



# DRAFT **Improvement and Recovery Plan**

February 2026

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## 1. Context

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Concerns regarding the financial, commercial and governance of Spelthorne Council led the Secretary of State, to commission a Best Value Inspection. The Best Value Inspection Report published in March 2025 highlighted significant deficits across a breadth of responsibilities, underpinned by poor member officer relationships, and a perception of a lack of openness to scrutiny, challenge and learning. The Report described *a culture of mistrust and broken relationships and a hostile environment*.

Following this review, utilising powers in section 15(5) and (6) of the 1999 Local Government Act, Directions were issued to the Council in May 2025, and the Council was placed into intervention.

Specific requirements included:

- To deliver financial sustainability by closing any short- or long-term budget gaps and reconfiguring services to match available financial resources
- To deliver a debt reduction plan, demonstrating how external borrowing and debt servicing costs will be reduced and ensuring adequate provisions are made in the sinking fund for future risks.
- To ensure compliance with all relevant rules and guidelines relating to the financial management of the Authority, including updating the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) policy
- To develop a comprehensive commercial strategy, including an asset and commercial investment rationalisation programme and deliverable strategies for regeneration sites.
- To develop a realistic plan to deliver the housing numbers outlined in the Local Plan and a viability plan plus future options for the residential portfolio
- To address systemic weaknesses in the Authority's governance function, to secure improvements in transparency, scrutiny and formal decision making
- To secure the proper resourcing and functioning of the system of internal controls, including risk management and internal audit.
- To improve the culture of working between officers and members, rebuilding trust and a full understanding of respective roles and mutual accountability
- To ensure access to the skills, capabilities and capacity to deliver the Improvement and Recovery Plan

The Council was required to prepare and agree its Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP) to the satisfaction of the Commissioners, within 6 months of receipt of Directions. The first iteration of the IRP was approved by the Council (October 2025) and was structured around five workstreams:

- Financial Recovery,
- Commercial,
- Housing and Regeneration,
- Governance, and
- Local Government Reorganisation.

The initial recovery priorities identified the immediate actions required to recover and stabilise the Council. In the period since the Directions were issued, considerable progress has been made against these recovery phase actions.

These include:

- the mobilisation of governance programme Boards to provide oversight of progress in responsiveness to the Directions
- the appointment of an interim Programme Director to mobilise the IRP, pending a sustained appointment
- standing up a PMO Team to track and report on activity
- external commissions mobilised to commence the development of the Commercial, Asset Disposal and Social Impact Strategies, and strengthen the financial function
- the agreement of the debt reduction and debt refinancing plan, a revised MRP Policy and improvements to the robustness of the statement of accounts.

Further work is planned and due to commence imminently, including:

- an Improvement and Intervention Communications Strategy
- Development of the LGR detailed plan and governance arrangements

In anticipation of concluding the initial phase of recovery work the Improvement and Recovery Board (IRB) recommended a review of the IRP to consider what was required to transition from recovery to improvement. Such that the Council can transform and sustain the change required to deliver best value.

In refocusing the Plan, actions have been mapped to the Directions and the Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on their Best Value Duty, to ensure the requirement to demonstrate a commitment to continually improve leadership, culture, financial sustainability, use of resources, governance, service delivery, partnerships and community engagement is set out.

Our ambition is to ensure the Spelthorne IRP provides assurance to Commissioners, Government, the new West Surrey Shadow Authority and our Councillors and employees that the Council has a deliverable plan to improve and be self-governing, fulfilling its best value duty in the shortest time possible. Through the prioritisation of actions over the coming year there will be a continual and clear focus on improvement in leadership, culture, service delivery and the governance and financial management environment. Commissioners will assess and monitor progress using the outcomes set out in this plan, which will inform their update reports and recommendations to Government and to the developing West Surrey Council of what has been achieved and what remains to be done.

## 2. Accelerating our improvement

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Our initial IRP predominantly focused upon the requirement to ‘diagnose and stabilise’ and addressed the immediate challenges of financial stability, commercial management, regeneration and housing, governance and LGR readiness, through implementing recovery actions. We recognise that we now need to transition from this initial phase of ‘diagnose and stabilise’ to the ‘transform and embed’ phase, accelerating mobilising the improvements required to rebuild the confidence of government, stakeholders, residents and partners in the emerging West Surrey Council.

The need to define and agree new leadership arrangements within Spelthorne, is a fundamental and essential building block of our IRP and planned Council priorities. This will require that difficult decisions are made. Our financial position necessitates that our priorities and ambitions are realistic and modest, that they draw on a strong evidence base of needs and that all Councillors collaborate to make the choices that maximise the impact and reach of services within the limited resources available. Put simply, Councillors must reconcile how they balance their desire to create the conditions where the life chances of Spelthorne’s diverse communities are enhanced with the restricted means to deliver this given the financial and debt position of the authority.

Navigating this will be challenging, for both the Councillors and the Officers. The constraint on resources is a reality and consequently there must be a relentless focus on driving greater levels of efficiency and effectiveness, continual improvement, and on accountability for performance. This requires an uptick in the capability available to the Council:

- Councillors need to be willing to rise to the challenge of visible, accountable and capable leaders who demonstrate appropriate behaviours and steer the improvement and recovery programme. Given the right information and skills, they can collaborate to make decisions on the future direction of services and to be accountable for their decisions.
- The executive leaders of the Council need to be willing to demonstrate their commitment to change. Month by month, week by week and day by day they must focus on their team's performance in mobilising changes and delivering the cost savings they are required to make. They need to innovate to secure the maximum impact from a diminishing resource base and collaborate to create a more effective and efficient way of working. They must demonstrate accountability for the results of their teams and take responsibility for performance management.
- All employees need to be willing to embrace a radical programme of change and in return be supported to adapt to working in a more constrained environment, where tenacity and resilience will be needed. Personal accountability for performance will extend to every team and officer.

Our plans, strategies and work to deliver improvement will actively demonstrate our commitment to local and national accountability; we will demonstrate our commitment to change our culture, to communicate and engage more effectively and to continually learn and improve.

We are committed to this and ensuring that our future direction and purpose is clear and can be sustained despite the inevitable local political, organisational, social and economic fluctuations ahead.

### 3. Our Improvement Priorities

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#### 3.1 The revised structure

This amended IRP build from the previous plan approved in October 2025. This alignment is illustrated in below:

| Previous IRP Themes             | Revised IRP Priorities                         |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Local Government Reorganisation | Strengthening and Improving Leadership         |
| Financial Recovery              | Improving Financial Sustainability             |
| Governance                      | Improving Governance and Assurance             |
| Commercial                      | Improving Commercial, Regeneration and Housing |
| Regeneration and Housing        |  |

**Table 1:** Aligning previous plan, revised plan and the Corporate Plan

The change in our IRP priorities, has been made in recognition of the progress made on *diagnose and recover* and the transition to the requirement to *transform, improve and embed*. In view of the interdependencies between our commercial, regeneration and housing work, we are recommending bringing this into a single priority theme. We are proposing introducing a priority area on leadership, focusing both on our current political and executive leadership arrangements alongside the leadership required for successfully transitioning to West Surrey.

Sections 4-8 of our IRP set out the detail for each of the priority themes. Each priority theme is divided into workstreams that interlink and collectively demonstrate the improvement journey the council is on. Against each workstream the plan sets out the desired objectives (defined as work packages), outcomes, the tangible outputs being produced and our approach for independent assurance to ensure we are delivering the change we are seeking to make.

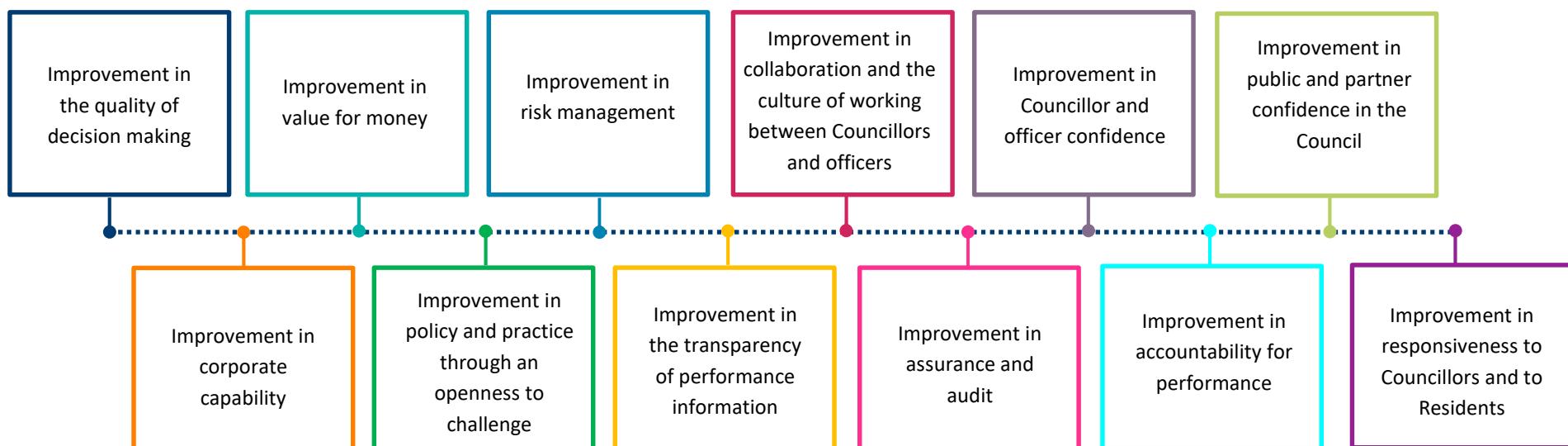
Delivery of the priority in its entirety is necessary for the totality of improvement to be achieved. The workstream structure is used, however as this aids performance management and tracking and supports a revised approach to reporting the impact and progress being made.

### 3.2 Spelthorne's Improvement and Recovery Outcome Framework

In addition to demonstrating delivery of the requirements of the Secretary of State's Directions, through our priorities and workstreams we have developed a framework of outcomes. These outcomes respond to the fundamental concerns raised in the Best Value Inspection Report namely of a Council that demonstrates:

- poor political and executive leadership and a culture of poor relationships between Councillors and officers,
- a lack of purpose and processes and consequently a Council failing in its best value duty,
- a weak governance and control environment, particularly in managing risks, assurance and performance
- a financially unsustainable and unviable Council
- a lack of openness to challenge, transparency and willingness to learn and improve.

Our outcome framework is defined to measure the improvement that we are making to enable us to accelerate a process of addressing the challenges outlined in the Best Value Inspection Report. Our outcomes are defined to be an active demonstration that we are committed to learning and improving. We will develop the capabilities and skills of our Councillors and officers to an exemplary standard to ensure that collectively we are known for embodying a culture of learning and improving and that this permeates all that we do and becomes fixed as part of our corporate DNA.



**Table 2: Outcome Framework**

### 3.3 Measuring and assuring our improvement

Through this adapted IRP, the cultural weaknesses identified in the BVI, as endemic across the Council will be reversed. Our Councillors, executive leaders and officers will demonstrate a commitment to learning and continually improving through challenge, scrutiny and personal and collective accountability.

An evaluation framework has been produced based on considering engagement on what improvement would look and feel like, along with best practice guidance and input from Commissioners. It will enable us and others to undertake a quantitative and qualitative assessment of our recovery and improvement. Our evaluation framework is broad based as whilst some aspects are measurable (such as having the correct polices in place and measuring key performance indicators) other aspects of our improvement are more intangible and require Councillors' and Commissioners to exercise their judgement on how well we are improving. In the case of Commissioners' judgement, this informs the confidence of MHCLG in the council and of partner councils in the newly forming West Surrey Council.

Achieving our outcomes will be continually tested by the Commissioners and our Improvement and Recovery Board (IRB), who will receive regular and detailed reporting against the desired outcomes, and through public reports to Councillors through Corporate Policy and Resources Committee (CPRC), Audit Committee and Full Council. We will also ensure through independent testing and challenge that our progress and performance is assured.

An outline plan for assuring our improvement is set out in section 8.

## 4. Our Plan for Improvement

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### 4.1 An overview

Our plan is summarised below. Sections 5-8 explore each section in greater detail, including our desired outcomes, outputs and approach to assurance. Underpinning all aspects of our improvement we are focused on ensuring a successful transition to the new West Surrey Council.



**Table 3: Improvement Plan Outline**

## 5. Strengthening and Improving Leadership

**Lead:** Cllr Sexton (Leader of the Council), Lesley Seary and Terry Collier (Interim Chief Executive)

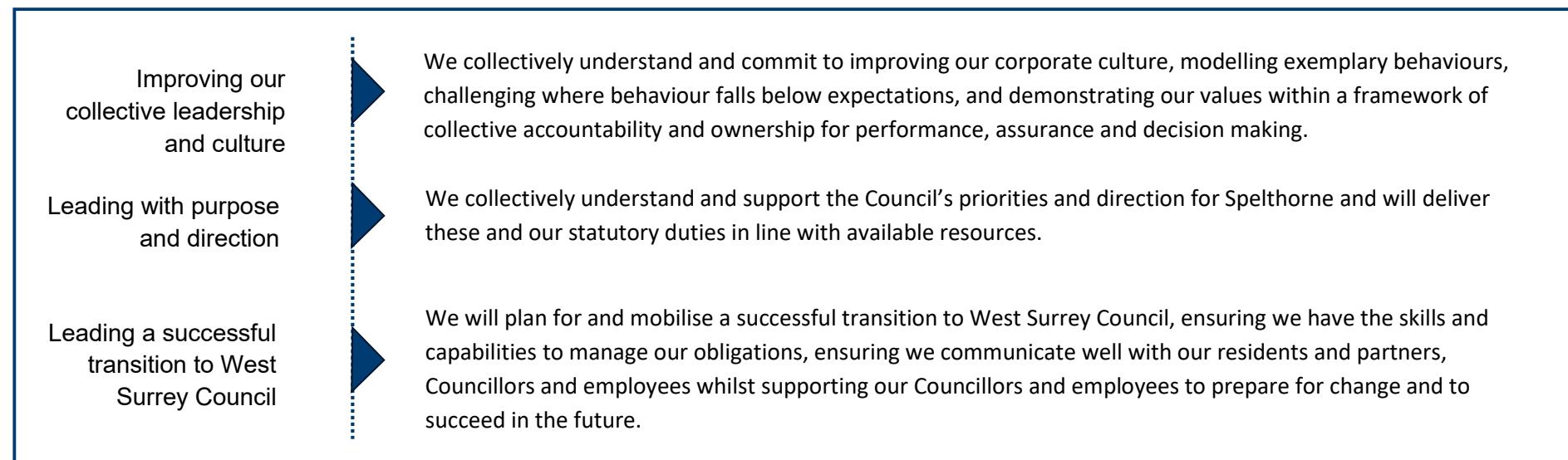
### What we are seeking to achieve

We are committed to rebuilding trust and confidence in and within the Council through strong leadership that demonstrates a clear purpose and strategic direction. Through this priority we will implement the foundations for exemplary place and corporate leadership matched with a commitment to a corporate culture that actively strives to improve transparency, accountability, ownership and collaboration. We will commit to modelling positive leadership behaviours externally with partners and within the Council between Officers and Councillors and between service areas.

This priority will be delivered through three interlinked workstreams:

1. Improving collective leadership and culture
2. Leading with purpose and direction
3. Leading a successful transition to West Surrey Council

As a result of these workstreams, we will demonstrate:



## Our Priority Plan in detail

### WORKSTREAM: IMPROVING OUR COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE

| Workstream Objective and Work packages  | Output  | Outcome  | Assuring our improvement   |
|---|---|--|--|
| The requirement to <b>improve standards, ownership and performance</b> that enables the Council to change and transition is a priority for every Councillor and every officer, with evidence of improvement experienced in actions, behaviours, ownership and accountability, communications and performance. | Communication and engagement on the practices of good behaviours underpinning the Nolan Principles.<br><br>KPI demonstrate a reduction in standards complaints and / or grievances. | <b>Improvement in collaboration and the culture of working between Councillors and officers</b> through recognising improvement and safely transitioning to West Surrey is a joint endeavour.<br><br><b>Improvement in accountability for performance</b> and behaviours through an uptick in commitment to personal, political group, executive accountability. | Commissioner Review<br><br>Independent Councillor Survey<br><br>Independent Staff Survey<br><br>Professional / Peer Review or Feedback |

## WORKSTREAM: LEADING WITH PURPOSE AND DIRECTION

| Workstream Objective and Work packages   | Output  | Outcome   | Assuring our improvement  |
|--|---|---|---|
| <p>Review the <b>purpose and direction of the Council</b> and through strong and accountable leadership determine how the Council will serve and engage with its partners and communities, whilst recognising the constraints the Council is operating under.</p> <p><b>Direction 1 (k)(l)</b></p> | <p>Clear statement of priorities</p>  | <p><b>Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council</b>, as Councillors provide visible leadership through a clearly articulated, achievable and prioritised direction for the Council.</p> <p><b>Improvement in collaboration and the culture of working between Councillors and officers</b> demonstrated through collectively agreeing purpose and direction.</p>  | <p>Commissioner Review</p> <p>Independent Councillor Survey</p> <p>Independent Staff Survey</p>       |
| <p>Service planning is undertaken, based on Council priorities, mirrors the requirements for improvement in how we deliver of priorities and is delivered within more limited resource availability.</p> <p><b>Direction 1 (g)</b></p>   | <p>Service planning process that is transparent, meets directions, priorities and performance expectations.</p> <p>Capability to deliver service plans, with an emphasis on benefits realisation and post-completion reviews to shared lessons learned.</p> <p>Revised approach to personal development plans and objectives and training plan developed.</p> | <p><b>Improvement in collaboration and the culture of working between Councillors and officers</b> in the process and output of the annual service planning process.</p> <p><b>Improvements in value for money and effectiveness</b> as the service planning process delivers improved outcomes within the constraints of available resources.</p> <p><b>Improvement in corporate capability</b> through applying programme and project management principles across all relevant services.</p> | <p>Commissioner Review</p> <p>Internal and / or Independent Audit</p> <p>Independent Staff Survey</p> |

## WORKSTREAM: LEADING A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION TO WEST SURREY COUNCIL

| Workstream Objective and Work packages  | Output  | Outcome  | Assuring our improvement   |
|---|---|--|--|
| <p>We will develop a <b>clear LGR transition plan informed by the Surrey LGR transition plan</b>, outlining the actions required, our robust management processes for tracking performance, managing risks and deviations from the plan. We will communicate our expectations to managers and officers and mobilise a programme of activity to support employees and Councillors to develop the capabilities to succeed in the new council.</p> <p><b>Direction 2</b></p> | <p>LGR plan, progress tracking and lead accountabilities developed and mobilised.</p> <p>LGR governance arrangements established.</p> <p>Communications plan developed and mobilised, and effectiveness tracked.</p> <p>Officer management development modular programme.</p> | <p><b>Improvement in corporate capability</b> through applying programme and project management principles across all relevant services.</p> <p><b>Improvement in risk management</b> through governance assurance, improved quality of information and clarity of accountability requirements.</p> <p><b>Improvement in the transparency of performance information</b>, with a clear process of officer accountability.</p> <p><b>Improvement in accountability for performance</b> through reacting to requests in a timely and professional manner</p> | <p>Commissioner Review<br/>Internal and / or Independent Audit<br/>Independent Councillor Survey<br/>Independent Staff Survey<br/>Professional / Peer Review or Feedback</p> |
| <p>We are effective and show professional and capable leadership of the Surrey procurement workstream, delivering a timely and comprehensive plan, being attuned to any risks and communicating effectively.</p> <p><b>Direction 2</b></p>  | <p>Procurement transition plan<br/>Pan-Surrey governance set up</p>   | <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</b> to build the connections that enable us to learn and improve and enable our Peers and Professionals to challenge our practice.</p>   | <p>Independent Advisor Reports<br/>Internal / Independent Audit<br/>Surrey LGR Implementation Board</p>  |

| Workstream Objective and Work packages  | Output   | Outcome  | Assuring our improvement   |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p>Arrangements for TUPE, asset transfer, archiving to ensure people, information and data and capital equipment is managed in a safe, legal and compliant way.</p> <p><b>Direction 2</b></p> | <p>Commission external specialist expertise if required and backfilling of resources.</p> <p>TUPE and HR plan</p> <p>Data transfer plan</p> <p>Asset transfer plan</p> <p>Contracts register</p> <p>Any other plans required by LGR Programme Team</p> | <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</b><br/>to enable us to learn and improve and enable our Peers and Professionals to challenge our practice.</p> <p><b>Improvement in corporate capability</b> by applying programme and project management principles across all relevant activities.</p> <p><b>Improvement in accountability for performance</b> ensuring all actions are delivered to time and quality expectations.</p> <p><b>Improvement in risk management</b> through governance assurance and a clear plan, subject to scrutiny and performance management and with clarity of accountabilities, escalation and governance.</p> | <p>Commissioner Review</p> <p>Internal and / or Independent Audit</p> <p>Surrey LGR Implementation Board</p> |

**Table 4:** Strengthening and improving leadership

## 6. Improving Financial Sustainability

**Lead:** Cllr. Nichols, Peter Robinson (Commissioner) and Terry Collier Chief Finance Officer (s151) (SRO)

### What we are seeking to achieve

The Council is committed to achieving long term financial sustainability through disciplined planning, effective governance and transparent reporting. This includes addressing significant budget gaps, reducing external borrowing and strengthening financial oversight. A credible multi-year financial strategy will be developed, supported by improved reporting, enhanced technical capacity and a renewed focus on affordability and risk.

This priority will be delivered through three interlinked workstreams:

1. Reducing our debt and improving our debt management arrangements
2. Improving our stability through delivering savings and maximising income
3. Improving our financial management capability and practice

As a result of these workstreams, we will demonstrate:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Reducing our debt and improving our debt management arrangements        | <p>We have significantly reduced the debt of the Council and reduced debt charges to secure a more stable financial position in the longer term to mitigate future risks and reliance on limited reserves.</p>   |
| Improving our stability through budgetary savings and maximising income | <p>We have implemented a range of actions linked to the service planning cycle to demonstrate significant savings – as well as maximisation of income. We have implemented a range of actions linked to the service planning cycle to demonstrate significant savings – as well as maximisation of income. To ensure that service and programme spending delivers the highest level of service and outcomes within the constrained resources available.</p>  |
| Improving our financial management capability and practice              | <p>We have a fit for purpose finance function that demonstrates exemplary leadership and management, implements robust financial controls, and champions effective scrutiny and reporting to enable clear accountability, effective risk management through governance assurance and compliance with statutory requirements and accounting standards. Budget holders will be active in their ownership and management of budgets. Political leaders and Councillors will be equipped to engage meaningfully in scrutiny and challenge.</p> |

## Our Priority Plan in detail

### WORKSTREAM: REDUCING OUR DEBT AND IMPROVING OUR DEBT MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS

| Workstream Objective and Work packages   | Output  | Outcome  | Assuring our improvement |
|--|---|--|--------------------------|
| <b>We will refinance and reduce our debt level</b><br><br><b>Direction 1 (c)</b>   | Completed - Debt refinanced in November 2025 and debt level reduced by £342m<br><br>Generate capital receipts from the asset rationalisation programme. | <b>Improve risk management</b> as Council debt reduced to a level more commensurate with asset values  | Commissioner report      |
| We will ensure the Authority is complying with all relevant rules and guidelines relating to minimum revenue provision (MRP).<br><br><b>Direction 1(f)</b>         | Completed – Approved at Council – November 2025<br><br>Included in 2026/27 revenue budget<br><br>Three-year MTFS approved by Council                    | <b>Improve policy and practice</b> through Full Council approval of a compliant MRP Policy. MRP calculations based on qualified valuer asset lives and MHCLG regulations and included in the 2026/27 budget and Treasury Management Plan | External Audit Report    |
| We will review the <b>reserve strategy</b> and ensure adequate provision for our <b>Sinking Fund</b> to manage our exposure to risks.<br><br><b>Direction 1(e)</b> | Completed - Sinking fund removed as part of new reserves strategy agreed at December 2025 Council   | <b>Improvement in risk management</b> through taking action on reserves.   | Commissioner Report      |

## WORKSTREAM: IMPROVING OUR STABILITY THROUGH BUDGETARY SAVING AND MAXIMISING INCOME

| Workstream Objective and Work packages   | Output   | Outcome   | Assuring our improvement  |
|--|--|---|---|
| <p><b>Implement a radical savings and income rationalisation programme</b>, to enable the Council to move towards achieving a balanced position prior to and beyond achieving unitary status. The savings process is kept under review to update figures, escalate any risk to achieving the savings and continue to explore further improvements to savings, income and revenue maximisation and benefits.</p> <p><b>Direction 1(a)</b></p> | <p>Savings plan produced and agreed by Commissioners, CPRC / Council, leading to approval of a balanced deliverable budget for 2026/27.</p> <p>Business cases for savings, income maximisation developed and agreed. For each saving:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Owner</li> <li>• Phasing</li> <li>• Delivery confidence rating</li> <li>• Risk and mitigation</li> <li>• Gateway reviews for high-risk savings</li> </ul> <p>Set out a pathway of savings options for West Surrey Council to consider</p> | <p><b>Improvement in value for money</b> as we realise savings and ensures the Council maximises income from fees and charges.</p> <p><b>Improvement in risk management</b> through governance assurance providing stronger assurance of budget, savings and spending.</p> <p><b>Improvement in the transparency of performance information</b>, with a clear assurance and review process.</p> <p><b>Improvement in accountability for performance</b> through more active management by budget holders.</p> | <p>Member, Public and Commissioner scrutiny of 2026/27 budget.</p> <p>Commissioner review November 2026</p> |
| <p>Detailed plan to generate <b>capital receipts</b>, to pay down further debt is developed and implemented, ensuring that the purpose of assets is reviewed against strategic priorities with a programme of sales</p>  | <p>Review of assets and plan developed and agreed. Implementation of the asset rationalisation programme commenced and monitored.</p> <p>Minimum capital receipts of £23m in 2025/26, £155m in 2026/27 and £300m</p>   | <p><b>Improvement in value for money</b> as Council debt is reduced by £300m over the next three years.</p>   | <p>Independent Advisor Reports</p> <p>Commissioner report to the new unitary authority.</p>                 |

| Workstream Objective and Work packages   | Output  | Outcome   | Assuring our improvement   |
|--|---|---|--|
| agreed.<br><b>Direction 1(a)</b>   | over the period 25/26– 28/29  |   |  |
| Develop a capital programme that does not rely on additional borrowing.<br><b>Direction 1(g)</b> | Council to approve a capital programme that has no additional prudential borrowing for 2026/27. | <b>Improvement in value for money</b> as a capital programme is developed that is based on available resources. | Public and Commissioner Scrutiny of 2026/27 Capital Programme Budget |

## WORKSTREAM: IMPROVING OUR FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT CAPABILITY AND PRACTICE

| Workstream Objective and Work packages   | Output   | Outcome   | Assuring our improvement   |
|--|--|---|--|
| We will <b>demonstrate exemplary corporate financial leadership</b> that includes improving the quality and accuracy of information we hold. This includes financial modelling, budgeting and accounting processes matched by implementing an effective internal control environment to safeguard the use of resources and manage risk.<br><br><b>Direction 1(f)</b> | <p>Budget process review in time for setting 2026/27 budget. Including standard templates.</p> <p><b>Monthly budget monitoring reports:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focus on forecast outturn, not variance noise</li> <li>▪ Include clear recovery actions for overspends</li> <li>▪ Defined escalation triggers (e.g. red-rated variances)</li> </ul> <p>Named accountable budget holders who</p> | <p><b>Improvement in collaboration and the culture of working between Councillors and officers</b> and satisfaction in the quality and rigour of analysis and reporting.</p> <p><b>Improvement in risk management</b> through governance assurance, improved financial governance and oversight.</p> <p><b>Improvement in the quality of decision making</b> through more comprehensive analysis of financial implications.</p> | <p>Audit Committee Annual Report Internal Audit Annual Governance Statement Finance element of new Governance Assurance Register Members Financial</p> |

| Workstream Objective and Work packages  | Output   | Outcome   | Assuring our improvement |
|---|--|---|--------------------------|
|   | <p>receive training.</p> <p>CFO sign off on robustness</p> <p>An improved / clean audit report with minimal recommendations for 2025/26 accounts, continued good progress, maintaining current improved arrangements and team of specialists</p> | <p><b>Improvement in value for money</b> through improved quality of information and transparent financial analysis.</p>  | Reporting Group          |
| <p>We will support our Councillors and Committee Chairs to ensure they have the <b>capability and curiosity</b> to scrutinise, challenge and make decisions based on understanding high quality options and advice.</p> | <p>Reduction in written clarification questions</p> <p>Provide councillors with training and guidance to support informed decision-making</p>  | <p><b>Improvement in collaboration and the culture of working between Councillors and officers</b> and satisfaction in the quality of analysis and reporting.</p> <p><b>Improvements in corporate capability</b> with Councillors equipped to fulfil their fiduciary responsibilities.</p> <p><b>Improvement in risk management</b> through governance assurance, improved financial governance and oversight.</p> <p><b>Improvement in the quality of decision making</b> through greater levels of curiosity and questioning and the conduct in meetings.</p> | Commissioner Review      |
| We will <b>redesign and restructure</b>   | Complete the financial team restructure  | <b>Improvements in corporate capability</b>   | Commissioner             |

| Workstream Objective and Work packages  | Output   | Outcome   | Assuring our improvement   |
|---|--|---|--|
| <p><b>the Council's finance service</b>, to ensure the Council has the skills and capacity, commensurate with its financial complexity, to deal with all financial issues and demonstrate a culture of challenge and scrutiny proactively and robustly.</p> <p><b>Direction 1(h)</b></p>        | <p>and ensure appropriate resourcing is in place by June 2026</p> <p>Undertake skills gap assessment and training, specifically with the Business Partnering team.</p> <p>Recruit quality interim resources to fill gaps, and work with West Surrey councils to share specialist support</p> <p>Establish a governance framework with defined roles and shared ownership</p>             | <p>deploying rigorous business partnering approaches, to elevate budgetary management arrangements.</p> <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</b> to learn and improve and improve professional challenge of our practices.</p> <p><b>Improvement in assurance and audit</b> as a result of improved capability and challenge.</p>  | <p>review</p> <p>Independent Survey of Councillors, particularly Audit Committee Members</p> |
| <p><b>We will develop the financial and budget management capability, of officers throughout the Council</b>, ensuring those with budgetary responsibilities are trained, take active accountability for good financial governance and realisation of savings.</p> <p><b>Direction 1(h)</b></p> | <p>Provide training to group heads to ensure they own their budgets and savings plans .</p> <p>Monthly service level budget reports circulated to budget holders, with a requirement to feedback on variations, to inform MAT assurance of finance.</p> <p>Outturn and financial performance actively discussed at MAT and MAT+ and reports / assurance provided to Audit Committee.</p> | <p><b>Improvements in corporate capability</b>, and <b>Improvements in accountability for performance</b> as budget holders are equipped and accountable for budget management.</p> <p><b>Improvement in assurance and audit</b> as a result of improved capability and challenge.</p> <p><b>Improvement in Councillor and officer confidence</b> through the demonstrable improvement in reports and analysis.</p> | <p>Independent Survey of Councillors, particularly Audit Committee Members</p>               |

**Table 5: Improving financial sustainability**

## 7. Improving Governance and Assurance

**Lead:** Cllr Sexton (Leader of the Council), Lesley Seary and Linda Heron (Monitoring Officer)

### What we are seeking to achieve

We are committed to rebuilding trust and confidence in the Council through establishing the foundation for governance excellence and corporate accountability. Councillors and Officers will collaborate to improve governance policy and practice. In all we do we will demonstrate exemplary governance, control and risk management, matched with a commitment to a corporate culture of assurance, shared by Councillors and officers, that places a high value on repositioning Spelthorne as a well-run and governed Council. We will assure the Government, Commissioners, residents and partners of our commitment to transparency, accountability and risk aware decision making, to rebuild confidence in the leadership and decision-making of the Council.

This priority will be delivered through three interlinked workstreams:

1. Establishing the foundations for governance excellence
2. Improving Council and committee effectiveness and decision-making practices
3. Creating an exemplary assurance and control framework

As a result of these workstreams, we will demonstrate:

Improving the culture of continuous learning and improvement



We have in place a range of approaches to support our learning and improvement. Considering the corporate learning we can glean from audit recommendations, performance metrics and KPIs, and an openness to feedback from other external sources. We commit to acting on recommendations, to change our practices to implement and embed improvements ensuring these are owned by our officers and Committee Members.

Improving Council and committee effectiveness and decision-making



We will overhaul our approach to decision-making by improving our Officer / Councillor relationships. We will provide early socialisation of options and improve the quality, analysis and timeliness of our reports. We will commit to respectful and robust scrutiny as an ambition to improve Council and committee effectiveness and conduct.

Creating and owning an exemplary assurance and control framework



We have the processes, protocols supported by a culture of accountability, that demonstrates highly effective assurance and control. Councillors and Senior Leaders will collaborate to develop a strong assurance and risk framework to manage risk effectively. Through our framework we will be accountable and transparent internally and externally for our actions.

## Our Priority Plan in detail

### WORKSTREAM: IMPROVING THE CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING

| Workstream Objective and Work packages   | Output   | Outcome  | Assuring our improvement  |
|--|--|--|---|
| <p><b>Recommendations from Audit reports</b> are understood and acted upon and the learning from improving process is shared via Service Leads to ensure the learning and new processes are owned and consistently implemented.</p> <p><b>Direction 1(d)</b></p>   | <p>Plan of internal audit reviews</p> <p>Regular review of all internal audit reports. Monitoring all recommendations and actions to ensure completion – by MAT, service committees and Audit committee.</p> <p>Review as part of the Annual Governance Review / Statement and learning included in the Governance Improvement Plan.</p> | <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</b> that improves governance practice.</p> <p><b>Improvement in accountability for performance</b> across all levels of executive and political leadership and activity</p>  | <p>Commissioner Review</p> <p>Internal and / or Independent Audit</p> |
| <p><b>Establish internal assurance arrangements</b> via MAT and MAT+ that actively demonstrate the organisation is learning from feedback received and working corporately to share learning and improve. With people held to account for activities they are responsible and have ownership of.</p> <p><b>Direction 1 (d)(h)(k)</b></p> | <p>Adaptations to MAT and MAT+, to increase focus on performance, assurance and corrective action.</p> <p>Other internal meetings demonstrate clarity of purpose with expectations for pre-preparation and accountabilities for actions.</p> <p>PMO data and performance tracking.</p> <p>A revised suite of progress / performance</p>  | <p><b>Improvement in assurance and audit</b> through implementation of rigour in internal processes.</p> <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</b> particularly related to audit, scrutiny and governance.</p> <p><b>Improvement in corporate capability</b> developing the skills and behaviours required in a well governed council, committed to continual improvement.</p> | <p>Commissioner Review</p> <p>Internal and / or Independent Audit</p> |

| Workstream Objective and Work packages | Output   | Outcome   | Assuring our improvement |
|--|--|---|--------------------------|
|  | <p>reports.</p> <p>Internal performance monitoring reporting and action planning.</p> <p>Annual governance review considers all areas of learning.</p> | <p><b>Improvement in accountability for performance</b> through assessing and responding to trends and clear lines of accountability for corrective actions.</p> <p><b>Improvement in the transparency of performance information</b> by conducting reviews and sharing the lessons learned from well/poor service performance.</p> |                          |

## WORKSTREAM: CREATING AND OWNING AN EXEMPLARY ASSURANCE AND CONTROL FRAMEWORK

| Workstream Objective and Work packages  | Output   | Outcome  | Assuring our improvement   |
|---|--|--|--|
| <p><b>Policies and processes that maximise transparency and accountability</b> are developed, ensuring compliance with the Nolan Principles and relevant Codes of Conduct. Through strong leadership and training there is a commitment to a culture of good governance demonstrated throughout the organisation.</p> | <p>Governance and Assurance Framework, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Assurance objectives for every team and officer integral to the service planning processes.</li> <li>▪ Revised governance procedures scoped and developed.</li> <li>▪ Councillor Code of Conduct.</li> <li>▪ Councillor Development and Mentoring Programme.</li> </ul> | <p><b>Improvement in Councillor and officer confidence</b> through clear requirements, training, development and mentoring, resulting in a more capable organisation with appropriate knowledge and skills.</p> <p><b>Improvement in public and partner confidence</b> in the Council as a well-managed organisation, with a stronger focus on local democracy.</p> <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through</b></p> | <p>Commissioner Review</p> <p>Independent Councillor Survey</p> <p>Internal and / or Independent Audit</p> |

| Workstream Objective and Work packages   | Output   | Outcome   | Assuring our improvement  |
|--|--|---|---|
| <b>Direction 1(d)</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ CIPFA self-assessment.</li> <li>▪ Financial regulations</li> <li>▪ New Governance Assurance Register</li> </ul>   | <p><b>an openness to challenge</b> that improves governance practice.</p> <p><b>Improvement in accountability for performance</b> across all levels of executive and political leadership and activity.</p>   |   |
| <p>The Council's <b>assurance and audit functions</b> are re-set, ensuring a strong grounding in integrity and ethical principles matched with high levels of capability, expertise and professional rigour to ensure a fit for purpose function.</p> <p><b>Direction 1 (d)(h)</b></p> | <p>Internal Audit Plan that is collaboratively developed.</p> <p>Clear ownership / accountability for the tracking of internal audit actions, assuring the Audit Committee.</p> <p>Relationship management with SIAP.</p>  | <p><b>Improvement in assurance and audit</b> through implementation of rigour in internal processes and compliance testing.</p> <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</b> particularly related to audit, scrutiny and governance.</p>   | <p>Internal and / or Independent Audit</p> <p>External Audit of Accounts</p>      |
| <p>Create a Council-wide strong <b>risk managed operating environment</b>, where risk is robustly assessed, and openly discussed and high risks are actively managed through a collaborative approach with Councillors, officers and Auditors.</p> <p><b>Direction 1 (d) (h)</b></p>   | <p>Governance Assurance approach to risk management developed, agreed, implemented, owned and embedded including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governance Assurance and Framework</li> <li>• Governance assurance monitoring and reporting through service committees, with Audit Committee overview of arrangements.</li> <li>• Training for all Councillors and</li> </ul> | <p><b>Improvement in risk management</b> through governance assurance and the awareness of risk, evident in decision papers, decision making, options analysis and delivery plans.</p> <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</b> including Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and specialist financial, commercial and legal expertise to support the understanding of risks and issues.</p> | <p>External and Internal Audit Risk Review</p> <p>Independent Advisor Reports</p> |

| Workstream Objective and Work packages | Output  | Outcome | Assuring our improvement |
|--|---|---------|--------------------------|
|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>senior staff</li> <li>• New Governance Assurance Register</li> </ul> |         |                          |

## WORKSTREAM: IMPROVING COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE EFFECTIVENESS AND DECISION-MAKING ARRANGEMENTS

| Workstream Objective and Work packages  | Output  | Outcome   | Assuring our improvement  |
|---|---|---|---|
| <p>The foundations for <b>effective decision making</b> are understood, implemented, adhered to and demonstrated through improved officer / councillor engagement and socialisation of well researched and articulated options prior to formal decision making.</p> <p><b>Direction 1 (d)</b></p> | <p>Forward Plan shares information on option socialisation, decision making and assurance.</p> <p>Councillor briefing programme and newsletter.</p> <p>Senior sponsor identified to champion improvements in reporting by April 2026.</p> | <p><b>Improvement in Councillor and officer confidence</b> through reduction of errors and openness to receiving feedback if reports are not of the quality expected.</p> <p><b>Improvement in corporate capability</b> developing the skills and behaviours required for briefing councillors.</p> | <p>Commissioner Review</p> <p>Independent Member Survey</p> <p>Independent Staff Survey</p> <p>Internal Audit</p> |
| <p>The <b>quality, accuracy and timeliness of reports is prioritised</b>, with senior managers accepting accountability for ensuring reports from their service area comply with new processes and met expectations and</p>   | <p>Revised report template / process requirements by Feb 2026.</p> <p>Requirements set in objectives (job profiles) that are assessed, and feedback</p>   | <p><b>Improvement in the quality of decision making</b> through well-written reports, with well drafted options, supported by clear risk analysis and internal scrutiny to assess impact on resourcing.</p> <p><b>Improvement in corporate capability</b> and the</p>                               | <p>Commissioner Review</p> <p>Independent Member Survey</p>   |

| Workstream Objective and Work packages   | Output  | Outcome  | Assuring our improvement  |
|--|---|--|---|
| <p>Committee needs.</p> <p><b>Direction1 (d)</b></p>   | <p>received and acted upon.</p> <p>Non-negotiable sign off process for reports / rejection.</p> <p>Accurate, well written reports that outline all the relevant information needed by Members to make informed decisions.</p>   | <p>skills of report writing.</p> <p><b>Improvement in accountability for performance</b> - resetting expectations for quality</p>  |   |
| <p><b>Democratic accountability</b> is elevated through public meetings conducted in a professional, respectful and constructive manner. Ensuring a high level of scrutiny of papers and business that is debated openly and concluded effectively.</p> <p>Audit Committee effectiveness is elevated through a clearer understanding of remit, using independent members and training Councillors to improve scrutiny of governance and financial controls.</p> <p><b>Direction 1(d)</b></p> | <p>Development of comprehensive Committee Work Programmes, covering pre-scrutiny, assurance and decision making. Named contacts to consult with Chairs and Committee members in advance of public meetings to facilitate the resolution of emerging issues.</p> <p>Conflict resolution policy adopted April 2026.</p> <p>Fully implement the audit of Governance recommendations approved by Audit Committee by May 2026</p> <p>Specific training for Chairs &amp; Councillors.</p> <p>Reduction in standards/grievance issues.</p> | <p><b>Improvement in Councillor and officer confidence</b> through forums and meetings being conducted in a respectful and skilful way.</p> <p><b>Improvement in collaboration and the culture of working between Councillors and officers</b> by the development of a conflict resolution approach that clarifies mutual accountabilities.</p> <p><b>Improvement in the quality of decision making</b> through pre-decision scrutiny as a key driver of effective policy development.</p> <p><b>Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council</b> through demonstrable scrutiny and audit of policies, assurance, financial performance tracking.</p> | <p>Independent Councillor Survey</p> <p>Independent Staff Survey</p> <p>Commissioner Review</p> <p>Centre for Governance and Scrutiny</p> |

| Workstream Objective and Work packages | Output  | Outcome | Assuring our improvement |
|--|---|---------|--------------------------|
|  | Independent members appointed to the Audit Committee for the 2026/2027. |         |                          |

**Table 6: Improving governance and assurance**

## 8. Improving Commercial, Regeneration and Housing

**Lead:** Cllr. Nichols, Cllrs Williams/Doran/Gibson, Mervyn Greer and Deborah McLaughlin (Commissioner) and Coralie Holman (SRO)

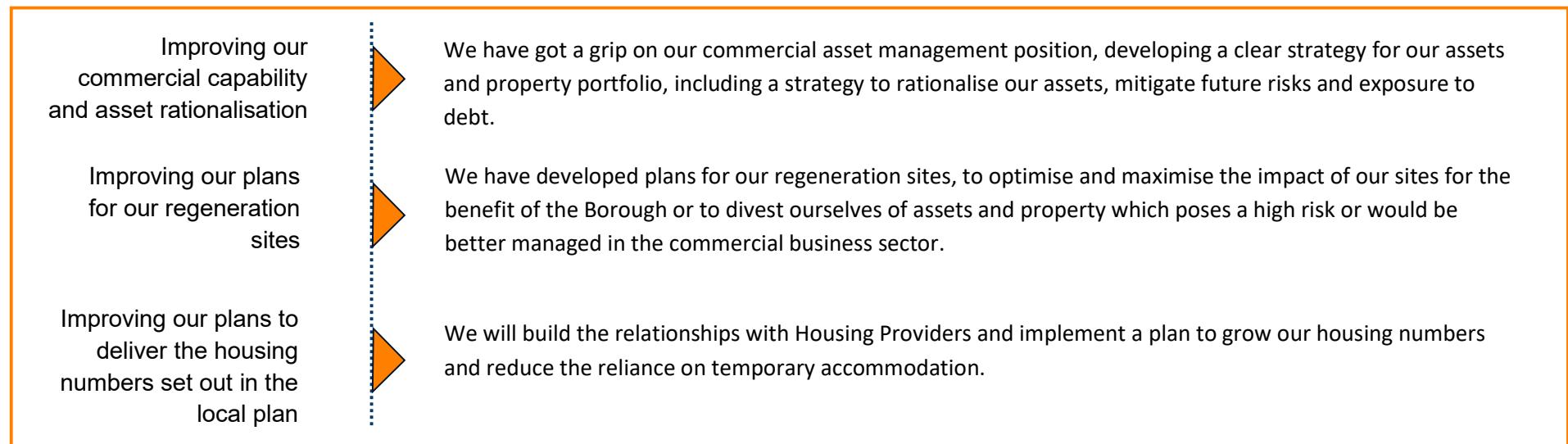
### What we are seeking to achieve

We are committed to reducing our exposure to commercial risks whilst simultaneously strengthening our commercial decision making, regeneration, affordable housing delivery, asset management and procurement functions. achieving the best value of our property assets. A commercial strategy and asset reduction plan will be developed and introduced, supported by stronger governance, improved procurement and better data management. We will pursue targeted disposals and develop realistic and credible plans for our regeneration sites. We will have a renewed focus on developing partnerships with developers and Registered Providers to increase housing provision and reduce reliance on temporary accommodation.

This priority will be delivered through three interlinked workstreams:

1. Improving our commercial capability and asset rationalisation planning
2. Improving our plans for our regeneration sites
3. Deliver the housing numbers set out in the Local Plan

As a result of these workstreams, we will demonstrate:



## Our Priority Plan in detail

### WORKSTREAM: IMPROVING OUR COMMERCIAL CAPABILITY AND ASSET RATIONALISATION

| Workstream Objective and Work packages   | Output   | Outcome  | Assuring our improvement   |
|--|--|--|--|
| <p>Strengthen our <b>workforce capability through targeted resourcing</b>, blending our internal team with external specialists to ensure we have access to all required specialisms to develop our plans and to identify and mitigate our commercial risks.</p> <p><b>Direction 1 (h)</b></p> | <p>Plan, for the programme, identifying the external commissions and interim, specialist support.</p> <p>Procurement and contracts for specialists, includes a timeline of deliverables</p>  | <p><b>Improvement in corporate capability</b> by broadening and supplementing the internal skills and commercial capabilities.</p> <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</b> that enables us to learn and improve and manage complex commercial business.</p> <p><b>Improvement in risk management</b> through governance assurance, accessing external, specialist commercial capabilities.</p> | <p>Commissioner Review</p> <p>Professional / Peer Review or Feedback</p>     |
| <p><b>Analyse portfolio data</b> to optimise asset performance, model operating and maintenance costs. Link to the sinking fund and model longer term financial requirements and financial management capability.</p> <p><b>Direction 1 (i)</b></p>  | <p>Up-to-date valuations for all assets and property.</p> <p>Detailed reviews of all assets and property data.</p> <p>Forward financial projections built into the MTFS and Sinking Fund.</p> <p>Property portfolio risk plan.</p> <p>Developed strategy for BP site (SW corner and main site)</p> | <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</b> linked to performance data and valuations.</p> <p><b>Improvement in value for money</b> through improved quality of information and transparent commercial and financial analysis.</p> <p><b>Improvement in risk management</b> through governance assurance improved quality of information.</p>  | <p>Internal and / or Independent Audit</p> <p>External Audit of Accounts</p> |

| Workstream Objective and Work packages   | Output   | Outcome   | Assuring our improvement            |
|--|--|---|-------------------------------------|
|  |  |   |                                     |
| <p>Strengthen our <b>governance of our commercial portfolio</b>, analysing data to support option development and risk management. Systems capture all data and financial risks to ensure active contract management and governance of the portfolio throughout the whole commercial lifecycle.</p> <p><b>Direction 1 (h)(i)</b></p> | <p>Commercial management procurement review by June 2026 leading to a commercial strategy and procurement framework.</p> <p>Contract management audit to confirm standardisation of practice across the council by June 2026 and a confirmed contract register.</p> <p>Commercial governance framework agreed for commercial portfolio, esp. covering the financial interface.</p> <p>Engagement plan for lead Councillors, to build knowledge.</p> <p>Property management system developed and updated.</p> | <p><b>Improvement in the quality of decision making</b> through access to options on optimisation or divestment, built on comprehensive and validated data.</p> <p><b>Improvement in value for money</b> through improved oversight and enforcement of procurement and contract stipulations.</p> <p><b>Improvement in assurance and audit</b> through robust contract management.</p> <p><b>Improvement in assurance and audit</b> through implementation of rigour in commercial processes.</p> | Internal and / or Independent Audit |

## WORKSTREAM: DEVELOPING OUR PLANS FOR OUR REGENERATION SITES

| Workstream Objective and Work packages   | Output   | Outcome   | Assuring our improvement            |
|--|--|---|-------------------------------------|
| <p>Following, valuations, <b>develop a Property and Asset rationalisation and divestment plan</b> to support debt reduction and manage the risk exposure of the Council.</p> <p><b>Direction 1 (i)</b></p> | <p>Expertise procured for valuations and assessments.</p> <p>Rationalisation and Divestment Plan produced and options debated with Councillors.</p> <p>Commence divestment of property and assets.</p> | <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</b> as a utilising data and evidence to develop a clear plan.</p> <p><b>Improvement in value for money</b> through divestment of assets.</p> <p><b>Improvement in risk management</b> through governance assurance and improved quality of information.</p> | Internal and / or Independent Audit |
| <p>Produce an asset disposal strategy for Housing Regeneration sites, to achieve best value and support Council priorities.</p>  | <p>Marketing Strategy for Regen sites agreed following the appointment of Agents</p> <p>Divest the housing sites portfolio and receive capital, following the appointment of developer/investor.</p>   | <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</b>, utilising data and evidence to develop a clear plan.</p> <p><b>Improvement in value for money and risk management</b> through divestment of assets and achieving savings on holding costs.</p>   |                                     |

## WORKSTREAM: IMPROVING OUR PLAN TO DELIVER THE HOUSING NUMBERS SET OUT IN THE LOCAL PLAN

| Workstream Objective and Work packages  | Output   | Outcome  | Assuring our improvement  |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p><b>Accelerate activity to meet our Housing Targets</b>, including meaningful external engagement to accelerate sites.</p> <p>Develop an Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), to set out our plan for affordable home development.</p> <p><b>Direction 1 (j)</b></p> | <p>Housing plan, to advance housing sites to development, leading to an increased pipeline of new housing including affordable housing</p> <p>Comprehensive programme of engagement with landowners, housing developers and registered providers undertaken.</p> <p>Agents engaged to market sites. Affordable Housing principles developed and agreed (Q1 2026)</p> | <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</b> to plan and to advance housing sites.</p> <p><b>Improvement in the quality of decision making</b> through clarity on sites and numbers.</p> <p><b>Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council</b> through a plan for affordable homes.</p> <p><b>Improvement in accountability for performance</b> demonstrated through an increased pipeline of new housing development, including affordable housing</p> | <p>Internal and / or Independent Audit</p> <p>Independent Partner and Stakeholder Survey</p> <p>Commissioner Review</p> |
| <p>To determine <b>the future Knowle Green Estates</b>, noting the requirement to reach a position prior to vesting the West Surrey Authority.</p>  | <p>Appointed consultants to produce a report on the viability of the company.</p> <p>Appoint consultants to undertake a stock conditions survey and red book valuation.</p> <p>Council decision on KGE future, and implementation of agreed KGE strategic decision.</p> <p>Alignment with housing LGR work to</p>  | <p><b>Improvement in the quality of decision making</b> through access to options based on an independent assessment of KGE viability.</p> <p><b>Improvement in collaboration and the culture of working between Councillors and officers</b> through engagement and the development of options for KGE.</p>   |   |

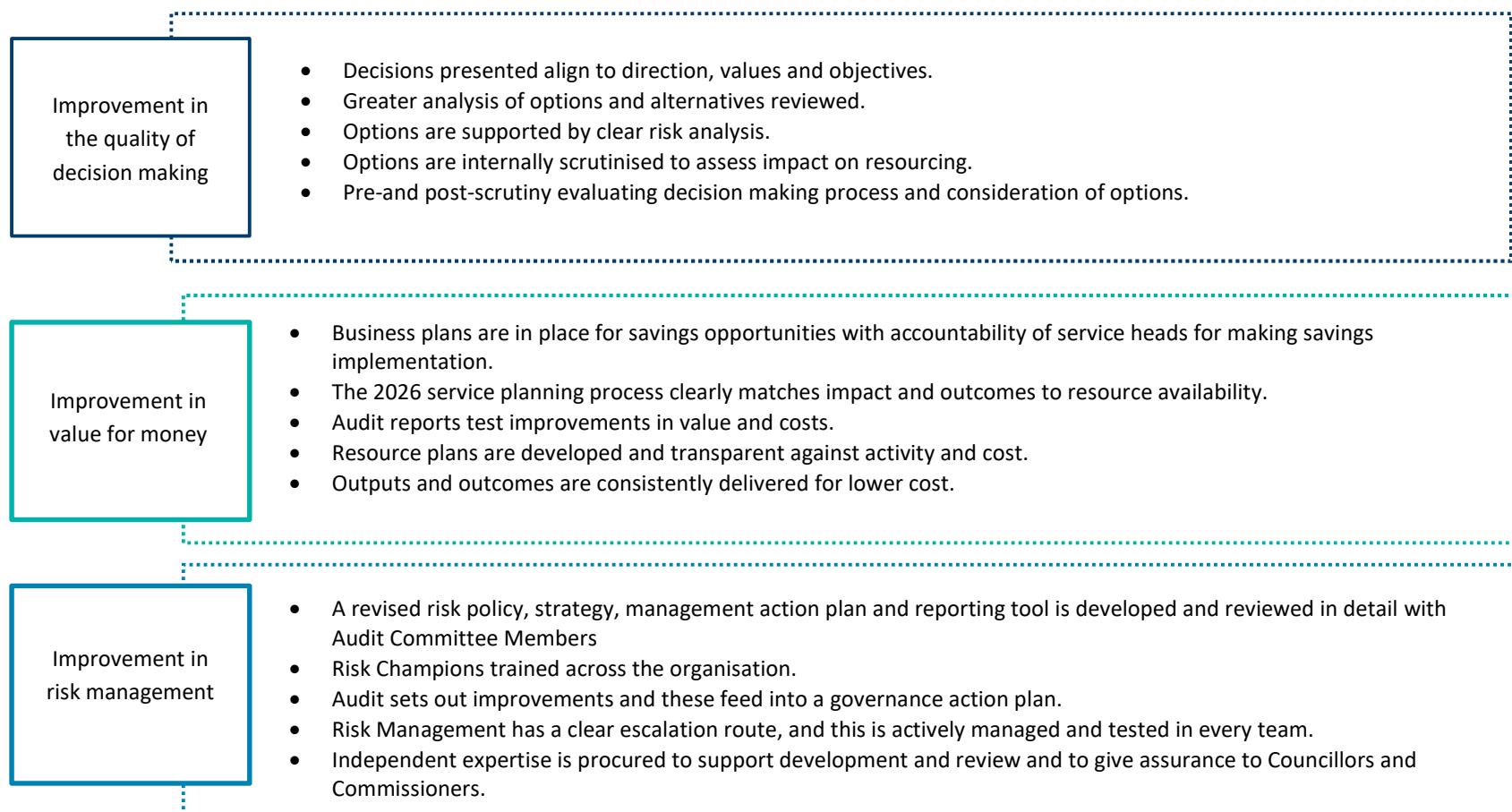
| Workstream Objective and Work packages  | Output  | Outcome   | Assuring our improvement  |
|---|---|---|---|
|   | handover responsibility.  |   |   |
| <p>Develop a plan to reduce our reliance on temporary accommodation, including early prevention strategies, and a savings reduction plan for temporary accommodation costs.</p> <p><b>Direction 1 (j)</b></p> | <p>Action plan with accountabilities specified developed (Q1 2026) following the MHCLG Desktop Peer Review of reliance on temporary accommodation.</p> <p>Savings reduction plan developed to be effective during 2026/27.</p> <p>Early Prevention plan of alternatives will follow the completion of the action plan.</p> <p>Procurement strategy for the use of temporary accommodation will be developed as part of the action plan.</p> | <p><b>Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council</b> through a plan to reduce temporary accommodation reliance.</p> <p><b>Improvement in value for money</b> through reduction in reliance on high-cost temporary accommodation and delivery better housing outcomes and solutions</p> | <p>Commissioner Review</p> <p>MHCLG Review</p> <p>Internal and / or Independent Audit</p> |

**Table 7: Improving Commercial, Regeneration and Housing**

## 9. Defining our Improvement Outcomes

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Through our revised IRP, the cultural weaknesses identified as endemic across the Council will be reversed and our Councillors, executive leaders and officers will demonstrate a commitment to continually improving through challenge, scrutiny, learning and accountability. To track our progress, we have developed this evaluation framework to enable quantitative and qualitative assessment of our improvement and recovery. This allows for the fact that whilst some aspects of improvement are measurable (such as having the correct policies in place and measuring key performance indicators) other aspects of our improvement will require a judgement to be made on how well the Council has improved.

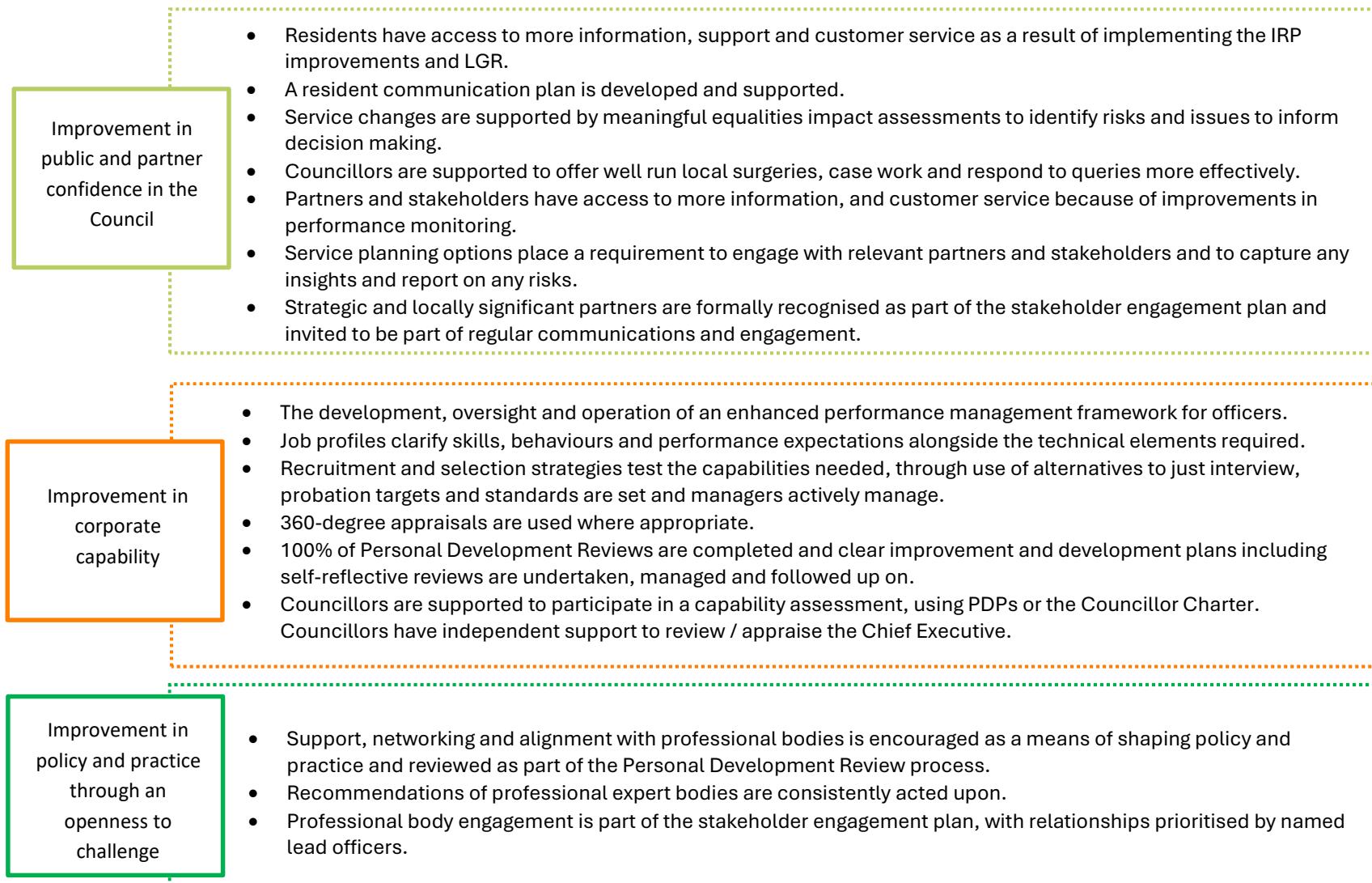


Improvement in collaboration and working culture between officers and between Councillors

- Agreed 2026 priorities sets out clear areas for formalised corporate collaboration.
- Improved communications between officers and Councillors.
- Implement matrix/collaboration teams where required ensuring clarity of purpose and role.
- A conflict resolution approach is developed and implemented for areas where there are conflicting roles, or perspectives, that act as a detriment to effective collaboration.
- Meaningful engagement in the setting of 2026 priorities.
- Enhanced Committee Services or Comms role to improve the flow of information between the officers and Councillors.
- Communication and / or lead officers develop protocols for closer engagement with local Ward Councillors to update and engage them.
- Named roles assigned responsibilities for working with Committees e.g. Audit, and with Councillors serving on external boards.
- Clear development of Member / Officer protocol and review processes.

Improvement in Councillor and officer confidence

- Respectful behaviours build mutual trust and confidence between Councillor and officers are tested.
- Belief that there has been a meaningful and sustained change in the approach to openness and transparency.
- Councillor forums and meetings are conducted in a respectful way.
- Councillors are engaged to set the needs for their annual training and development and receive training and development to support their role.
- Councillor attendance and participation is monitored, and political groups engaged in a review of quality of engagement.
- Councillors with roles on audit or other committees are given training and development to support them to succeed.
- A Councillor / officer protocol is drawn up, so Councillors know who to approach with questions or queries.
- Use of independents in Committees, as advisors or mentors to improve capability if required.
- Councillors provided with proportionate information on issues relating to the general business of the Council, the IRP and to matters relating to their wards to improve their knowledge and capability to support the improvement required in public confidence.
- All officers are engaged in work to disseminate the future direction and focus of the Council.
- All officers are engaged in contributing to discussion on the change programme in their teams.
- All officers are supported to develop objectives that are clear in their contribution to the direction of their team and the organisation.
- All officers receive clear and consistent communication from managers and the senior leaders.
- A regular programme of feedback and engagement is implemented to support the change programme.



|  |  |
|--|--|
| Improvement in the transparency of performance information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance indicators for publishing data to relevant Committees and Boards are established and reviewed.</li> <li>Data is reviewed for completeness and corrective action taken if performance data is incomplete.</li> <li>Where performance information highlights a risk or issue materialising, there is additional communication if required to brief on this.</li> </ul>  |
| Improvement in assurance and audit                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual governance review is comprehensive, built on evidence from Councillors, Leadership, Commissioners and engaging appropriately with partners and stakeholders.</li> <li>Audit Committee introduce a comprehensive Annual Report</li> <li>Annual governance review is supported by a well-documented governance improvement plan for 26/27, and a plan of improvements is shared with West Surrey. Governance Improvement Plan is actively monitored by MAT and the relevant Council Committees.</li> <li>Independent expertise and auditing are used to test strength in governance and systems to provide assurance of increasing rigour and capability in the internal operating environment.</li> </ul> |
| Improvement in accountability for performance              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Performance improvement and capability deficit processes for officers are developed, well understood, and monitored.</li> <li>Performance management and disciplinary policies and processes are redefined and managers and officers aware of compliance requirements and target dates for action planning improvement.</li> <li>Where team performance is poor, deep dives, pulse surveys and independent expertise are implemented to identify the root causes and plan for improvement.</li> <li>Through governance arrangements and improved reporting performance issues are escalated and a clear action plan agreed.</li> </ul>  |
| Improvement in responsiveness to Councillors and Residents | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protocols and metrics for public responsiveness are agreed and implemented as part of the new Protocol and external engagement. Metrics are tracked.</li> <li>Complaints are monitored corporately and at the Audit Committee for trends and corrective actions plans are developed and implemented.</li> <li>Correlation with compliments is monitored and reviewed.</li> </ul>  |

**Table 8: Measuring our improvement**

## 10. Measuring and assuring our improvement

To demonstrate our effectiveness and improvement, we will seek to assure Government, our local partners, stakeholders, residents, businesses, and our Councillors and employees of our improvement progress through an openness to external review and independent validation and testing. Our approach to independent assurance of progress is detailed in the table 9 below.

| Assurance Approach            | Priority and workstream   | Focus for the assurance activity   | Outcome to test   |
|-------------------------------|---|--|---|
| Commissioner Review           | All   | <p>Assuring and testing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>confidence that the political leadership of Spelthorne is capable, aware of their role, and committed to working collaboratively to discharge their responsibilities.</li> <li>confidence that Member and officers are committed to maintaining a high degree of openness, transparency and accountability in discharging their financial and governance leadership.</li> <li>confidence that the actions and commitments made in this Plan will sustain a longer-term programme of improvement that extends beyond the ending of government intervention into the new West Surrey Council.</li> </ol>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All outcomes</li> </ul>  |
| Independent Councillor Survey | <p><b>Strengthening and improving leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving our collective leadership and culture</li> <li>Leading with purpose and direction</li> <li>Leading a successful transition to West Surrey</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving governance and assurance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving a culture of learning</li> <li>Improving Council and Committee effectiveness and decision-making practices</li> <li>Creating an exemplary assurance and control framework</li> </ul> | <p>Assuring and testing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>whether Councillor and officer roles and accountabilities and requisite behaviours are clear and understood, specifically for any additional Councillor responsibilities on Audit, other Committees or arms-length bodies or partnerships e.g. Knowle Green Estates</li> <li>ownership and contribution to the development of the purpose, direction and priorities, set out in the Corporate Plan.</li> <li>whether improvements in confidence, understanding and embeddedness of Council strategy, governance and finance is evident.</li> <li>whether collaboration and working relationships with officers across all areas of the Council are more productive and collaborative.</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvement in collaboration and a culture of working between Councillors and officers.</li> <li>Improvement in the quality of decision making.</li> <li>Improvement in the transparency of information on performance.</li> <li>Improvement in</li> </ul> |

| Assurance Approach          | Priority and workstream   | Focus for the assurance activity   | Outcome to test  |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|
|                             |   | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. whether information and option analysis required to make decisions supports Councillors understanding of requirements, risk and implications.</li> <li>6. whether financial information and reporting is sufficient to enable Councillors to understand the progress being made and any risks and challenges.</li> <li>7. whether the organisation, through training and development, is supporting Councillors to maximise understanding and personal contribution.</li> <li>8. whether resident confidence in the Council as reported to Councillors is improving.</li> </ol>  | accountability for performance.  |
| Independent Staff Survey    | <p><b>Strengthening and improving leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improving our collective leadership and culture</li> <li>▪ Leading with purpose and direction</li> <li>▪ Leading a successful transition to West Surrey</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving governance and assurance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improving a culture of learning</li> <li>▪ Improving Council and Committee effectiveness and decision-making practices</li> <li>▪ Creating an exemplary assurance and control framework</li> </ul> | <p>Assuring and testing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. whether Councillor and officer roles and accountabilities and requisite behaviours are clear and understood.</li> <li>2. whether collaboration and working with Councillors and across the different areas of the Council are improving.</li> <li>3. whether there is greater confidence in the direction and strategic purpose of the Council and clarity as to how this translates into team and personal purposes and objectives.</li> <li>4. whether there is greater understanding of individual officers' purpose and value in delivering the required outcomes.</li> <li>5. whether the organisation, through training and development, is supporting officers to maximise understanding and personal contribution and resilience.</li> <li>6. understanding of core governance processes, delegations and expectations of personal accountability.</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improvement in Councillor and officer confidence</li> <li>▪ Improvement in collaboration and a culture of working between Councillors and officers.</li> <li>▪ Improvement in accountability for performance</li> </ul> |
| Independent Resident Survey | <p><b>Strengthening and improving leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improving our collective leadership and culture</li> <li>▪ Leading with purpose and direction</li> <li>▪ Leading a successful transition to</li> </ul>  | <p>Assuring and testing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. whether the Council has a clear purpose and direction, and its priorities are clearly communicated.</li> <li>2. whether increased community engagement and openness to public scrutiny is evident.</li> </ol>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council.</li> <li>▪ Improvement in</li> </ul>   |

| Assurance Approach                         | Priority and workstream   | Focus for the assurance activity  | Outcome to test   |
|--|---|---|---|
|  | <p>West Surrey</p> <p><b>Improving governance and assurance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improving a culture of learning</li> <li>▪ Improving Council and Committee effectiveness and decision-making practices</li> <li>▪ Creating an exemplary assurance and control framework</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving our financial sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improving our stability through budgetary savings and maximising income</li> </ul>  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. whether the experience of engaging and contacting the Council for routine enquiries improves and is more responsive and consistent.</li> <li>4. whether communication and transparency of relevant and important information about the Council is made increasingly available.</li> </ol>   | <p>responsiveness to residents and Councillors</p>  |
| Independent Partner and Stakeholder Survey | <p><b>Strengthening and improving leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improving our collective leadership and culture</li> <li>▪ Leading with purpose and direction</li> <li>▪ Leading a successful transition to West Surrey</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving governance and assurance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improving a culture of learning</li> <li>▪ Improving Council and Committee effectiveness and decision-making practices</li> <li>▪ Creating an exemplary assurance and control framework</li> </ul> | <p>Assuring and testing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. whether commissioned service delivery partners are engaged and have increased understanding of the purpose, direction and priorities of the Council.</li> <li>2. whether roles and relationships of Council Officers and Service Providers are clearly understood.</li> <li>3. whether service plans provide medium term clarity into procured and commissioned services and engagement on plans is comprehensive.</li> <li>4. whether information on performance, outcomes and delivery is open and transparent.</li> <li>5. whether commissioned partners are supported to improve.</li> <li>6. whether officer and Councillor oversight and governance requirements are clear.</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council.</li> <li>▪ Improvement in value for money.</li> <li>▪ Improvement in accountability for performance</li> <li>▪ Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</li> </ul> |
| Centre for Governance and Scrutiny         | <p><b>Improving governance and assurance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improving a culture of learning</li> <li>▪ Improving Council and Committee effectiveness and decision-making practices</li> </ul>   | <p>Assuring and testing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. whether the Council has a capable governance / scrutiny environment, with the skills and knowledge required to deliver a high performing scrutiny environment within a committee system.</li> <li>2. whether information and options analysis support greater</li> </ol>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improvement in the quality of decision making.</li> <li>▪ Improvement in collaboration and a</li> </ul>  |

| Assurance Approach               | Priority and workstream   | Focus for the assurance activity  | Outcome to test   |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|
|                                  |   | <p>Councillor scrutiny pre-decision and post decision making.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. whether Councillors are trained and developed and have the knowledge and skills to be capable and effective.</li> <li>4. whether evidence of effective scrutiny leads to demonstrable improvements in decision making.</li> </ol>   | <p>culture of working between Councillors and Officers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</li> </ul>   |
| External and / or Internal Audit | <p><b>Strengthening and improving leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Leading with purpose and direction</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving governance and assurance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improving a culture of learning</li> <li>▪ Improving Council and Committee effectiveness and decision-making practices</li> <li>▪ Creating an exemplary assurance and control framework</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving our financial sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reducing our debt and improving our debt management arrangements</li> <li>▪ Improving our stability through budgetary savings and maximising income</li> <li>▪ Improving our financial management capability and practice</li> </ul> | <p>Assuring and testing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. whether the revised annual service planning approach is robust and balances requirements for a focus on strategy-led, with resource planning process and demonstrates robust internal governance.</li> <li>2. whether there are any significant risks to capability or capacity.</li> <li>3. whether the governance framework is aligned to best value duty and CIPFA requirements for good governance.</li> <li>4. whether governance and financial processes are robust and whether over time through testing, these are evident and embedded throughout teams in the Council and in any commissioned partners or arms-length bodies where the Council is the Accountable Body.</li> <li>5. Whether for arm's length companies and partnerships, risks and governance requirements are understood and built into the governance assurance framework e.g. managing conflicts of interest.</li> <li>6. whether officers and Councillors understand risk management requirements and responsibilities under the governance assurance arrangements.</li> <li>7. whether risk management through risk assurance is embedded in all teams and over time whether the culture of a risk is evident in decision making and analysis of information and options presented in all reports and financial and governance implications.</li> <li>8. whether divestments are properly valued and accounted for and</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Improvement in value for money.</li> <li>▪ Improvement in risk management through governance assurance.</li> <li>▪ Improvement in assurance and audit.</li> <li>▪ Improvement in the quality of decision making.</li> <li>▪ Improvement in collaboration and a culture of working between Councillors and Officers.</li> </ul> |

| Assurance Approach            | Priority and workstream   | Focus for the assurance activity  | Outcome to test   |
|-------------------------------|---|---|---|
|                               |   | <p>reported in accordance with financial and accounting requirements.</p> <p>9. whether the External / Internal Audit reports demonstrate increasing satisfaction with the impact of financial management.</p>  |   |
| External Expertise Validation | <p><b>Strengthening and improving leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving our collective leadership and culture</li> <li>Leading with purpose and direction</li> <li>Leading a successful transition to West Surrey</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving governance and assurance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving a culture of learning</li> <li>Improving Council and Committee effectiveness and decision-making practices</li> <li>Creating an exemplary assurance and control framework</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving our financial sustainability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improving our financial management capability and practice</li> </ul> | <p>Assuring and testing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>the embeddedness of the vision, purpose and priorities, set out in Council priorities, amongst democratic and executive leaders and throughout the Council.</li> <li>whether strategic planning is evidence-led and whether service priorities support the delivery of the Best Value duty and statutory responsibilities of the Council.</li> <li>whether new arrangements are driving improvements in corporate capability, effectiveness and efficiency.</li> <li>whether the external experience of engagement with the Council improves and is consistent.</li> <li>whether the improvement and change planning process is well-led politically and corporately and the desired outcomes are clearly understood.</li> <li>whether there is demonstrable evidence of cultural change and an openness to learning and improvement that tests progress against a peer high performing Council.</li> <li>whether the governance, control and reporting environment has the foundations to be a high performing Council.</li> <li>whether the financial leadership and financial management capability is sufficient and rigorous.</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvement in collaboration and a culture of working between Councillors and officers.</li> <li>Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council.</li> <li>Improvements in the transparency of performance information.</li> <li>Improvements in accountability for performance.</li> <li>Improvements in Councillor and officer confidence.</li> <li>Improvement in the quality of decision making.</li> <li>Improvement in policy and practice through an openness to challenge</li> </ul> |

**Table 9: Approach to assuring our improvement**