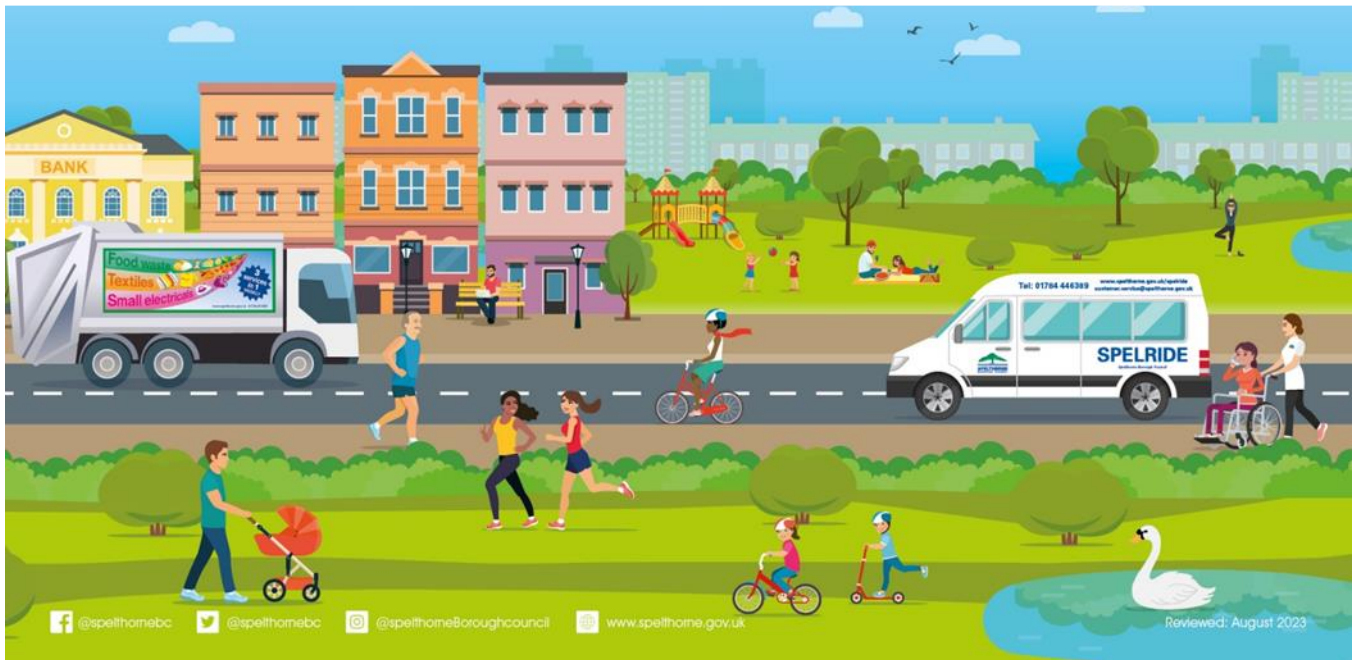




Position Statement

November 2023



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Key: GL: Administration Group Leaders

MAT: Management Team

MAT+: Management Team plus other Senior Managers

Context

In November 2022, Spelthorne Borough Council invited the LGA with a team of Senior Officers and Councillors to undertake a comprehensive [Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge](#). The team conducted more than 40 meetings involving over 125 people, including a range of Council Councillors and employees as well as external stakeholders and partners. The Peer Team concluded that:

"Spelthorne Borough Council has achieved many unique things of which they can be rightly proud, ranging from the high profile and strategic to the very local and small scale. Their Covid response was brilliant and a focus on supporting vulnerable people in their community is evident.

"The Council has a generally friendly and caring staff culture where cross-service working is very good. Partners and Officers would benefit from a clear political direction and visibility from the Council for which it needs a cohesive, functioning Councillor cohort."

In

Spelthorne, we place a lot of value on the work we do with our residents to understand what matters most to them and seek solutions together. The 2022-23 [Annual Report](#) demonstrates ways in which this authority have progressed our priorities and we are particularly proud of our work over the last 12 months to protect and support the most vulnerable residents. Despite the many challenges, both locally and nationally, that this Council has faced, we know what can be achieved when we work together with our communities and we will continue to make Spelthorne a place where everyone feels heard, respected and included. Some of our key highlights and achievements are presented on **pages 3, 7 and 20** demonstrating what this authority strives to achieve.

In July of this year, this authority also completed a full [Corporate Establishment Review](#) undertaken by The South East Employers Group (SEE). Its comprehensive terms of reference included the review of the complete organisational structure including contractors, rate of recruitment, digital transformation, shared services opportunities and recommendations from staff audits. The review concluded that in line with high performing authorities, "Spelthorne constantly reviews and innovates to meet the objectives of the Corporate Plan, achieves cost efficiencies and that staff have a sense of collective purpose and have trust in their senior managers in creating a safe environment to thrive."

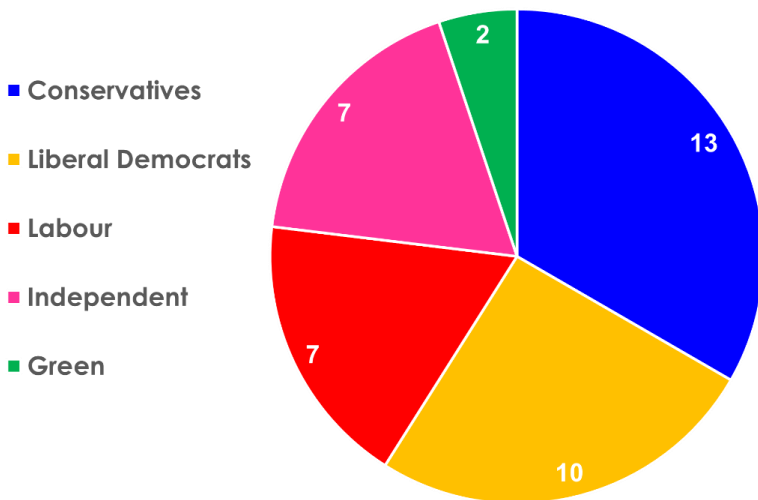
At the end of the LGAs Corporate Peer Challenge the Peer Team presented 12 recommendations to the Council and the associated approach and progress are detailed in this report.

2022 - 2023 highlights



Borough Elections

On the 4 May 2023 full [Borough elections](#) were held and resulted in a new Administration and change of Leadership. Councillor Joanne Sexton (Independents) is Leader of the Council and Councillor Chris Bateson (Liberal Democrat) is Deputy Leader. Further to a by-election in September 2023, out of the 39 cohort, a total of 22 new Councillors were elected to represent the Council.



Vision and Priorities

Recommendation 1: All Members need to identify what they have in common in terms of shared priorities and objectives for your Borough and your residents and use them to progress the delivery of your shared ambitions for Spelthorne.

Recommendation 2: Then share your agreed political ambitions for the Borough to create a longer-term vision embodied in a broadly agreed Corporate Plan.

Recommendation 5: Take the time today to plan for tomorrow. Do not put off the 'non-urgent strategic' work you need to do.

Outline approach

- a. Local Government Association (LGA) to be invited to come in at the outset after the May 2023 elections to help facilitate a number of sessions to get broad consensus on agreed vision and priorities.
- b. LGA to look at whether there is a broad Councillor consensus around a member led Council - where members and Officers work together as a team.
- c. Undertake a 'Strategy Day' for all Group Leader's (GL) with the LGA to find common ground that all GL's can sign up to (which can then be fed back by GLs to their groups).
- d. Use Induction Training Programme to set out the CARES priorities and PROVIDES values in the current Corporate Plan as a basis for the 'Strategy Day'.
- e. Agree at the first Council meeting after the May 2023 elections to continue with the CARES priorities for at least another year, to provide continuity and a basis for agreeing and setting a new strategy.
- f. New Corporate Plan needs to cover a longer period than four-years and needs to capture short, medium and long-term plans/priorities.
- g. Undertake a prioritisation exercise and determine what needs to give to generate capacity headroom for any new actions.
- h. Be clearer on celebrating our achievements.

Progress

LGA support

The LGA have actively supported Councillors and Officers following the May elections. A programme of support was developed and agreed with the Group Leaders (Independent, Lib Dem, Green, Labour) that control the Council. This included LGA reps supporting elements of a comprehensive Councillor induction training programme (**APPENDIX A**) delivered throughout May/June 2023. This induction programme introduced the 22 new Councillors to the 'CARES priorities' and 'PROVIDES values' outlined in the existing [Corporate Plan](#).



C A R E S



P R O V I D E

A programme of further LGA support has been developed and agreed with Leader/GLs. A number of elements have already been delivered including an LGA facilitated session with the 'Administration' GLs and a programme of LGA Leadership training which has been arranged for the Leader/Deputy Leader.

Common ground

Officers have facilitated several Corporate Plan focused sessions with the Leader/Deputy Leader over the summer to seek their views on refreshing the Corporate Plan based primarily around the CARES priorities.

Officers subsequently worked up some further ideas and on 7 September culminating in a session with GLs to discuss suggested changes. The LGA facilitated session on 13 September between GLs and MAT+ reinforced the need for prioritisation and working together based around the CARES priorities/PROVIDE values.

GLs subsequently had further discussions and decided on their top-5 priorities and objectives and advised the CX of these on 2 October.

GLs and MAT+ then met to discuss the Administration's proposed key priority areas and Officers are currently developing a new draft Corporate Plan based on GLs' priorities and objectives, with some suggested themes/actions for further consideration by GLs. A number of the priorities will be amended to reflect a change of emphasis, for example with the 'Affordable Housing' priority amended to reflect the need to address the wider housing need in the Borough. The previous 'Recovery' priority was focussed around the COVID pandemic and is currently proposed to change to 'Resilience' to focus on maintaining the Council's Financial Resilience in the context of cost of living and budget challenges. The Administration has agreed on the need for a five-year plan, which was also referenced at the LGA facilitated GL/MAT+ awayday discussion on 5 October.

See page 7 for 2022-23 'Affordable Housing' and 'Recovery' priority achievements.

Time today to plan for tomorrow

The Council, as with most authorities across the sector, is currently facing a particularly challenging budget setting process for 2024/25 so it is important that the Council does not at this stage over specify a set of detailed actions under the new Corporate Plan that the Administration cannot ultimately deliver financially in the light of the emerging budget process. We are therefore currently discussing the idea of presenting a high-level outline plan to CPRC and Council before Christmas to announce the key priorities and themes for the Administration for the Municipal Term to 2028, whilst further refining in conjunction with Councillors the detail in parallel with the budget setting process and presenting these more detailed actions under each priority at the February 2024 Council (where the Administration could also reference some of those actions planned for the year ahead in the budget speech). This would demonstrate how the Administration is taking the measured steps needed to work within the challenging budget situation, setting its goals on identifying realistic targets/actions the Council can deliver by adapting budgets where there is some flexibility to align with those priorities.

'Affordable Housing' and 'Recovery' priority achievements 2022 - 2023

Affordable Housing



£568k successful bid from DLUHC for rough sleeper initiative to offer outreach services to prevent homelessness

Partnership working with **Rentstart** to find homes for single people and childless couples



6

Secured Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme funding for 6 properties to house rough sleepers



rough sleepers into settled homes

Prevention of over **200** cases of homelessness



11 Funding secured from Local Authority Housing Fund to acquire properties for refugees

145 affordable homes granted planning permission by the Planning Team

Dedicated Tenancy Sustainment Officer to work with residents who require support, including finance, family support services and mental health services



New support services at the White House and Harper House and **27** residents moved on to live independently

Engagement with local sixth forms on housing advice for young people to raise awareness and tackle stigmatisation of homelessness

Housing Allocation consultation with **400** responses to help shape policy

Accommodation for Ex-Offenders with funding secured for **13** people into privately rented homes

Dedicated Tenancy Sustainment Officer to work with residents who require financial advice, family support services and mental health support

Homes4 SPELTHORNE
New Homes4Spelthorne website advising residents on the housing register available rented social housing in Spelthorne

Recovery



£218,850 in community grants distributed to **32 organisations**

77 projects completed including software improvements generating savings of **£690k**



empower employ train
Launch of the **Jobs & Skills hub** - providing adults advice on training and employment opportunities

Council Tax discount for bands A to D to help offset increased energy costs

Leisure centres football back at pre-pandemic levels at **92%**, fitness membership at **91%** and swim lesson at **99%**

Spelthorne Direct Services delivering sustainable commercial waste services to **300 customers** delivering profit that supports Council services

99.4% rent collection rate for commercial and regeneration properties (12 months to end of March 2023)

Balanced budget for 2022-23 with £480k revenue underspend and added to reserves to strengthen resilience
£7m

£10m net contribution from commercial assets supporting provision of discretionary services

£37.8m in sinking fund reserve

£469k issued to residents as part of the Household Support Fund and **349** discretionary housing payments amounting to **£381,443** to help residents with shortfalls in their rent

£154,428 discretionary rate relief awarded to organisations

£60,000 awarded to Citizens Advice to support residents through hardship

Business coaching, social media training and website development with over **30** local businesses

25k Covid and cost-of-living grants distributed

Local Plan



Spelthorne Local Plan 2022 - 2037 and Staines Development Framework

The [Local Plan](#) has been one area where Councillors have sought to debate and agree their political ambitions. The new Councillor cohort elected in May 2023 requested a pause for 3 months in the Examination of the proposed new Local Plan in order that all Councillors could be brought up-to-speed/review the proposals.

This was agreed by the Inspector. Councillors have brought in a 'critical friend' to assist them with this process and Officers have provided a number of training sessions to enable new Councillors to understand the Local Plan process and proposals under the draft Plan under examination. The Government have since issued a direction requiring the Council [not to withdraw its current Plan](#). The Administration is currently considering its next steps.

Going forward

The challenging budget position the Council faces for 2024/25 makes the need to prioritise resources all the more important and this is likely to be a theme that Councillors and Officers will need to return to throughout the next few months in setting the budget and launching the Corporate Plan.

Reporting progress with actions firmly focused on delivering the emerging Corporate Plan, we will be reporting our successes and other wider achievements to residents and businesses building on our recent nominations for a number of national awards.

Officer/Member relations

Recommendation 3: Take the opportunity you now have to reset the Officer / Member working relationship and agree how it will work differently going forward for the benefit of your residents.

Recommendation 4: The discrete but complementary roles of Officers and Members need to be better understood by all to improve working relationships.

Recommendation 6: Members need to respect Officers' roles and give them the time and space to focus on delivering the important priorities you have agreed.

Outline approach

- a. Consider how best to deliver the suggestion of a number of Councillor/Officer joint site visits, so that Councillors can further understand how officers work and the legislative background they have to work within.
- b. Schedule a further round table session where officers feed in views and GL's listen.
- c. Develop a separate logging system for councillor enquiries (to better manage the process, ensure fairness, understand trends, key issues and response times)
- d. Consider how to best bring new Councillors elected as a result of a by-election up to speed and briefed on the Council's processes, procedures and key policies.
- e. Officers to provide key information to Councillors and be able to articulate where delivery limitations exist, or where financial, service, resource or equity impacts prevail.

Progress

Working relationship

The new 'Administration' has striven to adopt a more inclusive approach to governing the Council. Building on that, an all-day strategic away-day for GL (Independent, Lib Dem, Green, Labour) / MAT+ took place in early September, led in the main by LGA facilitators. Collective discussions agreed to develop a 'One Team' approach between the administration GLs and officers and regular fortnightly Leadership / CEX / MAT meetings take place with documented agendas extending to c.25 items over several hours.

MAT continue to have fortnightly all-Councillor briefings to keep Members updated on current Corporate issues being addressed. Attendance is typically two-thirds of the Chamber; hence minutes are also shared with all Members. (**APPENDIX B** provides an example)

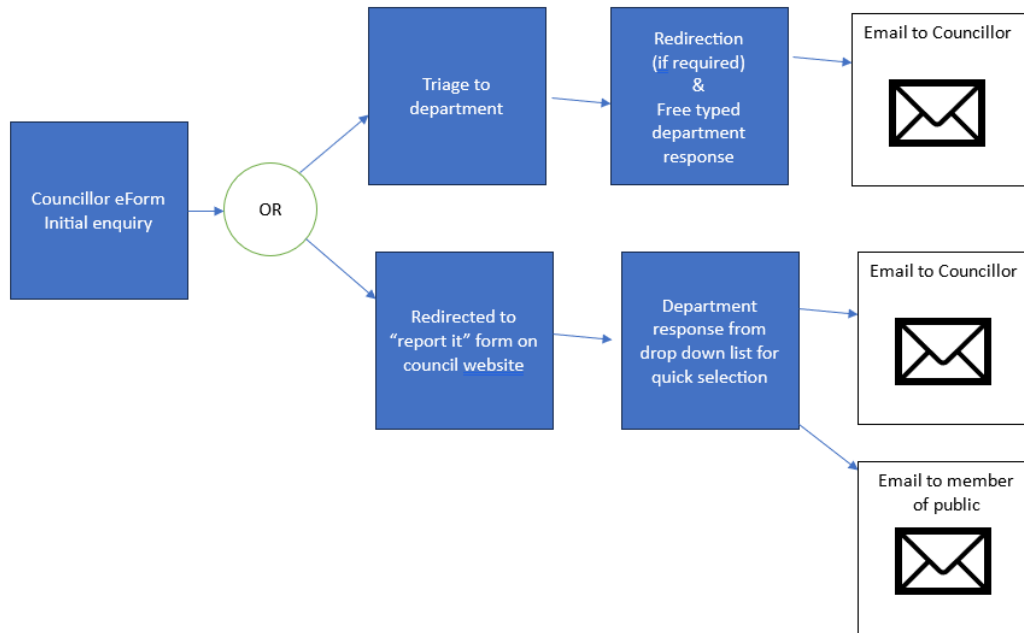
Managing expectations

Officers have been looking at options for Asset Portfolio tours and ward 'walkarounds' with Councillors. The Asset tours are now taking place and a preliminary 'walkaround' has taken place, though expectations will need to be managed as this could lead to further pressure on services/officers to address any identified issues within short timescales and within existing already stretched budgets.



A new Councillor online reporting form (**see process on page 11**) was created for reporting/logging issues. Although in use currently, this was found as having scope to be improved upon, hence a revised form has been developed and is awaiting Administration 'sign off' following being test demonstrated to Members. When operational we will be able to analyse and report on trends more effectively, providing a tangible tracking system and further enhancing quantitative and qualitative Corporate data.

Councillor online reporting form process



When Councillors join the Council, following the recent by-election, they receive a range of face-to-face training and other modules they can undertake including some on their own at home, similar to the key areas covered by the induction process for the new intake of Councillors joining after the May 2023 elections. This includes any training required for participation in specific Committees, such as Planning Committee.

Going forward

Building on the commitment of the Administration to actively work as 'Team Spelthorne', the cycle of engagement is becoming more settled and far more productive. New Councillor forms and utilisation of existing regular engagement with the CEX / MAT provide ample opportunity to register and address issues important to the Administration and vice versa. Attention will need to be given to due process, operating within Constitutional Committee System Governance parameters.

Behaviour

Recommendation 7: Recognise the risk of continued poor behaviour by some Members and the likely impact on the organisation and your reputation as a Council and a place. Take steps to address it.

Outline approach

- a. Logging system and process (referred to previously) is needed to ensure that there is equity in how Councillors approach Officers, and issues and responses are logged. (see page 10)
- b. Councillors need to undertake necessary training and be suitably prepared for their public duties.
- c. Follow up on actions arising from Extraordinary Standards Committees.
- d. Ensure that the Council's Code of Conduct is fully adhered to and endorsed/actioned by GL's.
- e. Mandatory training for Councillors (e.g. on planning, licencing, finance etc) will be enforced. GL's will take up failure of any of their Cllrs to attend mandatory training within their groups and accept that non-attendance will mean Cllrs cannot sit on the relevant Committee.

Progress

See comments re. Recommendation 6 above for general progress and on new Councillor reporting form (logging system). Significantly more mandatory training was required as part of the Councillors induction process that has successfully been delivered. New Officer Inductions now involve short face-to-face introductions to the Political Leadership of the Authority as part of the CEXs wider contextual presentation.

Going forward

Collective endeavours continue to be taken to address occurrences of sub-standard conduct both in and outside of the Chamber as there is a general lack of trust in Officer professional advice. It is also incumbent on managers to ensure Officers remain subscribed to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and relevant training, maintaining the CIM (Continuous Improvement Plan) process, addressing concerns, priorities and pressures as they arise. This way both Councillors' and Officers working as 'Team Spelthorne' can collectively achieve the priorities in our emerging Corporate Plan for our residents.

Financial

Recommendation 8: Continue your efforts to address the issue of outstanding audits of the financial accounts.

Recommendation 10: Engage in financial training for Members to promote a better understanding of financial implications, project viability and creating robust business cases.



Outline approach

- a. Ensure induction training is easily understandable and sufficiently focused on the role of Cllrs and Committees in budget setting, annual financial cycle, financial audit, investment portfolio and Knowle Green Estates and Spelthorne Direct Services.
- b. Review and refine training as required over time.
- c. Ensure all reports clearly spell out financial consequences of a course of action.
- d. Refine financial reports so that they are more visual and user friendly.

Progress

Financial accounts

At the March 2023 Audit Committee, KPMG confirmed their intention to issue an unqualified opinion on the 2017-18 Statement of Accounts. The Audit Partner signed off the 2017-18 Statement of Accounts on 19 June 2023. [Audited 2017-18 Statement of Accounts \(1\).pdf](#)

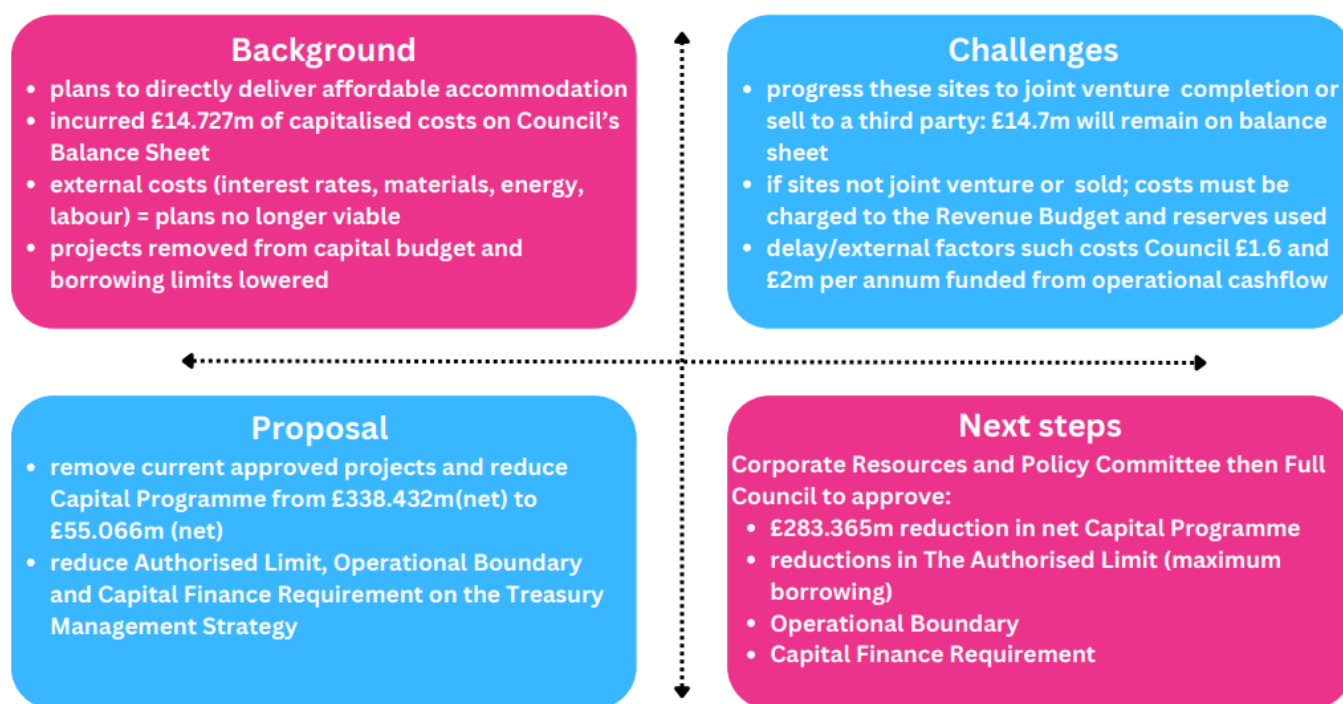
However, whilst Spelthorne has continued to publish all its draft statement of accounts on time, being one of only thirty percent of councils to meet the 31 May 2023 deadline for publishing the draft 2022-23 Statement of Accounts, we have now been caught by audit firms holding back to see what the Minister announces to address cutting through the national audit backlog (918 statements now beyond their audit sign off deadline). We continue to push BDO to engage and we have a meeting with BDO on 7 November 2023. The reality is that we are one of the Councils which is going to have its auditors issue disclaimers or qualifications on some of the backdated audits.

Financial training

Training for Councillors on Local Government Finance, Spelthorne structure and services was undertaken on 18 May. Treasury Management training for Councillors will be provided in January by our Treasury Management advisers Arlingclose.

A Councillor/Officer Financial Reporting Working Group (FRWG) has been set-up and is discussing changes to reports to make financial details easier to understand, more visual and user friendly. In doing so, the Group has considered how private sector businesses get across their key messages and has agreed to pilot a new '4 blocker' approach (**see page 14**) for summarising key aspects of the beginning of reports. The four-blocker template will apply to all decision-making reports except those going to regulatory committees. We have discussed at the Group the potential of providing dashboard functionality (using Power BI) for both Councillors and budget managers.

4 blocker approach



Budget cycle

The Finance Team have worked hard to streamline and make more efficient the Budget compilation process to facilitate an initial draft budget by the end of October to enable more time for Senior Officers and managers to consider options for closing the initial budget gaps. This has provided an additional six weeks for this option generation process, this is particularly timely given the additional budgetary pressures we are facing in the context of a cost of living and housing crisis. The Finance team continue to provide periodic all-Councillor Budget Briefings and more frequent updates on the Budget position are being provided at the fortnightly all-Councillor briefings. The Chief Finance Officer and Chief Accountant now have periodic budget/finance update sessions with the two members of the Administration acting as finance leads.

Financial reporting

As part of encouraging and helping members to take more ownership for financial and asset proposals, at a recent assets' strategy workshop with leading members it was agreed that three of the Councillors would present the summary at the following Development Sub-Committee. This worked well and help improved the reception of the proposals both at that meeting and subsequent meetings. The Financial Reporting Group has discussed and is supportive of the proposal of having Chairs or Vice Chairs or lead members present reports at Committees. To an extent this would be returning to the approach which operated under the Cabinet system when portfolio holders presented reports at Cabinet.

Going forward

Future training on finance is due to be discussed with the FRWG. This Group has agreed it would be useful to run a local government finance basics course for Councillors and consideration will also be given to offering similar training to managers.

Once the '4 blocker' approach has been trialled and refined this will be implemented within the Council report design structure.

Committee

Recommendation 9: Review the working of the Committee system by looking at best practice elsewhere to consider how to create a system that is fit for purpose.

Outline approach

- a. Use the opportunity created by the new cohort of Councillors elected in May 2023 to assist all Councillors to better understand the Committee System.
- b. Act upon the recommendations of the Committee System Review Group.
- c. Consider what is required in terms of Chairs' training to deal with Councillors who do not follow process and procedure.

Progress

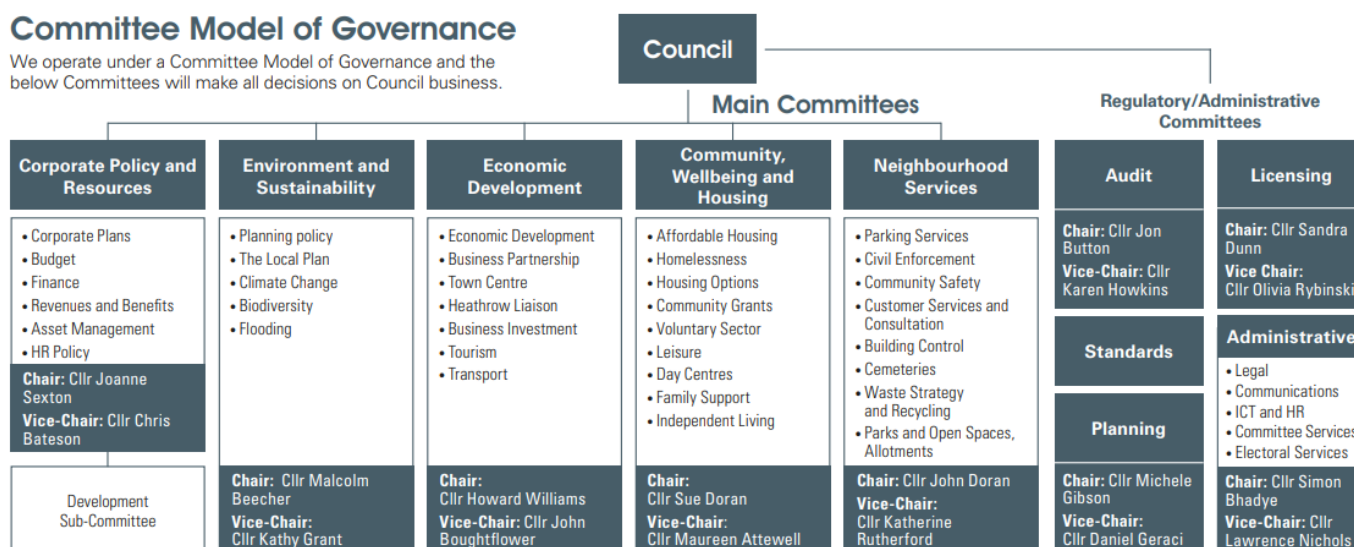
Comprehensive training on Committee system (**current model on page 17**) was provided during the Councillor induction process. A programme of training for the various Committees ran from 15 May to 27 July 2023. LGA Charing Skills training for Chairs and Vice-Chairs was provided on 18 July 2023.

The Committee System Working Group has been reformed following the changes in proportionality and continues to discuss any proposed Constitutional changes to the current Committee System. It is currently proposed to reduce the number of Committees by merging some of their functions.

The Committee System Working Group met last week to discuss changes that they and officers wanted to make to the Council's Constitution. These changes will be presented to the Standards Committee to be considered and recommendations to be made to December Council. Changes to merged Committee functions will have an effective implementation date that aligns with the Annual Council Meeting in 2024.

Committee Model of Governance

We operate under a Committee Model of Governance and the below Committees will make all decisions on Council business.



Going forward

Current Committee system 'streamlining' are currently under consideration, and all being equal, will benefit the operational efficiency of the current system. Along with a programme of additional training sessions e.g. Planning Committee training sessions planned up until Feb 2024, Councillors will be fully equipped to maintain organisational effectiveness.

Engagement

Recommendation 11: Improve the balance between communication and meaningful engagement whereby people feel listened to and heard. Use this in the context of evidence and need, to drive priorities and take people with you.

Outline approach

- a. Need to consider how we capture the views of those who do not engage, so that we get a wider understanding of the whole community, e.g. those who do not have housing, are in fuel poverty, youth who do not engage. Those who would otherwise fall through the safety net.
- b. Consider how we capture the views of the business community, and the younger demographic on issues that will affect them more over the medium/longer term.
- c. Look at whether there are existing forums/meetings that could be used more effectively.
- d. Ensure that we regularly feedback to our communities.

Progress

The Leader has recommenced meetings with Residents' Associations and continues to look to involve a wider scope of RAs. The CEX also offers RAs his (and on occasion senior officers) attendance at their meetings around the Borough often in support of issues and Councillors.

The new Corporate Plan in development will include more focus on wider engagement and will (subject to Administration ratification) include additional work with the aim of engaging with younger people and the development of a new Youth Council/Parliament to improve engagement with a wide spectrum of younger people.

It is also planned to develop a Citizens' Panel to play a role in future Local Plan design code work. This will involve a cross-section of the Borough in terms of age, demographic, employment and ethnicity. Depending on the success of this initiative, this could potentially be rolled out more broadly corporately. The Panel will be launched alongside a new digital consultation tool to meet the aims of our revised [Engagement Strategy](#) and [Consultation Policy](#).

Greater use of Spelthorne Business Forum will be used to capture views of the business community in addition to the annual business budget and Economic Development consultations.

The Spelthorne Healthy Community Partnership, with membership that encompasses over 140 people from a broad spectrum of organisations across the Borough, has been set up and is thriving.

The purpose of the group is to listen to and collaboratively explore new ways of delivering services and interventions for our community that address the wider determinants of health and wellbeing. **See page 20 for 2022-23 'Community' priority achievements and partnership working examples.**


This model of governance is based on the principles of integration as cited in The Health & Care Act 2022 and encouraged in the Fuller Stocktake.




Going forward

Build on the successful launch of the Spelthorne Healthy Community Partnership, in developing a new Citizens panel and a Youth Parliament.

Community priority achievements 2022 - 2023



Community




Establishment of **Food & Welfare Network** bringing together voluntary sector and food banks in response to increase in demand

Step Down/Up service - providing temporary accommodation to medically fit patients to free up hospital beds


£35k cost of living payments provided to **35** vulnerable families



50 referrals received to the **Family Support** team providing support to families with complex needs




£68k funding awarded from the Community Infrastructure Levy for improvements to grass football pitches




Specsavers Surrey Youth Games; bringing sports and healthy lifestyle opportunities to **40** children in deprived areas

Boccia and Parasports clubs for those with disabilities to participate in healthy activities



40th anniversary of the **Civic Trust Awards**, honouring residents for their voluntary service




Borough partnership for a Sanctuary Scheme for **survivors of domestic abuse**

Supporting **3,000** residents with hospital discharges in partnership with Runnymede, Elmbridge and Woking Council


Supporting **30 Afghan families** living in the borough helping them integrate into the local community and finding private rented homes

Community centres **6** days a week provision to reduce social isolation and the impact of fuel and food costs delivering over **3,000** activity sessions



Supporting **27** warm hubs during the winter

102 families given **playscheme vouchers** for subsidised play over the summer holidays



540 residents receiving help and advice through **Social Prescribing**

Providing **161** families with **Disabled Facilities Grants** so they can live independently

Support

Recommendation 12: Consider how the LGA can continue to assist with the above recommendations on this reset journey.

Outline approach

Engage the LGA for post-May 2023 elections to assist Councillors in developing the shared vision, priorities and objectives and other areas identified in the Peer Review report.

Progress

The LGA were engaged from May 2023 to support the new intake of Councillors and the emerging new 'Administration' and has met with GLs and senior management, including the LGA facilitated awayday on 13 September 2023. LGA representatives continue to support the Leader directly and are also working with GLs. MAT continues to liaise with LGA representatives on an ad-hoc basis as and when advice/support is required. Senior Officers have also benefitted from LGA facilitated awayday dedicated training. The Leadership are scheduled to attend the LGA Leadership Programme.

Going forward

Depending on future challenges this authority faces, it may well be necessary to seek further LGA support to help facilitate resolution. Currently, the 'Administration' is engaging with the DLUHC in relation to the Local Plan and has sought ongoing Counsel advice.

Utilise the LGA's expertise to support the Council in spring 2024 to undertake a full staff and Councillor survey to benchmark satisfaction against the 2022 survey.