

**Thurrock Council**

**Enhanced Improvement and  
Recovery Plan**

**October 2023**

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## 1. Context

Concerns regarding the financial affairs and governance of Thurrock Council led the Secretary of State, utilising powers in section 15(5) and (6) of the 1999 Local Government Act, to intervene and issue Directions to the Council in September 2022. On 16 March 2023 intervention was extended and collectively set out the requirement for the Council:

- To address systemic weaknesses in the Authority's governance function, to secure improvements in transparency and formal decision making.
- To deliver financial sustainability by closing any short- or long-term budget gaps and reducing the Authority's exceptionally high level of external borrowing.
- To ensure compliance with all relevant rules and guidelines relating to the financial management of the Authority.
- To implement an improved officer structure and performance management framework for the Authority which provides sufficient resources to deliver the Authority's functions in an effective way.
- To agree as necessary any changes needed to the Authority's operating model and redesign of Council services to achieve value for money and financial sustainability.
- To ensure that a strategic and systematic approach to risk management, with appropriate scrutiny and governance of the decision-making processes and procedures, is adopted and embedded across the Authority.
- To address the culture of poor financial management and governance of the Authority's commercial portfolio.

The Council is required to prepare and agree an enhanced Improvement and Recovery Plan to the satisfaction of the Commissioners, within 6 months of the new Directions, ensuring this enhanced plan draws upon the existing Improvement and Recovery Plan produced in December 2022. The new Improvement and Recovery Plan must include:

- an action plan to achieve financial sustainability and to close any short-term and long-term budget gaps identified by the Council across the period of its medium-term financial strategy, including a robust multi-year savings plan (Direction A)
- an action plan to ensure the Council's capital, investment and treasury management strategies are sustainable and affordable (Direction B)
- a strict debt reduction plan, and an updated minimum revenue provision policy in line with all relevant rules and guidelines (Direction C)
- an action plan to ensure the Council is complying with all relevant rules and guidelines relating to the financial management of the Council (Direction D)
- a suitable scheme of delegations for financial decision-making (Direction E)
- an action plan to reconfigure the Authority's services commensurate with the Authority's available financial resources (Direction F)
- a plan to ensure that the Authority has personnel with sufficient skills, capabilities and capacity to deliver the Improvement and Recovery Plan, within a robust officer structure (Direction G)

- an action plan to strengthen the Authority's governance function, to secure improvements in transparency and formal decision making. This should include measures to improve the Authority's scrutiny function, including the taking and recording of formal decisions (Direction H).
- arrangements to secure the proper resourcing and functioning of the system of internal controls, including risk management and internal audit (Direction I).
- arrangements to provide assurance, to the satisfaction of Commissioners, on the exercise of your role of Accountable Body to the Thames Freeport (Direction J).

The Best Value Inspection Report published in June 2023 highlighted significant deficits in the Council's openness to scrutiny, challenge and learning:

*The Council's lack of openness and transparency has given rise to a culture of insularity and complacency. Internal challenge has been discouraged, and external criticism and challenge have been routinely dismissed. This has undermined the Council's ability to learn from others and from its own previous mistakes. It has placed the Council in a state of 'unconscious incompetence' and has undermined its ability to secure continuous improvement.*

The Improvement and Recovery Plan submitted in December 2022 was structured around three distinct phases: Diagnose, Stabilise, and Transform and Embed. In the period since the original Directions were issued, considerable action has been taken and reported to Commissioners and Members relating to the first two of these phases. This includes:

- the mobilisation of governance Boards to enable the Commissioners to have oversight of progress in responsiveness to the Directions;
- the appointment of a Managing Director Commissioner for 2 years to stabilise the Council and drive change;
- an Improvement and Intervention Communications Strategy approved;
- a Change Team established on an interim basis with a Director lead;
- an extensive internal employee engagement programme implemented;
- a root and branch look at all opportunities for savings to be made to expedite actions towards financial stability; and
- the commissioning of external expertise to develop a new operating model for the Council, including transforming service delivery.

The Council is now very much focused on the latter phase of transform and embed, which is reflected in this revised Plan. Actions have pivoted from short term activity aimed at stabilising the Council to the changes required that will help to build the confidence of staff, Commissioners, government, partners and residents that the Council has learnt, listened and accelerated a programme of change and transformation, supported by a plan to continually improve its local leadership role to better serve its communities.

This Plan has also been developed within the context of a live Section 114 Notice, which was issued by the Council on 19 December

2022, confirming that the Council would not have the resources to deliver its expenditure and would seek exceptional financial support from Government. The Section 114 Notice required the Council to put in place additional internal controls to prevent non-essential spend. These have been operating since the Notice was issued and will remain in place as the Council moves towards a more financially sustainable position, supported by external reviews of how they are operating.

In refocusing the Plan, actions have both been mapped across to the specific Directions and to the draft Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on Best Value Duty, where the requirement is that Local Authorities demonstrate a commitment to continually improve their leadership, governance, culture, use of resources, service delivery and partnerships and community engagement. Our ambition is to ensure the Plan provides assurance to Commissioners and Government that Thurrock Council has a deliverable plan to improve, be self-governing and fulfils its Best Value Duty in the shortest time possible. Commissioners will assess and monitor progress using the outcomes set out in this plan, which will inform their update reports and recommendations to Government to allow Ministers to make decisions about the intervention.

Through the Council's Corporate Plan there will be a continual and clear focus on improvement in leadership, culture, service delivery and the governance and financial management environment.

## 2. Establishing Thurrock's future direction

The loss of confidence in the Council, shared by government, partners, stakeholders, residents and local businesses, will have a long legacy that will inevitably extend beyond the actions of this and the previous Plan in addressing the immediate weaknesses of financial, governance and leadership control. The Council needs to re-establish its purpose, reconnect and re-commit to its residents and businesses.

The need to define and agree a new direction for Thurrock, and to re-establish the purpose and strategic direction of the Council and its officers, is the fundamental and essential building block for this Plan and the related Corporate Plan. This will require difficult decisions to be made. The Council's financial position necessitates that the ambitions of the Corporate Plan 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, elected members must reconcile how they balance their desire to create the conditions where the life chances of Thurrock's diverse communities are enhanced by sustainable and inclusive economic growth, where residents are supported to reach their educational and skills potential and to live in a clean and welcoming environment with restricted means to deliver this. We are committed to doing this and ensuring that our future direction and purpose is clear and can be sustained despite the inevitable national and local political and economic fluctuations ahead.

Navigating this position will be challenging, for both the Members and the officers in the Council. The constraint on resources is a long-term reality and consequently the focus on driving greater levels of efficiency and effectiveness, on continual improvement, and on accountability for performance will be an ever-present reality. This requires an uptick in the capability available to the Council:

- Members need to be willing to rise to the challenge of residents for visible, accountable and capable leaders to demonstrate appropriate behaviours and steer the improvement and recovery programme. Given the right information and skills, they can reconnect the Council with residents and communities to better understand the diversity of needs across Thurrock and 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. Year by year, month by month, week by week they must focus on their team's performance in mobilising service changes and delivering the cost savings they are required to make. They need to innovate to make the maximum impact from a diminishing resource base, collaborate in creating a more effective and efficient way of working and be accountable and responsible for their results.
- 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 every officer in the Council.

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

### 3. Our Priorities

#### 3.1 The revised structure

As directed in the Directions from the Secretary of State 16 March 2023, this enhanced Improvement and Recovery Plan moves on from the previous plan submitted in December 2022. This alignment is illustrated in table 1 below:

| Previous IRP Themes         | Enhanced IRP Priorities                          | Corporate Plan (in development) |
|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------------|
| Financial Sustainability    | <b>Improving financial sustainability</b>        |                                 |
| Governance and Scrutiny     | <b>Improving governance and controls</b>         |                                 |
| Strategic Direction         | <b>Improving leadership to accelerate change</b> |                                 |
| Leadership and Culture      |  |                                 |
| Place Leadership and Growth |  | Place Leadership and Growth     |

Table 1: Aligning previous plan, enhanced plan and the Corporate Plan

The change in the number of priorities, from 5 to 3, has been made in recognition of the progress made and the transition from the ‘diagnose and stabilise’ phase to the ‘transform and embed’ phase, outlined in the previous plan. The design of a future direction for Thurrock and a new operating model for the Council, inextricably links leadership, culture and strategic direction into a single priority. The operating model also sets out a new approach to service delivery, embracing the concept of an ‘enabling Council’ with a locality-based approach, which will form the basis of the Corporate Plan. The Corporate Plan, and other Council strategies and plans, will detail the service outcomes and impacts for Place Leadership and Growth alongside the other service delivery areas including Adults and Children’s Services and the enabling corporate functions.

The new priorities whilst distinct themes, with clear outcomes, are inextricably linked and interdependent. All are equally essential to realise the improvement required.



Sections 4-6 of this Plan set out the detail for each of the priorities. Each priority is divided into a number of workstreams that interlink and collectively demonstrate the improvement journey the Council is on. Against each workstream the plan sets out the desired objectives, 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, however, is used as this aids performance management and tracking and supports a revised approach to reporting the impact and progress being made.

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

In addition to demonstrating delivery of the requirements of the Directions, through our priorities and workstreams we have developed a framework of outcomes. These outcomes respond to engagement with Members in developing this Plan and the fundamental concerns raised in the Best Value Inspection Report namely of a Council that demonstrated:

- a lack of community focus and local democracy,
- weak political and executive leadership and a culture of poor relationships between Members 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 weak at managing risks,



- a financially unsustainable and unviable Council

The outcomes are defined to measure the improvement that we are making. Delivering our outcomes framework will accelerate a process of addressing the challenges outlined in the Best Value Inspection Report, and are an active demonstration that as a Council, we are committed to ensuring that learning and improving is fixed as part of our corporate DNA. We will develop the capabilities and skills of our Members 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.

|   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Improvement in the quality of decision making</b>                                  | <b>Improvement in value for money</b>                    | <b>Improvement in corporate capability</b>                         | <b>Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise</b> |
| <b>Improvement in collaboration between officers and between Members and officers</b> | <b>Improvement in responsiveness to poor performance</b> | <b>Improvement in risk management</b>                              | <b>Improvement in assurance and audit</b>                                       |
| <b>Improvement in the transparency of performance information</b>                     | <b>Improvement in Member and officer confidence</b>      | <b>Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council</b> | <b>Improvement in responsiveness to the public</b>                              |

Table 2: Outcome Framework

An evaluation framework (section 7) has been produced based on considering engagement with Members on what improvement would look and feel like, along with best practice guidance and input from Commissioners. It will provide for quantitative and qualitative assessment of the Council’s improvement and recovery. This allows for the fact that while some aspects are measurable (such as having the correct policies in place and measuring key performance indicators) Members’ and Commissioners’ judgement on how well the Council has improved is a vital measure for continuous improvement and (in the case of Commissioners’ judgement) powers being handed back to the Council.

Achieving our outcomes will be continually tested by the Commissioners, who will receive regular and detailed reporting against the desired outcomes, and through public reports to Members through Overview and Scrutiny, Cabinet and Full Council. We will also ensure through independent testing and challenge that our progress and performance is assured. An outline plan for this is in sections 7 and 8.

## 4. Priority: Improving leadership to accelerate change

**Lead:** Leader of the Council and Assistant Chief Executive

### 4.1. What we are seeking to achieve

As a result of delivering this priority we will have a clear purpose and strategic direction for our Council. 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 and is responsive to our partners and communities. We will be transparent, accountable and will model positive leadership behaviours externally with partners and within the Council.

This priority will be delivered through two interlinked workstreams:

1. Leading with purpose and direction
2. Building our corporate capability

An integral part of leading with purpose and building our capability is the desire for a commitment to continually improve, and an openness to learning. This work has started and will form a core behaviour running through our Corporate Plan.

As a result of these workstreams, we will demonstrate:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Leading with purpose and direction</b> | We have a published Corporate Plan and a revised operating model for service delivery, that is developed in partnership by Members and officers. This workstream will refocus our efforts and actions on being exemplary and visible place leaders for the communities we serve.   |
| <b>Building our corporate capability</b>  | We have a new operating model that positions the Council as enabling the most effective and efficient delivery of public services within the resources available. We will redesign our organisation and have a corporate structure agreed and mobilised that has the right people in the right jobs to make a significant personal and corporate contribution to change. |

## 4.2. Our Priority plan in detail

| Workstream                         | Workstream Objective   | Outcome  | Output   | Assuring our improvement   |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Leading with purpose and direction | A long-term <b>purpose and direction for the Council</b> is developed and agreed, that reaffirms the role of the Council as a place leader and establishes how through strong and accountable leadership the Council will serve and engage with its partners and communities, whilst recognising the constraints the Council is operating under. | <p><b>Improvement in collaboration between officers and between Members and officers</b> demonstrated through collectively agreeing the purpose and direction of the Council.</p> <p><b>Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council</b>, as Members provide visible leadership through a clearly articulated, achievable and prioritised direction for the Council that puts place and local people at its centre.</p> | A statement produced supported by agreed corporate values, clearly sets out the purpose and direction for the Council.   | <p>LGA Peer Review</p> <p>Independent staff survey</p> <p>Independent public survey</p> <p>Independent partner and stakeholder surveys</p> <p>Independent Members Survey</p> |
|                                    | Develop a medium-term <b>Corporate Plan</b> that continues the change and improvement programme of the Council. Ensure the plan is evidence led and responsive to local needs, and that  | <p><b>Improvement in collaboration between officers and between Members and Officers</b> to develop and agree the service and place priorities that support the vision and delivery of the best value duty</p>   | <p>Corporate Plan produced in draft by January 2024, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium-term vision statement</li> <li>• Service delivery priorities</li> <li>• Resourcing arrangements</li> </ul> | <p>LGA Peer Review</p> <p>Independent Members Survey</p>   |

| Workstream | Workstream Objective  | Outcome  | Output  | Assuring our improvement             |
|------------|---|--|---|--------------------------------------|
|            | <p>strategic priorities align with the Council's financial strategy and current and future delivery arrangements.</p> <p>Ensure the plan includes actions to embed cultural change and foster positive behaviours. Particularly ensuring the organisation's performance is measurable and transparent and that officers are accountable for delivery, within the parameters of their delegations.</p> | <p>and statutory responsibilities of the Council.</p> <p><b>Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council</b> from residents, businesses, and partners as a result of clarity of vision, purpose and performance.</p> <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise</b> but utilising experience and knowledge from professional networks.</p> <p><b>Improvements in the transparency of performance information</b>, coupled with a clear process of political and officer accountability.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Culture, values and behaviours</li> <li>● Measures of success</li> <li>● Performance Management and Assurance Framework (PMAF)</li> <li>● Officer accountabilities</li> <li>● Political governance accountabilities</li> </ul> |                                      |
|            | <p>Develop and implement a new approach to strategy-led business planning that supports</p>   | <p><b>Improvement in collaboration between officers and between Members and officers</b></p>   | <p>Strategy-led Business Planning Process developed with a plan to implement 2025/26</p>  | <p>Internal or Independent Audit</p> |

| Workstream                                      | Workstream Objective  | Outcome   | Output  | Assuring our improvement  |
|---|---|---|---|---|
|   | <p>the delivery of the priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan, accelerates adoption and effectiveness of the new operating model, and delivers the best possible service within available resources.<br/><b>(Direction F)</b></p>  | <p>and in the responsiveness of the annual business planning process to Community needs and the deliverability of plans within the constraints the Council faces.</p> <p><b>Improvements in value for money and effectiveness</b> as year on year the business planning process delivers improved outcomes for the resources available.</p> |   |   |
| <p><b>Building our corporate capability</b></p> | <p>Develop, consult and approve a <b>new operating model</b> for the Council setting out a longer-term plan for internal management and service delivery arrangements. Ensuring the new operating model includes a strong locality-based focus, to enable services to be more effective and responsive to</p> | <p><b>Improvement in value for money</b> through delivery of core services and functions at a lower cost and automating all rules-based activity, meeting the requirements for best value.</p> <p><b>Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council</b> through</p>  | <p>New operating model agreed with Members and Commissioners.</p> <p>Detailed plan to operationalise and implement the operating model developed.</p> <p>Detailed plan to operationalise the new corporate Customer Centre.</p> | <p>Independent development of operating model options, and priorities, drawing on benchmarks from other high performing authorities</p> <p>LGA Peer Review.</p> <p>Independent public survey and / or Mystery Shopper</p> |

| Workstream | Workstream Objective  | Outcome   | Output   | Assuring our improvement  |
|------------|---|---|--|---|
|            | <p>communities.</p> <p><b>(Direction F)</b></p>   | <p>consistency and reliability of the engagement experience with the Council.</p> <p><b>Improvements in responsiveness to the public</b> through a corporate contact system and locality-based services which builds greater awareness of community issues and concerns in Thurrock.</p>  |  | <p>Independent partner and stakeholder survey</p>   |
|            | <p><b>Redesign and restructure the Council</b> to meet the principles and design of the new operating model, including implementing new ways of working and recruiting and developing the skills and capabilities required to be effective.</p> <p><b>(Direction G)</b></p> | <p><b>Improvement in value for money</b> as the organisation redesign meets the requirement to make sustainable efficiency savings.</p> <p><b>Improvements in corporate capability</b> leading to year on year increases in internal and external satisfaction with the Council.</p> <p><b>Improvements in responsiveness to the public</b> through a</p> | <p>Revised corporate design and structure set out and agreed.</p> <p>Consultation and mobilisation plan agreed and implemented.</p> <p>Revised approach to personal development plans, including capability and training developed and a plan to implement agreed.</p> <p>The development, oversight and operation</p> | <p>LGA Peer Review</p> <p>Internal and / or Independent Audit</p> <p>Independent staff survey</p> <p>Independent public satisfaction survey</p> |

| Workstream | Workstream Objective  | Outcome   | Output  | Assuring our improvement  |
|------------|---|---|---|---|
|            |   | <p>consistent engagement approach and an increased locality focus.</p> <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise</b> by incorporating involvement in professional networks into objective setting.</p>   | <p>of an enhanced performance management for officers.</p>  |   |
|            | <p><b>Stand-up a Programme and Project Management Office</b> to work across the whole organisation to report on benefits and outcomes delivered and to develop information and insight that enable Commissioners, Members and the officers to actively engage in the scrutiny of performance, consider emerging risks and respond with agility.</p> <p>The scope of the Programme and Project Management Office is to</p> | <p><b>Improvement in the transparency of performance information</b> for Members, commissioners and residents, supporting a culture of reflect, review and redress demonstrated in personal, team and corporate objectives, and leading to improved scrutiny of performance.</p> <p><b>Improvement in responsiveness to poor performance</b> and risk through assessing and responding to</p> | <p>Revised suite of progress / performance reporting for Commissioners, Members and SLT.</p> <p>Revised suite of public and partner reports and communications.</p> <p>Practices, policies and capability to deliver these functions for the capital programme, with an emphasis on benefits realisation and post-completion reviews to shared lessons-learned.</p> | <p>LGA Peer Review</p> <p>Independent Partner and stakeholder survey</p> <p>Independent Public Survey</p> <p>Independent Members Survey</p> |

| Workstream | Workstream Objective  | Outcome  | Output | Assuring our improvement |
|------------|---|--|--------|--------------------------|
|            | <p>cover this plan, the corporate plan and the wider change and capital programmes.</p> | <p>emerging trends and clear lines of accountability for corrective actions.</p> <p><b>Improvement in corporate capability</b> through applying programme and project management principles across all relevant services.</p> <p><b>Improvement in the transparency of performance information</b> by conducting reviews and sharing the lessons learned from projects, especially within the capital programme.</p> |        |                          |

Table 3: Priority - Improving leadership to accelerate change



## 5. Priority: Improving governance and controls

**Lead:** Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Transformational Change, Communications and Governance and Executive Director Corporate Services

### 5.1. What we are seeking to achieve

As a result of delivering this priority we will establish the foundations for governance excellence and corporate accountability. Through this priority our Members and officers will collaborate to review, refresh and co-create our governing policies, ensuring that we are fully compliant with all external guidelines and good practice and that our policies are enacted through clearly articulated procedures. In all we do we will demonstrate exemplary governance, control and risk management, matched with a commitment to a corporate culture, shared by Members and officers, that places a high value on repositioning Thurrock 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 two interlinked workstreams:

1. Establishing the foundations for governance excellence
2. Creating an exemplary control environment

As a result of these workstreams, we will demonstrate:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Establishing the foundations for governance excellence</b> | We have in place the policies and practice required to demonstrate strong governance. We will ensure that our policies are compliant and provide a solid foundation for the efficient and effective delivery of corporate and service priorities.  |
| <b>Creating an exemplary control environment</b>              | We have in place processes, protocols and a culture of accountability, that positions the Council as having a highly effective control environment. Members and Senior Leaders will collaborate to develop and implement an approach to the management of risk, including ensuring officers are empowered to deliver corporate objectives within a clearly articulated scheme of delegation. Through our control environment we will be accountable and transparent internally and externally for our actions. |

## 5.2. Our Priority plan in detail

| Workstream  | Workstream Objective   | Outcome  | Output   | Assuring our improvement   |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Establishing the foundations for governance excellence</b> | <p>Review and refresh all of our <b>governing policies</b>, ensuring our policies build the foundations for an exemplary governed Council, demonstrating proper democratic accountability and transparency to our residents and businesses, supported by an openness to public scrutiny and audit of activities.</p> <p><b>(Direction E)</b></p> | <p><b>Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council</b> as a result of improved public engagement, scrutiny and openness to challenge.</p> <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise</b> to build the connections that enable us to learn and improve.</p>                      | <p>Revised suite of policy documents and regulations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● constitution</li> <li>● financial regulations</li> <li>● scheme of delegations</li> <li>● ethics framework</li> </ul> <p>Policy documents reviewed and approved via the Committees of the Council.</p> | <p>LGA Peer Review</p> <p>External Audit and / or Independent auditing</p> |
|   | <p>Build a <b>capable and effective scrutiny function</b>, to ensure greater levels of openness, accountability and challenge to support learning and improvements in the effective and efficient delivery of public services.</p>   | <p><b>Improvement in the quality of decision making</b> as a result of openness to scrutiny pre and post decision and independent scrutiny alongside Member-led scrutiny.</p> <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise</b> to build the connections that enable us to learn and improve.</p> | <p>Statutory Scrutiny Officer and other officers in post.</p> <p>Scrutiny plan developed with and agreed by Members.</p>   | <p>Scrutiny Improvement Review (Centre for Governance and Scrutiny)</p>    |

| Workstream  | Workstream Objective  | Outcome  | Output   | Assuring our improvement   |
|---|---|--|--|--|
|   | <p>Undertake a <b>governance review for all external companies or partnership bodies</b> that the Council has an interest in, including the Accountable Body role for Thames Freeport, ensuring their governance framework is robust and their existence is regularly and independently reviewed.</p> <p>Individuals (Members and officers) representing the Council have the appropriate experience, skills and expertise to effectively perform their role.</p> <p><b>(Direction J)</b></p> | <p><b>Improvement in the quality of decision making</b> through proper Member oversight of service delivery and / or investments.</p> <p><b>Improvement in risk management</b> and awareness, through the scrutiny activity of capable officers.</p> <p><b>Improvement in assurance and audit</b> through regular review of external bodies with transparency of information feeding Council governance oversight.</p> | <p>Review of and report on constitutional, decision making, risk and reporting arrangements.</p> <p>Transparency in representation on Boards with a training and development plan developed and implemented to address any capability issues and ensure clarity in understanding of the role and responsibilities.</p> | <p>External Audit and / or independent auditing</p> <p>Independent Member Survey</p> |
| <p><b>Creating an exemplary control environment</b></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 Members,</p>   | <p><b>Improvement in risk management</b> and the awareness of risk, evident in decision papers, decision making, options analysis and delivery plans.</p> <p><b>Improvement in the quality of decision making</b> due to</p>   | <p>Risk Management Framework developed, meeting the HMG Orange Book best practice, agreed and implemented, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Risk Policy</li> <li>● Risk Strategy</li> <li>● Risk Management</li> </ul>  | <p>External and Internal Audit Risk Review</p> <p>Independent Advisor Reports</p>    |

| Workstream | Workstream Objective   | Outcome   | Output  | Assuring our improvement                             |
|------------|--|---|---|--|
|            | officers and Auditors.   | commissioning, if required, specialist financial, commercial and legal expertise for complex programmes or divestments matched with a culture of openness and accountability for escalating risks and issues.   | Action Plans (RMAP) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Risk monitoring and reporting</li> </ul>   |  |
|            | 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><b>Improvement in the quality of decision making</b> as a result of openness to audit and governance challenges.</p> <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise</b> including Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO).</p> <p><b>Improvement in assurance and audit</b> through implementation of rigour in internal processes.</p> | <p>Head of Assurance objectives demonstrate internal rigour and independence.</p> <p>Committee Effectiveness Survey on Internal Audit function.</p> | Independent and External Audit                       |
|            | Proportionate <b>processes that maximise transparency and accountability</b> are   | <b>Improvement in Member and officer confidence</b> and understanding of governance requirements through  | Revised suite of governance procedures scoped and developed.  | Independent and External Audit<br>Independent Member |

| Workstream | Workstream Objective  | Outcome   | Output   | Assuring our improvement  |
|------------|---|---|--|---|
|            | <p>developed, ensuring compliance with the Nolan Principles and relevant Codes of Conduct. Through leadership and training there is a commitment to a culture of good governance demonstrated throughout the organisation.</p> <p><b>(Direction H, I)</b></p> | <p>development and mentoring, resulting in a more capable organisation with appropriate knowledge, experience and skills.</p> <p><b>Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council</b> as a well-run and managed organisation, with a stronger focus on local democracy.</p> <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise</b> to build the connections that enable us to improve governance practice.</p> <p><b>Improvement in assurance and audit</b> through rigour in compliance testing.</p> | <p>Member Code of Conduct</p> <p>Member Development and Mentoring Programme</p> <p>Officer Code of Conduct</p> <p>HR policies and practice</p> | <p>Survey</p> <p>Annual Governance Statement articulates actions to further improve.</p> <p>Independent staff survey.</p> |

Table 4: Priority - Improving governance and controls

## 6. Priority: Improving our financial sustainability

**Lead:** Cabinet Member for Finance, Human Resources and Payroll and Chief Finance Officer

### 6.1. What we are seeking to achieve

As a result of delivering this priority we will develop and implement a comprehensive financial programme that ensures the Council designs, implements and delivers major financial changes to secure as soon as possible financial sustainability. Through this priority we will demonstrate exemplary financial leadership and will operate to the highest standards of financial management and control, ensuring that the Council is able to function and secures the essential outcomes for its residents, businesses and communities.

This priority will be delivered through three interlinked workstreams:

1. Divestment of the Council's investments
2. Improving our stability through budgetary savings and maximisation of income
3. Improving our financial management capability and practice

As a result of these workstreams, we will demonstrate:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Divestment of the Council's investments</b>                                      | We have significantly reduced the debt of the Council and reduced the budget financing debt charges to secure a more stable financial position in the longer term to mitigate future risks.   |
| <b>Improving our stability through budgetary savings and maximisation of income</b> | We have implemented a range of actions to demonstrate significant savings, reductions in the capital programme, generation of capital receipts - all of which will lead to the significant reduction in general fund borrowing – as well as maximisation of income to pay down a proportion of our debt and ensure that service and programme spending delivers the highest level of service and outcomes within the constrained resources available. Spending controls as a result of the Section 114 notice have also supported in delivering this objective. |
| <b>Improving our financial management capability and practice</b>                   | 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, risk management and compliance with statutory requirements and accounting standards. That there is strong and appropriate financial capability for leaders, budget holders and members enabling them to fulfil their own fiduciary duties and engage meaningfully in scrutiny and challenge.   |

## 6.2. Our Priority Plan in detail

| Workstream  | Workstream Objective  | Outcome   | Output   | Assuring our improvement   |
|---|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Divestment of the Council's investments</b>                                      | <p><b>Dispose of investments</b> to the fullest extent possible to pay down debt.</p> <p>Ensure that the governance, project management, and risk identification and management and budgetary control is robustly undertaken.</p> <p><b>(Direction A, C)</b></p>  | <p><b>Improvement in value for money</b> as Council debt reduced by £1.015bn and the percentage of revenue budget that finances debt charges is reduced.</p> <p><b>Improvement in risk management</b> and interest and investment risks negated.</p>  | <p>Divestment options and plan in place and reported to Commissioners, Cabinet and DLUHC.</p> <p>Actions to divestment of up to 93% of Council debt is underway by 31/03/24.</p>   | <p>Independent Advisor reports</p> <p>External Audit Reports</p>   |
| <b>Improving our stability through budgetary savings and maximisation of income</b> | <p>Through implementing a radical savings programme, alongside a programme to maximise income over each of the next five years and beyond, the Council's budget moves towards <b>achieving a balanced position</b>. 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>Improvement in value for money</b> as savings of £18.2m are made from the revenue budget for next 2 years (2024/25 and 2025/26) and further savings of c.£13.65m are made for each of the following 3 years (2026/27, 2027/28 and 2028/29).</p> <p><b>Improvement in value for money</b> as Council maximises income from fees and charges.</p> | <p>Two-year plan produced and agreed by Commissioners and Cabinet, leading to the production of a balanced deliverable budget for 2024/25.</p> <p>Report on any further plans to implement improvements whilst maintaining service standards.</p> <p>Business cases for income maximisation through fees and</p> | <p>Independent review of finances informing the agreed plan.</p> <p>Public and Commissioner scrutiny of 2024/25 budget</p> <p>External Audit of 2024/25 Accounts</p> |

| Workstream | Workstream Objective  | Outcome  | Output  | Assuring our improvement   |
|------------|---|--|---|--|
|            | To support a dialogue to commence between Thurrock's leadership and DLUHC on the longer-term financial sustainability of the Council.<br><b>(Direction A, C)</b>  |  | charges developed and agreed.   |  |
|            | Detailed plan to generate <b>capital receipts</b> , in order 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 agreed.<br><b>(Direction A, C)</b>   | <b>Improvement in value for money</b> as Council debt is reduced by £150m over five years subject to review (£42m sold by 31/03/24, c.£60m sold by 31/03/25) and the percentage of revenue budget that finances debt charges is reduced. | Review of assets and plan developed and agreed.<br><br>Implementation of the sales programme commenced and monitored.   | Independent Advisor Reports  |
|            | Develop a Capital Programme which leads to General Fund borrowing which is significantly smaller and aligned to the Corporate Plan. Reducing our reliance on borrowing will further reduce our overall debt and debt financing charges.<br><b>(Direction B)</b> | <b>Improvement in value for money</b> as Council debt is reduced and the percentage of revenue budget that finances debt charges is reduced.   | Produce a General Fund capital programme that has no prudential borrowing for 2024/25.<br><br>Produce a much-reduced Housing Revenue Account capital programme. | Public and Commissioner scrutiny of 2024/25 budget<br><br>External Audit of 2024/25 Accounts |



| Workstream   | Workstream Objective   | Outcome   | Output   | Assuring our improvement   |
|--|--|---|--|--|
| <p><b>Improving our financial management capability and practice</b></p> | <p>We will <b>demonstrate exemplary corporate financial leadership</b> that includes improving the quality and accuracy of information we hold and use including financial modelling, budgeting and accounting processes matched by implementing an effective internal control environment to safeguard the use of resources and manage risk.</p> <p><b>(Direction B, D)</b></p> | <p><b>Improvement in collaboration between officers and between Members and officers</b> and satisfaction in the quality and rigour of analysis and reporting.</p> <p><b>Improvement in risk management</b> through 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><b>Improvement in value for money</b> through improved quality of information ensuring that the Minimum Revenue Provision is properly calculated and budgeted for, that our Dedicated Schools Grant is balanced by 31/02/24 and that we will secure a reduced Housing Revenue Account business plan by 01/03/24.</p> | <p>Financial modelling review</p> <p>Budget process review</p> <p>Financial plan that accurately reflects Minimum Revenue Provision.</p> <p>Treasury Management Policy developed and agreed.</p> <p>Minimum Revenue Provision calculated and budgeted for, and assumptions agreed.</p> <p>A plan for balancing Dedicated Schools Grant developed, agreed and implemented.</p> <p>A reduced Housing Revenue Account business plan is developed by 01/03/24.</p> | <p>LGA Peer Review</p> <p>Independent survey of Members, particularly Audit Committee Members</p> <p>External Auditor report</p> <p>Professional Local Authority Financial Network</p> |

| Workstream | Workstream Objective  | Outcome  | Output  | Assuring our improvement   |
|------------|---|--|---|--|
|            | <p>We will <b>redesign and restructure the Council's financial 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>We will work corporately and with our Service and Programme Delivery teams to ensure leaders, budget holders and Members has the appropriate capability and accountability to implement financial management improvements and improve accountability for financial effectiveness.</p> <p><b>(Direction D)</b></p> | <p><b>Improvements in corporate capability</b> deploying rigorous business partnering approaches, to ensure delivery of the financial savings and income, as well as leaders, budget holders and Members being equipped to fulfil their responsibilities.</p> <p><b>Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise</b> to build the connections that enable us to learn and improve and enable our Peers and Professionals to challenge our practice.</p> <p><b>Improvement in assurance and audit</b> as a result of improved capability and challenge.</p> | <p>Finance services resource plan developed and agreed.</p> <p>Plan for leadership and technical assessment of existing and new staff implemented.</p> <p>Financial services restructure implemented.</p> | <p>LGA Peer Review</p> <p>Professional Local Authority Financial Network</p> |

Table 5: Priority - Improving financial stability

## 7. Measuring and assuring our improvement

Through this Improvement and Recovery Plan, the cultural weaknesses will be reversed and our Members, executive leaders and officers will demonstrate a commitment to learning and continually improving through challenge, scrutiny and accountability.

This evaluation framework will provide for quantitative and qualitative assessment of the Council's improvement and recovery. This allows for the fact that while some aspects are measurable (such as having the correct policies in place and measuring key performance indicators) Members and Commissioner judgement on how well the Council has improved is a vital measure for continuous improvement and (in the case of Commissioners' judgement) powers being handed back to the Council.

|   |
|---|
| <b>Improvement in the quality of decision making</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decisions presented align to direction, values and objectives.</li><li>• Greater analysis of options and alternatives reviewed.</li><li>• Options are supported by clear risk analysis.</li><li>• Options are internally scrutinised to assess impact on resourcing.</li><li>• Pre-and post-Scrutiny evaluating decision making process and consideration of options.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Improvement in value for money</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Business plans are in place for savings opportunities and for the new operating model implementation.</li><li>• The revised business planning process clearly matches impact and outcomes to resource availability.</li><li>• Audit reports test improvements in value and costs.</li><li>• Resource plans are developed and transparent against activity and cost.</li><li>• Outputs and outcomes are consistently delivered for lower cost.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Improvement in corporate capability</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The development, oversight and operation of an enhanced performance management for officers.</li><li>• Job profiles include clarity about skills, behaviours and performance expectations alongside the technical elements required.</li><li>• Recruitment and selection strategies test the capabilities needed, through use of alternatives to just interview, probation targets and standards are set and managers actively manage.</li><li>• 360-degree appraisals are used where appropriate.</li><li>• 100% of Personal Development Reviews are completed and clear improvement and development plans including self-reflective reviews are undertaken, managed and followed up on.</li></ul> |

- Councillors are supported to participate in a capability assessment, using the Councillor Charter.
- Councillors have independent support to review / appraise the Chief Executive.

### **Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise**

- Support, networking and alignment with professional bodies as a means of shaping policy and practice is encouraged and benefits to individuals and the teams reviewed as part of the Personal Development Review process.
- Professional body engagement is part of the stakeholder engagement plan, with relationships prioritised by named lead officers.

### **Improvement in collaboration between officers and between Members and officers**

- Corporate Plan sets out clear areas for formalised corporate collaboration.
- Improved communications between officers and Members.
- An approach is implemented for matrix/collaboration teams to operate ensuring clarity of purpose and role.
- A conflict resolution approach is developed and implemented for any reported areas where there are conflicting roles, or perspectives, acting as a detriment to effective collaboration.
- Meaningful engagement in the development of the new direction and purpose for the Council.
- Meaningful involvement at different levels in the development of the Corporate Plan.
- Centralised role to improve the flow of information between the officers and Councillors.
- Locality teams develop protocols for closer engagement with local Ward Councillors to update and engage them.
- Named roles assigned responsibilities for working with Audit, Scrutiny and Councillors on external boards.
- Clear development of Member / Officer protocol and review processes.

### **Improvement in responsiveness to poor performance**

- Performance improvement and capability deficit processes for officers are developed, well understood, and monitored.
- Performance management and disciplinary policies and processes are redefined and managers and officers aware of compliance requirements and target dates for action planning improvement.
- Where team performance is poor, deep dives, pulse surveys and independent expertise are implemented to identify the root causes and plan for improvement.
- Through governance arrangements and improved reporting performance issues are escalated and a clear action plan agreed.

### **Improvement in risk management**

- A revised risk policy, strategy, management action plan and reporting tool is developed and reviewed in detail with Audit Committee Members
- Risk Champions trained across the organisation.
- Audit sets out improvements and these feed into a governance action plan.

- Risk Management has a clear escalation route, and this is actively managed and tested in every team.
- Independent expertise is procured to support development and review and to give assurance to Councillors and Commissioners.

### **Improvement in assurance and audit**

- Annual governance review is comprehensive, built on evidence from Members, Leadership, Commissioners and engaging appropriately with partners and stakeholders.
- Annual governance review is supported by a well-documented governance improvement plan for 24/25 and subsequent years.
- Governance Improvement Plan is actively monitored by senior leadership and the relevant Council Committees.
- 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.

### **Improvement in the transparency of performance information**

- Performance indicators for publishing data to relevant Boards are established and reviewed.
- Data is reviewed for completeness and corrective action taken if performance data is incomplete.
- Where performance information highlights a risk or issue materialising, there is additional communication if required to brief on this.

### **Improvement in Member and officer confidence**

- Mutual trust and confidence between Members and officers.
- Belief that there has been a meaningful and sustained change in the approach to openness and transparency.
- Member forums and meetings are conducted in a respectful way.
- Members are engaged to set the needs for their annual training and development and receive training and development to support their role.
- Member attendance and participation is monitored, and political groups engaged in review of quality of development and engagement.
- Members with specific roles on scrutiny and / or audit or other committees are given specific training and development to support them to succeed.
- A member / officer protocol is drawn up, so Members know who to approach with questions or queries.
- Use of independents in Committees, as advisors or mentors to improve capability if required.
- Review of Members against the Councillor Charter to identify other on-going needs.
- Members provided with proportionate information on issues relating to the general business of the Council, the Improvement and Recovery Plan and specifically to matters relating to their wards to improve their knowledge and capability to support the improvement required in public confidence.
- Members and officers demonstrate collaborate and respectful behaviours to develop trust and confidence within each group and between them.
- 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 of 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 public and partner confidence in the Council**

- Residents have access to more information, support and customer service as a result of implementing the new operating model, eg a new corporate contact centre, locality teams etc.
- A resident communication plan is developed and supported.
- Improvements in local democracy arrangements are made, engaging resident forums.
- Service changes are supported by meaningful equalities impact assessments to identify risks and issues to inform decision making.
- Councillors are supported to offer well run local surgeries, case work and respond to queries more effectively.
- Partners and stakeholders have access to more information, and customer service because of implementing the new operating model, and the specialisation of functions.
- Business planning options place a requirement to engage with relevant partners and stakeholders and to capture any insights and report on any risks.
- Strategic and locally significant partners are formally recognised as part of the stakeholder engagement plan and invited to be part of regular communications and engagement.

#### **Improvement in responsiveness to the public**

- Protocols and metrics for public responsiveness are agreed and implemented as part of the new Contact Centre.
- Metrics are tracked.
- Complaints are monitored corporately and at Standards and Audit Committee for trends or teams and corrective actions plans are developed and implemented.
- Correlation with compliments is monitored and reviewed.
- Locality teams (as part of new operating model) identify increased opportunities for Member and officer community engagement and monitor take up and track queries.

Table 6: Measuring our improvement

We will seek to assure the Government, through our Commissioners, our local partners and stakeholders, our residents and businesses, and our employees of the improvements we are making through openness to external review. We will seek independent validation and testing of the progress we are making to demonstrate our effectiveness in improving and becoming the high performing Council the residents of Thurrock deserve.

Our approach to independent assurance of progress towards delivering the improvements and outcomes we have set for ourselves is detailed in the table 7 below.

| Assurance Approach        | Priority and workstream  | Focus for the assurance activity   | Outcome to test   |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|
| Commissioner Review       | ALL  | Assuring and testing: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. confidence that the political leadership of Thurrock is capable, aware of their role, and committed to working collaboratively to discharge their responsibilities.</li> <li>2. 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>3. 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.</li> </ol>                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All outcomes</li> </ul>  |
| Independent Member Survey | <b>Improving leadership to accelerate change</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leading with purpose and direction</li> <li>• Building our corporate capability</li> </ul> <b>Improving governance and control</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing the foundations for governance excellence</li> <li>• Creating an exemplary control</li> </ul> | Assuring and testing: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. whether Member and officer roles and accountabilities and requisite behaviours are clear and understood, specifically for any additional Member responsibilities on Scrutiny, Audit or arms-length bodies or partnerships e.g. Thames Freeport.</li> <li>2. ownership and contribution to the development of the purpose, direction and priorities, set out in the Corporate Plan.</li> <li>3. whether improvements in confidence, understanding and embeddedness of Council strategy, governance and finance is evident.</li> <li>4. whether collaboration and working relationships</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement in collaboration between officers and between Members 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 responsiveness to</li> </ul> |

| Assurance Approach       | Priority and workstream  | Focus for the assurance activity  | Outcome to test   |
|--------------------------|--|---|---|
|                          | environment  | <p>with officers across all areas of the Council are more productive and collaborative.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. whether information and option analysis required to make decisions supports member understanding of requirements, risk and implications.</li> <li>6. whether financial information and reporting is sufficient to enable Members to understand the progress being made and any risks and challenges.</li> <li>7. whether the organisation, through training and development, is supporting Members to maximise understanding and personal contribution.</li> <li>8. whether resident confidence in the Council as reported to Members is improving.</li> </ol>  | poor performance.   |
| Independent Staff Survey | <p><b>Improving leadership to accelerate change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leading with purpose and direction</li> <li>• Building our corporate capability</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving governance and control</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishing the foundations for governance excellence</li> <li>• Creating an exemplary control environment</li> </ul> | <p>Assuring and testing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. whether Member and officer roles and accountabilities and requisite behaviours are clear and understood.</li> <li>2. whether collaboration and working with Members 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</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvement in Member and officer confidence</li> <li>• Improvement in collaboration between officers and between Members and officers</li> <li>• Improvement in responsiveness to poor performance</li> </ul> |



| Assurance Approach                         | Priority and workstream  | Focus for the assurance activity  | Outcome to test   |
|--|--|---|---|
|  |  | <p>understanding and personal contribution.</p> <p>6. understanding of core governance processes, delegations and expectations of personal accountability.</p>  |   |
| Independent Public Survey                  | <p><b>Improving leadership to accelerate change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Leading with purpose and direction</li> <li>● Building our corporate capability</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving governance and control</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establishing the foundations for governance excellence</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving our financial stability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improving our stability through budgetary savings and maximisation of income</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 through the locality focus developed as part of the new operating model.</li> <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> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improvement in public and partner confidence in the Council.</li> <li>● Improvement in responsiveness to the Public</li> </ul>               |
| Independent Partner and Stakeholder Survey | <p><b>Improving leadership to accelerate change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Leading with purpose and direction</li> <li>● Building our corporate capability</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving governance</b></p>   | <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, through its Corporate Plan.</li> <li>2. whether roles and relationships of Council officers and Service Providers are clearly</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</li> </ul> |

| Assurance Approach                 | Priority and workstream  | Focus for the assurance activity  | Outcome to test   |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|
|                                    | <p><b>and control</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing the foundations for governance excellence</li> </ul>   | <p>understood.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>whether service / business plans provide medium term clarity into procured and commissioned services and locality-based engagement on plans is comprehensive.</li> <li>whether information on performance, outcomes and delivery is open and transparent.</li> <li>whether commissioned partners are supported to improve.</li> <li>whether officer and member oversight and governance requirements are clear.</li> </ol>  | <p>responsiveness to poor performance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise</li> </ul>  |
| Centre for Governance and Scrutiny | <p><b>Improving governance and control</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishing the foundations for governance excellence</li> </ul>  | <p>Assuring and testing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>whether the Council has a capable scrutiny function, with the skills and knowledge required to deliver a high performing scrutiny function comparable to peer authorities.</li> <li>whether information and options analysis support greater Member scrutiny pre-decision and post decision making.</li> <li>whether Members are trained and developed and have the knowledge and skills to be capable and effective.</li> <li>whether evidence of effective scrutiny leads to demonstrable improvements in decision making.</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvement in the quality of decision making.</li> <li>Improvement in collaboration between officers and between Members and officers.</li> <li>Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise</li> </ul> |
| External and / or Internal Audit   | <p><b>Improving leadership to accelerate change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Leading with purpose and direction</li> <li>Building our corporate capability</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving governance</b></p> | <p>Assuring and testing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>whether the revised annual business planning approach is robust and balances requirements for a focus on strategy-led, with resource planning process and demonstrates robust internal governance.</li> <li>whether the redesign and restructure of the</li> </ol>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improvement in value for money.</li> <li>Improvement in risk management.</li> <li>Improvement in assurance and audit.</li> <li>Improvement in the</li> </ul>   |

| Assurance Approach | Priority and workstream  | Focus for the assurance activity   | Outcome to test  |
|--------------------|--|--|--|
|                    | <p><b>and controls</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establishing the foundations for governance excellence</li> <li>● Creating an exemplary control environment</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving financial stability</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Divesting of assets and investments</li> <li>● Improving our stability through budgetary savings and maximisation of income</li> <li>● Improving our financial management capability and practice</li> </ul> | <p>organisation is sufficient to deliver the new operating model and whether there are any significant risks to capability or capacity.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <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 as designed 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, through an independent review of all external, arm's length companies and partnerships, governance requirements and risks are understood and built into the risk management framework.</li> <li>6. whether the risk management approach aligns to the HMG Orange Book and whether officers and Members understand requirements and responsibilities.</li> <li>7. whether risk management is embedded in all teams and over time whether the culture of a risk alert Council 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 reported in accordance with financial and accounting requirements.</li> <li>9. whether the External and Internal Auditor reports demonstrate increasing satisfaction with the</li> </ol> | <p>quality of decision making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improvement in collaboration between officers and between Members and officers.</li> </ul> |

| Assurance Approach | Priority and workstream   | Focus for the assurance activity   | Outcome to test  |
|--------------------|---|--|--|
|                    |   | impact of Financial Management.  |  |
| LGA Peer Review    | <p><b>Improving leadership to accelerate change.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Leading with purpose and direction</li> <li>● Building our corporate capability</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving our governance and control</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Establishing the foundations for governance excellence</li> </ul> <p><b>Improving our financial stability</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>1. the embeddedness of the vision, purpose and priorities, set out in the Corporate Plan, amongst democratic and executive leaders and throughout the Council.</li> <li>2. whether strategic planning is evidence-led and whether service and place priorities support the delivery of the Best Value duty and statutory responsibilities of the Council.</li> <li>3. whether the new operating model is driving improvements in corporate capability and effectiveness and efficiency.</li> <li>4. whether the external experience of engagement with the Council improved and more consistent.</li> <li>5. whether the improvement and change planning process is well-led politically and corporately and the desired outcomes are clearly understood.</li> <li>6. 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>7. whether the governance, control and reporting environment has the foundations to be a high performing Council.</li> <li>8. whether the financial leadership and financial management capability is sufficient and rigorous.</li> </ol> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Improvement in collaboration between officers and between Members 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 responsiveness to poor performance.</li> <li>● Improvements in Member and officer confidence.</li> <li>● Improvement in the quality of decision making.</li> <li>● Improvement in policy and practice through the use of external expertise</li> </ul> |

Table 7: Approach to assuring our improvement

## **8. Governing and reporting our improvement**

Our Improvement and Recovery Plan is comprehensive and far reaching, every Member and officer will play a part in its delivery and ultimate success. The need for us to accurately track progress and highlight and escalate risks to progress is crucial if we are to deliver the change we require to address the concerns in the leadership and governance of the Council and the financial challenges we face.

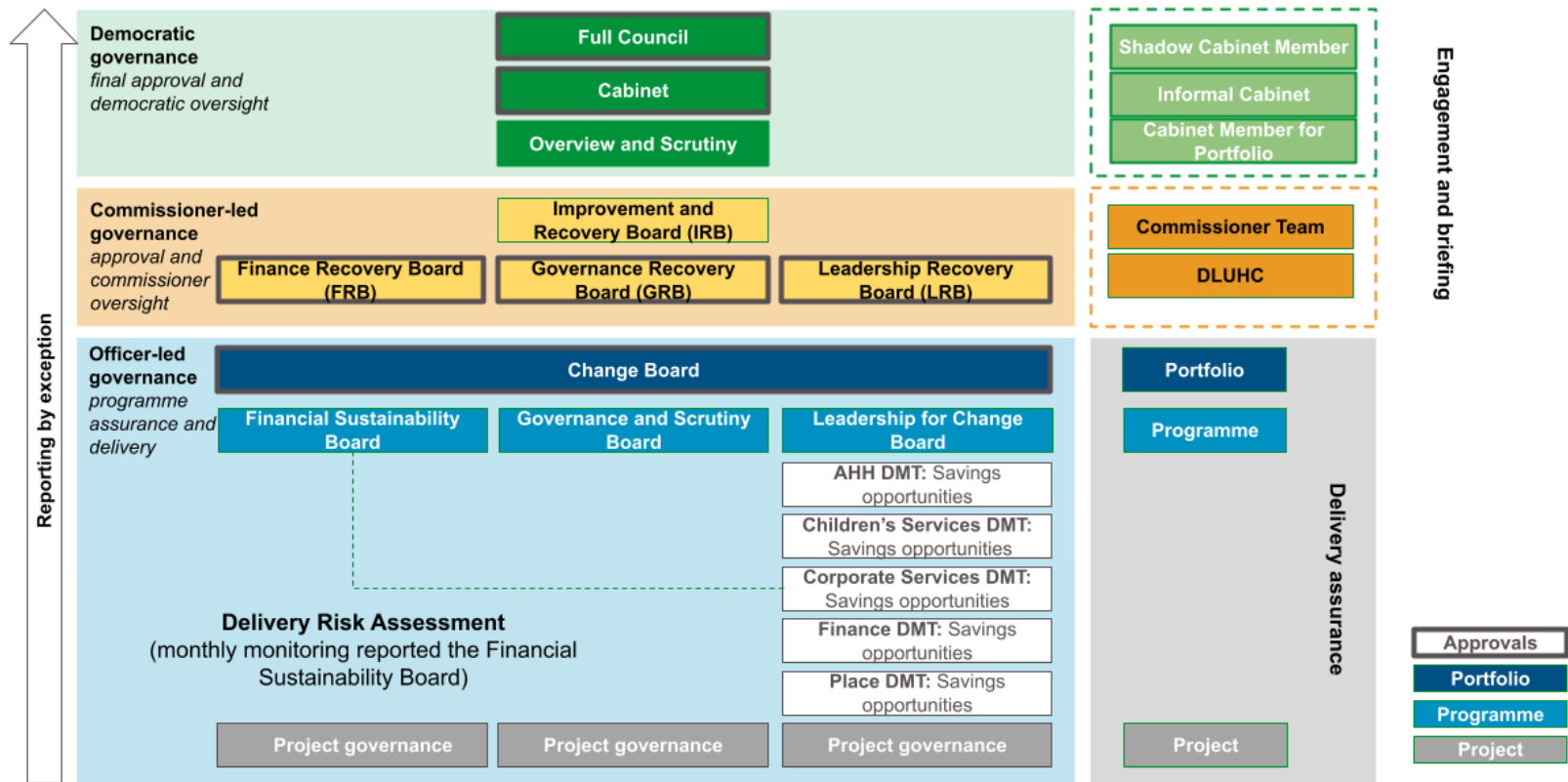
Internally how we are performing against challenging targets and change actions needs to be frequently and comprehensively understood, reported and communicated, particularly if a change action is at risk of not being implemented or delivered to time. This reporting needs to facilitate dynamic management conversations with teams and a repurposing of priorities. Responsiveness to change, adapting and re-prioritising will be fundamental qualities required. Members will be required to make decisions and adapt priorities but will need to build a relationship with officers that enables them to be clearly informed of risks and options so that they are able to make measured and thoughtful decisions.

Externally, as part of our commitment to be more transparent about our actions to meet the requirements of the Directions and exit the current intervention phase, we have committed to being more open. In parallel to the development of our revised Improvement and Recovery Plan and our Corporate Plan we are developing a detailed Communication Strategy which will be comprehensive in our approaches. Beyond the period of intervention as we strive to continue to improve and be a high performing, well-led and governed Council, we will continue to place a renewed emphasis on communication, partnerships and engagement so that we are active in demonstrating and living our committed to a new purpose and direction as an enabling Council, well connected with its residents, businesses, communities and partners.

### **8.1 Governance**

To ensure oversight of the priorities in this plan a governance structure is proposed that illustrates the Member-led governance, the Commissioner-led governance and the officer-led governance of the wider programme of change. The roles and responsibilities of each element of this governance structure is documented in an emerging and detailed Change Programme Governance Handbook. The governance of the plan and assessment of whether the Council is rising to the challenge of meeting its best value responsibilities, is part of a broader and more comprehensive change programme.

The diagram below outlines the respective governance layers for the plan and the change programme at officer, Commissioner and Member levels and the flow of information/reporting between them.



The Improvement and Recovery Board is a commissioner-led governance body which oversees the delivery of the entire Improvement and Recovery Plan, with the Financial Recovery Board and Governance Recovery Board focussing on finance and governance aspects respectively. With respect to the Change Programme, it reviews the overall progress of the delivery of the Improvement and Recovery Plan across the three Priorities, based on reporting by exception highlighting any significant changes across the programme relating to scope, budget, timeframes, benefits, as well as key risks or issues. The Improvement and

Recovery Board will review all proposals and business cases that have been approved by the Financial Recovery Board, Governance Recovery Board, and Leadership Recovery Board before they are recommended to Cabinet.

## **8.2 Reporting**

One of the challenges for Members and Commissioners is receiving a proportionate yet insightful levels of information regarding performance and risks to achieving the scale of change that was planned. Reporting will be led by the newly created Programme and Project Management Office in the Change Team and will use the existing 'Project Book' system to capture workstream / project level updates, which will feed the change programme reporting solution (PowerBI) to collate the Programme information. This will produce a visual review of progress and performance for review and discussion at the various governance forums.

Reporting of progress against the plan will be more dynamic, with most of the governance boards having access to live data as opposed to static reporting, this enables discussion and decision making to have the most accurate information to assess progress and to make decisions about changes or corrective actions.