



**Corporate  
Peer  
Challenge**  
Progress Review  
Position Statement

October 2024



**WATFORD  
BOROUGH  
COUNCIL**

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# Welcome to Watford

We were delighted to welcome the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge team to Watford in November of last year. Over four days, the group of six peers had the opportunity to really get under the skin of everything we do at Watford. As a council, we know that we truly live by our values; that we are bold, agile and really work together for our residents, and we relished showcasing Watford to our peer colleagues.

However, our ambition also means that we are constantly striving to improve our services and the organisation as a whole. That is why the Corporate Peer Challenge was so important to us; not only as a tool for identifying what we are doing well but, crucially, pointing out where we could do better. We have progressed each of the recommendations presented to us and the feedback provided by peers has been instrumental over the last year as we have developed our next Delivery Plan and moved forward key projects and initiatives such as the Town Hall Quarter, the Transforming Travel in Watford programme and our joint working with health partners.

Like many local authorities, our ability to deliver as much as we would like for our residents, businesses and community remains challenging in the financial climate. The pressure on housing remains keenly felt across the Borough and our

temporary accommodation costs have risen considerably over the last two years, with our proximity to London particularly impacting demand. In order to manage our budgets, we have reluctantly made service reductions over the past six months, recognising that other options to manage our budget had been exhausted. Nevertheless, we have adopted an inclusive and logical approach to prioritise our services and protect those which we know add real value to our residents. And we have undertaken this work with the support of colleagues from across the organisation, largely avoiding compulsory redundancies and enacting savings ideas from services themselves.

The Corporate Peer Challenge report and associated action plan was published in January 2024 and endorsed by our Cabinet on the 15th of that month. Buoyed by the positive feedback given by peers, members and officers have approached the implementation of these recommendations with the same vigour and passion that peers observed during their time with us last November, liaising with external partners and our Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure that the recommendations are fully implemented.

We are thrilled to welcome you back to Watford and look forward to updating you on our progress.



*Peter Taylor*

**Peter Taylor**  
Elected Mayor  
of Watford



*Donna Nolan*

**Donna Nolan**  
Chief Executive

# 2

# Executive Summary



**The Corporate Peer Challenge team visited Watford Borough Council between 14 and 17 November 2023. With the benefit of a detailed position statement developed by the council, the six peers gathered information and views from 55 meetings and reviewed a range of information relating to the council's operations to ensure that they were familiar with the organisation and Borough, the challenges we are facing and our plans for the future.**

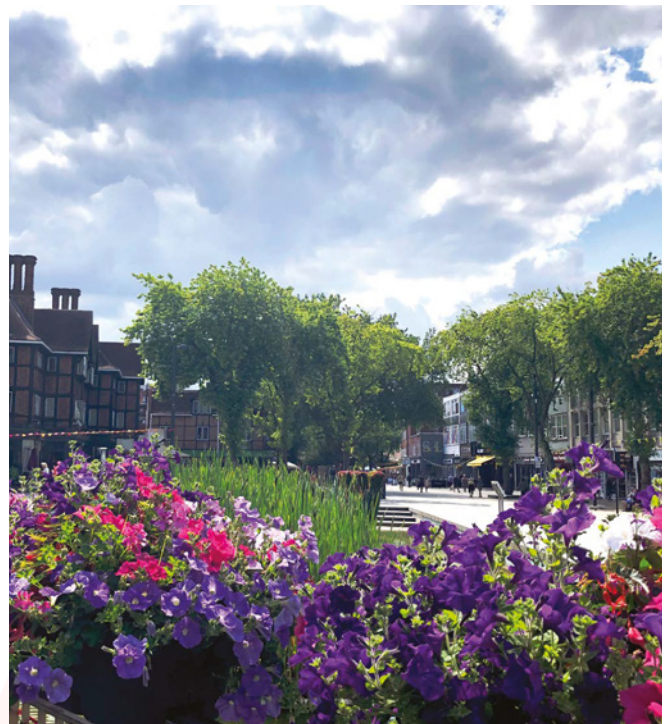
During their time with Watford, peers spoke to more than 150 people, including a range of colleagues, members and external stakeholders. The final report, including recommendations, was issued in February 2024 and published on the council's website following review of the associated Action Plan by Cabinet.

The report made a number of key observations about the council, including:

- Impactful political and organisational leadership;
- Amplified external focus on place shaping through 'Watford 2040';
- Positive application of the council's convening power e.g. in health, in the SW Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan, and in Watford's Place Board;
- Passionate staff who are invested in Watford and taking huge pride in their work and delivery to communities;
- Transformational organisation culture through strong leadership and nurture, exemplified by Reimagining Watford;
- Strong thread between Watford's political manifesto, council plan, delivery / strategic plans, and refreshed performance management framework;
- Positive relationships between members and staff;

- Agile working, supported by business focussed locally developed 'Team Charters';
- Financial challenge for 2024/25 and beyond was well understood throughout the organisation;
- Regeneration plans are subject to successful external funding bids and borrowing;
- Strong and mature partnerships with key stakeholders and communities.

In line with the purpose of the Corporate Peer Challenge to support continuous improvement, peers also made a number of recommendations to the council. As part of the peer challenge process, peer team leads return between six months to a year after the conclusion of the Peer Challenge to follow up on the recommendations that have been made. This review position statement sets out the recommendations, our agreed actions and our progress to date.



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# The Last 12 Months



Over the last 12 months, we have maintained our relentless focus on delivering for our residents, businesses and community. The approval of our new Delivery Plan, covering the period 2024 to 2026, in June of this year has maintained the strong link between our strategic direction and on the ground delivery, noted by peers in November. The Delivery Plan itself benefited from the recommendations provided by peers with a clear link between the peer challenge findings and activities included within the Delivery Plan. In addition, the council-wide development of the Delivery Plan allowed a strategic review of resources across the organisation, alongside our broader budgetary planning, to ensure that the limited resources available were sufficient to enable strong delivery of the Plan.

Since then, the Delivery Plan has acted as an impetus for service planning with each service developing new Plans, aligned absolutely to the Delivery Plan and relied upon to inform the Performance Development Review process, undertaken during the summer. Retention of a strong link between our strategic direction, our values and our people was a key plank of the newly approved People Strategy and has ensured that everyone in the organisation can understand the part they play in delivering for our community.

Our Corporate Management Team restructure has also been completed with two long standing members of the team leaving the organisation and one Associate Director also retiring. This has provided an opportunity to reduce costs in an equitable way across the council and identify synergies between service areas. The succession planning previously undertaken has served to ensure that the transition has been seamless, including for two of our three statutory officer roles, and the refreshed team is able to consolidate around the key strategic challenges facing the council. This includes working with a new government, maintaining relationships within a politically altered Hertfordshire, playing a key role in the local health agenda and ensuring a steady focus on the ongoing financial management of the organisation.

Alongside our major projects and day to day service delivery, we have successfully delivered Borough, Police and Crime Commissioner elections and the UK Parliamentary General Election, the last of which resulted in a change of MP and political party. Our new MP remains a councillor and we have already had good engagement to ensure that Watford continues to be

supported at a national level. The refocused Corporate Management Team has continued to work closely with our Portfolio Holders. Despite a change of Portfolio Holder responsibilities following the May elections, the transition has been seamless and supported by the succession planning approach adopted politically.

Our external focus has also been maintained. In addition, our Chief Executive continues to actively engage with MHCLG on opportunities related to public sector reform, the growth agenda and devolution, particularly following the election of the new government, and has championed the roles that districts can play in the emerging debate. Our Elected Mayor is now the Chair of the Hertfordshire Infrastructure Development Board, and the Deputy Chair of the Hertfordshire Growth Board. Our Chief Executive has stepped up to be the Chief Executive Lead on the South and West Herts Health and Care Partnership and is working closely with the District Council Network on several national challenges. The work of the Elected Mayor and Chief Executive ensures that we are engaged in evolving discussions about key strategic matters at a Hertfordshire and national level. Our Corporate Management Team continues to be engaged in conferences and external events so that we are actively learning from colleagues and, in return, sharing our learning for the broader local government family. We have spoken at various conferences, including the Local Government Strategy Forum, produced articles for the Municipal Journal and Local Government Chronicle and are returning to the LGA's Innovation Zone again this year to speak about our exciting work on the hugely successful engagement relating to our River Colne programme.

A focus on delivering value for money services has also continued. After our detailed budgetary work during 2023/24 enabled us to successfully set a balanced budget for this financial year, we have continued to take a longer-term view of finances. This has included standing up a designated Corporate Management Team Budget Board, launching our 'Redesign Sprints' and utilising new technologies, including actively investigating opportunities to use Artificial Intelligence, with our AI Policy recently approved at Cabinet. As is the Watford way,



this approach has been led by Cabinet, but continually shared with colleagues across the council with regular face to face briefings, engagement with Unison and the ongoing collection of ideas and suggestions from teams. However, we have also been realistic about our ability to sustain the level of service that we provide to our customers. As well as reluctantly implementing service reductions, including the ceasing of some services such as pest control, we have reviewed our key performance indicators so that we can be clear and transparent about the reality of the impact these changes will have on the services we provide.

Whilst a fundamental review of our Capital Programme meant that we had to take some tough decisions on which projects we should continue to take forward, our commitment to the delivery of our major projects in the Borough remains strong.

As part of our Town Hall Quarter Programme, the refurbishment of the Colosseum continues in earnest with the launch of the venue with partners AEG expected next year. We are awaiting confirmation of our second round National Heritage Lottery Funding for the completion of our new museum, situated within the Town Hall, and continue to firm up designs so that work can commence as soon as possible. Unfortunately, despite our £16m Levelling Up Fund having been confirmed by the previous government, we have yet to receive assurances from the new government that this commitment will be honoured. In light of this, we have been scenario planning to ensure that we are able to deliver as much of our Town Hall Quarter scheme as possible and continue to actively engage with government and civil servants at all levels to promote the significant benefits of this important funding. In terms of the New Neighbourhoods regeneration, Homes England



had paused engagement due to the General Election in July. However, recent dialogue has been extremely encouraging and we are hopeful that the investment needed to secure growth and investment will be forthcoming to enable the council, working in partnership with Mace, to deliver this transformative regeneration project, where upfront public sector funding of £10–£15 million will result in £200–£250 million of GVA, and act as an exemplar of how major towns and cities outside London can drive productivity and sustainable living.

We have also made considerable progress with NHS and Public Health colleagues to ensure whole-systems thinking about how a focus on prevention can bring about long-term, sustainable, improved health outcomes. We are championing a proposal to become a trailblazer for the Neighbourhood Health Centres, proposed by the new government, within our Town Hall Quarter programme, co-locating NHS providers, Borough and county council services to facilitate transformation and integration. We are being promoted by the NHS Federation as a case study for good practice in local government.

Recent engagement with Homes England and National Rail has also been very positive and we continue to strive to secure the regeneration of brownfield land at Watford Junction to extend the town centre and central business district to create a new, highly sustainable, mixed-use urban quarter around the station. There is an opportunity to deliver new Grade A office space, 3,000 new homes and circa 7,000 jobs (over £3bn of private sector investment) in high-density development, securing the long-term future of Watford Junction as a regenerated transport hub for Hertfordshire and the wider region.

Following public realm investments in Market Street, Queens Road and King Street, all located within the town centre, we are also forging ahead with our significant place making schemes, including the Low Carbon Hub on the Lower High Street. At the time of writing, we are in the process of consulting on these exciting plans where the council is using its role as a convener of place to introduce a scheme that will create a more attractive and memorable gateway into the town centre from the south and, in line with our sustainable transport ambitions, make it easier and safer to navigate and cross the ring road for pedestrians and cyclists. The outcome will be enhancements for walking, cycling, public transport, wayfinding, safety and street quality, as well as bringing vibrancy and custom to the businesses based in this part of town. It is another example of the council recognising the importance of continued investment and enhancement to ensure the ongoing vibrancy of our town centre for both present and future generations.

Delivery of the broader Transforming Travel in Watford programme continues with the launch of our e-car club earlier this year, the further implementation of electric vehicle charging points, the completion of public realm improvements at our district parades and the creation of our innovative Green Loop, supporting walking and cycling around the Borough, planned for September. Our commitment to hold ourselves to account has meant that we are clearly tracking the tangible benefits of this work with our Environmental Strategy annual report showing a sharp decline in transport emissions in the town. And we are continuing to focus on the facilities that we know, from our 'Big Conversation', matter to our residents; the award of 17 green flags for our green spaces, the opening of a new Changing Place facility at Woodside Sports Grounds, the development of public realm improvements at the historic St Mary's Churchyard and the continuation of our public sector decarbonisation scheme projects to include a further three community buildings.

Our Place Brand Narrative has been formally launched with our attendance at UKREiiF, accompanied by the development of the new

*Watford Actually* website and launch of our partner toolkit, developed with our broad range of partners and key stakeholders across the Borough. We have an exciting fresh *Watford Actually* image library to showcase what the Borough has to offer, though importantly these images will be retained for *Watford Actually* to maintain the distinctive council and *Watford Actually* brands.

Our commitment to continuous improvement has continued with a review of our key performance indicators, further improvements to our performance management and enhancement of our Audit and Scrutiny functions. Whilst our partnership with St Albans District and City Council continues to operate successfully, with the service recently receiving the LABC award for Best Residential Extension, we have also been working closely with Three Rivers District Council to review in detail the shared services we have had with them for more than 15 years.

We know, however, there are areas where we need to continue to adapt to meet evolving challenges. In the context of a 48% increase in the number of households presenting as homeless in the year, improvements to our Housing Service have also continued. We have started to see the positive impact of the service changes we have initiated, but we are under no illusion that there is still more to do, including the need to retain a strategic focus on boosting social and affordable housing across the Borough.

Our Corporate Peer Challenge report noted that 'WBC is hugely ambitious for Watford, residents and businesses and is driven for each to thrive' and the summary above provides confirmation that our approach has only strengthened in the last year as we continue to look for the next opportunity to deliver for our community.

We are also in the process of undertaking an internal exercise to self-assess the organisation against the government's 'best value standards' which will ensure we pay due regard to the statutory guidance whilst seeking further opportunities for improvements.





# 4

# Assessing our Progress



To assist with understanding the progress made against each of the Peer Challenge recommendations, we have 'RAG' rated each activity using the following methodology:

**Red:** Action has not progressed as expected

**Amber:** Action is progressing but may be slightly delayed or may be progressing with a slightly different trajectory than initially projected

**Green:** Action is completed or progressing on track as expected

## Recommendation 1A Theme: Finance

# RAG

**Recommendation:** The council has identified significant revenue savings for 2024-25, however there still remains a revenue gap for 2024-25 and further savings are required in 2025-26. The council should continue at pace to agree all required 2024-25 savings before the end of 2023-24 and during 2024-25, identify the savings opportunities for 2025-26. Implementation of 2025-26 savings during 2024-25 would further reduce revenue pressures and provide a contingency against unforeseen budget issues.

**Action:** The council will:

- Set a balanced budget for 2024/25, with the identified revenue gap met through the development and implementation of a detailed savings plan, income generation opportunities and the prudent use of reserves
- Continue work commenced in mid-2023 to scenario plan for 2025/26 and 2026/27, building on an understanding of the extent of further savings required to address the budget gap in future years and implementing identified in-year savings in 2024/25

- Continue work commenced in mid-2023 to embed its approach to developing its budget for 2024/25 and for 2025/26 and 2026/27 that ensures there is appropriate governance, engagement, scrutiny and challenge, including:
- Retaining the dedicated Budget Planning Programme Board set up in 2023 to lead on implementing and monitoring budget proposals, reporting into Corporate Management Board to agree recommendations for reporting to Cabinet and Finance Scrutiny Committee
- Regular communications and engagement with staff, UNISON and members, led by the Chief Executive
- Testing budget planning and setting, through scenario planning, consistently reviewing and updating assumptions as pressures and opportunities are identified.

**Progress:**

- We set a balanced budget in January 2024 following significant council-wide work to identify and resolve the revenue gap.
- As recommended by the Peer Challenge team, this work has continued throughout 2024, taking a data driven approach to service redesign. This approach has begun with a high-level benchmarking exercise utilising an external benchmarking tool and working closely with services to identify opportunities for savings and efficiencies. Portfolio Holders are expected to sign off the first tranche of 'Service Redesign Sprints' in September which will launch in the autumn and demonstrate proof of concept. Key to this will be the better use of technology, establishing joint working internally and externally and improving processes. Learnings from these first sprints will be incorporated into the redesign process and rolled out across all services over the next 18 to 24 months.
- A designated Corporate Management Team Budget Board has been established which provides the council's leadership team with focused time to address, manage and oversee this important issue.
- Since the peer challenge, our Chief Executive has held three all-staff briefings, keeping staff apprised of the financial challenge and the work ongoing to address this.
- Voluntary redundancy opportunities earlier this year helped to avoid a significant compulsory redundancy process and demonstrated to colleagues that the council was doing everything it could to identify savings in a fair, proportionate and logical way. The council headcount has reduced from 237 at the time of the Corporate Peer Challenge to 213 currently, representing a 10% reduction in resource. The development of the new Delivery Plan has been aligned to these reduced resources and our key performance indicators reviewed to similarly reflect these changes.
- The Chief Executive continues to meet regularly with UNISON colleagues to discuss the financial challenges and they were fully engaged on both the voluntary and compulsory redundancies.



## Recommendation 1B

### Theme: Finance

RAG

**Recommendation:** The council has a relatively large capital programme that is subject to inherent risks associated with external factors such as interest rate changes, construction cost inflation, demand for residential and commercial premises and the cost of living. The council must continue to monitor these external factors, manage these risks and implement appropriate mitigating actions, in order to ensure that the council is not overly exposed to new financial pressures.

**Action:** The council will:

- Continue work commenced in mid-2023 to review its capital budget as part of budget setting for 2024/25, including a risk assessment of the programme and prioritising the delivery of programmes and projects, in light of budget pressures
- Undertake a review of its risk register to ensure that all risks identified with the capital programme are fully reflected and are part of the regular reporting of risks to Cabinet and Audit Committee (also see Recommendation 2)

**Progress:**

- The review of our capital programme was completed in January 2024 as part of the budget setting process. This included a risk-based approach focused on pausing or stopping projects for which business cases were not robust or which were not regarded as the highest priority in terms of benefit delivery.
- The council's Corporate Risk Register is now reviewed by Corporate Management Board and Cabinet on a quarterly basis and reflects the major capital projects.
- A more fundamental review of the council's Risk Management Strategy commenced in August 2024, and incorporated learning from a recent audit of the process. This is focused on the need for risk conversations to ensure that our approach is reflective of the reality of challenges and risks faced by the organisation. There was a delay to the commencement of this work as a result of the UK Parliamentary General Election.



# Recommendation 1C

## Theme: Finance

RAG

**Recommendation:** Portfolio holders are briefed on the council's financial position and the quarterly budget monitoring report is provided to the Finance Scrutiny Committee. In order to improve transparency and provide a more robust management process, the quarterly report should also be provided to cabinet and timeliness of reporting should be improved.

**Action:** The council will:

- Present the quarterly budget report to Cabinet
- Review the timetable of reporting against the council's annual meeting cycle for the next municipal year

**Progress:**

- This commenced in January 2024 (starting with Period 8 2023/24), with the latest report presented at Cabinet on 8 July 2024.
- The first full report for 2024/25 was considered by Corporate Management Board in July, and by Portfolio Holders in early August before following the formal committee route to Finance Scrutiny Committee in September and to Cabinet in October.
- The year-end report 2023/24 to Cabinet and Council in July also set out the main risks and emerging pressures in 2024/25 to ensure that members have earlier sight of this.



## Recommendation 2

### Theme: Finance

**RAG**

**Recommendation:** A significant slippage of capital expenditure during 2023-24 indicates that the risks have already impacted upon project delivery. In order to manage expectations both externally and internally and ensure that objectives remain realistic and time-bound, a review of project milestones and risk mitigation actions should be undertaken. The results of this review should be published both internally and externally by the council.

**Action:** The council will:

- Review its capital programme, continuing the approach implemented in 2023, to test and build assurance of:
  - Objectives
  - Delivery timescales
  - Project milestones
  - Risk mitigation (also see Recommendation 1c)

**Progress:**

- A further review of the capital programme has commenced as part of the 2025/26 budget setting process and will be included with reports to Full Council which takes place on 28 January 2025.
- Milestones of key projects impacted by slippage have been reviewed and continue to be under review. Whilst the capital programme has reduced significantly as a result of timely action undertaken in setting the current budget, a number of the projects, particularly relating to the Town Hall Quarter, continue to carry significant risk. This is predominantly in relation to the completion of the Town Hall for which Levelling Up funding is required. Although funding was confirmed by the previous government in March of this year following our successful validation of the project, the new government has not yet been able to confirm the position. The ongoing uncertainty in relation to Levelling Up funding is the reason for the amber rating for this recommendation. The council had scenario planned for such an eventuality and has put into motion its 'Plan B', focusing on the delivery of the museum only within the Grade II listed Town Hall building.



## Recommendation 3

### Theme: Branding and Communications

RAG

**Recommendation:** The council should review its approach to communications to ensure that all members of the community are able to access council services. For example, the provision of a simple approach to gaining access to benefits including housing benefit. This review should include engagement with community groups in order to determine the efficacy of the communications plans.

**Action:** The council will:

- Engage with our voluntary and community sector partners to understand the best channels for providing information, advice and guidance, building on their experiences and understanding
- Include the council's approach to communications at a meeting of Watford's Community Network to test ideas and solutions with the network

**Progress:**

- The council hosted a community roundtable event on 3 June with its key voluntary sector partners, CA, W3RT, One YMCA, New Hope and Watford Community Housing to understand where the council could improve information and advice for all sectors of the community.
- The roundtable agreed three joint community working groups which have been set up focusing on:
  - Digital inclusion
  - Alignment of communications and campaigns
  - Spatial data and community insights.

- By the time of the Peer Challenge review each of these working groups will have met twice. These groups have formed a key strand of our approach to working with our community to ensure that our services remain accessible, we are aligned on our messaging for residents and businesses and that we are sharing data and information to inform delivery and prioritisation.
- The council's approach to communications will be presented to the next meeting of the Watford Community Network towards the end of this year following joint community working group activities.
- In the meantime, the council's new 'co-browsing' tool has been launched on our website allowing our customer services agents to see customer's screens and assist them with the completion of online forms from the comfort of their own home. We have also implemented our new AI chatbot tool which allows customers to communicate with the council in any language.
- As Chair of the Hertfordshire Digital Inclusion Board, the Elected Mayor is championing a strategic approach across the county to digital access for all.



## Recommendation 4

### Theme: Finance

RAG

**Recommendation:** In view of the fact that the shared services arrangements with Three Rivers District Council have been in place for many years, these arrangements should be reviewed to ensure that they meet the current objectives and business needs of the council whilst providing value for money and giving a springboard for future growth of shared service arrangements.

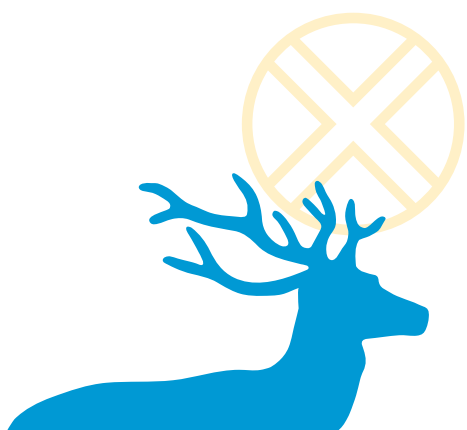
**Action:** The council will:

- Build upon the existing work that Local Partnerships have been commissioned to deliver in relation to the future growth of shared service arrangements within South West Hertfordshire
- Review shared service arrangements with Three Rivers District Council

**Progress:**

- We are continuing our ongoing collaboration with Three Rivers District Council in a joint initiative to commission Local Partnerships to conduct a comprehensive cost apportionment analysis. This analysis, alongside associated recommendations, is aimed at ensuring a fair and equitable financial arrangement for our existing five shared services: Revenues and Benefits, IT, Human Resources, Finance, and Procurement.

- The process of finalising these financial agreements is progressing well, with both councils working diligently to reach a conclusion by 1st December 2024. This timeline is crucial as it will allow us to incorporate the outcomes into the budget-setting process for the 2025/26 financial year, ensuring that our shared services continue to operate efficiently and effectively.
- In parallel with this review, we have been actively exploring opportunities to expand our Human Resources and Organisational Development shared services to include neighbouring Boroughs. Whilst Hertsmere Borough Council has recently decided to withdraw from this process, we are encouraged by the continued commitment from St Albans District and City Council. As our current partner in shared Legal, Building Control, and Planning Enforcement services, St Albans remains a key collaborator in advancing this initiative.
- These efforts reflect our ongoing dedication to enhancing collaboration and optimising service delivery across our region. We remain focused on identifying and implementing solutions that will benefit our communities through shared expertise, resources, and best practices.



# Recommendation 5

## Theme: Risk Management

**RAG**

**Recommendation:** In view of the fact that the council is operating in a dynamic and fast-changing environment, strategic risks should be reported more frequently than the current annual report to the Audit Committee and a separate report should be provided to cabinet on a regular basis.

**Action:** The council will:

- Take the corporate risk register to Cabinet quarterly and to Audit Committee twice a year - with the risk register going to Audit Committee initially then to Cabinet
- Develop a proposal for Audit Committee setting out a programme of in-depth reviews for particular risk areas to start in the new municipal year
- Appoint an independent member to the Audit Committee

**Progress:**

- A cycle of risk management reporting is now in place to Cabinet (quarterly) and Audit Committee (twice a year).
- Following a public recruitment process, an independent member with an audit background has been appointed to Audit Committee who attended their first meeting on 23 May, already providing robust scrutiny and challenge to build on the quality of discussions at the meeting.
- A review of risk management arrangements, is being undertaken over the summer which will consider oversight by Audit Committee and take into account feedback from members and colleagues, as well as

information provided by a recent Audit. This is focused on the need for risk conversations to ensure that our approach is reflective of the reality of challenges and risks faced by the organisation. There was a delay to the commencement of this work as a result of the UK Parliamentary General Election, and hence why progress is assessed as amber.

- The Statutory Officer Group, which included colleagues from internal audit, has been repositioned and developed into a Governance and Risk Group, to ensure a greater strategic oversight of risk management.
- We have undertaken a fundamental review of our strategic awareness and preparedness for a civil emergency (including cyber attack), as a council and as a place. As part of this review, we have strengthened our approach to governance, with the Governance and Risk Group having strategic oversight of our preparedness, and One Watford Place Board, in support of the council's statutory duties, for the Borough's preparedness, particularly in terms of humanitarian assistance and recovery.



## Recommendation 6

### Theme: Branding and Communications

RAG

**Recommendation:** Significant work has already been undertaken in the development of the strong “*Watford Actually*” brand. Whilst being cognisant of the current economic challenges, work should now continue to identify and work with external brand ambassadors and roll out the branding strategy.

**Action:** The council will:

- Develop an implementation plan with clear delivery milestones and associated actions, including developing relationships with key sectors to effectively embed the brand
- Identify key external brand ambassadors to champion the “*Watford Actually*” brand
- Develop the brand assets into a toolkit that enables the ambassadors and other key businesses and organisations to use and adapt the brand alongside their own brand and marketing strategies
- Embed the brand within the scope of the One Watford Place Board so that it is understood and championed across the Borough’s key partner organisations

**Progress:**

- A detailed activity plan, setting out the priority milestones to continue growing buy-in from stakeholders and partners across the Borough in order to successfully embed *Watford Actually*, has been created.
- We have started rolling out the partner toolkit to wider partners and stakeholders across the Borough, empowering officers at Corporate Management Team level to champion and promote *Watford Actually* in forums and meetings.

- There is continued development of the new *Watford Actually* website, which will be reviewed with key stakeholders and partners to further create a sense of Borough-wide ownership. The new website will have the benefit of a fresh *Watford Actually* image library.
- Plans for the first public campaign, aimed at residents and visitors within a 45-minute drive of Watford, has been initiated to begin building brand recognition.
- The *Watford Actually* brand was also used by the council during UKREiif where senior officers met with a range of private sector partners to promote growth within the Borough.
- The Place Brand Narrative has been presented to the One Watford Place Board, in order to secure agreement of governance of *Watford Actually* through the Board and support embedding it as Borough champions. This included providing One Watford Place Board with a toolkit, equipping them to begin applying the brand both within their individual organisations and externally.



# Recommendation 7

## Theme: People, Organisational Development and Skills

RAG

**Recommendation:** The council is to be commended on its plans to deliver an ambitious and far-reaching programme of activities. It will be essential that the council's plans for organisational development ensure that the skills of the workforce and internal capacity continue to be aligned to these growing aims and ambitions.

**Action:** The council will:

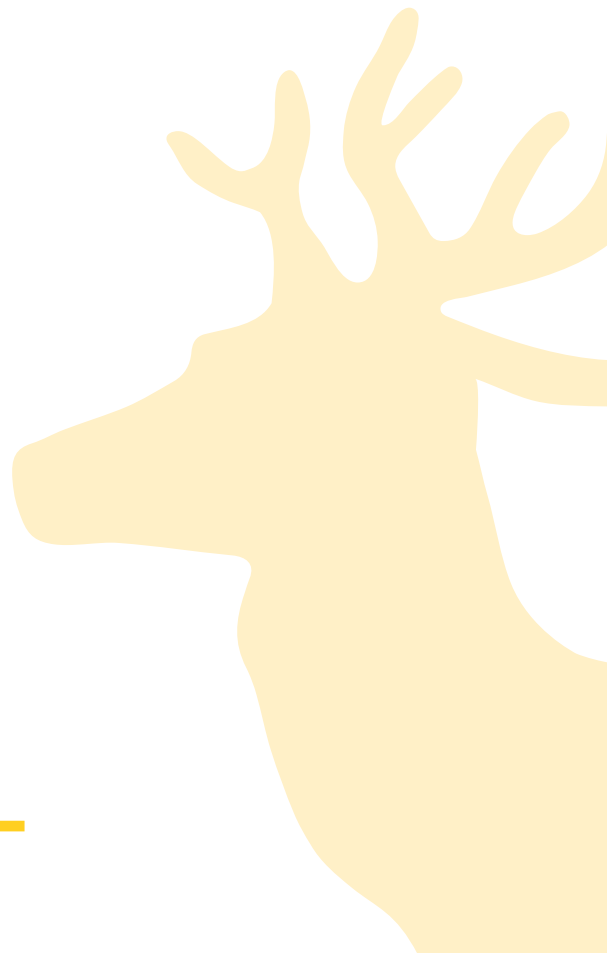
- Launch our People Strategy that was in draft in November 2023 to support the growth and development of our people so that they align with our council's aims and ambitions
- Provide quarterly updates on progress against the Strategy to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Progress:**

- Our People Strategy was approved by Cabinet in June 2024, with implementation now underway. To date this has included:
  - Values Communication and Engagement Plan Reviewed: Successfully revamped our strategy for communicating and engaging with our employees, enhancing how we embed our core values into daily operations;
  - Staff Behaviour Framework Delivered: Implemented a comprehensive framework that clearly defines expected staff behaviours. This is aligned with our core values and directly linked to our performance management processes, ensuring a cohesive approach to managing success;
  - Equality Statement Integration: Proactively included an equality statement in all recruitment advertisements, reinforcing our commitment to diversity and inclusion at every level of hiring;

- Leadership Development Program Refreshed: Thoroughly reviewed and updated our leadership development offerings to better reflect our evolving priorities. This ensures our leadership training incorporates best practices from both the public and private sectors, focusing on equipping leaders to deliver on their priorities;
- Values Embedded in Leadership through CMT and SDL Collaboration: Collaborated with the Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Service Delivery Leads (SDLs) to seamlessly integrate our values into their leadership behaviours and decision-making processes.

- Quarterly updates on the People Strategy delivery have been included as part of the council's quarterly Performance and Progress report, the first of which for 2024/25 was reviewed by Cabinet in September 2024.
- Our leadership development programmes continue. These initiatives are designed to ensure that our political and officer leadership teams are aligned in their understanding and approach, creating a unified direction that drives our collective ambition forward. The focus of these programmes is not only to enhance our strategic capabilities but also to deepen our understanding of the broader context in which we operate, and to have trusted conversations, including succession planning. These efforts are integral to sustaining our huge ambition for Watford.





**WATFORD**  
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