



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

CABINET

(updated agenda)

4 September 2023

7.00 pm

**Rooms 201/202, Annexe, Town Hall,
Watford**

Contact

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01923 278377

Publication date: 4 September 2023

Cabinet Membership

Mayor	P Taylor	(Chair)
Councillor	A Dychton	(Deputy Mayor)
Councillors	J Pattinson, G Saffery, I Stotesbury, M Watkin and T Williams	

Agenda

Part A – Open to the Public

1. **Apologies for absence**
2. **Disclosure of interests (if any)**
3. **Minutes of previous meeting**

The [minutes](#) of the meeting held on 10 July 2023 to be submitted and signed.

4. **Conduct of meeting**

The Cabinet may wish to consider whether there are any items on which there is general agreement which could be considered now, to enable discussion to focus on those items where the Cabinet sees a need for further debate.

5. **Performance and Progress Report: Q1 2023/24** (Pages 4 - 70)

Report of the Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services, Delivery Support Lead, Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead

6. **Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26** (Pages 71 - 110)

Report of the Communications and Engagement Lead

7. **UK Shared Prosperity Fund Phase 2 Proposals** (Pages 111 - 131)

Report of the Economic Development Lead

8. Exclusion of press & public

The Chair to move: that, under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business as it is likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during consideration of the item there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in Section 100(1) of the Act for the reasons stated below in terms of Schedule 12A.

Note: if approved, the Chair will ask members of the press and public to leave the meeting at this point.

9. Letting at Croxley Business Park (Pages 132 - 158)

Report of the Associate Director of Property and Asset Management

The report is considered exempt in accordance with paragraph 3, Part 1 Schedule 12A as it relates to the business affairs of the council and contains commercially sensitive information.

Agenda Item 5

Report to:	<i>Cabinet</i>
If other:	<i>N/A</i>
Date of meeting:	<i>4 September 2023</i>
Report author:	<i>Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services, Delivery Support Lead, Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead</i>
Report sponsor:	<i>Director of Partnerships</i>
Portfolio holder:	<i>Councillor Mark Watkin</i>
Report title:	<i>Performance and Progress Report – Q1 2023/24</i>

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 Following the Mayoral election last year, in June 2022 Watford Borough Council launched its new Council Plan which sets out an ambitious agenda for the town and the council. The Council Plan forms part of the organisation's strategic framework, which aims to ensure that the council delivers on its commitments. Underpinning the Council Plan is a two-year Delivery Plan and our key corporate strategies, which are both supported by a suite of key performance indicators (KPIs). This allows the council to ensure that both projects, strategies and high quality services continue to be delivered, and for action to be taken if areas of concern are identified. A critical part of this approach is regular reporting of the key elements of the council's strategic framework and day to day performance. This report, therefore, contains updates comprising:

- the Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022-24;
- the key performance indicators for Q1 of 2023/24.
- Key corporate strategies

1.2 The updates reflect the positive outcomes that have been achieved over the first quarter of 2023/24. The progress achieved since the last update to Cabinet is shown in the updates appended to this report (Appendices A, B and C).

1.3 The successful delivery of the commitments in the Council Plan 2022-26 is critical to ensuring we remain focused on what is important to Watford and we are seen by our community as an organisation that delivers on its promises. As such, the council has committed to reporting on progress against our key plans on a quarterly basis. This report forms the fifth of these updates since the approval of the new Council Plan.

1.4 As part of our drive for continuous improvement, a review of the council's key performance indicators across the organisation was undertaken in first part of

2023 with the support of both Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Appendix B reports against the newly agreed key performance indicators.

2.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet note:

2.1 The progress updates within this report relating to:

- the Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022 -24 (Appendix A)
- the key performance indicator results for Quarter 1 of 2023/24 (Appendix B)
- the council's key corporate strategies (Appendix C)

2.2 That the report will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 September 2023.

3.0 Report pathway

3.1 Next review body: *Not applicable:*

3.1.1 Indicative date: *Not Applicable*

3.2 Final review body: *Cabinet*

3.2.1 Indicative date: *4 September 2023*

- **Contact Officer:**

For further info contact: Liam Hornsby, Associate Director of
Customer and Corporate Services,

Email: liam.hornsby@watford.gov.uk

Reviewed and signed off by: Kathryn Robson, Director of Performance

4.0 Detailed proposal

4.1 The council has an ambitious agenda for Watford and recognises that a focused, and aligned, strategic framework is fundamental to the successful delivery of its plans for the town.

4.2 Following the Mayoral election in May 2022, the council reviewed and refreshed its strategic framework to better reflect these ambitions as well as the Mayor's Manifesto, local intelligence, community feedback and best practice. The renewed framework, comprising the council's key strategies

and plans, confirms our focus on what is important to the town and its residents and that resources are allocated to its priority commitments.

4.3 A critical part of the successful delivery of the renewed framework is robust, and regular, monitoring and reporting of the associated plans including:

- the Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022-24;
- Key performance indicators.
- Key corporate strategies

This report presents a progress update of the plans outlined in 5.5 and in associated Appendices (A, B and C).

4.4 A significant amount of progress has been achieved across all delivery areas. The direction set by the strategic framework has ensured services have clarity on where they need to concentrate, focus their energies and support the council's reputation as a council that gets things done and that delivers on what is important to the town.

4.5 Running throughout the council's progress is the strengthening of our organisational approach, governance and structure. This means the council has the essential building blocks in place to support all of our activities and commitments not just across these plans but also across all of our corporate work and effort. This has particularly focused on:

- making sure we have the right capacity to deliver, particularly at the senior level of the organisation and following the recent realignment of Tier 4 management of the council;
- a renewed emphasis on integrating how we work strategically;
- making sure the way we make our decisions is transparent, timely and supported by the relevant information; and
- our organisational culture, underpinned by our recently approved values and behaviours, is directed to our 'one team' approach, shared ownership of our corporate priorities and commitment to deliver

4.6 All of our plans and strategies are underpinned by a suite of key performance indicators, which have recently been reviewed and ensure that, as an organisation, we continue to provide high quality services to our residents, businesses and community.

5.0 Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022-24

5.1 The new Council Plan 2022-26 was approved by Council in June 2022 as was the associated Delivery Plan 2022-24.

5.2 The Council Plan is designed to be strategic, high level and outward-facing, with an emphasis on outcome focused commitments based around four key themes:

- A greener, brighter future
- An inspiring, thriving and creative town
- A diverse happy and healthy town
- A council working for our community and serving our residents

Each theme has a number of areas of commitment under which specific projects and areas of work have been identified and articulated through the Delivery Plan 2022-24.

5.3 Whilst the Council Plan has a four-year perspective, the Delivery Plan has been developed to focus on key priorities to 2024. The 18-month perspective means that the Council can remain flexible and agile to respond to emerging and future challenges and opportunities over the life of the Council Plan.

5.4 By reporting regularly to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the progress made by the organisation against the Council Plan and, particularly the Delivery Plan, we can ensure we are continuing to focus our resources on what is important to our town and community. It also provides transparency and clear accountability to our community.

5.5 The full report can be seen an Appendix A but some key highlights, by Council Plan theme, are included below:

A greener brighter future

- In line with our commitment to invest in sustainable transport, a new Watford Car Club, in partnership with Enterprise Car Club, will be launching in the autumn 2023. The scheme, which will consist of six electric or hybrid vehicles for hire, will provide an affordable, convenient and environmentally friendly option for residents wishing to hire a car.
- Our Cassiobury Wetland project is now progressing with re-baselined key milestones and an agreed concept design which will see this area of biodiversity returned to life. £25k has also be awarded by the Landfill Communities Fund in order to help us realise this vision.
- Groundwork, our contractor on the River Colne programme, have obtained £100k funding from the Environment Agency to continue supporting our ambitions for the River Colne.

- Delivery of the council's Environmental Strategy 2023-30 has commenced. Through the Strategy we will work towards our ambition to achieve net zero carbon emissions for the borough by 2030.

An inspiring, thriving and creative town

- Watford's Place Brand, Narrative and Strategy was approved by Cabinet in July 2023 and will be launched in late summer 2023. The Strategy will be a key tool in promoting Watford as a great location for businesses, attract more visitors and support the local economy.
- We were a winner in the East of England Awards for Planning Excellence, winning in the category of 'Best Plan' for the 'Watford Local Plan 2021-2038: A Sustainable Town'.
- The decarbonisation and fabric repairs work to the Town Hall and Colosseum are now complete. The decarbonisation works were funded by a £3m Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme grant. Through this scheme the council has installed state of the art photovoltaic (PV) panels on the roof of the Town Hall and Colosseum, reducing the reliance on traditional power sources. The PVs are expected to save 24 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. In addition a 30% saving in both gas bills and carbon emissions is expected due to the new cavity wall insulation.
- We are progressing the Colosseum refurbishment works and are meeting regularly with the new venue operator, AEG, to agree and finalise the design changes to the building.
- Local projects funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) are progressing well with good participation from the SME community. We have submitted the year 1 UKSPF return to DLUHC and have received confirmation for year 2 funding.

A diverse, happy and healthy town

- Practical completion for the New Crematorium was achieved in June 2023. The new facility, which is located in Hemel Hempstead, will serve residents in Watford, Dacorum, Hertsmere, Three Rivers and St Albans and will be opening in Q2.
- The Conservation Areas Management Plan was approved by Cabinet in June 2023. The action plans will ensure that we take the necessary steps to enhance and protect the historical features, and character, of different areas of the borough.
- The Easter 2023 holiday programme was successfully delivered and a scheme offering sessions to families via a local voluntary organisation was piloted with a good uptake by Watford residents.

- The Watford Community Lottery was launched and the first inaugural draw was held in June 2023. 60% of all ticket sales will go towards supporting our local community and good causes.
- To date 2,600 trees have been claimed via the county-wide tree giveaway, which will go towards increasing our green canopy.
- Following closures over Covid, the Healthy Hub at the Town Hall is open on Wednesdays for face-to-face drop-in appointments and once a month on a Friday for the HCC Health Improvement team to provide bookable appointments for Watford residents to have NHS health checks.

A council working for our community and serving our residents

- Through our Customer Experience Strategy we have launched the Customer Care Service Standards, which sets out what our customers can expect from us and how we will deliver our services by adopting best practice in line with the council's values.
- We participated in the 'South West Herts Great Big Green Week', a national campaign which aims to draw attention to climate change. A number of fun and educational events were held across Watford and Three Rivers including a Palace Family screening of Lorax, Watford Green Gym and Watford Green Market.
- We successfully delivered the May 2023 Local Elections in compliance the Electoral Commission Guidance and some aspects of the Elections Act 2022, such as the Voter Photo ID, which is now a requirement.
- The Information & Insight Strategy (formally the Business Intelligence Strategy) and Delivery Plan were approved in June 2023. The Strategy sets out how we will achieve our vision of an organisation driven by intelligence to meet the demands of our customers and continue to provide high quality services.
- We showcased the implementation of our agile working approach at the Local Government Association Conference. This included a video message from our staff and members on the benefits of agile working and how this has improved their work life balance.

6.0 Key Performance Indicators

6.1 Our key performance indicators underpin our Council Plan by ensuring that the organisation continues to perform against a range of measures.

6.2 The measures highlighted within this report have supported the delivery of good quality services (both internal and external) by highlighting areas of good performance and, more importantly, under performance. This allows the council to ensure that services continue

to offer a high quality service to our residents and businesses, and for action to be taken if areas of concern are identified.

6.3 The attached report (Appendix B), therefore, shows the results for the current set of key performance indicators during the first quarter of the 2023/24 financial year. In summary, out of 45 indicators measured in Q1, 42 of those had targets set. Out of the 42 indicators with new, more challenging targets, 23 exceeded targets, 4 were outside of the target but within tolerance and 15 were outside of the target. Some key highlights, by Council Plan theme, are included below:

- Average time to process housing benefit claims was 1 day outside of target, but within tolerance. This is the first dip in results after 15 months of being within target. Fewer Housing Benefit claims coming in means that a small number of claims taking the full term to process has impacted the figures. The recent addition of new automation should improve this figure during the next quarter. Average time to process a change of circumstances was also outside of target, but within tolerance. Due to a third-party error, the service needed to manually process several hundred rent increases which would have normally been automated. This took a significant amount of resource, and impacted processing times.
- Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates collection are both on track to be within target at the end of the year, and up on results this time last year. During Q1 the online Discounts and Exemptions form was launched, which is increasing automation and resulting in faster awards of Discounts and Exemptions. % of Housing benefit classified as 'LA error' was outside of the target, and above this time last year. This result is primarily due to an overpayment in one case which occurred in April. Whilst this result is over the threshold and therefore won't attract a subsidy, it is early in the year, and more expenditure throughout the year will reduce the LA Error overpayment figure over time.
- Processing of Major and Other planning application types was well within target. Processing of Minor planning application types was just outside of target by 1%.
- Looking at customer experience measures, Self service levels and telephone calls answered both exceeded targets. Customer call-backs are now being offered on all calls coming into the CSC, and as a result less calls should be abandoned.
- Telephone waiting time to the CSC was just outside of target by 1%, but within tolerance. This was due to increased demand face to face for the Housing service. In addition, system faults affected phonelines for over 2 hours in total during April and June. In May the service exceeded the target by 5%.
- FOI response time remained strong at 91%, but still below target of 100%, reflecting the complexity of some of the requests the council receives.

- Several new KPIs related to Customer satisfaction by contact channel were added as part of the KPI review, and the metrics are based around the percentage of customers who have given a positive rating of the service received. The contact channels assessed in Q1 were website, telephone and digital. All three contact channels were below target, although telephone was just under target, with 97% of customers giving a positive rating. Digital was below this at 85%, and the website was the lowest at 42%. It is worth noting that, of the website feedback received, 68% relates to Parking, and comments tended to relate to dissatisfaction at being issued a PCN rather than the website itself. Face to face customer satisfaction is not currently being measured and will be introduced in line with the new Town Hall opening.
- The other 2 new KPIs related to customer experience were customers signed up to digital/email as preferred contact channel and complaints response time. Both were outside of the target for Q1, although not by a significant amount. Further promotion of online services, via the delivery of our Customer Experience Strategy, should help to improve this figure over the next quarter.
- Leisure Centre usage, swimming lesson sign-up and membership increased for most indicators for both Central and Woodside centres. There was a slight reduction in swimming lessons take up at Woodside, however this is expected to level out in the coming months. There was a free 'gym and swim' offer running from the 3rd to the 14th April, plus a sales promotion offering a £1 joining fee during April. A Personal Trainer Launch day in May generated £2,000 of income.
- The number of parking penalty charge notices issued in Q1 was 8,632.
- There were 11 verified rough sleepers at the end of June, and of those, four were new. Five of the verified rough sleepers currently in Watford have no recourse to public funds so cannot be assisted under the homelessness legislation or through private rented accommodation as they cannot have access to welfare benefits. The service are continuing to explore options for how these rough sleepers can be supported.
- The numbers of households living in temporary accommodation has been over 100 since November 2022, and rose in Q1 to 148. All local authorities are experiencing increased levels of homelessness as a result of the economic climate. The reasons for homeless include private landlords selling their homes in greater numbers than before or wanting to relet at higher rents (perhaps linked to increased mortgage interest rates); more family and friends unable to accommodate (likely to be linked to cost of living increases). In addition to increased numbers of people requiring TA, there is increasing difficulty in finding settled accommodation to help people move on from TA. Affordability of homes is a significant issue, with the LHA and wages not increasing, meaning most private rental costs are unsustainable, and even social housing costs are unaffordable for some residents. In addition, there have been delays in completions of large new social housing due to development stalling or going into liquidation.

- There are 4 new KPIs relating to Housing. The number of homeless relief cases closed with a successful outcome was well below the 60% target at 36%. The number of successful homeless preventions exceeding the 60% target at 63%.
- The number of Homeless households in Temporary Accommodation out of area was 18, over the target of 3 or less. This is linked to the delays in handovers of new homes, and an increase in the number of homeless applications during the quarter. This resulted in the council having to source additional units from the market, which is usually situated outside the borough. There is stiff competition for hotel and nightly let accommodation arising from other local authorities also dealing with increased homelessness applications. London Boroughs are routinely placing their clients within Watford hotels, and also providing significant incentives to private sector landlords.
- Number of new homes for social rent handed over in Q1 was 13, on track for the yearly target for 40. The ambition is 120 new homes by 2026.
- The result for the indicator relating to staff sickness was well within target as usual, and the lowest figure reported since Q2 2022. Long term sickness remained low in Q1 and an improvement on levels recorded last year. Short-term sickness was the lowest recorded since Q1 2022, and was almost half the level recorded in Q1 last year.
- Beryl Bike usage is a new KPI for Q1 and results are similar to last year with 30,393 journeys made in Q1. Beryl Bike usage is seasonal, with Q1 and Q2 expected to be higher than Q3 and Q4 when the weather is colder. Usage is on track to achieve the target of 115,000 journeys this year.
- There are new KPIs included for Community Protection, relating to pest control and fly-tipping. Pest control response time exceeded the target set, with 99.50% of initial treatments carried out within 10 working days. Fly tip response for both standard and urgent requests also exceeded targets with 97.67% and 100% respectively of fly-tip cases responded to within timescales.
- Residual household waste was just outside of the new, more challenging target agreed as part of the KPI review, but within tolerance. Q1 is an estimated result as June's data isn't yet available from HCC. The annual target should still be achievable. Waste recycled and composted was within target.
- The Watford Market occupancy rate is a new KPI for Q1, which measures the number of market units which are occupied with rent paying traders. A good result was achieved, with 93.50% of the market units occupied.
- Levels of litter and graffiti were both within target, with litter slightly increasing compared with Q1 last year, and graffiti decreasing. The fly-posting score outside of target, with the main issue caused by non-compliant posters advertising an event in Cassiobury Park (accounting for

a 1% loss in performance). The detritus score has significantly increased from 6.46% last year to 9.71% this year. This is a result of an agreed service change to reduce the frequency of overnight cleansing of high-speed roads, in order to make a cost saving.

7.0 Key Council Strategies

7.1 Aligned to the Council Plan are a number of key strategies which guide the organisations' delivery of services in a number of specific areas. These strategies have each been approved individually by Cabinet and, in line with our ambition to strengthen delivery across the council, updates on these strategies will be included within the quarterly Performance and Progress reports reviewed by Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

7.2 These are attached at Appendix C and are intended to give an overview of progress over the past period, highlight the key activities for the next period and provide key pieces of information about the particular area of delivery.

8.0 Implications

8.1 Financial

8.1.1 The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy is aligned with the Council Plan to ensure that the commitments within the Plan are resourced. The Council's budget underpins the whole of the Council Plan and Delivery Plan. The importance of the budget is recognised under the theme 'A Council working for our community and serving our residents' with the related commitment being 'Focus and challenge how we manage our budget so it is concentrated on delivering our commitments and securing greater investment for Watford'.

8.1.2 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no further financial implications arising from the contents of this report.

8.2 Legal issues (Monitoring Officer)

8.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the Council Plan is one of the policy framework documents listed in the constitution that has to be approved by Council. The plan was approved by Council on 13 June 2022.

8.3 Risks

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested control measure	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)	Risk rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Slippage on delivery of the Council Plan	<p>Failure to deliver our commitments resulting in poorer outcomes for our town and residents.</p> <p>Potential impact on the reputation of the Council.</p>	<p>Regular monitoring and reporting to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny</p> <p>Robust project and programme management</p>	Treat	3 (severity) x 2 (likelihood) = 6
Failure to recognise milestones / completion of commitments	Lost opportunity to celebrate success internally and externally	<p>Regular monitoring and reporting to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny</p> <p>Robust project and programme management</p> <p>Clear communication of milestones / achievements</p>	Treat	3 (severity) x 2 (likelihood) = 6
Failure to promote and recognise the Council's strategic approach and culture that is focused on delivery and outcomes	Lost opportunity to embed a renewed strategic approach and culture that ensures Watford BC remains a high performing, innovative and	<p>Regular, robust and accurate reports for Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny that is owned across service areas</p> <p>Linking delivery to staff and team objectives</p>	Treat	3 (severity) x 1 (likelihood) = 3

	agile organisation			
Slippage on delivery of the key strategies	Failure to deliver our commitments to staff potentially resulting in failure to deliver our Council Plan.	Regular monitoring and reporting to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Robust project and programme management.	Treat	3 (severity) x 2 (likelihood) = 6
Failure to scrutinise organisational performance	Potential for performance to slip with consequences for quality of service delivery	Robust scrutiny and challenge	Treat	3 (severity) x 2 (likelihood) = 6
Failure to respond to issues with organisational performance	Potential for issues with performance not to be addressed, and for poor performance to continue	Response to issues identified monitored by Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Leadership Board and Portfolio Holders.	Treat	3 (severity) x 2 (likelihood) = 6
Failure to provide transparency over organisational performance	Lack of understanding and trust related to organisational performance, particularly where performance is below the standard expected.	Ensure KPIs have sufficient commentary explaining the context around the quarterly results. Ensure portfolio holders have regular opportunities to review and discuss organisation performance.	Treat	3 (severity) x 2 (likelihood) = 6

8.4 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

8.4.1 Equalities

8.4.1.1 An Equality Impact Analysis (EIA) was developed for the Council Plan 2022-2026. This is consistently reviewed based on up-to-date information and data the council receives to ensure the council meets its public sector equalities under the s149 (1) of the Equality Act 2010.

8.4.2 Data Protection Impact Assessment

8.4.2.1 Having had regard to the council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

8.5 Sustainability

8.5.1 The council's commitment to sustainability runs through the Council Plan and a range of actions to deliver our climate change commitments are identified within the Delivery Plan. These range from pushing forward with delivering greener ways to travel in Watford to promoting Watford's transition to a low-carbon economy. Indeed, an entire theme is devoted to delivering 'a brighter, greener future' with a whole range of activities planned to meet our sustainability commitments.

8.6 People Implications

8.6.1 The Council Plan sets the Council's strategic direction, and is, therefore, a key document for staff, enabling them to understand our commitments and priorities and allowing them to contribute fully to our success and achievements. As the overarching plan for the Council, it provides the framework for all our strategies and policies and links, through the Delivery Plan, to service business plans and individual staff objectives and outcomes. The principles demonstrate how we go about our work and are an important guide for staff on the Council's expectations recognising it is not just what we deliver but how we deliver that is a measure of our organisational culture.

8.7 Community Safety/Crime and Disorder

8.7.1 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires the Council to give due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of its functions on crime and disorder in its area and to do all it reasonably can to prevent these. Our theme: A diverse, happy and healthy town, underpins our commitment to 'promote our welcoming and respectful town' and the associated action to 'ensure everyone feels welcome, included and safe in Watford' and to 'establish our commitment to the wellbeing of women and girls' by working with partners and using our statutory powers.

9.0 Next steps should recommendations be approved

9.1 This report is to update the Cabinet on the following:

- Appendix A – Council Plan 2022-26 / Delivery Plan 2022-24 progress update
- Appendix B – Key Performance Indicators update Q1 2023-24
- Appendix C – Key Corporate Strategies

Following review by Cabinet, this report will be presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comment.

9.2 In order to improve transparency of our corporate performance, a designated web page has been created providing a single location for the Council Plan 2022-26, Delivery Plan 2022-24 and key strategies to be publicly accessible. Alongside these strategies, the Performance and Progress reports will also be available .

10.0 Appendices

- Appendix A –Delivery Plan 2022-24 progress update
- Appendix B –Key Performance Indicators update Q1 2023-24
- Appendix C1 – Economic Growth Strategy 2022-26
- Appendix C2 – Customer Experience Strategy 2022-26
- Appendix C3 – Sustainability Strategy 2023-30
- Appendix C4 – Transforming Travel in Watford Strategy
- Appendix C5 – Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-26
- Appendix C6 - Cultural Strategy 2018-25

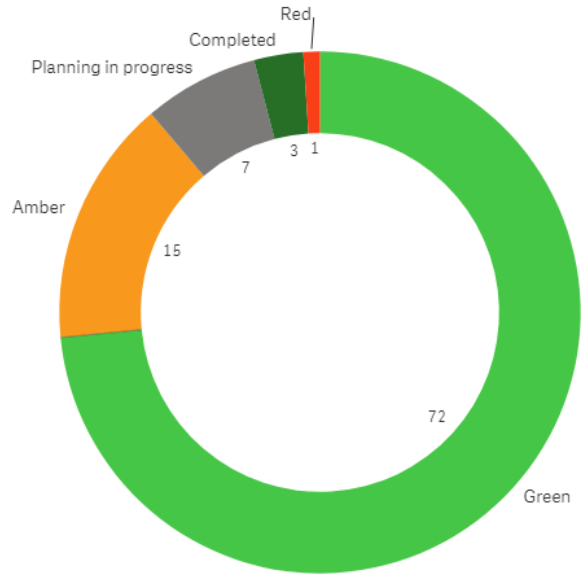
11.0 Background papers

- Watford Borough Council: Council Plan 2022-26
- Watford Borough Council: Delivery Plan 2024-26
- Economic Growth Strategy 2022-26
- Customer Experience Strategy 2022-26
- Sustainability Strategy 2023-30
- Transforming Travel in Watford Strategy
- Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-26
- Cultural Strategy 2018-25

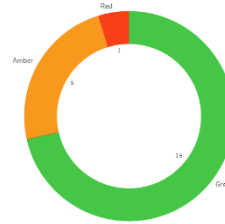


Delivery Plan Overview

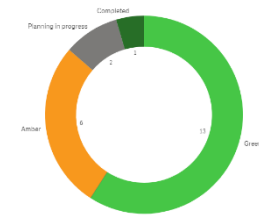
CDP Activity BRAG Split



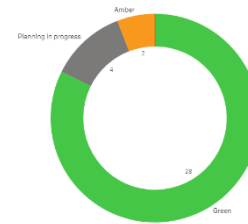
Council Plan Theme - A greener, brighter future



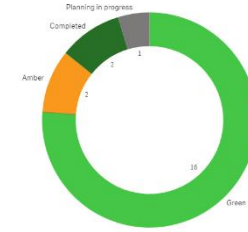
Council Plan Theme - An inspiring, thriving and creative town



Council Plan Theme - A diverse, happy and healthy town



Council Plan Theme - A Council working for our community and serving our residents



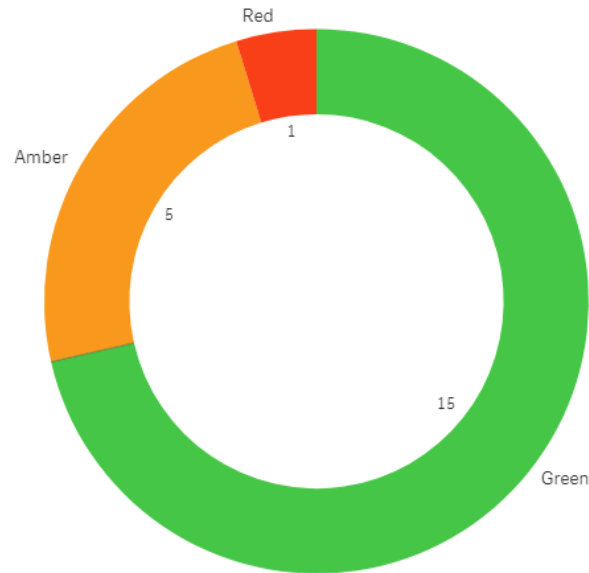
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Key

- D.Green – Completed
- Green – On track
- Amber – Potential Risks / Some uncertainty
- Red – Challenges

THEME: A greener brighter future

Overview



Key achievements over this period

- In line with our commitment to invest in sustainable transport, a new Watford Car Club, in partnership with Enterprise Car Club, will be launching in the autumn 2023. The scheme, which will consist of six electric or hybrid vehicles for hire, will provide an affordable, convenient and environmentally friendly option for residents wishing to hire a car.
- Our Cassiobury Wetland project is now progressing with re-baselined key milestones and an agreed concept design which will see this area of biodiversity returned to life. £25k has also be awarded by the Landfill Communities Fund in order to help us realise this vision.
- Groundwork, our contractor on the River Colne programme, have obtained £100k funding from the Environment Agency to continue supporting our ambitions for the River Colne.
- Delivery of the council's Environmental Strategy 2023-30 has commenced. Through the Strategy we will work towards our ambition to achieve net zero carbon emissions for the borough by 2030.

Commitment	Activity		BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline
Encourage people to make greener travel choices, reducing congestion and improving the health and wellbeing of the town	1. Investigate greener travel and transport solutions that work for Watford	We will continue to investigate the potential for a low-carbon transport hub in Watford town centre to encourage more use of public transport, reducing congestion and improving air quality for everyone.	Green	↔	In line with our Transforming Travel in Watford Strategy, good progress has been made regarding the investigations into a low-carbon transport hub, including identifying potential sites within the borough. Over the last period, further work has been undertaken to develop an outline business case and over the next period, potential designs will be developed.
	2. Promote ways of to travel that support people make greener choices	We will explore initiatives such as secure cycle parking and school travel plans to give people options other than using their car for every journey.	Green	↔	<p>Through our ambitious TTIW Programme, a number of initiatives that will provide residents with options other than using their own cars for short and long journeys have been progressed. This includes awarding the contract for the new Watford Car Club, which will be formally launched in autumn 2023, to Enterprise Car Club. The scheme will provide six electric or hybrid vehicles for hire, offering an affordable, convenient and environmentally friendly option for residents.</p> <p>The St Albans Road Sustainable Transport Corridor revised Masterplan has now been received and, once signed off, an implementation programme will be developed.</p> <p>Proposals for the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans are progressing with the identified sites currently being safety audited and costings completed.</p> <p>The District Shopping Parade Improvements project planning is underway with improvements planned to shopping parades in both The Brow and Whippendell Road.</p> <p>Further information on how the council is progressing delivery of its Transforming Travel in Watford Strategy is included within Appendix C4.</p>
	3. Champion sustainable travel initiatives and greener vehicles options	We will introduce initiatives such as electric vehicles, e-cargo bikes, electric charging points and e-car clubs to encourage more use of green transport, reducing congestion and improving air quality.	Green	↔	<p>The installation of the electric vehicle charging points, which is funded by a successful On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS) grant of £592.5k, is well underway. 38 sites have been identified for charge points and all sites have now been surveyed with Ringway, HCC's principal contractor for highway services . Leaflet deliveries were undertaken to promote the benefits of the scheme and the ORCS funding.</p> <p>Our contractor will commence delivery of the first phase from July 2023. We will be launching the Watford Car Club in partnership with Enterprise Car Club in autumn 2023.</p> <p>HCC have secured funding for a cargo bike trial with Raleigh Bikes and have confirmed that Cassiobury Infant School will be trialling the bike in September 2023. Two additional cargo bikes will be available for loan to businesses or others who would like to participate in the trial. The council has registered interest.</p>

Commitment	Activity	BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline	
	4. Work with our partners to improve our cycling and walking network, including designing and implementing a green loop	We will work with Hertfordshire County Council and our cycling and walking communities to improve the cycling and walking network across our town so more people choose to cycle and walk.	Green	↔	Plans continue to improve our cycling and walking network and working to identify how our Wayfinding Strategy can align with the Green Loop to create a comprehensive solution. The sites identified are currently being safety audited and 3D modelling of the Green Loop East is continuing. We have agreed a priority intervention measure with HCC which is focussed on the contraflow lane along St Johns Road, which will ensure a 'loop' rather than a one direction flow.
	5. Champion proposals for a sustainable transport option for Watford Junction to Croxley	We will work closely with Hertfordshire County Council on the Watford to Croxley Link, examining the feasibility of options to secure the best transport system for our town, offering greater choice for our residents, visitors and commuters to travel sustainably.	Green	↔	We are continuing to work closely with HCC in line with the council's commitment to support proposals for sustainable transport across the town. The Watford to Croxley Link stage 2 work, which is the final stage in the options and feasibility study, is close to completion and a draft report is expected by the end of July 2023.
Promote improvements to Watford's biodiversity to enhance the range of habitats, plants and wildlife in the town	6. Set out our commitments to improving Watford's biodiversity	We will develop our Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plan, recognising the importance of our range of habitats across the town and setting out how we will improve and enhance these for future generations.	Green	↔	Our Biodiversity Strategy is being scoped with the Planning Policy team, and in line with the recently approved Environmental Strategy. The recruitment process for an interim support has been completed and the project can now commence in earnest. A range of work is already underway to support our commitment to biodiversity including improvements to the River Colne, Cassiobury Wetlands and our Tree Planting Programme.
	7. Enhance and extend our green canopy, through our proactive tree planting initiative	We will work with our community to plant 20,000 trees across the town by 2026, increasing our green canopy, making Watford a more pleasant place to live, work and enjoy recreation time.	Green	↔	Following the successful planting of 126 new trees in 2022/23, planning for this year's Tree Planting Programme is now underway for 2023/24. Opportunities for additional tree funding continues to be explored. The next phase of the County-wide Tree Giveaway has been publicised and over 2,600 have been claimed to date. Tree watering is in place with Veolia and is monitored monthly.
	8. Rediscover the River Colne to enhance the river, the river corridor, as a place for our community to enjoy	We will improve the River Colne through Watford to make it a more appealing place for local people to enjoy and a better environment for plants and wildlife to flourish.	Amber	↔	With onsite improvements works at the River Colne now commenced, the river berm installation at Knutsford South has been completed with support from our volunteers. Planting will be completed at the appropriate time to maximise their success. Groundwork, our contractor, have successfully obtained £100k funding from the Environment Agency to continue supporting our ambitions for the River Colne. A number of Balsam (invasive species) bashing events have been held with the support of volunteers. A 'Tales of the River' intern has been appointed to support delivery of this workstream and has arranged successful events including the Wildplay and River Amble events. This activity remains Amber as the completion of the full scope of in river works along the southern section of the river this Autumn / Winter is at risk,

Commitment	Activity	BRAG ¹ Rating	Trend	Headline	
				due to the dependency on the EA agreeing a permit in time. This risk is being monitored closely and being reviewed with our in-river specialists.	
	9. Reinvigorate the Cassiobury Wetlands as an important part of our natural environment	We will improve the wetland and habitat of the former watercress beds on the River Gade in Cassiobury Park to enhance biodiversity, water quality and preserve and protect relevant related historical features.	Amber	↔	Following the previously reported challenges with the Cassiobury Wetland project significant progress has been made over the last quarter, enabling us to proceed with delivery. The contract sum has been agreed and concept design complete. A Landfill Communities Fund of £25k has been awarded to help support the delivery of our ambitions for the Cassiobury Wetlands.
	10. Celebrate and enhance Whippendell Woods as a site of special scientific interest	We will protect Whippendell Woods, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), in order to preserve its 'favourable condition' status.	Green	↑	In line with our commitment to sustainability, works remain ongoing in Whippendell Woods. Our Ash Dieback plan is with the Forestry Commission, awaiting the felling license and we have acquired a tree survey quote from a contractor. To preserve the SSSI status of Whippendell Woods we are working with Bike Park Chilterns, a Community Interest Company, to find a new location for the unofficial mountain bike trail that had been in use in the woodlands. We are awaiting a comms plan and artist impression of the proposed facility.
	11. Promote healthy and sustainable gardening across the town	We will continue compost give-aways using our green waste recycling to bring back the organic material as free, nutrient-rich compost for Watford residents to grow plants and vegetables.	Green	↔	In line with our commitment to promote healthy and sustainable gardening across the town, the council's popular Compost Giveaway will continue on an annual basis, encouraging and supporting our residents to grow plants and vegetables. The next phase of the county-wide Tree Giveaway, which contributes to our commitment to enhance the green canopy across the town, was launched and to date over 2,600 trees have been claimed.
	12. Provide clear guidance on improving biodiversity in the town	We will set out guidance for developers on how to improve and enhance biodiversity in developments so they contribute to the town's goals for better habitats and environmental diversity	Amber	↔	Whilst a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) for how developers can contribute to our vision and ambition to enhance biodiversity across the town has been drafted and a briefing session held with councillors, the government released draft guidance which indicates that the process will be standardised. This will remove the ability of Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to set out local projects and charge rates for schemes that qualify for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) investments. The BRAG rating remains amber until the guidance is formalised however Herts LPAs have started to discuss how approaches can be applied consistently which could aid progress on approaches set out in the emerging SPD. An application for the first tranches of ringfenced funding (£15k) from the government for biodiversity net gain implementation was submitted in April 2023.

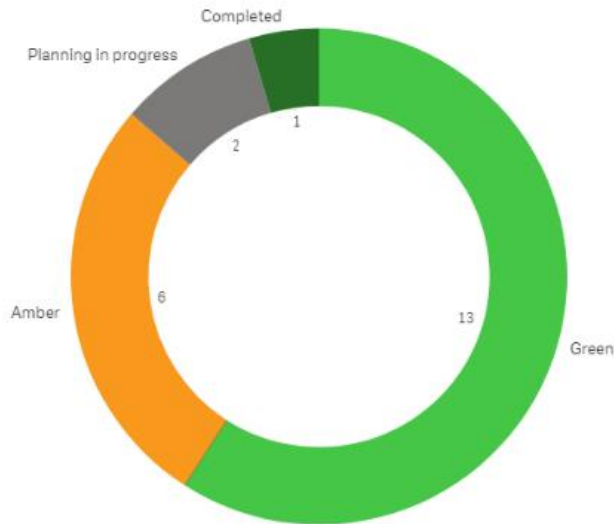
Commitment	Activity	BRAG ¹ Rating	Trend	Headline	
<p>Work alongside our community and businesses to find the right ways to reach net carbon neutral, seeking not just to learn from others but to explore innovative solutions that will work for Watford</p>	13. Develop and implement our new Sustainability Strategy	We will work with our community and businesses to develop and implement our new Sustainability Strategy, now called Watford's Environmental Strategy: addressing the climate and ecological emergency, which will set out how together, we can contribute to our target to be a net carbon neutral borough by 2030.	Green	↔	Now that the council's Environment Strategy is approved, delivery of the Delivery Plan is well in progress via a designated Sustainability Programme, however the commitment to achieve net carbon zero by 2030 and the promotion and enhancement sustainability is a key objective in other projects and programmes such as the River Colne and Town Hall Quarter Programmes. Further information on how the council is progressing delivery of its Environment Strategy is included within Appendix C3.
	14. Prepare for legislative changes to help protect our environment	We will respond to the requirements of the Environment Act 2021 to ensure we deliver on our role in improving air quality, tackling waste, improving biodiversity and making other environmental improvements.	Green	↔	The council's Environmental Strategy, which takes into account the requirement of the Environment Act 2021 and sets out our ambition and plan for achieving new carbon zero by 2030 and which was adopted in March 2023, delivery is in progress. Further information on how the council is progressing delivery of its Sustainability Strategy is included within Appendix C3.
	15. Explore opportunities that will contribute financially to our green commitments and goals	We will explore innovative, economically viable ideas that contribute to net carbon zero tapping into emerging trends, including investigating the possibility of green bonds to raise funds for planned projects.	Red	↔	As previously reported, due to the current economic climate and the rise in interest rates the proposal for the Green Investment Bond Scheme has been deferred until the economic climate improves, hence the red rating. The Electric Super Hub initiative, a high-speed charging hub for Electric Vehicles constructed on council-owned land, is still being explored which would entail leasing the land to an operator. Two operators are currently undertaking soft market testing and developing business cases to test the viability of this initiative.
	16. Investigate generating energy from renewable sources	We will examine including sustainable energy generation in council developments so we lead by example and demonstrate how it can work effectively.	Green	↔	Alongside the extensive decarbonisation works to the Town Hall and Colosseum, we are undertaking a procurement exercise to appoint sustainability consultants to undertake a review of further opportunities on council assets, making the most of external funding opportunities. An update report will be available by Autumn 2023. The decarbonisation works at the Town Hall and Colosseum are now complete following a year-long project to improve the sustainability of both heritage buildings.
	17. Improve the energy performance of the Town Hall and Watford Colosseum	We will carry out extensive de-carbonisation works to our Town Hall and Colosseum to improve their energy efficiency and ensure they have a reduced carbon footprint.	Amber	↔	The decarbonisation work and fabric repairs to the Town Hall and Colosseum, funded by the £3m central government grant, is now complete. As part of the initiative, the council has installed 144 state-of-the-art photovoltaic (PV) panels on the roof of the Town Hall and 36 on the Colosseum to harness renewable energy, reducing the reliance on traditional power sources. It is expected to save 24 tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO ₂) per year. In addition a 30% saving in gas bills and carbon emissions is

Commitment	Activity	BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline	
				expected due to the new cavity wall insulation and a further 166-tonne annual saving in carbon through the replacement of lights with LED equivalents and installation of new roof insulation. Training for our Facilities Management team to equip them with the knowledge and skills for operating and managing the new systems has been confirmed. The Colosseum roof insulation replacement works are nearing completion.	
	18. Ensure the council's own buildings are energy efficient	We will explore ways to improve the energy performance of all properties within our portfolio.	Green	↔	In line with our ambition to lead by example, we are working on data collection/assessment of energy usage at Croxley Business Park, and to act as a case study for potential wider roll out across the Council. Our application for the next round of funding from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme to improve the energy efficiency of some of our operational and community estate was unfortunately rejected, however we are preparing a case for further PSDS funding for works to improve the energy efficiency of operational and community estate.
	19. Promote sustainable construction in our own developments	We will actively encourage the use of sustainable materials in any of our new developments so we can role model to others who develop in our town.	Amber	↔	As with the Town Hall and the Colosseum, the council is continuing to encourage the use of sustainable materials in new developments with a BREEAM rating of 'Very Good' targeted for direct development of Gateway Zone at Watford Business Park and a Home Quality Mark, an independently assessed certification scheme for new homes, of 4 (out of 5) at Riverside Road development. The amber status reflects the delay in commencing construction work at Watford Business Park due to issues with the Environment Agency however there is no impact on the scheme sustainability criteria. We are working with existing joint venture partners to assess and implement the most efficient and viable energy solutions in residential projects. Similarly, the recent refurbishment of the Annexe at the Town Hall saw 94% of all material recycled with even higher targets achieved to date on the decarbonisation works at the Town Hall and Colosseum.
Encourage residents and businesses to recycle more, reusing materials and reducing waste and what they throw away	20. Increase how much our residents recycle and reduce the waste we throw away as a town	We will build on the success of our waste and recycling scheme to boost household recycling rates across the borough, introducing the opportunity for food waste collections for all households and setting targets that reflect our sustainability ambitions.	Green	↔	The waste and recycling service changes introduced in 2020 has resulted in an increase of recycling rates for the council. The council and its contractor will strive to deliver the new target for recycling rates over the next 4 years. A proposal for the introduction of food waste from flats and high rise building is being developed by the council and its contractor with a view to implementing in 2023 subject to budget. The scheme will make it easy and simple for all residents to recycle as much as they can.
	21. Support our partners to reduce waste and increase recycling	We will work with our partners, including our environmental services provider and leisure services provider to deliver the next step change in reducing waste and	Green	↔	We are working with our key contractors across the borough, such as Watford Market and leisure centres, to reduce the amount of waste created and seek to increase the recycling rates. Our new Environmental Strategy 2023-30 is a key tool and will support us to achieve our ambitions. We have committed to reducing waste by 50% by

Commitment	Activity	BRAG ¹ Rating	Trend	Headline
		increasing recycling, particularly through campaigns and changing behaviours.		2030 and with recycling making up at least 60% of the waste. We have also committed to reducing the council's own waste to near zero by 2030.

THEME: An inspiring, thriving and creative town

Overview



Key achievements over this period

- Watford's Place Brand, Narrative and Strategy was approved by Cabinet in July 2023 and will be launched in late summer 2023. The Strategy will be a key tool in promoting Watford as a great location for businesses, attract more visitors and support the local economy.
- We were a winner in the East of England Awards for Planning Excellence, winning in the category of 'Best Plan' for the 'Watford Local Plan 2021-2038: A Sustainable Town'.
- The decarbonisation and fabric repairs work to the Town Hall and Colosseum are now complete. The decarbonisation works were funded by a £3m Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme grant. Through this scheme the council has installed state of the art photovoltaic (PV) panels on the roof of the Town Hall and Colosseum, reducing the reliance on traditional power sources. The PVs are expected to save 24 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. In addition a 30% saving in both gas bills and carbon emissions is expected due to the new cavity wall insulation.
- We are progressing the Colosseum refurbishment works and are meeting regularly with the new venue operator, AEG, to agree and finalise the design changes to the building.
- Local projects funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) are progressing well with good participation from the SME community. We have submitted the year 1 UKSPF return to DLUHC and have received confirmation for year 2 funding.

Commitment	Activity	BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline	
Position Watford as a town where start-ups and business innovation can thrive, supported by strong local skills, generating a range of job opportunities, including for our young people	22. Deliver our Innovation and Incubation Hub	We will provide a new Innovation and Incubation Hub, as part of our Town Hall Quarter, which will support start-up businesses in the town and give our key sectors a boost, tapping into the significant opportunity provided by the flourishing creative sector and drawing businesses into the borough.	Amber	↔	Following confirmation that the council's bid for Levelling Up Funding had been unsuccessful, work has been underway to develop a lower cost, scaled down business model for the proposed new business hub. In both scenarios, we will ensure that we can still support Watford start-up businesses and give our key sectors a boost, whilst making efficient use of the Town Hall.
	23. Develop a skills and employment plan for Watford that supports the current, and future, needs of our local businesses and life chances of residents	We will work with our business community and education partners, linking to the Hertfordshire LEP Skills and Employment Plan to develop and deliver a Watford Skills and Employment Plan, connecting local skills to business needs.	Green	↔	Delays in the release of the Herts Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP), produced by Herts Chamber and awaiting sign off by central government, has stalled the development of the Watford Skills and Employment Plan. This is a key evidence base and therefore is required to ensure our Watford Skills and Employment Plan has appropriate alignment with themes and priorities from the Local Skills Improvement Plan.
	24. Maximise economic potential and harness new opportunities from Watford's future growth sectors	We will engage with our successful business sectors and partners at local, county and regional levels, building on the economic drive our sectors provide for Watford's economy, promoting clustering where it makes sense for our town to create greater growth and encourage inward investment.	Green	↔	The Sectors Action Plan will be progressed in Q1 of 2024/25 due to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) taking priority, although the evidence has been gathered and sub-regional work is underway with parties around creative and screen industry potential. However, the UKSPF projects are automatically supporting key sectors as they are cross-cutting.
	25. Make the most of our Shared Prosperity Fund allocation	We will use our Shared Prosperity Fund to boost our ambitions for prosperity, jobs and skills, spreading opportunities and building our sense of community pride.	Green	↔	New local projects, Watford Net Zero and Watford Fit to Bid, are live and progressing well with good participation from our SME community. The small business scale-up support will get underway in the autumn and the community wealth building 'Resource Bank' work should commence over the summer. The Herts LEP-led countywide projects are on track with quarterly progress and impact reporting in place from Herts LEP. A paper setting out proposals for allocation of the remaining UKSPF funding is going to Corporate Management Board in July and to Cabinet for approval in September 2023.
Tell Watford's story as a great location for businesses where they can invest, grow and succeed as part of our flourishing business community and networks that connect people	26. Promote what makes Watford a great location for business, connecting to building pride in the town and our profile as a great place to visit	We will work with partners to shape our place narrative and brand, sharing what is great about Watford, attracting more visitors and supporting our local economy, putting the town on the map as a great place for business.	Green	↔	Our place brand and narrative has been developed and shared with a range of partners. A report and Watford's Place Brand, Narrative and Strategy were taken to Cabinet in July 2023 outlining the progress made to date and the next steps. We are aiming to launch the Strategy in late summer 2023 and this will be supported by a website and social assets.
	27. Ensure there is a strong voice for local businesses by fostering	We will engage with Watford businesses, encouraging an empowered business community that can be a strong voice for the town, making the most of opportunities	Green	↔	Business engagement is a day to day or BAU (business as usual) activity for the Economic Development team. The team meet with several businesses each week and connect them with resources and services that can help them flourish within our town. They support a wide-range of business

Commitment	Activity	BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline	
	effective business networks and forums	and new ventures and encouraging vibrant networks and forums that bring businesses together in a meaningful and effective way.			network activities and events, for example this quarter the team attended the Business Expo held at the Hilton Hotel. The next Council-led Business Connect event is being planned for October 2023. A Watford Business Leaders forum will be established at a point where engagement with Key Businesses is at a logical point to facilitate this. The UKSPF projects are proving good catalysts to help ramp up Key Business engagements.
	28. Engage with wider economic, business and planning partnerships to make sure Watford's interests are represented	We will work closely with our partners in Hertfordshire LEP, Herts Growth Board and the South West Herts Joint Strategic Partnership to shape and influence wider discussions on our economic role and impact.	Green	↔	We are continuing to work closely with our partners to shape our planning and economic partnerships. This includes agreeing a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) with all five South West Herts authorities and the launch of a consultation on the 'Realising our Potential' document which sets out the draft vision and objectives for working together in the future for the benefit of the wider South-West Hertfordshire area. The works towards the development and adoption of the JSP (Joint Strategic Partnership) is underway. We have commissioned consultants to undertake the SW Herts infrastructure and green belt alignment assessments.
Create a distinctive and successful neighbourhood at the heart of our town, providing space and time for residents, businesses and the community to enjoy and experience	29. Progress our transformational plans for the Town Hall Quarter	We will take forward plans to revitalise the north end of Watford High Street to create a vibrant and attractive neighbourhood within our Town Hall Quarter for our residents to enjoy, as well as establishing a new area in the town for culture to flourish.	Amber	↔	Work with our joint venture partner, Mace, on the New Neighbourhood scheme continues to progress with de-risking activities for utilities, highways and financial viability. Having previously secured £55k funding for investigatory work, engagement with Homes England to discuss further funding opportunities continues. The activity status remains amber due to the ongoing current economic climate which has delayed the anticipated investment.
	30. Secure the future of Watford Colosseum, improving the heritage building and attracting a new operator	We will refurbish the Watford Colosseum so it remains a first-class entertainment venue, attracting a new operator to bring an exciting and diverse range of performances and creative events to boost the town's cultural offer and local economy.	Amber	↔	The decarbonisation works to the Colosseum are now complete and the roof insulation replacement is nearing completion. Following the successful completion of enabling works, the refurbishment design work is now completed with work continuing on-site to allow for a 2024 opening. Council officers continue to meet regularly with the new Colosseum operator, AEG, to finalise design changes to the Colosseum, as well as operational and financial issues. The amber status reflect the ongoing risk of inflation to capital build projects of this type.
	31. Enhance a sustainable town centre with a mixed economy that will have a broad appeal to all ages and interests	We will develop our Town Centre Framework to ensure that our vibrant and diverse town centre continues to attract residents, businesses and visitors to live, work, shop, eat, drink and enjoy spending time.	Complete	↔	Following a significant level of public engagement, the Town Centre Strategic Framework consultation was completed and approved by Cabinet in March 2023.

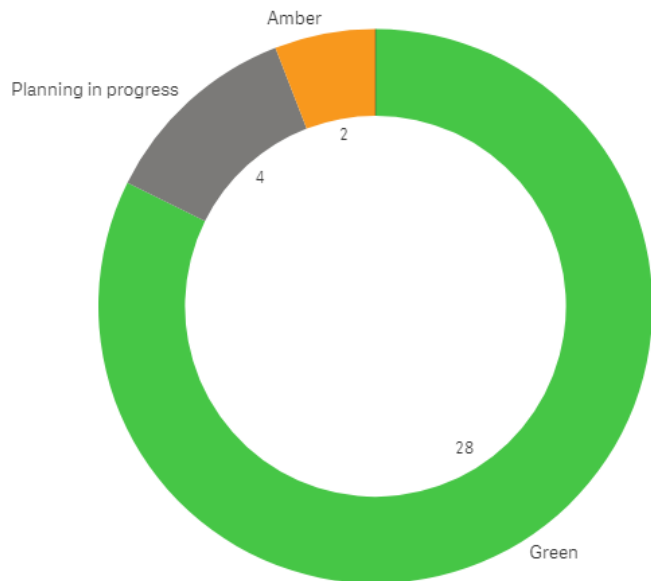
Commitment	Activity	BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline	
	32. Enhance our outdoor public spaces to make them welcoming and attractive	We will improve a number of our public spaces to provide excellent, safe and attractive outdoor spaces that support a greener Watford. This work will include the enhancement of key areas of our town such as St Mary's Churchyard, Market Street, Queens Road and St Albans Road.	Green	↔	Building on previous public realm improvements in Clarendon Road and Market Street, work in Queens Road is now complete. Planning work will commence in St Mary's Churchyard over the next period. The council remains committed to investing in our public realm spaces to support local businesses and is consulting with the HCC on options for the next phase of public realm works. The District Shopping Parade Improvements project will introduce improvements to identified shopping parades within the borough in order to create vibrant and welcoming spaces and enhance public realm for businesses, residents and visitors. The Brow and Whippendell Road have been prioritised for delivery in the first phase.
	33. Promote the appeal of our town centre and all it has to offer	We will continue to deliver our 'Shop and Eat Local' campaign to attract people to our town centre, supporting our local businesses and their unique appeal.	Green	↔	We are continuing to engage with new businesses and encouraging local people to nominate businesses to appear in campaigns. We are also working with Watford BID and Atria to understand when new businesses arrive.
	34. Promote Watford Market and our offer as a market town	We will support our local traders by continuing to run our popular 'Market Late' events, showcasing the great range of food and drink stalls in the market and trialling specialist markets.	Green	↔	The procurement exercise to identify a new operator for Watford Market has now been completed. The new operator will take on the day to day management of Watford Market, including the Market Lates and Specialist Markets events, and support our local market traders who provide a wide variety and wonderful stalls for our residents and visitors such as food, takeaways and beauty services. The Market Lates and Specialist Markets, which provide a great opportunity for local traders to showcase their diverse food and drink offer will continue in 2023/24.
Ensure the right mix of facilities, services and transport links as part of new developments to create successful, well-designed new communities	35. Take forward plans for the Watford Junction Quarter	We will bring landowners together so we can progress with our long-term plans to create a new Watford neighbourhood that successfully combines new homes, station facilities, jobs, public space, school provision and community facilities for both our existing and new residents.	Green	↔	Whilst the council does not own the land around Watford Junction, we are committed to improving the local amenities to create a new neighbourhood and have continued to liaise with key landowners and stakeholders regarding the redevelopment of the area. The Council is also in conversation with Network Rail regarding future improvements of the station and on a development strategy. We are waiting to hear about funding from NR operations for design work on the station to improve the journeys of the many of our residents who use Watford Junction every day.
	36. Continue our transformation of Watford Business Park	We will complete the Gateway development at Watford Business Park to continue our plans to create new and high quality business space to maximise local employment opportunities and generate income for the council to support its wider priorities.	Amber	↓	Following the sign off of our ambitious and exciting plans to develop Watford Business Park into a new and high-quality business space, the main contract works are progressing and completion is expected in Q3 of 2023/24. The new facility will provide modern and flexible commercial units, a number of which will be fitted out for office accommodation to meet the requirements of potential businesses. The marketing materials have been produced.

Commitment	Activity	BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline	
				The amber status reflects the delay in practical completion from September to November 2023 and the budget implication in light of additional remediation works required, design changes and the EOT claim.	
	37. Continue to deliver the neighbourhood at Riverwell	We will continue to develop the Riverwell scheme to deliver a high quality mix of new homes, jobs, open spaces and community facilities, maintaining an income source for the council to support its wider priorities. The work at Riverwell will support the opportunity for West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust to deliver its ambition for an acute hospital in Watford.	Amber	↔	The JV partnership is managing the impact of the current economic climate and inflationary pressures on the Riverwell scheme. KIER Construction have been commissioned to complete the remaining works on the Avenues phase 1 development. The programme is amber rated as the partnership continues to review all Riverwell development phases to understand the ongoing economic impacts and explore options to maintain progress and delivery.
	38. Achieve the right long-term balance of development, services and transport links for our town	We will adopt our new Local Plan for Watford which will shape how the town will develop sustainably over the next 30 years and make sure that key development sites are underpinned with creative, sustainable and well considered planning frameworks.	Green	↔	The Watford Local Plan 2021-2038 was adopted in Q2 of 2022/23 and will provide the council with the opportunity to influence local and sustainable development across the town. The council are pleased to be a winner in the East of England Awards for Planning Excellence, winning in the category of 'Best Plan' for the 'Watford Local Plan 2021-2038: A Sustainable Town'.
Make sure we have quality homes to meet the needs of residents, including housing that is affordable through direct ownership, private rental, affordable and social rent housing	39. Deliver a new Housing Strategy for Watford	We will deliver a Housing Strategy that sets out the strategic direction for housing activity in Watford for the next five years. The delivery of housing growth, bringing inward investment into the borough, ensuring existing homes are of good quality, and preventing homelessness will all contribute to meeting the housing challenges faced by our residents.	Planning in progress	↔	The paper on the approach to delivering the Housing Strategy, including an outline project plan will be taken to Portfolio Holders in September 2023. Formal work to develop the strategy will commence in Q3 of 2023/24.
	40. Review and refresh our Nominations Policy	We will deliver a new Nominations Policy for Watford to help our residents apply to our housing register, how we manage the register, your choice about where you live, how we assess applications and allocate properties.	Green	↔	The principles for a revised Nominations Policy have been drafted and are ready for consultation. An approach document, which sets out the timetable, has been agreed with Corporate Management Board, the Housing Portfolio Holder and the Elected Mayor. Over the next period, any changes to the existing policy will be reviewed and informed by legal advice, with consultation undertaken prior to any major changes.
	41. Improve housing provision for those local families who need homes that are affordable	We will work with partners to deliver high quality new homes for social rent, for local families who need them the most and support the housing needs of the most vulnerable members of our community.	Green	↔	The Steering Group to deliver social rented homes across the town is developing a strategic action plan to consider regeneration opportunities and proposals for spend of commuted sums to deliver social rented homes. There are ongoing delays to the Ascot Road, Brightwell and Yeatmans developments, which has led to a reduction in our final outturn for the

Commitment	Activity	BRAG ¹ Rating	Trend	Headline	
				handover of affordable lettings. In Q1 13 social rented homes were handed over.	
	42. Develop planning guidance to ensure developers provide new homes that support local needs	We will provide guidance to inform how new homes and buildings should be designed so they meet the needs of Watford and are built to a high standard.	Amber	↔	The development of the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) is further delayed, reflecting the uncertainty until national guidance is clarified. Specifically, this has delayed the initial vision document consultation process. A table to monitor viability figures to better understand issues and their interpretation as part of the decision-making process was completed.
	43. Deliver a refreshed Private Sector Renewal Policy	We will review and refresh our Private Sector Renewal policy to support the improvement of Watford's housing stock, setting out how we can help the private sector improve and maintain housing quality in the town.	Planning in progress	↔	The refreshment of our Private Sector Renewal policy was delayed to enable alignment with our Housing strategy work. A stock condition assessment is being undertaken through summer 2023 following release of the Census 2021 data to inform the policy and changes.

THEME: A diverse, happy and healthy town

Overview



Key achievements over this period

- Practical completion for the New Crematorium was achieved in June 2023. The new facility, which is located in Hemel Hempstead, will serve residents in Watford, Dacorum, Hertsmere, Three Rivers and St Albans and will be opening in Q2.
- The Conservation Areas Management Plan was approved by Cabinet in June 2023. The action plans will ensure that we take the necessary steps to enhance and protect the historical features, and character, of different areas of the borough.
- The Easter 2023 holiday programme was successfully delivered and a scheme offering sessions to families via a local voluntary organisation was piloted with a good uptake by Watford residents.
- The Watford Community Lottery was launched and the first inaugural draw was held in June 2023. 60% of all ticket sales will go towards supporting our local community and good causes.
- To date 2,600 trees have been claimed via the county-wide tree giveaway, which will go towards increasing our green canopy.
- Following closures over Covid, the Healthy Hub at the Town Hall is open on Wednesdays for face-to-face drop-in appointments and once a month on a Friday for the HCC Health Improvement team to provide bookable appointments for Watford residents to have NHS health checks.

Commitment	Activity		BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline
<p>Continue our investment in our outstanding parks and open spaces so they remain the best in the area</p>	<p>44. Deliver improvements to Meriden Park</p>	<p>We will, in consultation with our residents, improve the popular and well-loved Meriden Park, including providing new paths, planting and landscaping, for the whole community to enjoy.</p>	<p>Green</p>	<p>↔</p>	<p>Following the significant improvement works last year, we are continuing to deliver enhance our popular Meriden Park. In Q1, further wildflower seeding was completed alongside additional watering following the recent dry weather. The wildflowers at the park have started to germinate which will create a beautiful wildflower meadow supporting biodiversity within the town.</p>
	<p>45. Continue our programme of investment and improvements in Watford's parks</p>	<p>We will carry out a range of improvements across our award winning parks and open spaces, including improving footpaths, refurbishing grass tennis courts, and carrying out cycling path repairs. In addition, we will promote the 'cycling code of conduct' and associated engagement programme to support considerate cycling.</p>	<p>Green</p>	<p>↔</p>	<p>Following the completion of footpath and cycling path improvements in Cassiobury Park last year, the development of our Green Spaces Strategy is ow underway. The temporary bike bay trial, which is in place in Cassiobury Park until the end of September 2023, is progressing well. In the next quarter we will finalise the map of the next set of priority pathway repairs in Cassiobury Park, which will be subject to budget availability.</p>
	<p>46. Enhance Woodside Playing Fields so it offers improved facilities and opportunities for leisure and sport</p>	<p>We will invest in Woodside Playing Fields to enhance the activities on offer, including improvements to both the current boxing and cricket facilities.</p>	<p>Green</p>	<p>↔</p>	<p>We are progressing the enhancement of Woodside Playing Field to plan. In Q1 we released the RIBA stage 3 spatial design, MEP services schemes and external improvements. In addition the intrusive structural surveys were completed and the Changing Places facility design scheme was approved by Muscular Dystrophy UK who are the approval body for DLUHC. The Changing Places facility will ensure that our facilities are fully accessible for people with disabilities. We have shared the scheme with the principal stakeholders including the clubs on site, governing bodies and members and a wider stakeholder forum on 21 June 2023 was well attended.</p>
	<p>47. Complete our work in partnership for a new crematorium for south west Hertfordshire</p>	<p>We will complete the new crematorium and agree future running arrangements, with our partner local authorities, to deliver enhanced facilities, including a remembrance chapel and gardens.</p>	<p>Amber</p>	<p>↔</p>	<p>We achieved practical completion of the New Crematorium on 16 June 2023 and completed a number of essential activities such as insuring the facility, installing highway signage, trademark registration and staff training. Whilst the completion of the project was later than planned, the team are now working towards the opening of the new facility in Q2 providing residents of Hertfordshire with more choice to say goodbye to their loved ones.</p>
<p>Celebrate and promote our town's rich and diverse culture and creativity</p>	<p>48. Reimagine our Museum and its place in telling the history of our town</p>	<p>We will develop proposals for a modern, inspiring Heritage and Museum service based in our historic Town Hall that engages and educates our residents and visitors by telling the story of our town and its rich and diverse history, including ensuring that the service and sacrifice of fallen service men and women is recognised.</p>	<p>Green</p>	<p>↔</p>	<p>Plans to create of the new museum service, based at the Town Hall have continued over the last period. In Q1 the RIBA stage 3 design was approved for consultation by the Members Steering Group. In May 2023 the National Heritage Lottery Fund, who provided a development grant of £68k, granted permission to commence the elements of work to be funded by the grant and the first monitoring visit was held in June 2023.</p>

Commitment	Activity		BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline
			Green		A Community Curator has been recruited to support delivery of the project to ensure extensive community engagement as the plans for the museum progress, with volunteers already supporting the costume inventory work.
	49. Celebrate 100 years of Watford Borough, building a legacy for future generations	We will lead a programme of celebrations across the town commemorating 100 years since the formation of the borough of Watford.	Green	↔	Whilst this activity is now complete, we are however continuing to celebrate 'centenary heroes' through 2023 and launching a time capture in autumn 2023.
	50. Bring our local heritage to life for our community	We will create a new innovative heritage trail across the town to recognise Watford's rich culture and past.	Green	↔	Our Town Centre heritage trail was successfully launched in March 2022, providing a digitally interactive route along the High Street. Plans to update this will be timed to align with new projects such as the Blue Plaque Scheme, which formed part of the Mayor's Manifesto and for which planning is underway. Our successful bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund also means that a heritage trail will form part of the 'Tales of the River' project.
	51. Enhance the town's creative and cultural appeal through a new Public Art Strategy	We will develop a Public Art Strategy for Watford, to explore how art in all its forms, can animate and enhance our public spaces, building on Watford's strong sense of identity and creativity and linking to improved wayfinding across the town.	Green	↔	Our Public Art Strategy will be a key tool in enhancing our public spaces and attract visitors to our High Street. Drafting of the strategy is underway. In the meantime, the pilot commission options are being developed.
	52. Commemorate the town's links to our past	We will introduce a Blue Plaque scheme which will commemorate links between our historic buildings and famous residents, events or former buildings.	Planning in progress	↔	This scheme will build on the '100 People Who Made Watford' initiative. This provides a range of information on some of those Watfordonians who have made exceptional contributions to the town. The project has been scoped by looking at areas where similar schemes have been implemented and understanding how learning could be applied to Watford.
	53. Mark and reflect on Watford's response to COVID-19	We will install a public memorial providing a place for reflection and commemoration to build on the community spirit and recognising the outstanding work across the town during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Green	↔	The location for a general space for reflection and contemplation has now been agreed and will be delivered alongside the improvements works to St Mary's Churchyard. Delivery of the project will commence over the next period.
	54. Enhance our town's historical features and character	We will develop a series of conservation management plans to enhance and protect the historical features, and character, of different areas across the town.	Green	↔	The Conservation Areas Management Plan was approved by Cabinet in June 2023, where it was subsequently adopted. An additional recommendation was proposed by Cabinet regarding how the actions set out in the Action Plan would be monitored and it was agreed that updates would be reported through the council's Enterprise Programme Management Office, which will be agreed with the EPMO in the next quarter.

Commitment	Activity		BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline
<p align="center">Promote our welcoming and respectful town</p>	<p>55. Ensure everyone feels welcome, included and safe in Watford</p>	<p>We will continue to make sure people feel welcome and safe in Watford, working closely with our partners to bid for funding that will support ways to have a positive impact on levels of violence against women and girls.</p>	<p>Green</p>	<p>↔</p>	<p>The Joint Action Group members are successfully progressing through the Community Safety Action Plan and opportunities for actions within core business and set against the Community Safety Partnership priorities which are included in the plan (the priorities are Serious Youth Violence, Violence Against Women and Girls, Community Wellbeing and Reassurance and Inform). The action plan is monitored and updated monthly through the Joint Action Group with exception reporting to One Watford.</p>
	<p>56. Establish our commitment to the wellbeing of women and girls</p>	<p>We will deliver 'White Ribbon' accreditation for Watford Borough Council as a part of our ongoing commitment to tackle violence against women and girls, and continue our productive engagement with our One Watford partnership, which is bringing together all strands of this work across the town.</p>	<p>Green</p>	<p>↔</p>	<p>Following our successful White Ribbon accreditation last year, the Steering Group, which is chaired by the Elected Mayor, is continuing to work on the action plan for submitting to White Ribbon in the summer 2023. We are progressing the communication campaign and have arranged a training for members in July 2023.</p>
	<p>57. Make sure our town remains clean and free from litter</p>	<p>We will trial a new mobile CCTV approach, as part of our overall CCTV review, which allows us to target litter and fly-tipping hotspots and obtain evidence so that we can prosecute offenders, helping to keep our streets clean and litter-free.</p>	<p>Amber</p>	<p>↔</p>	<p>The trial for the three mobile test cameras is ongoing and due to be reviewed in September 2023 when the effectiveness of the trial can be assessed. We are continuing to progress the remedial actions identified in the CCTV Review undertaken in 2022 which is expected to be ongoing until the end of December 2023.</p>
	<p>58. Develop a range of information and signposting to create a 'welcome to Watford' resource</p>	<p>We will develop a digital 'welcome to Watford' resource for new residents, setting out how they can be fully involved in the life of the town and make the most of Watford and all it has to offer.</p>	<p>Planning in progress</p>	<p>↔</p>	<p>A revised timetable has been agreed for the delivery of our 'Welcome to Watford' resource for new residents. The project will be scoped in Q4 of 2023/24 for launch in 2024/25. The resource will link into our Place Brand work, building on the narrative and key messages about Watford.</p>
<p align="center">Listen to and hear the diverse voices of Watford</p>	<p>59. Engage with our community to support better outcomes for our town and residents</p>	<p>We will develop our strategic approach, setting out how we will proactively work and engage with our community and our voluntary and community sector.</p>	<p>Green</p>	<p>↔</p>	<p>The Community Engagement and Participation Strategy is drafted to provide strategic direction and action planning on a council-wide approach to how we engage with our community. The Strategy was shared with voluntary and community sector groups in Q1 and was presented to Cabinet in July 2023 for approval, followed by consultation and final Cabinet approval in autumn 2023.</p> <p>Further information on how the council is progressing delivery of its Community Engagement and Participation Strategy is included within Appendix C5.</p>

Commitment	Activity	BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline	
	60. Continue to engage with our community so we actively listen to their views and ideas	We will continue to run our Pensioners Forum to provide support, guidance and companionship for our older residents, who contribute so much to the life of our town.	Green	↔	Recognising the valuable contribution our elderly residents made to the town, and mindful of the additional support they may need, our Senior's Forum continues to be held regularly, supported by Watford and Three Rivers Trust.
	61. Understand and support specific groups within our community	We will introduce a new Veterans Forum for ex-forces personnel, who have done so much for our town and country, building on our commitment to the Hertfordshire Armed Forces Covenant, which provides support between our civilian community and local Armed Forces community.	Planning in progress	↔	We are working closely with community groups and organisations to support Veterans in Watford. Cllr Grimston has been appointed as the Veterans champion for the council.
	62. Support the voluntary sector in Watford to provide positive outcomes for our residents	We will develop a new Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework and work in partnership with charitable, community and voluntary organisations focused on helping our residents live healthy, happy and independent lives, understanding and meeting their needs through initiatives such as opening up the Town Hall to wider community use.	Green	↔	We have initiated a Community Project to develop a new Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (VSCF) and have established a Member Steering Group to oversee the delivery. We are reviewing community needs against commissioned services to identify gaps in service provision and undertaking structured conversations with commissioned organisations to support co-design of the new framework.
	63. Ensure our community buildings benefit local residents	We will work with our community tenants to ensure our community buildings are well maintained, and, that our buildings maximise the benefits for local people.	Green	↔	<p>Our funding application for a further Public Sector Decarbonisation Funding, to allow us to decarbonise more council-owned buildings in addition to the Colosseum and Town Hall was unfortunately not successful. However, we are continuing to ensure our community buildings are well maintained and have recently completed 99% of all EPC surveys. We are currently evaluating the tender responses for the appointment of a consultant to develop our Sustainable Asset Strategy.</p> <p>In line with our ambition to leverage external funds, a Local Carbon Skills fund bid for a heat decarbonisation plan has been submitted. The outcome of the bid is expected in mid-July 2023.</p> <p>The planned works to Cheslyn House, St Mary's Advice Centre and Vicarage Road Cemetery are now complete, improving each of these facilities for Watford residents.</p>
	64. Deliver our Equality and Diversity policy so it underpins what we do and how we engage with our community	We will develop an Equality and Diversity policy for Watford, making sure it reflects our diverse town and our commitment to being a place where everyone can thrive.	Green	↔	The Census 2021 figures will underpin the council's approach to its Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy. The draft Equality and Diversity Policy was developed with an internal and external focus, covering the council's role as an employer as well as a service provider and convener of place. The policy will be presented to Cabinet in autumn 2023.

Commitment	Activity		BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline
	65. Work with partners to end rough sleeping on the streets of Watford	We will continue to deliver our Homelessness Strategy for Watford, reviewing this on an annual basis and adapting it regularly to ensure that it remains innovative and effective, supporting our target of minimising rough sleepers on the streets of Watford.	Green	↔	Significant progress has been made to reduce homelessness across the town in the last few years. The review of the Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan, which was updated and refreshed in line with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities requests, is now complete and available on the council's website since May 2023.
Support improved health and wellbeing across the town	66. Encourage Watford to develop as an age friendly town	We will work towards making Watford an age-friendly town which residents and visitors of all ages can enjoy, ensuring local services are accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities.	Planning in progress	↔	Government guidance still requires Local Planning Authorities to prepare design codes for age-friendly towns, however with revised planning guidance anticipated in lates 2023/24, the requirements may change, which may have implications for resources and a delay to the timetable for the adoption of any guidance. We held an internal officer workshop and are planning a workshop with councillors to discuss design issues, risks and opportunities. We are exploring how Watford could become an age friendly community in consultation with the Centre for Ageing Better and the UK Centre for Age-Friendly Communities. Further work is being undertaken to consider how this could be resourced and developed. A further update will be provided in the Autumn.
	67. Tackle digital isolation so residents can effectively engage using new technology	We will work with our partners, volunteers and community groups to support residents who do not have access to technology, choose not to do so or do not currently have the skills to use IT so that they have the same opportunities as others in our town.	Green	↔	Our proposal to tackle digital isolation is still in progress as we explore a number of opportunities, including the option of continuing our work with Watford and Three Rivers Trust who may potentially be able to secure further NHS funding, and the option of using our Welcoming Spaces, volunteers and the council's CSC to support residents who are digitally isolated. The proposal will be presented in the autumn 2023.
	68. Develop services to support our residents' health and wellbeing	We will work closely with our partners to develop a mental health strategy for Watford, ensuring the right support is available for residents who need it. Watford's Healthy Hub will provide a pivotal link to assistance and guidance, including opening up conversations about the menopause and for those needing help with mental health issues.	Green	↔	In Q4 of 2022/23 a Healthy Hub Coordinator was successfully recruited to support delivery of the Healthy Hub services. Plans for the alignment of health inequalities and the Healthy Hub are now completed with mental health now embedded within the service of the Healthy Hub. The Healthy Hub at the Town Hall is open every Wednesdays for face-to-face drop-in appointments and once a month on a Friday for the HCC Health Improvement team to provide bookable appointments for Watford residents to have NHS health checks.

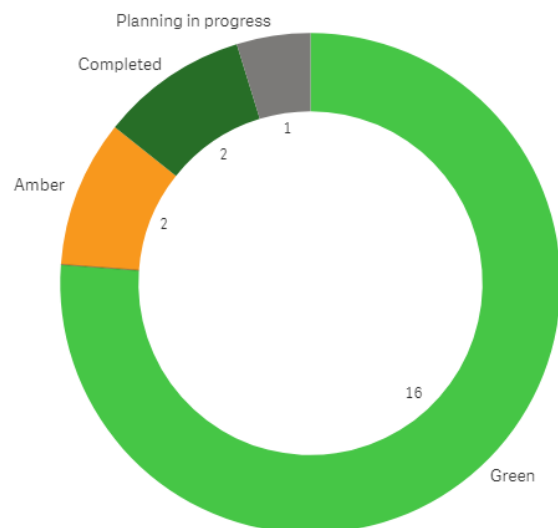
Commitment	Activity	BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline	
	69. Engage with health partners to improve public health and health inequalities for our residents	We will engage across our health partners to make sure the health and wellbeing needs of Watford are represented in new health structures and commissioning of services.	Green	↔	<p>We are leading the development work with health and social care partners to position Watford's services and joint-working with health colleagues, charities and community leads to deliver health initiatives such as cancer awareness and prevention. An event was held at Watford Football Club (WFC) to explore and align collaborative opportunities.</p> <p>The Healthy Hub service provision continues to be developed to deliver HCC's core offer. We are using the Hub to signpost, offer health awareness sessions and outreach health initiatives into marginalised communities.</p> <p>The following Satellite Hubs will continue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about living with Dementia Creative Art Community cafe programme for people with Dementia, carers/family. • Palliative Care Creative art programme at the Peace Hospice • Bereavement Programme Creative Art programme • Diabetes lifestyle project in partnership with Watford PCN. This project was held at Watford Central Health surgery targeting individuals from the South Asian community. We had 16 referrals with 14 that confirmed for the course.
	70. Support single homeless people to access accommodation and support	We will continue to establish and embed our single homelessness pathway, focusing on the root causes of homelessness and working closely with our partners to support individuals on every part of their journey into independent living.	Green	↔	<p>The Single Homelessness Project (SHP) was initiated in 2021 to bring together all temporary accommodation providers into a multi-agency team and to provide a holistic view of Watford's approach to accommodating and supporting single homeless people and was formally completed in the last quarter of 2022/23. Since its inception, the SHP project has effectively reduced the number of people sleeping rough in Watford from 80+ to a handful. The formal pathway has been in place since April 2021 and through this over 300 single homeless clients have been provided with a safe, secure, welcoming physical environment with access to the most appropriate support that meets their individual needs, such as mental health, substance abuse and debt advice.</p>
Bring together ways to help our residents who might be struggling financially	71. Make sure residents are aware of what help we offer to support them manage their finances	We will promote our council tax discount scheme so residents know support might be available to help them pay their bills.	Green	↔	<p>We no longer require customers to complete a claim form for council tax reduction where they are in receipt of Universal Credit. We promote the scheme at all contacts with customers on the telephone or at the Customer Service Centre. We have a dedicated officer to provide help for customers complete an online form if required.</p> <p>Our new 'change in circumstance' online form went live at the end of Q4. This is for benefit customers that need to report a change, such as a house move. Our discount and exemption form went live in June 2023 and this will enable residents to apply online for a discount or exemption and in some circumstances they will receive a decision immediately, improving the customer experience, providing greater flexibility and improving service efficiency.</p>

Commitment	Activity		BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline
	72. Coordinate advice in the town for those seeking information on how to cope with the cost of living crisis	We will work with partners to ensure people can access the advice and information they need when they face financial difficulties, particularly those who are vulnerable or are dealing with debt.	Green	↔	A 'Cost of Living' page has been added to the council website to provide information to local people who may be facing financial difficulties. This is in addition to the 'Cost of Living Forum' which was convened with local voluntary and community organisations to work together on a response for Watford. Partners are collaborating to make sure support is coordinated. We are also engaging with Hertfordshire County Council to link into county support and ensure local residents are accessing all the help available. Some of the 'Welcoming Spaces' which were established for the winter months, have continued over the summer due to the success in terms of numbers visiting.
	73. Use innovative ways to support our local community financially	We will build upon the success of our COVID-19 Fund, Ukraine Community Funds and Watford Community Fund to investigate a new local lottery to support our local community so that they can continue their good work in our town.	Green	↔	The Watford Community Lottery inaugural draw took place on 24 June 2023 and by this date, 45 local good causes, including Watford Palace Theatre, Watford Social Centre for the Blind and Watford Women's Centre, had joined the scheme. Over 1k tickets were sold for the first draw which puts the scheme on track to achieve the projected annual revenue. The scheme will ensure that at least 60% of all tickets sold goes towards supporting our local community and good causes.
	74. Welcome the whole town and visitors to our Big Events	We will deliver our exciting, free programme of Big Events across the town, including our Big Screen, Big Beach and Fireworks, bringing our community together regularly in our town centre and parks.	Green	↔	In 2022/23 we successfully delivered several Big Events attracting and bringing together many of our residents. In addition, a special Big Coronation lunch at the Cassiobury Park Bandstand took place on 7 May 2023 as part of the town's Coronation celebrations. The Big Events for this year, such as Big Beach, Big Screen, Big Sports and Big Fireworks, have been planned.
	75. Provide an appealing and lively programme of holiday activities for young people	We will continue to offer our young people exciting things to do during the Easter and summer holidays so they can be engaged and involved in an enjoyable range of free activities.	Green	↔	We delivered the free Easter 2023 holiday programme and piloted a scheme offering sessions to families via a local voluntary organisation, for which there was a good uptake. A review of the data indicates the majority of people who benefitted from the scheme are Watford residents from across the community. The Cost of Living Forum with groups and organisations was convened to bring together the support available and to make sure local people are aware of where to go for help. The forum is also bringing together data and information to build understanding of the extent of the crisis within Watford and make sure Watford is coordinating with county, regional and national support and campaigns. Although the winter months are over, the 'Welcoming Places', which are supported by the Watford Community Fund, will continue as they have proven to be very successful and are meeting a range of community needs. The government has announced Household Support Fund 4 for 2023/24, which at district level will be used to support food charities and energy support.

Commitment	Activity		BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline
	76. Improve private sector housing across the town, focusing on how it can contribute to both environmental and community benefits	We will support the sustainability of the town's privately owned homes making use of Energy Company Obligation funding to improve the energy efficiency and warmth of those who are vulnerable or on low incomes.	Green	↔	The Energy Company Obligation (ECO), which aims to tackle fuel poverty and help reduce carbon emissions, will be delivered through to the end of March 2026. Processes to progress the ECO directly with installers via our partners at National Energy Foundation have been established and our statement of intent issued in accordance with the revised government guidance. We are awaiting further ECO+ guidance to become enacted in the autumn 2023 after which we will adapt our own assistance to reflect the changes, however we are pre-empting this and beginning marketing to be ready to deliver.
	77. Help our community better access the benefits of Watford's economic growth	We will explore ways to create a resilient and inclusive economy that benefits our community, building on foundations from the Hertfordshire Community Wealth Building project, linking local people with opportunities and supporting our voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector link to make a greater economic contribution.	Green	↔	Our plan around Community Wealth Building will focus on the economy related activities we are delivering which will also derive benefits from our communities, both business and resident communities. The proposed Watford Business Charter will be a key tool to enable this. The Charter will encourage businesses to do more in 5 areas: recruit local, buy local, go green, connect with community and be a great employer. A 'Resource Bank' will be developed alongside the Charter to support businesses to deliver upon this.

THEME: A council working for our community and serving our residents

Overview



Key achievements over this period

- Through our Customer Experience Strategy we have launched the Customer Care Service Standards, which sets out what our customers can expect from us and how we will deliver our services by adopting best practice in line with the council's values.
- We participated in the 'South West Herts Great Big Green Week', a national campaign which aims to draw attention to climate change. A number of fun and educational events were held across Watford and Three Rivers including a Palace Family screening of Lorax, Watford Green Gym and Watford Green Market.
- We successfully delivered the May 2023 Local Elections in compliance the Electoral Commission Guidance and some aspects of the Elections Act 2022, such as the Voter Photo ID, which is now a requirement.
- The Information & Insight Strategy (formally the Business Intelligence Strategy) and Delivery Plan were approved in June 2023. The Strategy sets out how we will achieve our vision of an organisation driven by intelligence to meet the demands of our customers and continue to provide high quality services.
- We showcased the implementation of our agile working approach at the Local Government Association Conference. This included a video message from our staff and members on the benefits of agile working and how this has improved their work life balance.

Commitment	Activity		BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline
<p>Make sure we deliver an outstanding customer experience and the high quality services our community expects</p>	<p>78. Provide an excellent customer experience for everyone who engages with the council</p>	<p>We will prepare and deliver a new Customer Experience Strategy to transform how we engage with our customers over the next four years, delivering a real step change across all our services, embracing innovation and embedding a first class experience our customers will value.</p>	<p>Green</p>	<p>↔</p>	<p>We are progressing the delivery of the Customer Experience Strategy, working collaboratively with colleagues across the council and capitalising on synergy with other projects to deliver the Strategy vision. In Q1, we finalised and commenced the launch of the Customer Care Service Standards, which sets out what our customers can expect from us and how we will deliver our services by adopting best practice in line with the council's values.</p> <p>We are continuing to develop the business case for the introduction of proactive customer alerts which is expected to deliver significant benefits for both the council and our residents by adopting current technology to streamline and deliver our services. In addition we are assessing the viability of new delivery options such as voice automated telephony, customer alerts, SMS and WhatsApp.</p> <p>The recent approval of the Information and Insight Strategy will enable us to progress our plans for using data to drive improvements to our services.</p> <p>Further information on how the council is progressing delivery of its Customer Experience Strategy is included within Appendix C2.</p>
	<p>79. Champion a greener and more sustainable council that strives to reduce our carbon footprint</p>	<p>We will embed our ambition to be net carbon neutral by 2030 by continuing to deliver our organisational Sustainability Action Plan (now part of our newly approved Environmental Strategy) so that it intrinsic to everything and ensures we reduce our carbon footprint in line with our green goals.</p>	<p>Green</p>	<p>↔</p>	<p>We have formalised the delivery of the new Environment Strategy and set out how we will achieve our ambition to be net carbon neutral by 2030 through the Sustainability Programme. Sustainability is at the heart of everything we do, and is woven through other council projects, programmes, schemes and initiatives such as the Rediscovering River Colne, Town Hall Quarter and Transforming Travel in Watford Programmes.</p> <p>Further information on how the council is progressing delivery of its Environment Strategy is included within Appendix C3.</p>
	<p>80. Focus the right resources in the right places to secure future success</p>	<p>We will review how we employ our resources (including staff and finances) to make sure they are focussed on the areas which are most important to the council and support the delivery of this Plan.</p>	<p>Green</p>	<p>↔</p>	<p>Following the successful introduction of our Service Delivery Lead Officers to strength the council's ability to deliver against its priorities, the annual Personal Development Review process is currently in progress, giving staff the opportunity to review their performance, celebrate their successes and identify personal and professional development opportunities. Through this process we will ensure that staff objectives are aligned and prioritised to the delivery of the Council Plan.</p>

Commitment	Activity		BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline
	81. Explore opportunities to share services with other councils where it delivers best value and better customer outcomes	We will work with other authorities to develop and implement business cases that explore opportunities to share more services where this will deliver improvements for our customers.	Green	↔	Phase 2 of the Building Control and Planning Enforcement Shared Services with St Albans City District Council is being progressed. This phase of the project will see the review and implementation of processes and procedures, using best practice. We will ensure that staff are trained and have access to the necessary systems and data to enable them to deliver an efficient and seamless service, whilst achieving value for money across both authorities.
	82. Make sure the council continues to hold successful and well run elections	We will support and prepare for the implementation of the Elections Act 2022 so that our elections continue to be effectively managed and voters are well informed on elections and how to exercise their right to vote.	Green	↔	The May 2023 Local Elections were successfully delivered in compliance with the Electoral Commission Guidance and certain aspects of the Elections Act 2022. This included the introduction of Voter Photo ID and an increased focus on supporting voters with disabilities. Our Communications and Engagement colleagues produced and implemented a robust comms strategy to promote the requirement for Voter Photo IDs. This ensured that the majority of our voters had acceptable IDs, enabling them to vote. We will continue to implement the remainder of the Elections Act from 2023 through to 2025.
Pioneer new ways of working that challenge us to innovate, transform and consistently improve	83. Adopt the right digital technology that matches and supports our ambition for excellent service delivery for our residents	We will develop and deliver a new four-year ICT strategy to drive forward how we use ICT and digital technology to deliver our ambitions, seeking opportunities to innovate to meet the needs of the council and our community.	Green	↔	The IT Strategy continues to be developed. In the meantime, the ICT team continue to deliver on a number of projects such as Microsoft 365 and the replacement of Councillor IT devices at both Watford and Three Rivers councils.
	84. Deliver a step change in how we use our data and information so it strengthens our drive for constant improvement	We will improve how we use our data and information to challenge our decisions, enhance performance and support excellent customer experience, using our information to monitor service delivery and to drive action if something needs improving.	Green	↔	The Council's Information and Insight Strategy 2023-26 (formally known as the Business Intelligence Strategy) was approved by Cabinet in June 2023. The Strategy sets out how we will achieve our vision of an organisation driven by intelligence to meet the demands of our customers and continue to provide high quality services. This has underpinned the development of a corporate Continuous Improvement Framework which will be reviewed by Cabinet in October 2023. We are exploring the use of external data sources, such as Mosaic and Acorn, to see how these data can be used to deliver and support targeted services and schemes such as the Digital Isolation scheme. We have progressed the development of our external performance dashboard on the council's BI platform, Qlik, which has been used to produce our Q1 progress and performance report.
	85. Strengthen our approach to contract management to ensure we are making the most of our	We will implement a robust contract management framework to ensure we deliver expected outcomes and excellent value for money from our contracts,	Complete	↔	The review of our existing contract management approaches has been completed and the final version of the Contract Management Handbook has been published. Relevant officers have been given the necessary training to ensure that the council continues to achieve the very best value from our

Commitment	Activity		BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline
	contracts and that they are delivering for us and the town	providing the best service for our customers.			contracts. Training guides are also available on the intranet to enable officers to refresh their training as and when required.
	86. Embed social value through our procurement process	We will update our Procurement Strategy to strengthen our approach to evidencing economic, social and environmental outcomes when procuring, awarding and delivering contracts.	Complete	↔	The council's updated Procurement Strategy was approved by Cabinet in January 2023. The Strategy will make sure we continue to get best value from the market during this period of economic instability and includes a comprehensive proposal on social value and measurement which supports the delivery of our Sustainability Action Plan.
<p>Focus and challenge how we manage our budget so it is concentrated on delivering our commitments and securing greater investment for Watford</p>	87. Ensure our investment portfolio is ambitious and effectively managed to deliver maximum value to the council	We will ensure that we are actively managing our investment portfolio, including exploring new opportunities to protect our income, manage risk and maximise value over the longer term, so that we can continue to provide high quality services to our residents and businesses.	Amber	↓	<p>We continue to agree long leasehold extensions on Watford Business Park (WBP) where appropriate which generate capital receipts and secure rental income for the medium to long term. We are continuing to utilise the council's existing land bank to generate further income through direct development or through joint venture arrangements. Examples include the Gateway site at WBP and the Riverwell Multi-Storey Car Park. Out of Borough Assets performing well. For example Coleshill Industrial Estate rents agreed have grown from £6.50 psf to in excess of £7.50 psf in the last 2 years.</p> <p>Croxley Park is actively managed to ensure that open market rent is maintained with minimal voids. The Croxley Park Business Plan for 2023/24 was adopted in March 2023. The GT Model tracks the financial performance of the Park compared to assumptions made at the time of the lease being taken in 2019. It was assumed in 2019 that the whole of Building 1 would have been let and income producing by now, rather than just a single floor, so the revenue being generated at present is not as was originally forecasted, due to the continuing availability of 60,000 ft in Building 1, although occupier interest in the building is now increasing. The vacant occupancy costs to the council and annual headlease rental uplifts are at capped level.</p>
	88. Assess the feasibility of a Growth Fund and its benefits for Watford	We will explore where our financial strength can support start-up and growth opportunities delivering a positive investment return for the council and renewed prosperity for the town.	Planning in progress	↔	The Council has set aside £500k towards a Growth Fund. As part of our bid to central government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF), a further £500k was requested to complement the Innovation Hub initiative, which would have allowed a £1m fund to be set up to support businesses in the Hub, through a grants and loan scheme. However, since the council was unsuccessful in securing the LUF funding, a decision has been made to not progress the initiative due to the economic climate.
	89. Manage and direct the council finances effectively	We will ensure that our budgets align with our priorities and that budget management is robust, forward-looking and supports the best possible service outcomes from	Green	↔	The 2023/24 budget included a Council Tax increase of 2.99%, well below inflation. The Council proactively manages and monitors budgets during the year to ensure value for money and effective prioritisation of resources. The 2024/25 budget setting process has now begun and will ensure that council

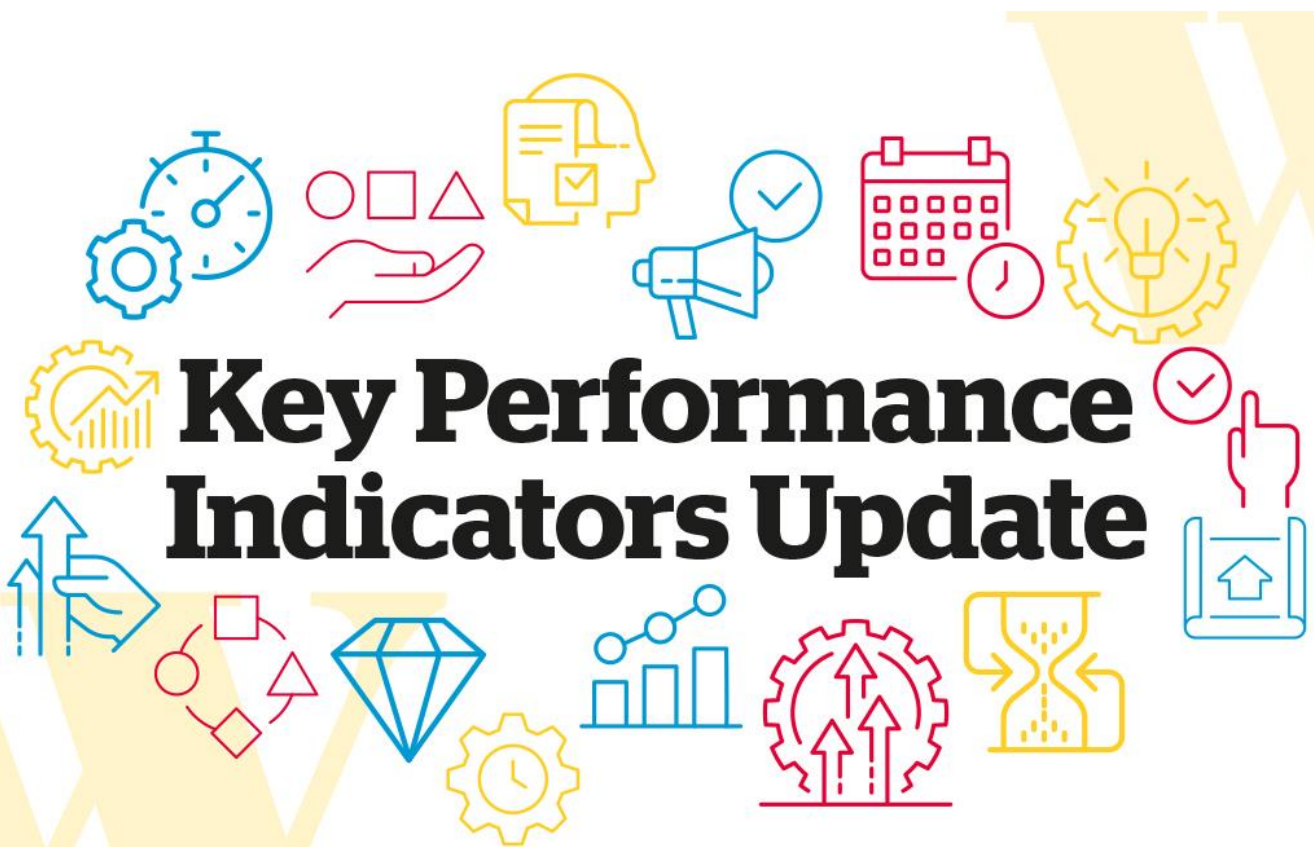
Commitment	Activity		BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline
		available resources, enabling us to keep council tax increases below inflation.			resources continue to align to council priorities to deliver the best possible service outcomes. 5.
	90. Identify new commercial opportunities that align with our ambition	We will look for new and innovative commercial opportunities that will align to our values, whilst ensuring a financial return that can be used to support the council's activities for the benefit of the borough.	Green	↔	The Collaboration and Commercial Strategy, which identifies future opportunities, has been drafted and is scheduled to go to Cabinet in autumn for approval. Due to the current financial climate the council is not seeking to undertake any major investments at the current time and will look to pursue opportunities to collaborate with partners, ensure our existing investments hold up and explore opportunities as they arise.
	91. Manage our ambitious capital programme so that it supports our aspirations	We will develop a commercial risk and mitigation strategy for our capital programme to protect the council against turbulence in global markets, whilst still delivering our ambitious programme of improvements.	Amber	↔	The rapid and significant increase in inflation continues to pose significant risks to the affordability of the Capital Investment Programme. The greatest exposure is to projects that are at the pre-tender stage where the council has not yet entered into contract. Where possible, mitigations are in place such as the early purchase of materials to protect against future price rises. The affordability of all schemes within the Capital Programme is kept under review and project appraisals take into account the cost of funding projects and include the associated borrowing costs where relevant.
	92. Invest our Croxley Park funds in ethical investments	We will make sure the funds we receive from Croxley Park are invested in a sustainable way to deliver financial goals and better future for us all.	Green	↔	Funds from the Croxley Park investment are placed with the Royal London Sustainable Diversified Trust Fund and Royal London Sustainable Managed Growth Trust Fund with the aim to provide capital growth that will maintain the value of the investment in line with inflation. The performance of these funds is monitored by the Property Investment Board and reported through the Council's budget monitoring report, with income utilised to deliver our corporate priorities as outlined within the Council Plan.
Lead by example, securing our reputation as a forward thinking, caring and inspiring organisation where staff can thrive and achieve their best for our residents and businesses	93. Build on our innovative approach to agile working, realising the benefits for our staff and our community	We will ensure our staff are able to provide timely high quality and efficient services to customers by opening up opportunities for staff to work in an agile way in a modern, collaborative and inspiring workplace, helping the council to become an employer of choice.	Green	↔	The council's new collaborative and focused working space opened in July 2022, providing a modern and fit for purpose space for teams to deliver the very best services to residents, businesses and the community. To ensure the working space remains fit for purpose, we are regularly conducting staff surveys to collate feedback on both the space and technology and implementing changes as required. We recently showcased the implementation of our agile working approach at the Local Government Association Conference. This included a video message from our staff and members on the benefits of agile working and how this has improved their work life balance.

Commitment	Activity		BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline
	94. Secure robust succession planning, making sure we value and manage our talent to recruit and retain the best for Watford	We will open up opportunities for our staff to grow and develop, building their skills and knowledge to achieve. Where we do recruit, we will appoint the best, ensuring we recruit people with the right experience and behaviours to be part of 'Team Watford'.	Green	↔	The Values and Behaviours, which set out the expected behaviours for 'Team Watford', ensuring that we provide the best service to our residents, businesses and community, were launched in December 2022. We have now commenced the full roll out and implementation of the values and behaviours, which will also include incorporating these into each stage of the employee lifecycle so that we can support the performance of our staff. As well as the Values and Behaviours, our new People Strategy, currently in development, will also determine how we support, develop and retain our staff. The Behavioural framework will be used as part of our recruitment process.
	95. Embed our values and behaviours so they inspire our staff to achieve even more and underpin how we work	We will collaboratively develop meaningful corporate values and behaviours with our staff and use these as the foundation to implement a behaviours framework. This will help develop the skills of our people at all levels, and from all backgrounds, to recognise individual contributions, expertise and knowledge and to improve the resident and customer focused services we deliver.	Green	↔	The implementation of the council's values and behaviours framework is well underway. In Q1 significant work was undertaken to shape the values and behaviours and the focus has now moved to delivery. We have initiated an internal, comprehensive communications and engagement campaign, an important aspect of the project to ensure successful implementation. This included sharing a video message from the Chief Executive on the importance of the values and behaviours. Our Agile Pathfinders and Tier 4 Service Delivery Leads will play a key role in championing the values and behaviours across the council. A training programme will be rolled out shortly to support them.
	96. Refresh our Organisational Development approach so that it effectively underpins and supports our Council Plan	We will ensure we develop, motivate and inspire our staff so they are supported and empowered to do their best for our residents and businesses by refreshing our Organisational Development approach.	Green	↔	The council's People Strategy and Delivery Plan, which will stretch to 2027, is currently going through the formal approval process. Once approved, we will prioritise projects for delivery from August 2023. The roll out and implementation of our refreshed Values and Behaviours Framework is now well underway. Through this process the Values and Behaviours Framework will be worked into the employment lifecycle from recruitment and onboarding to development and progression and through to the Performance Development Review process.
	97. Seek and implement opportunities for people to have fulfilling local government careers	We will create apprenticeship opportunities for local people at the beginning of their working life, providing them with experience, skills and knowledge from across the council to help kick start their careers.	Green	↔	The council's Corporate Apprenticeship Scheme aims to support local people, particularly our younger residents, at the beginning of their working lives. Currently one apprentice is on the Scheme working with services across the council in order to gain the skills, knowledge and experience they need to help them start and progress in their career, whilst providing valuable public services to our customers. We are planning to recruit a further four apprentices although this will be reliant on available funding.

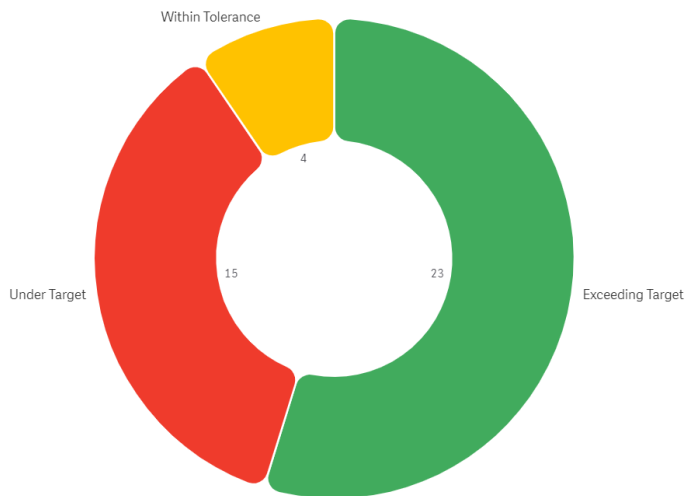
Commitment	Activity	BRAG' Rating	Trend	Headline
	98. Protect the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our staff	We will ensure that we protect the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our staff by developing their resilience and providing opportunities for genuine two-way engagement	Green	<div style="text-align: center;">↔</div> <p>A team event was held in July 2023 for our valued Health and Wellbeing (H&WB) champions, who play a key role in supporting our staff through the council's health and wellbeing initiatives. At this event the H&WB champions provided input into the health and wellbeing survey we are planning to conduct in autumn 2023. The responses from the survey will be summarised into a report which will then guide our next steps.</p> <p>We also held a 'Time to Talk' event in May giving our staff the opportunity to get together.</p> <p>We are planning to deliver a number of 'Lunch and Learn' sessions by June 2024.</p>



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
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Appendix B: Quarter 1 Key Performance Indicators 2023/24

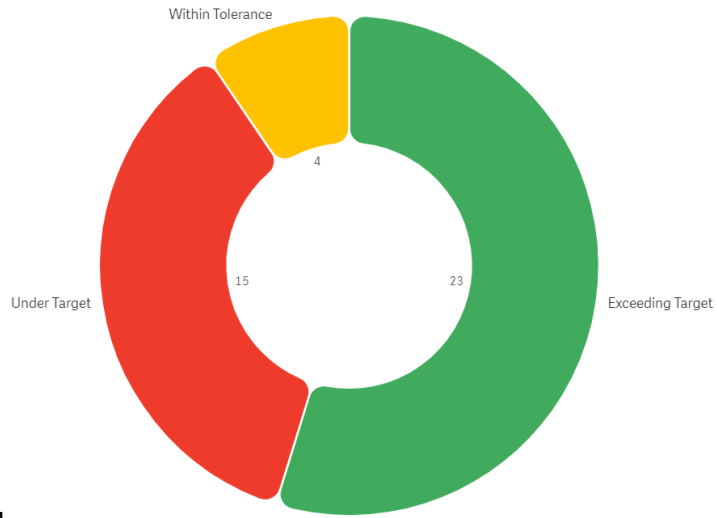


- 48 new indicators in the revised list of KPI's.
- 45 KPI's measured in Q1 (see below for why 3 KPIs not reported in Q1)
- 42 KPI's with targets
- 23 exceeding target
- 4 outside target but within tolerance
- 15 outside target

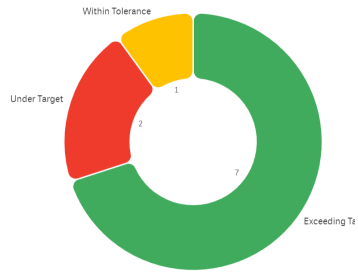
Summary – Quarter 1 Key Performance Indicators

- This report presents the first set of results from the new list of KPIs agreed as part of the KPI Review process that took place between January and March 2023. The new KPIs fulfil the following principles:
 - Aligned to our Council Plan and associated outcomes
 - Provide insight into key services provided to customers by the Council
 - Measureable targets which are realistic but challenge the organisation to continually improve and inform decision making
 - Focused on trends so that performance can be seen over time
- KPIs are grouped by Council Theme, and where applicable, for each KPI the following information will be shown; Desired result (low or high), target, latest result, latest result vs target, previous result, and trend.
- A target has been defined for each KPI where possible, however there are 3 KPIs that do not have targets. These are, number of short terms sickness instances, number of long term sickness instances, and number of parking penalty charge notices issued.
- Where appropriate, services have defined a tolerance for some of the KPIs. This is where the result is under target, but by a small amount, and not considered to be of concern.
- For those KPIs that are new, previous results, trend information and performance over time have not been provided, as there are no previous results to compare to. This information will be included from Q2 onwards.

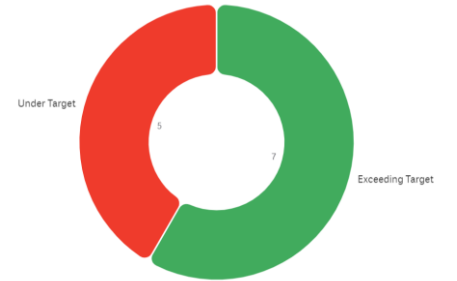
Q1 Key Performance Indicators Overview



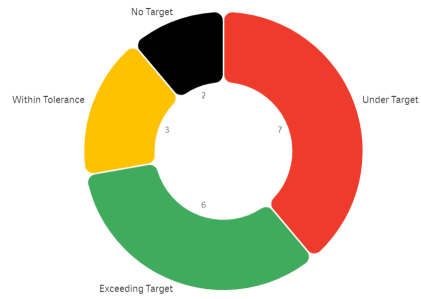
Council Plan Theme - A greener, brighter future



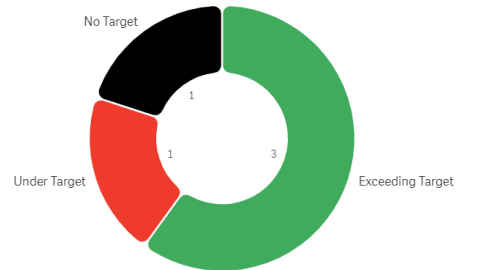
Council Plan Theme - A diverse, happy and healthy town



Council Plan Theme - A Council working for our community and serving our residents

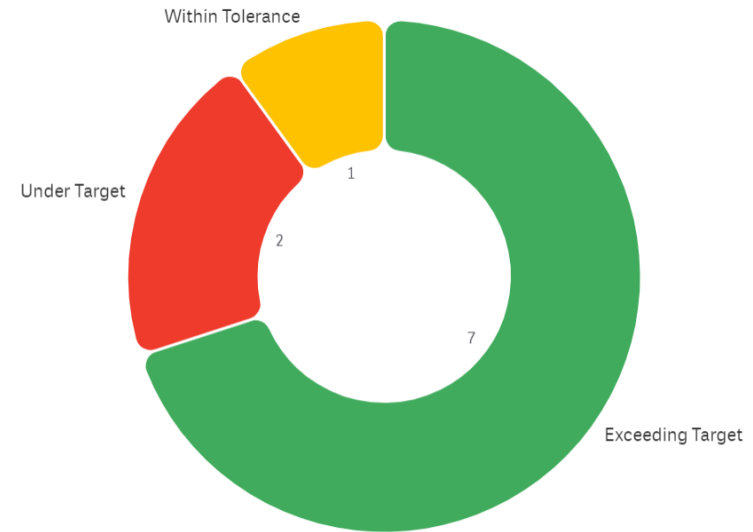


Council Plan Theme - An inspiring, thriving and creative town



Council Plan Theme: A greener, brighter future

- Good results recorded for Q1, with Fly tip response, Beryl Bike usage, waste recycled and composted and leisure centre customer service response times all exceeding target.
- Residual household waste was just outside of the new, more challenging target agreed as part of the KPI review, but within tolerance. Q1 is an estimated result as June's data isn't yet available from HCC. The annual target should still be achievable.
- The metric being used to measure Beryl Bike usage is 'number of journeys'. The target of 115,000 journeys this year had been agreed, which is a quarterly target of 28,750.
- Fly tip response is a new KPI for Q1, and is split in to standard and urgent requests. The target is to respond to 95% of requests with the set timescales (3 days for standard requests and 1 day for urgent requests).
- Customer service single view response times (Watford Leisure Centre) monitors customer experience, and has a target of 100% of customer comments responded to within 48 hours.
- The detritus score has significantly increased from 6.46% this time last year to 9.71% this year. This large increase is as a result of an agreed service change to reduce the frequency of overnight cleansing of high speed roads from 3 to 1 session per year, in order to make a cost saving. This was approved at the Strategic Partnership Board for the Veolia contract in March 2023. If high speed road transects were to be excluded from the survey results, we would see an improved score of 6.36%. However, performance gains have still been made within Medium Obstruction housing areas.



Council Plan Theme: A greener, brighter future

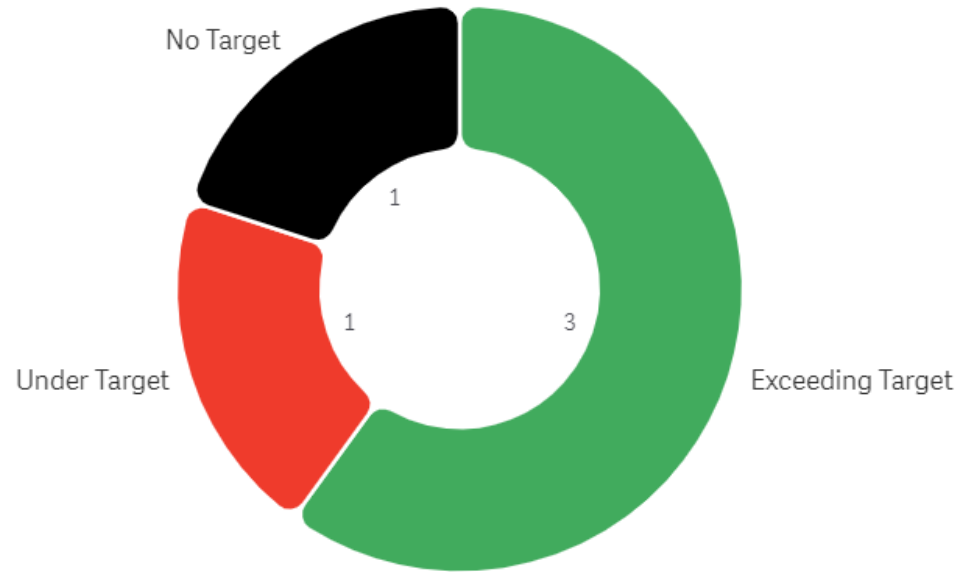
Service Area	Indicator	[Desired result (low/high)]	Target	Latest Result	Latest Result vs Target	Previous Result	Trend	Performance over Time
Environment (Waste and Recycling, Parking, the Market)	Residual household waste per household	Low	83.75	84.63	● Within Tol.	87.05	● Improved	
Environment (Leisure and Community)	Levels of Litter: Improved street and environment	Low	4.5%	3.37%	● Exceeding Target	4.96%	● Improved	
Environment (Leisure and Community)	Levels of Graffiti: Improved street and environmental cleanliness	Low	3.7%	3.57%	● Exceeding Target	2.98%	● Declined	
Environment (Waste and Recycling, Parking, the Market)	Waste recycled and composted	High	52.0%	53.72%	● Exceeding Target	50.79%	● Improved	
Environment (Leisure and Community)	Levels of Detritus: Improved street and environmental cleanliness	Low	5.5%	9.71%	● Under Target	6.35%	● Declined	
Environment (Leisure and Community)	Levels of Fly Posting: Improved street and environmental cleanliness	Low	0.4%	1.39%	● Under Target	1.39%	● No Change	

The indicators below are all new for Q1, therefore trend analysis is not yet available.

Service Area	Indicator	[Desired result (low/high)]	Target	Latest Result	Latest Result vs Target
Community Protection	Fly tip response - urgent requests	High	95.0%	100.00%	● Exceeding Target
Community Protection	Fly tip response - standard requests	High	95.0%	97.67%	● Exceeding Target
Environment (Leisure and Community)	Watford Leisure Centre - Customer Service single customer view response times	High	100.0%	100.00%	● Exceeding Target
Environment (Waste and Recycling, Parking, the Market)	Beryl Bikes – usage	High	28,750	30,393	● Exceeding Target

Council Plan Theme: An inspiring, thriving and creative town

- Processing of 'major' and 'other' planning applications were both within target. Processing of 'minor' planning applications was just outside of the target by 1%.
- The number of parking penalty charge notices issued was lower than the previous quarter, but higher than Q1 last year. There was only 1 tribunal appeal in Q1, which was won by the council.
- The Watford Market occupancy rate is a new KPI for Q1, which measures the number of market units which are occupied with rent paying traders. A good result was achieved, with 93.50% of the market units occupied.



Council Plan Theme: An inspiring, thriving and creative town

Service Area	Indicator	[Desired result (low/high)]	Target	Latest Result	Latest Result vs Target	Previous Result	Trend	Performance over Time
Planning	Processing of planning applications: 'major' applications - % determined within 13 weeks	High	90.0%	100.00%	● Exceeding Target	1,00.00%	● No Change	
Planning	Processing of planning applications: 'other' applications - % determined within 8 weeks	High	92.0%	99.00%	● Exceeding Target	1,00.00%	● Declined	
Planning	Processing of planning applications: 'minor' applications - % determined within 8 weeks	High	92.0%	91.00%	● Under Target	97.00%	● Declined	
Environment (Waste and Recycling, Parking, the Market)	Penalty Charge Notices issued	n/a	0	8,632	● No Target	9,080	● Improved	

The indicator below is new for Q1, therefore trend analysis is not yet available.

Service Area	Indicator	[Desired result (low/high)]	Target	Latest Result	Latest Result vs Target
Environment (Waste and Recycling, Parking, the Market)	Watford Market occupancy rate	High	90.0%	93.50%	● Exceeding Target

Council Plan Theme: A diverse, happy, healthy town

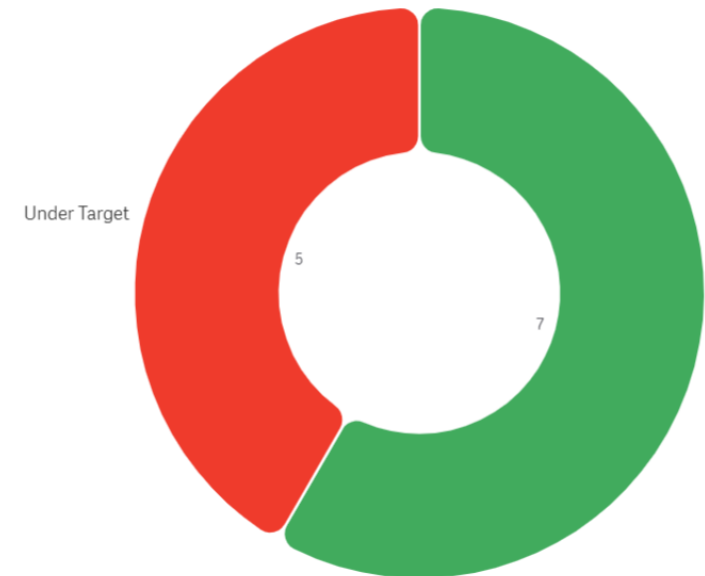
- There were 11 verified rough sleepers at the end of June, and of those, four were new. Five of the verified rough sleepers currently in Watford have no recourse to public funds so cannot be assisted under the homelessness legislation or through private rented accommodation as they cannot have access to welfare benefits. The service is continuing to explore options for how these rough sleepers can be supported.
- Two new Housing indicators included in Q1 were number of successful homeless relief cases, and number of successful homelessness prevention cases. Of the 98 cases where the council ended a relief (actually homeless) duty, 35 ended successfully by securing alternative accommodation.

The top 3 reasons for the loss of the last settled home were end of a private rented tenancy (11), family/friends no longer willing to accommodate (7) and eviction from supported housing, racially motivated harassment and non-violence relationship breakdown (6).

The 60% target for this KPI was based on what had been achieved in the past, especially when there was a higher number of handovers from housing associations and a good supply of private rented homes. In Q1 the council experienced delays in handovers of new homes from housing associations, resulting in a number of households spending far longer in temporary accommodation than anticipated. There is also a massively decreasing amount of private rented sector which is affordable.

Of the 24 cases where the council's prevention (threatened with homelessness) duty ended, the council was able to secure alternative accommodation in 11 cases and enable the household to remain where they were in 4 cases (15 in total).

For Prevention cases the top 3 reasons for the threat of homelessness was end of private rented tenancy (7- 3 of which were landlords wanting to sell), end of a social rented tenancy (5) of which all were households experiencing financial difficulty and family no longer willing or able to accommodate (2).



- Most Leisure Centre usage results exceeded targets and were continuing on an upward trend. The only one that had dropped since the last quarter was swimming lesson take up at Woodside branch. It's anticipated that this will level out over the coming months, so is not a concern at this point.

Council Plan Theme: A diverse, happy and healthy town

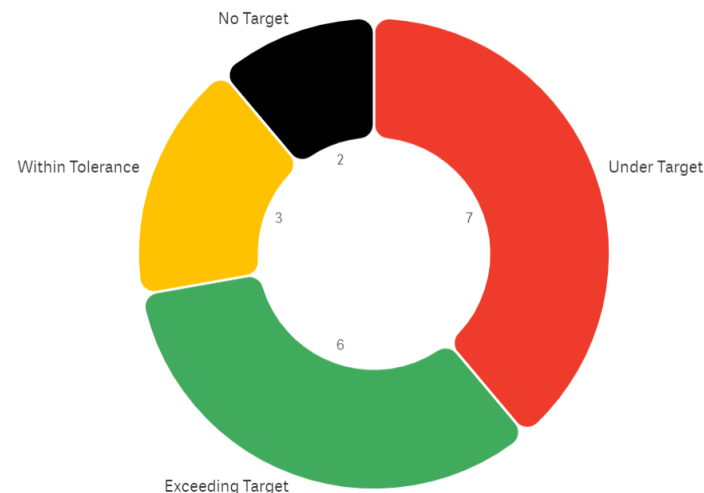
Service Area	Indicator	[Desired result (low/high)]	Target	Latest Result	Latest Result vs Target	Previous Result	Trend	Performance over Time
Environment (Leisure and Community)	Watford Leisure Centre - Woodside - swimming lessons take up	High	2,149	2,063	● Under Target	2,101	● Declined	
Housing	Number of Rough Sleepers	Low	5	11	● Under Target	10	● Declined	
Housing	Households in Temporary Accommodation	Low	100	148	● Under Target	122	● Declined	
Environment (Leisure and Community)	Throughput of Watford Leisure Centre: Woodside	High	164,329	225,190	● Exceeding Target	218,539	● Improved	
Environment (Leisure and Community)	Throughput of Watford Leisure Centre: Central	High	134,693	193,359	● Exceeding Target	121,855	● Improved	
Environment (Leisure and Community)	Watford Leisure Centre – Central - swimming lessons take up	High	1,744	1,762	● Exceeding Target	1,638	● Improved	
Environment (Leisure and Community)	Membership of Watford Leisure Centre: Woodside	High	5,170	5,870	● Exceeding Target	5,730	● Improved	
Environment (Leisure and Community)	Membership of Watford Leisure Centre Central	High	3,560	3,905	● Exceeding Target	3,643	● Improved	

The indicators below are all new for Q1, therefore trend analysis is not yet available.

Service Area	Indicator	[Desired result (low/high)]	Target	Latest Result	Latest Result vs Target
Housing	Successful Homeless Relief Cases	High	60.0%	36.00%	● Under Target
Housing	Homeless Households in Temporary Accommodation Out of Area	Low	3	18	● Under Target
Housing	Number of new homes for social rent	High	10	13	● Exceeding Target
Housing	Successful Homelessness Preventions	High	60.0%	63.00%	● Exceeding Target

Council Plan Theme: A council working for our community and serving our residents

- Telephone waiting time to the CSC was just outside of target by 1%, but within tolerance. This was due to reduced staff resource for several weeks in April as a result of unexpected sickness and increased demand face to face for the Housing service. In addition, system faults with 8x8 affected phonelines for over 2 hours in total during April and June. In May the service exceeded the target by 5%.
- Council Tax collection rate is up 2% on last year, and on track to achieve the 97% collection target by the end of the year. In Q1 the service launched the online Discounts and Exemptions form which is being automated resulting in faster awards of Discounts & Exemptions.
- 176 Freedom of Information requests were received in Q1, and response time within timescales was below the 100% target at 91%, however this is still a good result. 86 complaints were received in Q1, and 91% were responded to within timescales.
- Staff sickness is at the lowest level since Q1 2021/22. Instances of short-term sickness was almost half the number recorded in the previous quarter.
- Telephone calls answered exceeded targets. With customer callbacks being offered on all services into the CSC (where customers can leave their details, hang up and not lose their place in the queue), less calls should be abandoned. Compared to the same quarter last year we have improved by 2% with nearly 1000 more calls offered. In Q1 1047 call backs were made to customers.



Council Plan Theme: A Council working for our community and serving our residents

- Several new KPI's related to Customer satisfaction by contact channel were added as part of the KPI review, and the metrics are based around the percentage of customers who have given a positive rating of the service received. The contact channels assessed in Q1 were website, telephone and digital.
All 3 contact channels were below target, although telephone was just under target, with 97% of customers giving a positive rating. Digital was below this at 85%, and the website was the lowest at 42%. It is worth noting that, of the website feedback received, 68% relates to Parking, and comments tended to relate to dissatisfaction at being issued a PCN rather than the website itself.
Regarding telephone feedback, 1495 customers left feedback, of which 14 were negative. The majority of the ratings are for Council Tax service (1121) which receives the most service calls into the CSC. Face to face customer satisfaction is not currently being measured and will be introduced in line with the new Town Hall opening.
- Average time to process housing benefit claims was 1 day outside of target, but within the tolerance of 2 days outside of the target. This is the first dip in results after 15 months of being within target. Fewer Housing Benefit claims coming in means that a small number of claims taking the full term to process has impacted the figures. In addition, the service had planned to implement more automation in Q1, however this will now be going live during Q2. Average time to process a change of circumstances was also outside of target, but within tolerance. Due to a third-party error, the service needed to manually process several hundred rent increases which would have normally been automated. This took a significant amount of resource, and impacted processing times.
- % of Housing benefit classified as 'LA error' was outside of the target, and above this time last year. This result is primarily due to an overpayment in one case which occurred in April. Whilst this result is over the threshold and therefore won't attract a subsidy, it is early in the year, and more expenditure throughout the year will reduce the LA Error overpayment figure over time.

Council Plan Theme: A Council working for our community and serving our residents

Service Area	Indicator	[Desired result (low/high)]	Target	Latest Result	Latest Result vs Target	Previous Result	Trend	Performance over Time
Customer Services	Telephone waiting time to the CSC (Less than 20% waiting for more than 30 seconds)	Low	20.0%	21.00%	● Within Tol.	19.00%	● Declined	
Revenues and Benefits	Speed of processing Housing Benefit Claims	Low	7	8	● Within Tol.	5	● Declined	
Revenues and Benefits	Average time to process change of circumstances (from date of receipt to date processed)	Low	6	8	● Within Tol.	2	● Declined	
Customer Services	FOIs response time	High	100.0%	91.00%	● Under Target	97.00%	● Declined	
Revenues and Benefits	% of Housing Benefit overpayment classified as 'LA error'	Low	0.5%	0.73%	● Under Target	0.07%	● Declined	
Customer Services	Self service levels	High	70.0%	76.00%	● Exceeding Target	84.00%	● Declined	
Customer Services	Telephone calls answered	High	95.0%	96.00%	● Exceeding Target	95.00%	● Improved	
Human Resources	Sickness absence (working days lost per employee, rolling 12 month rate)	Low	5	3	● Exceeding Target	4	● Improved	
Revenues and Benefits	Collection Rates of Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR)	High	24.3%	31.58%	● Exceeding Target	97.80%	● Declined	
Revenues and Benefits	Council Tax Collection Rate	High	24.3%	30.00%	● Exceeding Target	95.70%	● Declined	
Human Resources	Staff sickness – long term	Low	0	3	● No Target	2	● Declined	
Human Resources	Staff sickness – short term	Low	0	25	● No Target	44	● Improved	

Council Plan Theme: A Council working for our community and serving our residents

The indicator below is new for Q1, therefore trend analysis is not yet available.

Service Area	Indicator	[Desired result (low/high)]	Target	Latest Result	Latest Result vs Target
Customer Services	Complaints response time	High	100.0%	91.00%	● Under Target
Customer Services	Customer Satisfaction by contact channel – TELEPHONE	High	99.0%	97.00%	● Under Target
Customer Services	Customers signed up to digital/email as preferred contact channel	High	70.0%	66.00%	● Under Target
Customer Services	Customer Satisfaction by contact channel - WEBSITE	High	80.0%	42.00%	● Under Target
Customer Services	Customer Satisfaction by contact channel – DIGITAL	High	90.0%	85.00%	● Under Target
Community Protection	Pest Control response times	High	98.0%	99.50%	● Exceeding Target

Results not available in Q1

- Customer satisfaction Face to Face – This will not be measured until the Customer Service Centre reopens in the new Town Hall space.
- Satisfaction with Watford Leisure Centres – This data will be available from Q2 this year.
- Watford leisure centre – Net zero/carbon footprint - commentary provided but no percentage improvement available yet. Will update when data becomes available.

Economic Growth Strategy

Q1 Highlights

- Helped promotion of Watford as an attractive place for investment at UKREiIF (UK Real Estate Investment and Infrastructure Forum) and the Council's great support for small businesses at the Three Counties Business Expo, at the Hilton Hotel Watford, with circa 250 attendees.
- Met with many businesses this quarter, including big brands and HQ's as well as many small companies representing a range of industry sectors. This has helped all of those businesses access useful support services, information and networks that they would not otherwise have known about.
- Worked with VVV on a new plan to invigorate the Clarendon Road Connect network, so it can better support and represent businesses.
- Supported Watford Chamber in creating a plan for a sustainable future as a local chamber. This means Watford Chamber can continue to act as a representative body for many in our small business community and provide valuable networking opportunities and business support signposting.
- Commenced Phase One of our UKSPF funded projects and provided DLUHC with reporting on Year 1 spend.
- Our One Watford for Business meeting of economy stakeholders enabled good sharing of local and regional insight and information, and brought a new focus on decarbonisation in the voluntary sector, and wider promotion of the UKSPF funded projects.
- Supported the Community Network Event to ensure good links are made between economy and community strategies and attended the Digi-Cluster networking event, supporting local collaboration in the creative digital sector.
- Attended the Watford Health Workshop to help ensure that plans are cognisant of the links between economic wellbeing and health.
- Met Services for Young people to explore how we can increase the volume of work experience opportunities our local businesses offer young people, and how to connect the people they support with new employment opportunities.
- Met LEP colleagues leading the Herts Film Office and screen industries strategy, to ensure Watford's businesses benefit from regional activity comes into the borough. The team also met with Visit Herts to ensure Watford is well represented through the county's tourism / visitor economy initiatives.
- Successfully launched the Watford Fit to Bid project, with over 60 SME's in attendance. This project will provide funded training, resources and mentoring to help our small business community win more local contracts.
- Worked with local businesses and Watford Chamber on early-stage plans for the Watford's Purple Tuesday initiative in November, which promotes disability confidence and awareness.
- Launched 'Watford Net Zero', which will provide funded support for businesses to start to measure and reduce their carbon footprint and supported the Environmental Managers forum, inviting new businesses to be part of this group, so that they can share best practice.



Q2 Priorities

- Drafting the proposal for Phase 2 of UKSPF funded projects. The proposed projects intend to support Economic Growth Strategy delivery, help our business community overcome barriers and thrive, and help our communities access economic opportunity.
- Holding our Watford Fit to Bid 'Meet-the-Buyer' event, through which we will connect our small businesses with the contract tendering opportunities that our some of our larger organisations can offer over coming months.
- Working with FSB (Federation of Small business) to create a Watford Local Leadership report, which will set out how Watford Council is supporting small businesses and making it easy for them to connect with our services.
- Promoting Watford as a great place for business through the Herts Chamber Inspire magazine, which reaches businesses across the county and beyond.
- Targeting business support to our secondary high streets utilising Watford's allocation of Herts Growth Boards 'Save the High Street' funding.
- Meeting with several more businesses on Clarendon Rd to help inform a view of how we can better support them and how they can connect with wider initiatives happening across the town.



Customer Experience Strategy

Q1 Highlights

- Launched our 'Customer Care Service Standards (CCSS)' and the accompanying 'Staff Guide to Delivering Great Customer Experiences' in July 2023. The CCSS is a comprehensive public facing document which clearly sets out how we will support and serve our customers when they contact us, access our services and importantly, reinforces our commitment to providing excellent services
- Our range of online services continue to develop, making it simpler and easier for our customers to contact us and use our services. Current priorities include Immigration Inspections and HMO processes.
- Promotion of our online services, including bin collections, garden waste sign-up and council tax payments.
- Developed proposals for the implementation of 'Screen Sharing' and 'Proactive Alerts', features that will benefit our customers.
- Drafted our 2022/23 annual complaints report, allowing us to identify where improvements are needed.
- Tested automated customer telephone surveys, meaning all customers who call via a mobile phone will get offered the chance to leave feedback -unless they opt out, providing us with more balanced feedback.



Almost 11,000 online forms submitted

20% reduction in the number of complaints received from the previous year



529, 031 visits to the council website

1,225 visits to the Customer Service Centre



96

% of all telephone calls answered

Q2 Priorities

- Introduce automated customer telephone surveys
- Develop additional proposals to support customers impacted by digital isolation.
- Subject to a clear business case, introduce Proactive Alerts and Screen Mirroring
- Finalise the Annual Complaints Report.
- Progress development of our digital processes.



Sustainability Strategy

Q1 Highlights

- Sustainability Champion volunteer officers in place to help the Council lead by example
- Energy usage audit completed at Croxley Business Park
- Council committed to involvement in next phase of Herts 'Solar Together' scheme to support Watford Households to install solar panels and benefit from cheaper sustainable energy
- New Car Club operator appointed
- Council land made available for an EV rapid charging site
- Continued public engagement for River Colne and 'Tales of the River' giving the people of Watford the opportunity to develop new green skills, along with corporate sessions to remove invasive species
- Sustainable procurement strategy updated to have social value and sustainability at its core
- Successful Great Big Green Week - e-newsletter, cycle day and video-showing at Palace Theatre
- Watford highly commended in recent Energy Efficiency Awards and Watford-based contractors Carbon Rewind and Sustain Homes were also multi-award winners

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Q2 Priorities

- Herts 'Solar Together' scheme phase 2 rollout
- Further 'Tales of the River': Wildplay Sessions at Oxhey Activity Park during the school summer holidays to enable the public to explore local green spaces
- Outcome of Council building emissions audit
- Outcome of submission to Sport England for support with the decarbonisation of leisure centres
- Site surveys for EV charging installation for the New Car Club
- Commence development of the energy usage strategy for Croxley Business Park
- Relaunch Water Quality Forums
- Waste Aware campaign to reduce food waste

144 solar panels installed on the Town Hall and 36 on the Colosseum

147 hours of direct volunteer action on invasive species across the River Colne catchment via public and corporate volunteer sessions



91% of households are now setting out their black bin for collection (66% in 2019) and producing less residual waste (avg 4.5kgs per household compared with 4.7kgs in 2019).

Watford households now producing less recycled waste (avg 4.5kgs per household compared with 4.7kgs in 2019)



227 windows refurbished in the Town Hall and 54 in the Colosseum to make them more energy efficient

1 million km undertaken by Beryl bikes since launch saving 43 tonnes of CO2



Transforming Travel in Watford

Q1 Highlights

- Enterprise have been procured as our new car club partner, with the Initial launch of six electric vehicles scheduled for Winter 2023. This will be a convenient, flexible and cost-effective solution for people who don't want to incur the high costs associated with car ownership, providing another travel option for the residents of Watford.
- Installation of 79 new charging points will commence in August and will bring the total number of charging points in the borough to 102). The new charging points have been funded by a successful ORCS grant bid and in partnership with provider Blink.
- The first of our School Travel Plans has been agreed with Orchard School.
- An immersive virtual reality bike ride experience of the eastern part of our green travel loop has been finalised. Virtual cyclists can experience what the green loop could be like in the future.

Q2 Priorities

- Progress design work with Hertfordshire County Council to improve the Dalton Way junction for cyclists to enable a bid for Active Travel Funding Autumn 2023.
- Proposals for the promotion and wayfinding of the Green Loop to be progressed.
- Green Loop virtual reality experience promoted at Cassiobury Park and Oxhey Activity Park events in September.
- Engagement work including information leaflet and questionnaire for local businesses and residents to commence that will inform designs to improve the Whippendell Road and The Brow parades, providing further opportunities for sustainable travel.
- Options on the St Albans Road masterplan to be finalised with clarification about long-term interventions that would make a meaningful contribution towards a modal transport shift.

49

bus stop improvements made to date across the borough.

57% of residents who responded to our consultation told us that they want to change to an Electric Vehicle.



Watford bike share riders have now clocked up one million kilometres since the scheme was first launched in March 2020 - the equivalent of almost 25 journeys around the Earth.

Feedback from Beryl Bike users shows that, on average, nearly a fifth of the 347,000 bike, and e-bike journeys made in Watford have replaced road transport journeys, equating to over 43 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions saved; the equivalent of more than 19,000 litres of petrol.



Community Engagement and Participation Strategy

Q1 Highlights

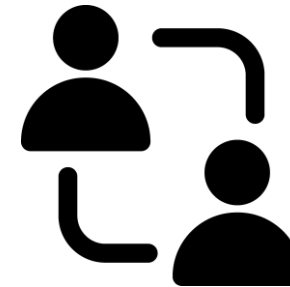
- A series of pre-consultation exercises were carried out throughout June as part of the development of our first ever Community Engagement and Participation Strategy, including meetings with key Voluntary and Community Sector partners.
- Our inaugural Community Network Event was held on 19 June, providing an opportunity for community organisations across the town to get together, network, and learn more about what the council is doing to support our local community groups.
- The draft strategy was approved for consultation at Cabinet on with the full consultation commencing on 11 July.

Q2 Priorities

- Consultation feedback will be analysed and used to inform the final draft of our Community Engagement and Participation Strategy.
- The strategy will return to Cabinet seeking formal approval and delivery of the strategy will commence shortly thereafter.

43

Community and charity organisations represented at our inaugural Community Networking Event



Cultural Strategy

Q1 Highlights

- A review has been undertaken to assess the Cultural Strategy's progress and monitoring arrangements and discussed by our Cultural Leaders Group
- The review found that all actions are underway as ongoing activity or complete
- A subgroup of the Cultural Leaders Group held a workshop to review the cultural sector leadership oversight and governance model and to determine the most appropriate approach for Watford's cultural organisations.

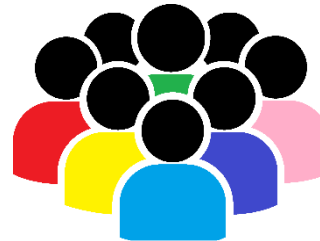
Q2 Priorities

- Delivery of our popular BIG Events programme providing free or low cost activities for families across the town, including the Big Screen, Big Beach and the Big JiveSwing Festival.
- Delivery of Watford Fringe, an exciting festival of performances, art and more, promoting our town's diverse cultural offering

1133

Visitors attended our Market Lates events in May and June

35 free and inclusive sessions were delivered across Watford in 12 different locations as part of our Easter events programme, making this accessible to all 5-15year olds during the Easter holidays



800 people enjoyed a variety of local music and bands at the King's Coronation Big Lunch

21 bands took part in Record Store Day, supporting our local businesses



Part A

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: Monday, 4 September 2023

Report author: Communications and Engagement Lead

Title: Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 and Delivery Plan

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 We are a council that embraces innovation, seizes opportunities and harnesses our collective energy to achieve more for Watford, our residents and our community. Our Council Plan 2022-26 sets out how, together, we will achieve our vision and ambitions for the town and council.
- 1.2 Our new Communications and Conversations Strategy has been developed to align our voice to our Council Plan, amplifying our messages and enhancing the profile of the council, our services and all that we do to make Watford so special. Like our Council Plan it is outward facing and focused, with a separate internal communications strategy to be developed, building on the work already championed by the Chief Executive.
- 1.3 The Strategy also aligns with other key council strategies and policies, including the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, Community Engagement and Participation Strategy and Customer Experience Strategy and will support these as well as areas such as the council's Environmental Strategy, Transforming Travel in Watford, the Town Hall Quarter programme and Rediscovering the River Colne.
- 1.4 Through the strategy and associated delivery plan (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2), we are seeking to move our communications and conversations with our community to the next level, in line with our commitment to continuous improvement, innovation and new opportunities.

2.0 Risks

2.1

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested Control Measures	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate or transfer)	Risk Rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Failure to align the council's outcomes to our communications and conversations	Local residents and community are not kept informed about the council, limiting understanding of council services and opportunities to participate and engage	A strategy that is linked to the Council Plan and the council's ambitions	Treat	3x 2 = 6
A strategy that doesn't support continuous improvement or improvements	Failure to deliver a 'step change' and greater alignment	A clear, SMART Delivery Plan	Treat	3x 2 = 6

3.0 Recommendations

Cabinet to

- 3.1 Approve the draft Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 and associated Delivery Plan set out in Appendices 1 and 2.
- 3.2 Delegate to the Elected Mayor, as Portfolio Holder, to approve any final amendments / updates before publication in consultation with the Director of Performance and Communications and Engagement Lead.
- 3.3 Note the Strategy and Delivery Plan will be monitored in line with the council's approach to performance management and with regular reports to the Portfolio Holder and Cabinet on progress.

Further information:

Marie Power

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Report approved by:

Kathryn Robson

kathryn.robson@watford.gov.uk

4.0 Detailed proposal

- 4.1 The Council Plan 2022-26 and associated Delivery Plan 2022-24 sets out an ambitious programme for both the town and the council. The plan is focused on seizing opportunities for Watford and ensuring we harness our resources to focus on what is important to the town and our residents. It is designed to be strategic, high level and outward facing, with an emphasis on outcome focused commitments. It describes to the workforce, our community and our partners how we see the council and the town progressing by resetting our strategic themes, commitments and areas of activity.
- 4.2 The Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 set out in appendix 1 has been developed to align our voice to the Council Plan, amplifying our messages and enhancing the profile of the council, our services and all that we do to support the town, our residents and make Watford so special. It sets out how we will demonstrate the council's commitment to keep local people informed and engaged, looking to do this in a way that is meaningful through building two-way conversations.
- 4.3 Like the Council Plan, the Communications and Conversations Strategy and Delivery Plan are outward facing. A separate internal communications strategy for staff is to be developed, which will complement the Communications and Conversations Strategy, recognising it is a shared responsibility, and everyone has a part to play in supporting and delivering good communications for the council.
- 4.4 As communications underpins all the council's services and activities, the strategy also aligns with other key council strategies and policies, including the emerging Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy, Community Engagement and Participation Strategy and Customer Experience Strategy and will also support key Council Plan strategies such as the council's Environmental Strategy, Transforming Travel in Watford and major initiatives including the Town Hall Quarter programme and Rediscovering the River Colne.
- 4.5 **The Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 – Overview**
- 4.6 The council has built a strong communications platform on which to develop the Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 with high levels of engagement through social media and good reach across the Watford community and beyond. Through the strategy, we have the ambition to take our communications to the next level, learning from others and seek innovation where

it helps deliver our aims and commitments.

- 4.7 Within the strategy, we present four strategic communications themes We will support the delivery of the Council Plan and raise how we deliver communications and conversations by:

Theme 1 – Promoting what is important to our town and community, as a trusted leader of Watford, through a shared and coordinated programme of activity

Theme 2 - Recognising the different ways people from our diverse community choose to hear from us and communicate with us, targeting their needs and preferences

Theme 3 – Amplifying our voice to highlight our achievements and successes within Watford and beyond

Theme 4 – Building resilience so we can pivot effectively to respond to new opportunities

4.8 **Planning and resource**

- 4.9 We recognise that we need to use our communications resources to achieve maximum impact and outcomes. Through the strategy, we have identified a corporate approach to pivot our planning and resource using the **Champion, Core** and **Classic** model, which allows us to tier our activities and focus our communications activity.

Champion

High impact with big audience. Ambitious multi-faceted project. Council Plan priority. Long term.

Core

Low impact with big audience or high impact with limited audience. Contained project or initiative. Medium term

Classic

Standard service information sharing and updates. Low impact with more limited audience. Short term

4.10 **Delivering the Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 – Delivery Plan**

- 4.11 The Delivery Plan at appendix 2 sets out in greater detail how the council will focus on activities that will bring the strategy to life. Whilst the Delivery Plan will be

monitored, there will be the opportunity to flex to continue to align with the Council Plan and the council's priority areas of focus and activity.

5.0 **Implications**

5.1 **Financial**

5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that the Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 and associated Delivery Plan will be delivered within existing budgets.

5.2 **Legal Issues (Monitoring Officer)**

5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the Communications and Conversations Strategy has been developed within the legal context governing local authority communications. The law governing communications in local authorities can be found in the Local Government Acts 1986 and 1988. Communications activity must adhere to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011, which provides guidance on the content, style, distribution and cost of local authority publicity. This code is statutory guidance and, therefore, councils must have regard to it and follow its provisions.

5.2.2 The principles of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011 means that that all communications activity is:

- o lawful
- o cost effective
- o objective
- o even-handed
- o appropriate
- o aware of equality and diversity
- o issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity, such as before elections

5.3 **Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection**

5.3.1 An overall equality impact analysis has been undertaken on the Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 (Appendix 3).

5.3.2 The equality impact analysis takes into account that under s149 (1) of the Equality Act the Council must have due regard, in the exercise of its functions, to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them
- foster good relations between persons who share relevant protected characteristics and persons who do not share them.

5.3.3 The EIA will be reviewed and updated during the life of the strategy.

5.3.4 Having had regard to the Council’s obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

5.4 **Staffing**

5.4.1 The Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 sets out how the organisation will inform and engage with the Watford and wider community. A separate internal communications strategy will be developed to complement this outward focused strategy.

5.5 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

5.5.1 Informing, reassuring and communicating on matters relating to community safety will be part of the council’s partnership work with the police and other community safety partners.

5.6 **Sustainability**

5.6.1 Promoting the council’s commitment to sustainability through the Environmental Strategy - Addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergency 2023-30, will be a core component of our communications and conversations planning and activity.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Watford BC Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 (Draft)

Appendix 2 Watford BC Communications and Conversations Strategy Delivery Plan 2023-26 (Draft)

Appendix 3 Watford BC Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 Equality Impact Analysis

Background papers

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report. If you wish to inspect or take copies of the background papers, please contact the officer named on the front page of the report.

- Watford Borough Council – Council Plan 2022-26
- Watford Borough Council – Delivery Plan 2022-24



**Watford Borough Council's
Communications and Conversations Strategy
2023-2026**

1. Foreword by our Elected Mayor Peter Taylor

PUTTING OUR RESIDENTS AT THE HEART

In Watford, we believe in the art of the possible. As a town and as a council we are ambitious to achieve more and do things better for our people, which is clearly expressed in our Council Plan and Delivery Plan. What these plans also highlight is that the people of Watford – the community and businesses we serve – are always at the heart of everything we do. These principles are woven throughout the Communications and Conversations Strategy.

Excellent and effective communication is pivotal in both achieving the bold goals we have for Watford and ensuring the community remains the driving force behind all our activities. As an Elected Mayor, the people of Watford have voted for me directly and I represent the whole of the town. This means I am visible and accessible to the community in a way that traditional council leaders aren't. This has fostered a culture of candid and engaging communications in Watford, which is highlighted in the strategy.

Good communication goes far beyond just talking to and updating people. It's about empowering our communities by equipping them with tools, knowledge and information to improve their everyday lives. It's about hearing people, discovering their stories, insights and experiences and in so doing, continuing to deliver excellence across all our services. Most importantly it's about uniting people. This comes through strongly in our Communications and Conversations Strategy, along with the need to reflect everyone who makes our town what it is.

Peter Taylor
Elected Mayor of Watford

2. DRIVING COMMUNICATIONS AND CONVERSATIONS EXCELLENCE FOR WATFORD

Watford is a town that is known for its ambition, entrepreneurial spirit and creativity, which makes it an exciting place to live, visit, work and to do business. We are forward-looking and have a 'can do', welcoming and caring spirit that makes great things happen.

The council reflects the drive of our town, embracing innovation, seizing opportunities and harnessing our collective energy to achieve more for Watford, our residents and our community. Our Council Plan 2022-26 sets out how, together, we will achieve our vision and ambitions. Through this Communications and Conversations Strategy, we will align our voice to amplify our messages and enhance the profile of our council, our services and all that we do to make Watford so special.

We have included conversations in our strategy to reflect the importance of talking, listening and having a discussion or just a chat – whether online or in person.

con-ver-sa-tions (noun): talks, especially informal ones, between two or more people, in which thoughts, feelings and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered, with news and information exchanged.

Through this strategy we will take our communications and conversations to the next level by:

- Encouraging everyone to share their stories to promote what we do.
- Exploring different and innovative ways of communicating, particularly in light of budget constraints.

- Making our communications more meaningful, relevant and accessible for our diverse audiences.
- Making the best use of our resources by consistently using our Champion, Core, Classic model to prioritise council communications.
- Carrying out robust evaluation to understand what works for our community and how we can improve our communications and engagement.
- Ensuring we work to the principles of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity so that that all communications activity is:
 - lawful
 - cost effective
 - objective
 - even-handed
 - appropriate
 - aware of equality and diversity
 - issued with care during periods of heightened sensitivity, such as before elections

Stepping up to support the Council Plan

Our communications and conversation themes

We will support the successful delivery of the Council Plan and raise how we deliver communications and conversations by:

Theme 1 – Promoting what is important to our town and community, as a trusted leader of Watford, through a shared and coordinated programme of activity

Theme 2 - Recognising the different ways people from our diverse community choose to hear from us and communicate with us, targeting their needs and preferences

Theme 3 – Amplifying our voice to highlight our achievements and successes within Watford and beyond

Theme 4 – Building resilience so we can pivot effectively to respond to new opportunities

3. UNDERSTANDING THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE OUR TOWN

We are committed to a people first approach, so having a comprehensive understanding of our residents and businesses is the bedrock of all our communications and determines:

- the most effective platforms for each communication/project
- other methods and channels we can use
- timing of communications activities
- tone of voice

The best conversations flow two-ways. We don't just want to throw information out and talk at people. To succeed in ensuring Watford continues to thrive and prosper we need people to be interested in what we have to say and invested enough to talk back and pitch in.

This can only happen if we have a true sense of who our residents, businesses and communities are. They need to know that we get them and from there we can create trust, build on relationships, cultivate community cohesion and hit the apex of working with, not just for, the people and businesses we are here to support.

Building community spirit

Our diverse and vibrant community is central to what gives Watford its spark and energy. We are proud to have been recognised as a 'rainbow town' that has welcomed people from many different backgrounds and experiences to enjoy all that Watford has to offer.

Communications, and the conversations it encourages, play a vital role in building community spirit and a sense of pride, and reaching as many groups as possible. Our communications need to reflect, and be led by, our community so that it includes and involves everyone. This in turn helps in overcoming barriers and being a trusted voice for Watford, for our community and also for our staff through linking to our Customer Experience Strategy, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and our Community Engagement and Participation Strategy.

We will:

- ensure our communications and conversations reflect the full diversity of Watford
- work with our Elected Mayor, councillors, community leaders and groups to better understand our residents and how they want to hear from, and talk to, us
- ensure content (videos, online content, website forms, printed materials, advertising) meet accessibility standards and use images and photos that truly reflect the people of Watford
- use the data we have about our audiences to shape our communications and target resource towards the most impactful channels
- help to ensure equality of access to our services

4. SETTING OUR FUTURE DIRECTION

Our culture shaping our communications

It is vital the way we communicate reflects our values of integrity, trust and respect – who we are - along with our values of bold, together and agile - how we work. This underpins our aspiration to use communications and conversations to improve the lives of our residents and help keep Watford an outstanding place to live, work and do business.

As the country moves through this period of economic uncertainty, it is essential that we remain mindful of the financial pressures facing both the council and the community when planning and delivering communications. We must be sensitive to the changing economic climate and what this means for our communities, and practical in terms of what we can deliver.

We will achieve this through this strategy and its delivery plan, and by embracing these core principles of work:

- **People first** – the people we are talking to and working for are always our starting point. This includes proactively responding to particular issues and concerns raised by our community.
- **Never stand still** – explore new technologies and techniques which are always emerging to ensure effective use of resource and to best serve our town and community.
- **Evaluate, question and learn** – take the time to assess if communications are landing and why, exploring alternatives and challenging ourselves to apply what we've learned.

5. REFLECTING OUR LOCAL CHARACTER AND IDENTITY

A consistently applied and authentic council brand, including our tone of voice, use of language and imagery is essential in telling Watford's story and generating key conversations. Our brand is more than

just a logo, it's a window into the lives of our community, our personality and our ambitions, giving us visibility across the town and credibility when communicating with residents and businesses. If we use our brand well, we can successfully continue to communicate our vision for Watford's future.

Amplifying Watford's place brand and narrative

Watford's place brand and narrative showcases Watford as a dynamic, vibrant and bold town, highlighting all that makes it such an attractive and unique destination to live, visit and work.

We will champion the place brand and model how it should be used, encouraging others to embrace what it can achieve for the town, its profile and reputation. The council brand will reflect and complement the place brand, helping to embed it across Watford and beyond, building its presence and impact.

To maintain our strong branding presence and to make sure it works successfully with the town's place brand we will:

- align with Watford's place brand and use it where appropriate
- model the use of the place brand and champion it to local partners and key organisations
- apply the council brand consistently across all our services, channels and communications materials
- ensure agreements are in place with partners on collaborative projects on how to use both our brand and place brand (where appropriate)

Our reputation is underpinned by

- ✓ what we say about ourselves
- ✓ what people say about us
- ✓ doing what we say we will do

Our tone of voice

We are shaped by the people around us. So, as a proud Watford organisation that's here to serve the people and businesses of this town, it makes sense to talk like Watford. The language we choose to use is important because it allows our personality to shine and lets our residents and businesses know that we get them.

- **Bold** – keep it short and to the point to maximise impact and show that we are honest and straight-talking.
- **Friendly** – chatty language is clearer for people to understand, indicating we are open and tying in with our commitment to make Watford a welcoming place for all.
- **Approachable** – avoid technical language to get people engaged with our communications and to kick-start conversations.

6. HOW WE COMMUNICATE

6.1 Our focus

Following the cuts to local authority funding, the unprecedented fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic, high inflation and the cost of living crisis, we continue to operate in the midst of a perfect storm. Two-way

council communications are increasingly essential for our community while resources, including budget, are decreasing.

Watford’s ambitious Council Plan also means that the breadth of our communications is growing. Although small geographically, we also have a fast-growing and diverse population, with different needs and communications preferences.

This strategy looks at how we can maximise the resource we have, and communicate and engage effectively with our community by:

- shaping our communications around our community’s preferences
- consistently using the **Champion, Core, Classic** model to focus resource

6.2 Pivoting our planning and resource

Watford’s big, bold agenda means we must deliver complex communications with limited resources and diminishing budgets. Using the **Champion, Core** and **Classic** communications model allows us to tier our activities and focus our communications planning.

The objectives of the model are to:

- show our community the scope of Watford’s Council Plan
- enable the best allocation of resource and budget to drive value for money
- allow for proper and effective campaign planning
- encourage conversations with the community, Mayor and councillors, staff, residents and partners
- empower all Watford BC staff to communicate effectively in face-to-face communications, via professional channels liked LinkedIn and building case studies and best practice examples

	Features	Budget	Channels options	Design	Example
Champion	High impact with big audience Ambitious multi-faceted project Council Plan priority Long term	Higher budget	Social media Website Email marketing Print advertising Radio Meetings and events Mayor and councillors Partner channels Explore new opportunities	Unique creative identity	Town Hall Quarter programme Rediscovering the River Colne
Core	Low impact with big audience or high impact with limited audience	Low budget	Social media Website Email Limited print and direct	Standard design work required	EV charger rollout Shopping parade upgrades

	Features	Budget	Channels options	Design	Example
	Contained project or initiative Medium term		engagement options		
Classic	Standard service information sharing and updates Low impact with limited audience Short term	No budget	Website Potentially social media and email marketing	No design required	Temporary bin collection changes

6.3 Building our media and public relations profile

As a lively town so close to London and as a Mayoral local authority, Watford attracts significant local, regional and national media attention.

- In line with our commitments to being transparent and promoting our wonderful town, we take a proactive approach to media relations, working to build positive relationships with the media and issuing an average of 800+ press releases and arranging around 20 broadcast interviews a year.
- We also respond to around 200 media enquiries a year, and aim to provide useful briefings and statements swiftly. Not only does this enable us to tell Watford’s story but it means we can ensure the information the public are receiving is accurate and balanced.
- With so many ambitious projects in track, trade media is becoming increasingly important in building Watford’s reputation as an innovative and dynamic council and we will identify where stories and messages would generate interest beyond our boundaries.

6.4 Creating strong social media connections

Unsurprisingly, social media has become critical to all our communications, enabling us to have real conversations with residents, share information and updates quickly and target our messages to keep them relevant – all for free or at minimal cost. As we navigate the financial pressures facing local authorities, digital media will be an increasingly important part of our communications toolkit, giving us bang for our buck. Continuing to grow our social media following and engagement is an ongoing priority.

- We know that people want to engage with us on social media, with almost 60% of those in our top MOSAIC groups¹ having a preference for using it. Over the last two years, our follower numbers have grown significantly, increasing by more than 20% to a total of 65,687. This is partly down to our understanding the distinctions between each platform and its audience, an ongoing piece of work, enabling us to create interesting content which works and gains traction.

¹ Rental hubs 22% of our community, Urban cohesion 19% of our community and Domestic success 16% of our community

- Social media is about having great conversations. It's a window into the life of our community and, in line with our commitment to be open, friendly and approachable, we always try to respond to comments, positive or negative, directly on the platform.
- We challenge ourselves to keep informed of changes, trends and new technologies so that we can keep building relationships with communities. New platforms are always emerging and we will explore and trial these, adopting the right ones to suit both our community and our resource.
- Monitoring what has worked well helps us to shape and evolve our social media approach.
- Our social media guidance for staff and members sets out how we use our platforms and offers advice on using them successfully both at work and home. We encourage all Watford BC colleagues to have great conversations through LinkedIn, which is a great way to celebrate our corporate and individual successes and maximise the council's resource and impact

Facebook: 22,156 followers – primary users 25-34 year olds

Twitter (X): 12,505 followers – primary users 18-29 year olds

Instagram: 5,695 followers – primary users 18- 24 year olds

LinkedIn: 6,583 followers – primary users 30-39 year olds

Nextdoor: 18,748 followers – primary users 55-64 year olds

(As of August 2023)

6.5 Enhancing our profile through websites, email and digital

We recognise that the website is a place where people want to get things done and access the information they need quickly.

- We are committed to ensuring web content is easy to understand, accessible for those who are sight impaired and that it is translatable.
- Detailed information about the council's key programmes, which are complex, multifaceted and have a big impact will be delivered via microsites, including watfordtownhallquarter.com, rivercolnewatford.org. These sites have a shelf life and aim to provide the community with a full overview of major projects in a simple and accessible way. They help people to see the bigger picture for our town and capture the long-term vision, so that people feel properly informed.

Email also continues to play a role in our communications toolkit.

- We have a weekly resident newsletter providing regular updates on events, useful information and campaigns straight to inboxes.
- With around 7,000 people signed up, this is an area of growth for the council, with a sign-up campaign underway along with a review of how and where we give people the opportunity to subscribe to newsletters.
- Email also gives us a way to update specific groups, forums and communities about things they are interested in, including our sustainability group and people registered for housing updates.

Digital publications are available to anyone with online access and are a cost effective way to distribute publications and information

- We already make our twice yearly About Watford magazine available online and will continue to promote this to our community. We support this by working with the local Talking Newspapers group to have the publication recorded and provided digitally to their subscribers

6.6 Targeting traditional media

There can still be a place for traditional, printed (and then published online) media.

- It has a broad reach, is very visible and helps us get messages out to those who aren't active online or on social media.
- But it can be expensive and there is an environmental impact, so using our communications model we can decide if it's right for the project and our audience.
- We always look to cross promote where possible and maximise the use of traditional print media when we do use it, by adding inserts to dedicated mailings, and posting long-term campaigns on our poster sites to minimise cost.

Media	Timing	Reach
16 town centre digital boards	Continuous, 10 seconds per minute	Around 1million visitors a month to town centre
131 bus shelter poster sites, 6sheet and 14 underpass poster sites	Continuous, option to change every two weeks	1million+ a month
Dedicated council mailings, including council tax and elections	Twice a year	Every eligible resident/household
Flyers	As needed	Limited for targeted audiences

7. DELIVERING OUR STRATEGY

Our strategy will be translated into action through a detailed Delivery Plan (2023-26).

We will rigorously monitor this plan and measure how well we are doing through our council commitment to continuous improvement and reporting back to our residents and community. As we deliver, we will review this strategy, also providing the opportunity to refresh with new ideas, innovation and best practice.

Our communications strategy is integrated into our strategic fabric

8. OUR PEOPLE

WE ALL TELL OUR STORY

Our people are our best ambassadors. Through our Communications and Conversations Strategy, we are harnessing our collective voice to tell our story with confidence and pride, both within Watford and beyond, letting others know about all the fantastic work we do, the decisions we take and the difference we are making.

OUR PEOPLE AT OUR HEART – INVOLVING AND INSPIRING

We recognise and appreciate the importance of our people across everything we do. Just as with our outward facing communications, our people communications go beyond informing and consulting to really involving, collaborating and empowering to create greater belonging and deeper engagement.

We have a People Communications Strategy that ensures everyone feels informed, engaged and inspired, which is key to who we are and our success. The strategy works alongside our shared values and behaviours and our revitalised People Strategy and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policy.

Championed by our Chief Executive, we have a strong framework of communications and engagement that underpins our People Communications Strategy, which encourages people to share, learn from others and celebrate what they do, including:

How we inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower

In Touch	<i>updates from the Chief Executive and celebrating our successes</i>
TeamTalk	<i>news from CMT, written each fortnight by a member of CMT</i>
Staff Ambassadors Group	<i>an empowered staff group, supporting the Chief Executive by testing new ideas and shaping how we work</i>
Pathfinders	<i>an enthusiastic team who pioneer initiatives and show how it is done</i>
Conversations	<i>an opportunity to spend some time with the Chief Executive, sharing day-to-day work experiences</i>
Team Watford pulse surveys	<i>checking-in to create a greater people experience</i>

For more information about communications at Watford BC: communications@watford.gov.uk

COMMUNICATIONS AND CONVERSATIONS DELIVERY PLAN – V07

Excellent communication is about...

- *Empowering our communities by equipping them with tools, knowledge and information to improve their everyday lives*
- *Hearing people and giving them a voice so they continue to feel a deep connection with the town they call home*

This delivery plan sets out in detail how we will deliver excellence.

THEME 1: PROMOTING WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO OUR TOWN AND COMMUNITY THROUGH A SHARED AND COORDINATED PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITY

COMMITMENT: Develop communications plans for the commitments and activities in the Council Plan delivery plan, taking through our ‘champion, core and classic’ approach so we highlight our achievements and let residents, businesses and the community know what we are doing.	Actions	Delivery date
1. Identify Delivery Plan activities against our ‘champion, core and classic’ model	Create a map of the Delivery Plan and communications activities.	End of September 2023
2. Further develop annual communications planner to assist resourcing and focus of activity – this is to identify our ‘champion, core and classic’ projects	Build on the current tracker to map the council’s communications activities.	First draft mid-October 2023 and then ongoing
3. Develop separate communication plans for each champion area	Working closely with ADs and SDLs, develop ‘champion’ communication plans, linking to the project plans for these areas.	Ongoing
4. Develop and agree a core narrative for the council, integrating it across our core messages	Create a set of short, medium and long narratives for the council that can be used for multiple activities.	End of October 2023

THEME 2: RECOGNISING THE DIFFERENT WAYS PEOPLE FROM OUR DIVERSE COMMUNITY CHOOSE TO HEAR FROM US AND COMMUNICATE WITH US, TARGETING THEIR NEEDS AND PREFERENCES

COMMITMENT: Identify ways to have new and deeper conversations with our community, particularly our emerging communities and those who are underrepresented	Actions	Delivery date
1. Undertake research into Watford’s community profile (Census, MOSAIC and staff expertise) and how different parts of the community prefer to receive information	Develop a profile and plan, including the feedback, expertise and insights of ADs, SDLs and frontline staff, for addressing the needs of different parts of the Watford community and embed across the organisation.	End of February 2024
2. Create links to community groups and advocates who can support messaging and understanding of emerging communities	Link to the council’s Communications and Participation Strategy and new approach to community networks.	Ongoing
3. Build on our connections with young people in the town to target our communications in a way that is interesting and engaging for them	Research which channels are effective when engaging young people (under-18s and 18–30-year-olds). Undertake research with young people in the town.	End of March 2024 End of May 2024
4. Support the consultation process for the Community Engagement and Participation Strategy and its subsequent rollout	Develop a communications and engagement plan to maximise reach, encourage conversations and help build positive partnerships.	July – September 2023 for consultation Ongoing
5. Working closely with ADs and SDLs, maintain the consultations forward plan, helping to ensure awareness of cultural events and faith festivals is at the forefront of planning	Work with the Strategic Initiatives Officer and Community Commissioning Lead to embed a process to keep the forward plan up to date and give it visibility across the organisation.	Process in place by end of November 2023

COMMITMENT: Identify ways to have new and deeper conversations with our community, particularly our emerging communities and those who are underrepresented	Actions	Delivery date
6. Align our communications with the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to ensure: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. the language we use is inclusive and accessible ii. we are both representing and reflecting our community 	Review and update our in-house style guide and promote to all staff.	End of September 2023

THEME 3: AMPLIFYING OUR VOICE TO HIGHLIGHT OUR ACHIEVEMENTS AND SUCCESSES BOTH WITHIN WATFORD AND BEYOND

COMMITMENT: Explore opportunities to tell Watford's story	Actions	Delivery date
1. Lead on the rollout of Watford's place brand and narrative, ensuring it becomes embedded across the town	Champion the place brand and narrative to key partners and model how it should be used. Identify opportunities to celebrate and promote the place brand narrative, including through relevant events, media and awards opportunities.	Ongoing
2. Amplify Watford's place brand and narrative through the council's communications and conversations	Identify opportunities for the council's communications to include the place brand and narrative and ensure the key narrative is amplified in council communications where appropriate and relevant.	Support launch in September 2023 Ongoing
3. Review the council's branding and associated templates	Undertake a review of the council's brand in terms of how it is applied to our templates and online / printed materials.	Proposal end of December 2023

COMMITMENT: Explore opportunities to tell Watford's story	Actions	Delivery date
4. Identify areas where Watford has achieved / excelled to share beyond the town through local government networks, LinkedIn and, potentially, for award recognition	<p>Identify and recommend what opportunities are available to promote our work, including the annual LGC and MJ awards.</p> <p>Support the Chief Executive and colleagues with opportunities to present what we do to our local, regional and national networks, including through local government media.</p> <p>Share more of our work and successes through our LinkedIn account, highlighting how we are addressing our priorities and shining a spotlight on our achievements, including developing our voice for these posts.</p> <p>Refresh our trade media lists and identify key media targets.</p>	<p>First draft end of September 2023 and then ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>October 2023</p> <p>August 2023</p>
5. Engage with our partners, businesses and community where we can mutually support and add value to each other's communications and messaging	<p>Continue to engage in key partnerships (e.g. Community Safety, Cost of Living Forum) to provide communications advice and support, working with others to craft and disseminate.</p> <p>Link to county, regional and national communications where appropriate and broadcast through our channels where appropriate.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>
6. Continue to build positive relationships with local and regional media outlets to promote the town and the work of the council, and support transparency	<p>Set up regular meetings with local outlets.</p> <p>Identify feature opportunities to push to local and regional contacts.</p>	<p>End of July 2023 and then ongoing</p>

COMMITMENT: Explore opportunities to tell Watford's story	Actions	Delivery date
7. Evaluate activity to measure effectiveness and success	Further develop the service's KPIs and other measures for reporting to CMB and the Elected Mayor as PH and to inform future activity to reach our target audience and deliver the best return on investment.	Review of measures end of November 2023

THEME 4: BUILDING RESILIENCE SO WE CAN PIVOT EFFECTIVELY TO RESPOND TO NEW OPPORTUNITIES

COMMITMENT: Explore new ways of delivering effective and successful communications	Actions	Delivery date
1. Understand the benefits of 'behavioural change' to communications and conversations so that it can support our ambitions and successful delivery	Develop a council understanding of behaviour change, which areas it might support and key activities that might help achieve changes needed.	First draft end of March 2024 and then ongoing
2. Ensure that up to date policies are in place for key areas of communications (such as social media)	Review communications policies and update / refresh if needed.	End of December 2023
3. Identify key industry events to attend in order to keep abreast of trends and developments and build peer relationships to foster continuous learning.	Compile programme of events.	End of August 2023
4. Explore if we can engage influencers to amplify our messaging	Explore potential influencers and make connections.	End of January 2024



**WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL**

Equality Impact Analysis

Title of policy, function or service	Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 and Delivery Plan
Lead officer	Kathryn Robson
Person completing the EIA	Kathryn Robson
Type of policy, function or service:	Existing (reviewed) <input type="checkbox"/> New/Proposed <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Version & Date	Version 0.1

1. Background

As a town and as a council we are ambitious to achieve more and do things better for our people, which is clearly expressed in our Council Plan and Delivery Plan. What these plans also highlight is that the people of Watford – the community and businesses we serve – are always at the heart of everything we do. These principles are woven throughout the council’s new Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26.

The council has chosen to focus on conversations to reflect the importance of talking, listening and having a discussion or just a chat – whether online or in person.

The strategy is supported by a delivery plan, which will bring the commitments in the strategy to life, keeping local people and the town up to date on what the council is doing and providing an opportunity to share their views. Both the strategy and delivery plan recognise the diversity and vibrancy of Watford and how this should inform and influence our communications and conversations.

In terms of approach, the strategy has been developed around key themes and has drawn on good practice, including [LG Comms](#) , and taken into account the legislation that informs local government communications.

2. Focus of the Equality Impact Analysis

As this is a strategy an Equality Impact Analysis has been undertaken. This EIA, therefore, considers the potential equality related impacts, both positive and negative of the council’s Communications and Conversations on the people in the groups or with the characteristics protected in the Equalities Act 2010.

These are:

1. Age
2. Disability
3. Gender Reassignment
4. Pregnancy and maternity
5. Race
6. Religion or belief
7. Sex (gender)
8. Sexual Orientation
9. Marriage and Civil Partnership.

3. Engagement and consultation

The recent Big Watford conversation explored people's views of the council's communications and how people want to engage with us.

The survey is still open (as of August 2023) but early analysis shows:

- Over 75% of people think the council keeps them well informed
- There is significant interest in engaging with the council across a range of channels and opportunities, including surveys, social media, drop ins and contact with the Elected Mayor and councillors

In total, around 700 responses have been received to the consultation. All respondents were asked to complete a number of equality related questions so it will be possible to understand the responses across the protected characteristics.

The emerging strategy has been shared internally across services, including with the officer leading on developing the council's EDI policy to allow for any issues to be raised and also to make sure synergies and links have been captured.

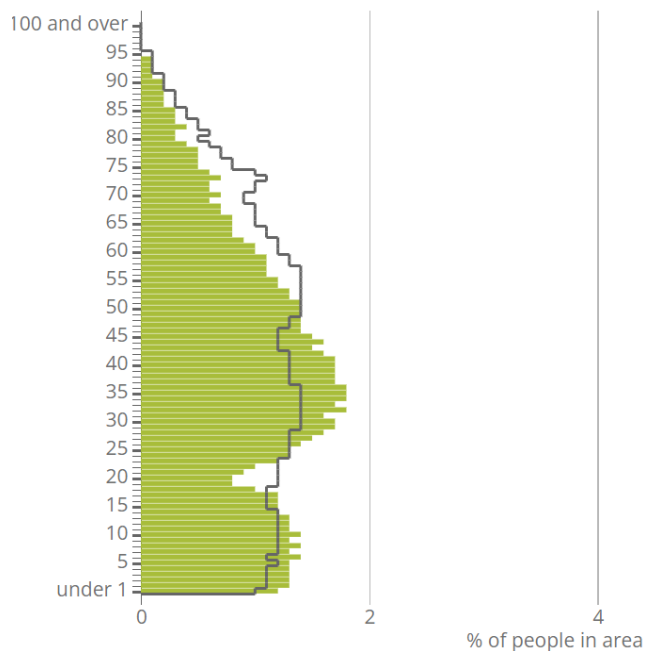
4. What we know about the Watford population

Population (including age)

Watford is a town with a growing population. The census data 2021 indicates that Watford has a population of 102,300, an increase of 13.3% since the previous census in 2011. This is higher than the overall increase for England (6.6%), where the population grew by nearly 3.5 million to 56,489,800.

Watford's population is currently projected to increase to 110,300 by 2035, a rise from 2016 of 14.2%. This growth will be a challenge for Watford, given our tight borough boundaries and is recognised within the Council Plan, shaping a number of our commitments and areas for action in the Delivery Plan.

The chart below shows Watford's age ranges between 0 – 100 and over in percentage of the population (green) compared with the England / Wales percentages (black line).



Overall, this comparison shows that Watford is a relatively young town. This is particularly the case in the 0 to 19 age range. Similarly the 30 to 49 cohort accounts for a significantly higher proportion of the Watford population than nationally.

The median age in Watford is 36 compared with 40 for England. This means that we are a town which is popular with families and, whilst we are a town for all, we recognise that our plans need to reflect our large number of young people and families. In terms of voluntary and community sector organisations, this means there are likely to be demands for help across all age profiles but those supporting families and younger children may face higher than average demand.

Population density

The population density for Watford is circa 4,770 people per square kilometre. This makes it the most densely populated district area in Hertfordshire and in the country (434 per square kilometre). This is a reflection that we are an urban district, with many characteristics of a metropolitan borough. In comparison with many metropolitan boroughs, particularly those in and around the outskirts of London, our density is relatively low.

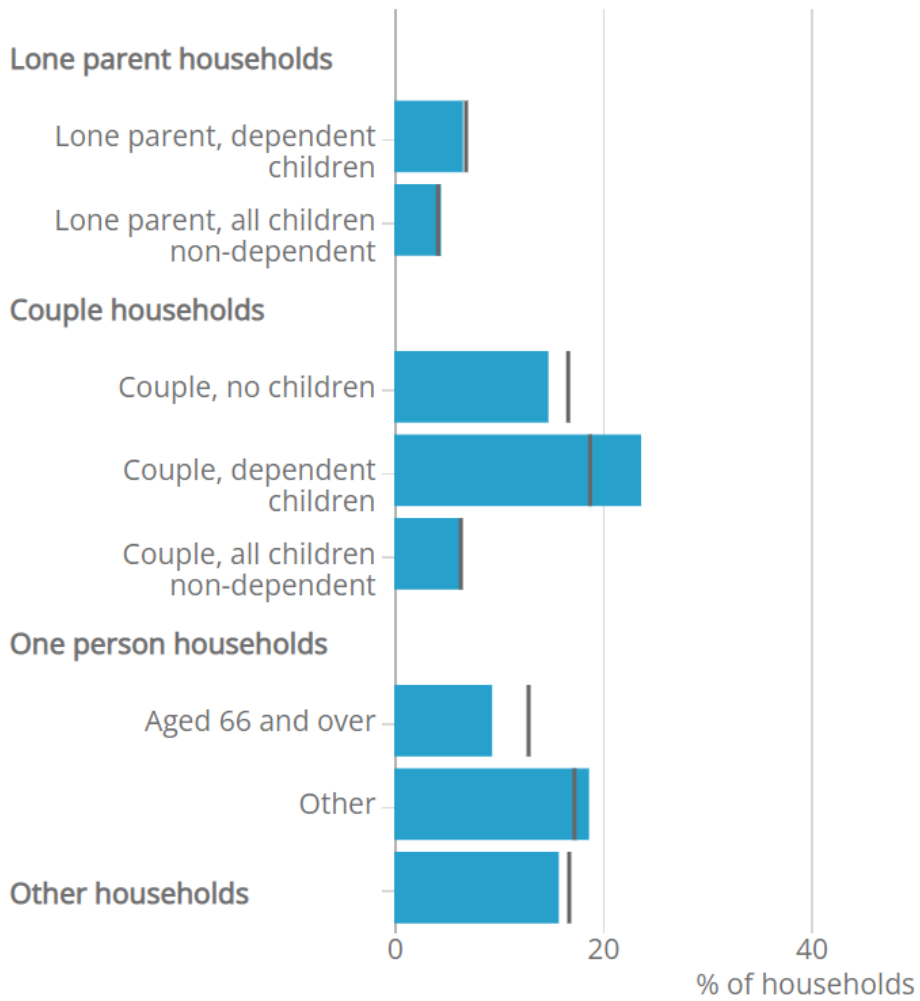
Households

Number of households

The ONS data, based on the census, says that there were 39,628 households in Watford at the time of the Census. The average household size in Watford is currently 2.57. This is slightly higher than the national average of 2.45 and is in line with the Census 2021 household composition data below.

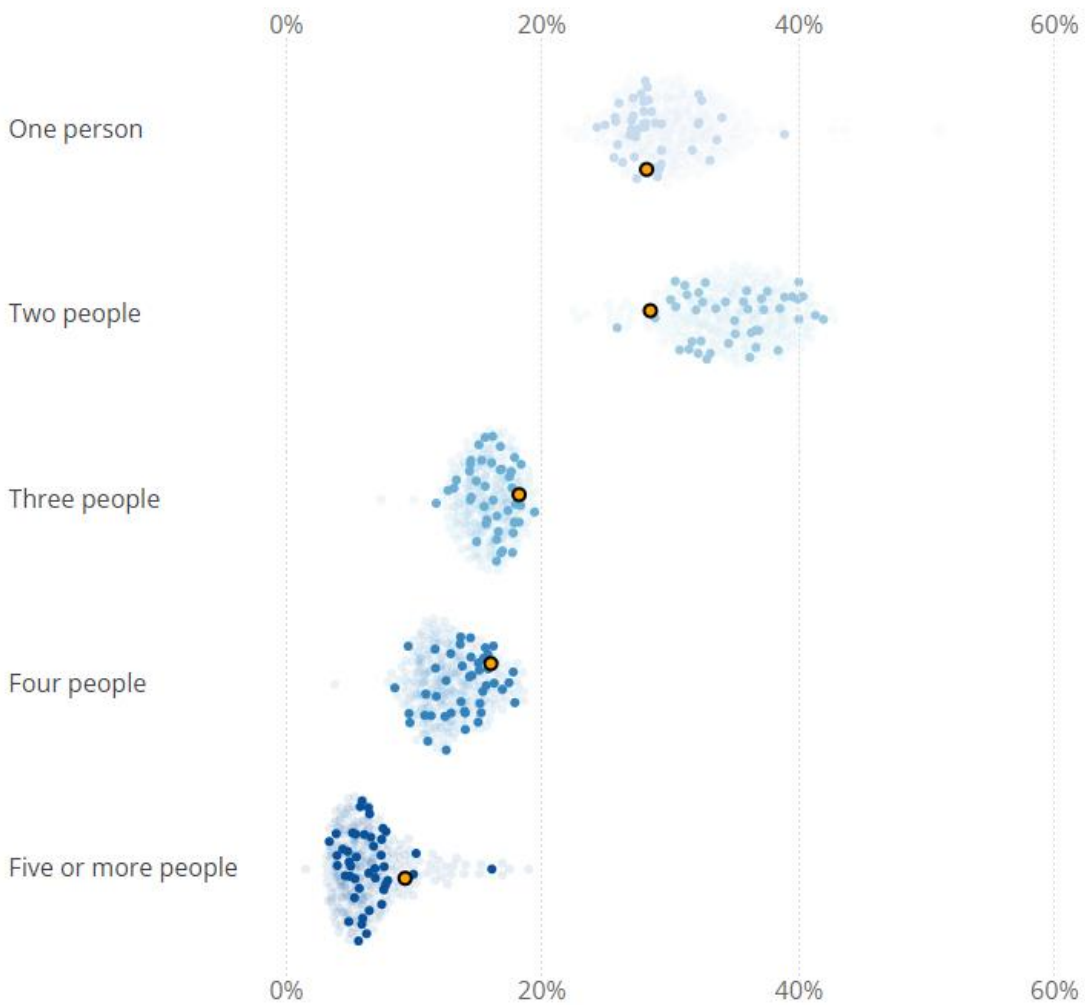
Household Composition

The chart below sets out the composition of Watford households in the Census 2021, with Watford's percentage shown in the blue bars compared to the England and Wales percentages shown by the vertical black bar. Watford has a higher percentage of both households with couples with no children and households with dependent children than England and Wales. As a town with a relatively young population, it has fewer one person households with residents aged 66 and over.



The second chart on household composition shows that Watford has higher than England and Wales average for larger sized households – 3 or more people. Again, this reflects that Watford is a ‘family town’ with different generations living together in one household.

Local authorities within the same region are highlighted



Language spoken at home:

Below is the data collected in Census 2021 with regard to household language. This is another indication that Watford benefits from groups and organisations set up to support those who may have arrived in the town more recently.

	Number	Percentage
All adults in household have English as a main language	30443	76.8%
At least one but not all adults in household have English as a main language	3486	8.8%
No adults in household, but at least one person aged 3 to 15 years, has English as a main language	1438	3.6%
No people in household have English in England as a main language	4261	10.8%

Main Language

The Census asked people their main language, with over 90 choices. Whilst English was significantly the most chosen language with nearly 80,000 residents citing English as their main language, there are a substantial number of residents with other main languages. The top ten after English are below (see Appendix 1 for the full list of languages).

Language	Number
Other European language (EU): Romanian	3,361
Other European language (EU): Polish	1,659
South Asian language: Urdu	1,486
South Asian language: Tamil	1,193
Portuguese	1,140
South Asian language: Gujarati	954
South Asian language: Malayalam	643
Other European language (EU): Italian	551
Other European language (EU): Hungarian	489
Other European language (EU): Bulgarian	435

Disability/Health

Watford has a lower percentage of residents with a disability (15% than England overall (17.7%). A higher percentage of people in Watford also declared they were in good health (48.2%) compared to England overall (47.5%).

Sexual orientation and gender reassignment

Census 2021 included questions on sexual orientation and gender identity for the first time. 2.7% of those who selected to answer the sexual orientation question identified as LGB+ orientation ("Gay or Lesbian", "Bisexual" or "Other sexual orientation"). 0.31% of those who selected to answer the gender identity question answered 'no' to whether their gender identity is the same as their sex registered at birth.

Ethnicity

Watford has a very diverse population, more so than the rest of Hertfordshire; it is one of the strengths of our town and what makes us such a vibrant and diverse place to be. This diversity is an opportunity for our voluntary and community sector in terms of how they respond to the various needs of the Watford community and how they reach out to engage and include people in what they do.

	WATFORD 2011	WATFORD 2021
		102,245 TOTAL
White: English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	61.9% (55,875)	46.0% (46,820)
White Irish	2.3% (2,063)	2.1% (2,149)
White: Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0.1% (61)	0.1% (80)
White: Roma	Not a category in 2011	0.3% (343)
White: Other White	7.7% (6,947)	12.6% (12,836)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black Caribbean	1.1% (990)	1.3% (1,300)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Black African	0.5% (412)	0.7% (692)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: White and Asian	1.0% (939)	1.4% (1,408)
Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups: Other Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	0.8% (763)	1.4% (1,444)
Asian/Asian British/ Asian Welsh: Indian	5.5% (4,923)	9.7% (9,954)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Pakistani	6.7% (6,082)	8.0% (8,197)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Bangladeshi	0.4% (362)	0.5% (493)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Chinese	0.9%	1.0%

	WATFORD 2011	WATFORD 2021
	(822)	(1,024)
Asian/Asian British/Asian Welsh: Other Asian	4.4%	5.3%
	(3,981)	(5,369)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: African	3.5%	3.9%
	(3,142)	(3,954)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Caribbean	1.7%	1.7%
	(1,558)	(1,733)
Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African: Other Black	0.6%	0.8%
	(529)	(801)
Other ethnic group: Arab	0.3%	0.7%
	(294)	(763)
Other ethnic group: Any other ethnic group	0.6%	2.8%
	(558)	(2,885)

Religion or belief

Religious groups in Watford, 2021 census:

- Christian - 45,447 people or 44.6%
- Buddhist - 1,021 people or 0.85%
- Hindu - 8,398 people or 8.2%
- Jewish - 944 people or 0.93%
- Muslim - 13,262 people or 11.0%
- Sikh - 664 people or 0.6%
- Other - 859 people or 0.71%
- No religion – 25,340 people or 24.8%

6,311 people did not answer this question

Gender

The 2021 census did not allow for any option other than female or male.

FEMALE	50.8%
MALE	49.2%

Marriage and Civil Partnership

For census 2021, this has been updated to reflect the revised Civil Partnership Act that came into force in 2019.

Category	Number of Watford households
Does not apply <i>not eligible for a legal partnership</i>	21,282
Never married and never registered a civil partnership	30,974
Married: Opposite sex	38,023
Married: Same sex	192
In a registered civil partnership: Opposite sex	85
In a registered civil partnership: Same sex	60
Separated, but still married	1,744
Separated, but still in a registered civil partnership	7
Divorced	6,074
Formerly in a civil partnership now legally dissolved	18
Widowed	3,782
Surviving partner from civil partnership	5

Mosaic Profile

Mosaic is a classification system which segments our population into 15 groups and 66 types

WHAT IT TELLS US ABOUT WATFORD?

Rental hubs 22% of our community

Educated young people privately renting in urban neighbourhoods
7% nationally

Urban cohesion 19% of our community

Residents of settled urban communities with a strong sense of identity
5% nationally

Domestic success 16% of our community

Thriving families who are busy bringing up children and following careers
7% nationally

5. How will the council ensure equality is promoted through the place brand

Under the Equality Act 2010, three areas need to be considered when analysing the equality impact of the brand strategy:

1. **eliminate** discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act
2. **advance** equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it
3. **foster** good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not

A. Positive impacts

The Communications and Conversations strategy is underpinned by the council's commitment to delivering its Council Plan 2022-26 and recognises the importance of understanding and responding to the town's diverse community and residents.

The strategy has identified the theme:

Recognising the different ways people from our diverse community choose to hear from us and communicate with us, targeting their needs and preferences

The strategy further identifies how this will be achieved, with the delivery plan outlining the activities and action that will support the council meet its commitment to diverse, accessible communications.

- ensure our communications and conversations reflects the full diversity of Watford

- work with our Elected Mayor, councillors, community leaders and groups to better understand our residents and how they want to hear from, and talk to, us ensure content (videos, online content, website forms, printed materials, advertising)
- meet accessibility standards and use images and photos that truly reflect the people of Watford
- use the data we have about our audiences to shape our communications and target resource towards the most impactful channels
- help to ensure equality of access to our services

This EIA identifies this will have a positive impact on all those with protected characteristics and that the importance of inclusive communications that reflects the town and residents has been considered and addressed.

Through this the council will be actively meeting the public sector equality duty, removing barriers and seeking ways that communications can foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those that don't.

B. Negative impacts

The following negative impacts have been considered during the course of this analysis.

As a diverse town, with residents from a range of ethnic backgrounds, we know language can be a barrier to participation and access to services and facilities. Equally, language and imagery can make people feel excluded where they do not reflect their lives and experiences. We will work with our community to understand how the commitments in the strategy can be effectively delivered and so they feel included not just in terms of communications but across our services and Council Plan.

As outlined above, we will make sure the language and imagery we use is culturally sensitive and reflects our town and residents, including those with protected characteristics, promoting the council and the town across the community and beyond so that there are no barriers to people accessing council services or enjoying all that the town has to offer.

We also recognise that, whilst communications moves more and more to online and digital, there are those for whom these are not easy to access. The strategy emphasises the need for channel mix and this will be considered as we plan and deliver our communications and consultations.

6. Overall conclusion

The new Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 will have a positive impact on those with protected characteristics as it has identified the importance of making sure the council recognises that it needs to understand the different needs of its diverse community to deliver effective and successful communications and to build conversations that matter. Practical measures and actions such as ensuring imagery and language is sensitive to the Watford community, including those with protected characteristics and should actively promote our diversity as a town are ways the council can signal its intent. The strategy recognises this is a minimum and there will need to be ongoing and forward looking thinking that responds to the community and what we learn from feedback and engagement.

This EIA has been approved by: Kathryn Robson

Date: 1 September (version 1)

Summary of potential positive impacts and ways in which they can be ensured

Positive Impact	Protected characteristics	Ways to ensure the positive impact
<p>Delivery of the Communications and Conversations Strategy 2023-26 particularly in relation to the theme: <i>Recognising the different ways people from our diverse community choose to hear from us and communicate with us, targeting their needs and preferences</i></p>	<p>All</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep our commitment to diverse channels at the forefront of our communications thinking and planning, recognising not all people receive information and messages in the same way or feedback their views • Remain committed to diverse images that represent Watford, recognising the power of images to make people feel included and part of their town • Recognise that our commitment will mean being proactive and asking our community how they want to receive information and hear from us – and how they want to share their views • Stay up to date and informed on any new ways of communicating and engaging • Identify opportunities where the community can be the ‘right voice’ for Watford, recognising these can be the best way to tell our story and share our messages

Summary of potential negative impacts and ways in which they can be removed or mitigated

Negative Impact	Protected characteristics	Ways to mitigate the negative impact
<p>Potential if communications and conversations are not sensitive to those with protected characteristics, which could mean people face barriers or are excluded from accessing council services or other activities and services in the town</p>	<p>All</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commitment to diversity and inclusion within the new strategy and delivery plan is embedded and actioned • Specific areas such as language, imagery and channels are considered and addressed in communications planning and constantly reviewed • Ensure the strategy links to other key council policies, including the emerging EDI policy • Keep in touch with the community throughout the span of the strategy to ensure that it continues to be relevant and meet community need

Appendix 1

Full details of main languages spoken in Watford

Language	Number of residents
English (English or Welsh in Wales)	79,640
Other European language (EU): Romanian	3,361
Other European language (EU): Polish	1,659
South Asian language: Urdu	1,486
South Asian language: Tamil	1,193
Portuguese	1,140
South Asian language: Gujarati	954
South Asian language: Malayalam	643
Other European language (EU): Italian	551
Other European language (EU): Hungarian	489
Other European language (EU): Bulgarian	435
Spanish	432
East Asian language: Tagalog or Filipino	411
Arabic	390
South Asian language: Panjabi	380
South Asian language: Telugu	350
South Asian language: Hindi	343
South Asian language: Nepalese	310
West or Central Asian language: Persian or Farsi	270
South Asian language: Sinhala	268
Other European language (non EU): Albanian	260
French	244
South Asian language: Any other South Asian language	228
African language: Akan	224
Other European language (EU): Greek	223
Russian	199
Turkish	195
East Asian language: All other Chinese	170
South Asian language: Bengali (with Sylheti and Chatgaya)	158
Other European language (EU): Lithuanian	156
East Asian language: Cantonese Chinese	136
Other European language (EU and non-EU): Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin	116
West or Central Asian language: Pashto	96
Other European language (EU): Czech	89
South Asian language: Marathi	78
Other European language (EU): Slovak	77
African language: Any other African language	58
Other European language (EU): German	54
African language: Any other West African language	54
East Asian language: Japanese	53
East Asian language: Mandarin Chinese	49
African language: Shona	48

South Asian language: Pakistani Pahari (with Mirpuri and Potwari)	46
African language: Somali	46
Sign language: British Sign Language	45
Other European language (non EU): Ukrainian	44
East Asian language: Any other East Asian language	38
Other European language (EU): Latvian	34
Other European language (EU): Dutch	34
East Asian language: Thai	33
East Asian language: Korean	31
East Asian language: Vietnamese	28
African language: Igbo	26
African language: Afrikaans	25
West or Central Asian language: Kurdish	24
Other European language (EU): Swedish	21
Other European language (EU): Any other European language (EU)	21
African language: Swahili or Kiswahili	19
Other UK language: Romany English	17
West or Central Asian language: Any other West or Central Asian language	15
East Asian language: Malay	13
African language: Yoruba	12
African language: Tigrinya	10
Other European language (EU): Danish	9
West or Central Asian language: Hebrew	9
Other European language (EU): Estonian	8
Welsh or Cymraeg (in England only)	7
Caribbean Creole: Any other Caribbean Creole	7
African language: Amharic	7
Sign language: Any sign communication system	7
Other European language (EU): Slovenian	5
Other European language (EU): Finnish	4
African language: Any other Nigerian language	4
Other European language (non EU): Northern European language (non EU)	3
African language: Krio	3
African language: Lingala	3
Sign language: Any other sign language	3
Other UK language: Gaelic (Irish)	2
Other European language (EU): Maltese	2
African language: Luganda	2
Other European language (non EU): Any other Eastern European language (non EU)	1
Oceanic or Australian language	1
Caribbean Creole: English-based Caribbean Creole	1
Other UK language: Gaelic (Scottish)	0
Other UK language: Manx Gaelic	0
Other UK language: Gaelic (Not otherwise specified)	0
Other UK language: Cornish	0

Other UK language: Scots	0
Other UK language: Ulster Scots	0
Other UK language: Irish Traveller Cant	0
Other European language (non-national): Any Romani language	0
Other European language (non-national): Yiddish	0
North or South American language	0
Does not apply	3,892

PART A

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 4th September 2023
Report author: Cherie Norris, Economic Development Lead
Report sponsor: Ben Martin, Assistant Director Planning, Infrastructure and Economy
Portfolio holder: Peter Taylor, Elected Mayor
Report title: UK Shared Prosperity Fund Phase 2 Proposals

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out proposals for allocation of all of Watford's UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- 1.2 Detailed proposals for allocation of Phase 1 projects, utilising year 1 funds and some of year 2 funds, were agreed by Portfolio Holders 16th January 2023. Those projects have been procured and are commencing.

This report sets out Phase 2 proposals to allocate the remainder of year 2 funds and all of year 3 funds. It provides detail about the new local projects proposed for investment. We are seeking approval of these proposed allocations.

There is no change to the proposed allocation of funds to Herts-wide, LEP-led projects, these remain as set out in previous papers. It should be noted that the funds will be transferred to Hertfordshire LEP once the relevant year's funds are received from DLUHC.

It should be noted that no project can commence until the relevant funds have been received from DLUHC.

The investment summary table in section 4.3 sets out the complete allocation proposal.

- 1.3 There are not considered to be any equality issues related to these proposals, although some of the projects are expected to have positive benefits in relation to equality.
- 1.4 Project risks will be managed and mitigated on a project-by-project basis. The primary risk to the council is reputational if there is challenge or a project delivery issue, however there is sufficient mitigation in place to minimise this risk.

There is not thought to be any risk of funds not being received from DLUHC or being withdrawn.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve allocation of Watford's UK Shared Prosperity Fund to all proposed project concepts, enabling the team to then develop these proposals into fully scoped projects and progress them through to delivery.
- 2.2 Specifically, to agree the Phase 2 proposals as set out in 4.4, to allocate funds to new local projects which would utilising the remainder of year 2 and year 3 funding.
- 2.3 To note that the allocations to year 2 and year 3 Herts-wide projects will be transferred to Herts LEP once funds are received from DLUHC.

3.0 Report pathway

- 3.1 Next review body: *Cabinet*
 - 3.1.1 Indicative date: 4th September 2023
- 3.2 Final review body: *Cabinet*
 - 3.2.1 Indicative date: 4th September 2023

Contact Officer:

For further info contact: Cherie Norris, Economic Development Lead
Email: Cherie.norris@watford.gov.uk
Reviewed and signed off by: Ben Martin, Assistant Director Planning Infrastructure and Economy.

4.0 Detailed proposal

4.1 Background

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is part of central governments Levelling-Up agenda and is intended to 'build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK', with three priority areas for investment:

- Community and Place
- Supporting Local Business
- People and Skills

Despite there being a range of potential intervention areas behind these headline priorities, fundamentally UKSPF replaces EU funding which in Hertfordshire was primarily invested in business support and skills development services.

The UKSPF paper to Portfolio Holders dated 18th July 2022 set out the fund context, approach taken to confirm Watford's priorities for this fund, and high-level proposals for indicative fund allocations. The indicative proposals were then submitted to central government as Watford UKPSF 'Investment Plan'.

Watford's Investment Plan was approved by central government in December 2022 and Watford's allocation of £1,000,000 over three years was confirmed. Year 1 was 2022/23, we are currently in year 2 of the programme.

The funding proposals are focused in two areas:

- £332,500 is allocated to Hertfordshire-wide economy, business support and skills projects, the principle of which was agreed through Herts Growth Board in Spring 2022 primarily to ensure continuation of key services previously receiving EU funding. These projects are being led by Herts LEP.
- £627,500 is allocated to new local economy, business support and skills projects.
- The remaining 4% of the funding is the allocation for administration and resource.

4.2 Context of new proposals

The Phase 2 project proposals have been created with consideration of:

- Alignment with Watford's current Council Plan and political priorities.
- Supporting delivery of Watford's Economic Growth Strategy 2021-25, as agreed in spring 2022 would be the focus for UKSPF funds.
- Reflection of outline proposals in the Watford UKSPF Investment Plan submitted to government in July 2022.
- Ensuring outputs and outcomes committed to DLUHC can be achieved – and wherever possible overachieved.

- Recent changes to UKSPF programme guidance, reflecting a national priority to bring more economically inactive people back into the workforce. DLUHC confirmed that year 2 funds can be invested in new People and Skills projects (previously new skills projects only with year 3 funds).
- June 2022 Expressions of Interest submitted for allocation of Watford's UKSPF to local projects. The EoI process was part of our consultation with economy and community related organisations.
- Maximising:
 - value for money
 - positive impact for Watford's businesses and community
 - delivery capacity with limited internal team resources
- Allocating sufficient funding to make projects viable for delivery organisations.
- Building on good foundations being created through Phase 1 projects, particularly around decarbonisation, boosting local supply chains and supporting small businesses growth.
- Revalidation of current business need and economic trends. Through discussion with One Watford for Business stakeholders, analysis of regional and local economic commentary and direct feedback from Watford businesses, priorities remain:
 - Staff skills development and training, recruitment challenges
 - SME access to bidding for local contracts
 - Support for start-up and micro business early-stage growth
 - Reducing carbon and environmental sustainability

4.3 Investment Summary

Projects highlighted in **green** are Phase 1, have already been approved and are commencing.

Projects highlighted in **amber** are Phase 2 proposed, and to be approved.

Projects highlighted in **blue** are Herts-wide, project concepts have been approved and funds will be transferred to Herts LEP once funding has been received from DLUHC.

Ref:	Project	2022-23	22-23 carry forward	2023-24	2024-25	Totals
	4% admin allocation	£4,691		£9,383	£25,925	£39,999
Capital fund allocation and projects						
1)	Community and Place - CCTV projects for crime reduction	£15,000		£10,000	£10,000	£35,000
2)	Gaming Training Hub			£20,494	£120,446	£140,940
Revenue funding: New local business support and skills development projects						
3)	Community Wealth Building (Resource Bank creation)			£15,000		£15,000
4)	Business decarbonisation - Wenta Watford Net Zero project	£27,591		£15,000	£30,000	£72,591
5)	Boosting local supply chains - Fit to Bid project	£50,000		£12,187	£25,000	£87,187
6)	Scale-up support for start-up and micro businesses			£20,000	£50,000	£70,000
7)	Upskilling in the workplace		£10,000	£10,000	£61,784	£81,784
8)	Work-ready skills (support for people ready to get back into work)				£100,000	£100,000
9)	Business engagement and boosting participation (Blueberry calling)				£8,000	£8,000
10)	Contribution to Herts SHDF 2 supply chain support and events				£5,000	£5,000
11)	Developer skills and employment impacts - assessment of gaps, need and opportunity				£12,000	£12,000
Revenue funding: Herts-wide, Herts LEP-led projects						
a)	Destination Management Service - Visit Herts				£5,000	£5,000
b)	Herts start-up support - Wenta , Get Enterprising			£22,500	£30,000	£52,500
c)	Sector development activity - creative and screen industry				£5,000	£5,000
d)	Herts Film Office	£10,000		£10,000	£10,000	£30,000
e)	Herts Growth Hub			£30,000	£30,000	£60,000
f)	Herts Opportunity Portal			£10,000	£20,000	£30,000
g)	Step2Skills Road to Employment			£50,000	£30,000	£80,000
h)	Step2Skills Inclusive Employment Programme				£25,000	£25,000
i)	Step2Skills Pathways to Employment 16-24 Year Olds				£45,000	£45,000
	Totals	£107,282	£10,000	£234,564	£648,155	£1,000,001

4.4 Detail of Phase 2 proposals

1) CCTV projects for crime reduction (capital funding)

Summary:

Contribution of £10k funding towards each of:

- 1 x Cassiobury Park CCTV refresh in 2023/24
- 1 x Watford Fields new CCTV install in 2024/25

Rationale:

This is the only project aligned with the funding programmes 'Community and Place' priority. The current proposal builds on year 1 investment in crime reduction measures through the £15,000 contribution towards the installation of a CCTV camera in Victoria Passage.

Further justification for the year 2 and 3 projects, and the specific proposals, will be developed by colleagues in the Community Safety team in due course. The report is seeking approval of allocation of UKSPF funds to these concepts so that officers can fully develop the projects.

Outcomes:

DLUHC outcomes targeted:

- 2 x neighbourhood improvements undertaken (plus 1 output from year 1 investment, 3 in total)
- 5% decrease in number of crimes reported from all 3 improvements.

2) Gaming Training Hub (capital funding)

Summary:

This project proposes creation of a new training hub for disadvantaged young people, focused on training related to new technologies, virtual reality, gaming and animation activities. The objective is to enable young people to develop the skills needed to enter the workplace, or start their own business, gaining employment within the booming film and TV industry surrounding Watford, or related creative digital fields.

Rationale:

Response to the call for Expressions of Interest issued in June 2022 suggested there are established providers that could create such a training hub and deliver the required outcomes.

There is potential for a training hub to be located within the Town Hall complex, maybe part of the Terrapin, so we are working with

colleagues in the EPMO and Town Hall team to explore possibilities. A location here would contribute to the innovation and community outcomes that the Council is targeting for use of the Town Hall. If appropriate space is available, a provider could, for example, enter into a minimum two-year tenancy, on a cost-neutral basis to the council.

The timeframe could be targeted at Autumn 2024 ready for the 24/25 academic year.

Capital funding would be required to refurbish and furnish any space appropriately, and also to contribute to towards procurement of the equipment required to deliver the training (IT/gaming hardware). The refurbishment could be led by the Council team; a grant could then be awarded to the provider (subject to satisfactory bidding process) who would be responsible for procuring the equipment.

The proposed model would require a provider to secure revenue funding for delivery of the curriculum from other sources.

The provider would be required to work with our local business community to harness potential for collaboration, enhanced learning potential, new innovation, and help secure routes into employment.

The provider would be fully responsible for delivery of the service, working with local schools, West Herts College and other agencies to attract sufficient numbers of students, and for securing the required outcomes. The council would only be responsible for provision of the space, refurbished appropriately, and for awarding a UKSPF grant to fund the equipment.

The council may, however, also choose to support promotion of the hub service to support its success.

Fund allocation:

Year 2 funding £20,494, year 3 funding £120,446 – total £140,490

The proportion of funding required to refurbish and furnish the space would need to be determined, working with colleagues in the EPMO and facilities teams. The remainder would be available as grant towards equipment costs.

Significant match funding will be required, primarily revenue to meet the curriculum delivery and staffing costs, and also to fund any remaining equipment costs.

The precise volume and structure of match funding would be established through the 'call for bids' process.

Route to delivery:

The first step is to work with the EPMO and Town Hall team to establish whether there would be suitable space available in the Town Hall complex / Terrapin.

Working under guidance of procurement, we would issue a 'call for bids' to enable any relevant organisation to submit a bid to deliver the service and bid for the associated grant funding for equipment. This would ensure due process is followed with complete transparency. The full project requirements will be set out clearly in the specification and the successful bidder would have to meet these requirements in full. No bespoke refurbishment of the space would take place until a contract was in place with the service delivery organisation.

Outcomes:

DLUHC outcomes targeted:

- Entrepreneurs assisted to be business ready – 7
- Jobs created – 5
- New businesses created – 4

In addition, other local outcomes will be targeted in relation to skills development and training. These would be identified through the 'call for bids' process, where bidders would be invited to set out the outputs and outcomes that they could achieve.

3) Community Wealth Building - Resource Bank (revenue funding)

This project is included here for completeness; however, investment is already approved. This is funding to resource the creation and launch of a Resource Bank required to support the success of a Watford Business Charter.

4) Business decarbonisation – Watford Net Zero (revenue funding)

Summary:

Wenta secured the contract to deliver the Watford Net Zero project, utilising year 1 and year 2 funding and delivery is underway. The proposal now is to build on this important work and continue the project into year 3, to support Watford’s journey towards a net zero carbon future.

Rationale:

Sustainability is strategic priority for the council. Greater outputs and outcomes can be achieved for our business community by extending a successful project, rather than starting something new. The UKSPF funding means that Wenta Net Zero business support offer is fully funded, so that there is no cost of entry to the businesses. There are two strands to Wenta’s project, firstly providing information, advice and guidance, training and resources to businesses over a two-year period to help them measure and reduce their carbon footprint. Secondly, they are offering an intensive ‘deep dive’ support service to 10 businesses with more complex carbon challenges.

Fund allocation:

Year 3 funding £30,000, on top of £42,591 from year 1 & 2 funding. Total of £72,591 over 3 years.

Route to delivery:

Provision was made within the contract recently awarded to Wenta, for an extension for a further year, to be able to allocate year 3 funding on the basis of satisfactory performance with utilisation of year 1 and 2 funding.

Outcomes:

Outputs & outcomes	DLUHC requirement		Stretch targets	
	Year 1 & 2	Year 3	Year 1 & 2	Year 3
businesses receiving non-financial support	47	48	265	100
businesses adopting new-to-firm technology or processes	6	4		

businesses measuring carbon footprint			150	100
businesses with net zero/sustainability plan			100	50
businesses pledged NZC by 2050			10	10

5) Boosting local supply chains - Watford Fit to Bid (revenue funding)

Summary:

Branduin secured the contract to deliver the Watford Fit to Bid project, utilising year 1 and 2 funding and delivery is underway. Having had a very successful start to the project, the proposal now is to build on the first phases of delivery and continue the project into year 3, in order to help Watford's SME's thrive and keep procurement spend within our local economy.

Rationale:

The project provides training, resources and mentoring for small businesses to help them become more successful in bidding for new larger contracts. It also facilitates 'meet-the-buyer' events. This involves working with some of our larger businesses to gain their commitment to be part of a 'buyer' panel, setting out forthcoming contracts so that our local businesses can submit bids for the products or services required. Interest has been expressed from several of our HQ's, brands and 'anchor' organisations. Branduin have an established model to support this approach.

Greater outputs and outcomes can be achieved by extending a successful project into a third year, rather than starting something new.

Fund allocation:

Year 3 funding £25,000, on top of £62,187 from year 1 & 2 funding. Total of £87,187 over 3 years.

Route to delivery:

Provision was made within the contract recently awarded to Branduin, for an extension for a further year, in order to utilise year 3 funding on

the basis of satisfactory performance with utilisation of year 1 and 2 funding.

Outcomes:

Outputs & outcomes	DLUHC requirement		Stretch targets	
	Year 1 & 2	Year 3	Year 1 & 2	Year 3
businesses receiving non-financial support	40	20	70	30
Jobs created	10	10		
Jobs safeguarded	3	3		
Businesses engaged in new markets	15	15		

6) Scale-up support for start-up and micro businesses (revenue funding)

Summary:

The University of Herts (UH) were successful in securing the contract to deliver support and mentoring for small and start-up businesses with good potential to ‘scale-up’, utilising year 1 and 2 funding. The proposal now is to build on this with allocation of year 3 funding, to give the project sufficient critical mass to be viable and deliver the outcomes required.

Rationale:

Further to the successful ARG funded Watford Young Entrepreneur Project last year, which helped 40 local people start new businesses, it has become clear that there is demand for support services to help newly formed businesses go through the early stages of growth, so that they become resilient as established businesses. Feedback from start-up businesses said that mentoring is the most valuable form of support. UH has over 70 mentors available through their networks, with experience across a wide-range of sectors and business disciplines. With multi-year funding they can create a viable project to help our small businesses through the challenging early stages of growth, so that they can make a greater contribution to our local economy and go onto offer good employment to local people. This project delivers additionality over and above existing business growth support services (e.g. Herts Growth Hub).

Fund allocation:

Year 3 funding £50,000 on top of £20,000 year 2 funding, so £70,000 in total.

Route to delivery:

Provision was made within the contract recently awarded to UH for an extension for a further year, in order to utilise year 3 funding on the basis of satisfactory performance with utilisation of year 1 and 2 funding.

Outcomes:

Outputs & outcomes	DLUHC requirement		Stretch local targets	
	Year 1 & 2	Year 3	Year 1 & 2	Year 3
Entrepreneurs assisted to be business ready		5		
Jobs created	5	10		
Business receiving non-financial support			8	16
Business with a clear plan for growth			8	16

7) Upskilling in the workplace (revenue funding)

Summary:

This project would provide funding to a training provider in order for them to offer a range of training courses to Watford businesses, which businesses could use to improve the skills of their staff, on a fully or partially funded basis. The project would have to focus on training in disciplines related to known skills gaps, or sectors where there are known skills shortages. There are many of these, but for example Herts Local Skills Improvement Plan points to shortages in professional skills, soft skills, digital skills, green skills, sales skills, customer service skills and specific technical skills such as cyber security, AI and VR.

Rationale:

This project responds to national priorities to enhance workplace skills and also responds to extensive feedback from local businesses that

they are struggling to find and keep the right skills within their teams. In parallel to this, businesses are facing the significant cost pressures related to inflation (energy, transport, materials, wages etc) and may not have available budget for staff training and development. Enabling businesses to access relevant, funded training for their staff will help businesses increase productivity – at a time when there are national and regional productivity challenges – it will help increase staff loyalty enabling businesses to retain good people, and also improve the skills of individuals for their own economic wellbeing.

Fund allocation:

A single fund would be offered of £81,784, comprising £10,000 carried forward from year 1, £10,000 from year 2 and £61,784 from year 3.

Route to delivery:

Procurement process or 'call for bids', depending on advice from the Procurement Manager. A detailed specification will be drafted and the provider would need to set out a strong proposal meeting all required criteria to be selected to deliver the project.

Outcomes:

There is a minimum commitment to DLUHC of:

- number in employment engaging with the skills system – 6
- number gaining qualifications, licences and skills - 2

However, this project will be expected to deliver a far greater number and range of outputs and outcomes than this minimum. The targets will be established through the procurement process.

8) Work-ready skills, support for people ready to get back into work (revenue funding)

Summary:

This project would provide training and skills development for people not in work, but ready to come back into employment. This would have to focus where other programmes are not already delivering, and therefore the voluntary sector is expected to be well placed to help facilitate this.

We will seek creative proposals to suggest new ways for the private and third sector to work together to facilitate the provision of relevant training, to help people become employment ready, and to connect them with routes into employment.

Rationale:

Unemployment figures only reflect those claiming unemployment benefits and there is employment support in place to help those people. It is those who are classified as 'economically inactive' that we are seeking to target with this project. There is extensive commentary about people who have left the workplace over recent years, for a variety of reasons, and national government is keen to see initiatives to help these people back into the workforce. Balancing this with the continuing feedback from our local businesses that it is difficult to recruit people with the right skills, this project will seek to connect the demand businesses have with a supply of new candidates who have been enabled through relevant training.

Through the UKSPF Expression of Interest (Eoi) process in June 2022 several local voluntary sector organisations submitted Eois which proposed training offers for local people wanting to get into work. This project needs to provide a response to that interest and proposes to seek a way to engage the third sector in delivery. The project would also need to focus on local partnership working and leveraging any relevant existing or proposed initiatives (for example the proposed Watford Business Charter).

Fund allocation:

£100,000 from year 3 funding in total.

Route to delivery:

Procurement process or 'call for bids', depending on advice from the Procurement Manager. A wide scope will be defined to encourage creative solutions to be proposed, with a clear weighting for meeting key criteria.

Outcomes:

DLUHC requirements below are a minimum, and this volume of funding would be expected to deliver a far greater number and range of outcomes than this. These will be defined through the procurement process.

number of socially excluded people accessing support	2
number receiving support to sustain employment	4
number in employment following support	2
number receiving support to gain a vocational licence	15
number in employment following support	15

9) Business engagement and boosting participation £8,000 (revenue funding)

Using telemarketing to boost business participation in the ARG funded business support projects proved really successful, enabling many more businesses to access funded support than would otherwise have been the case. We therefore propose to allocate £8,000 for provision of telemarketing activity to increase business participation in these projects. This has the additional benefit of creating new awareness of the good work the council is doing within the business community and providing new engagement opportunities for the team.

A specific scope of work would be defined and procured from a proven telemarketing company.

In terms of comms generally, whilst each individual UKSPF project must include provision for marketing, and each provider is responsible for attracting sufficient participation in the scheme, the Council clearly has a strong interest in success and will support comms and marketing plans as appropriate. Again, learning from our experience with the ARG funded projects, care will be taken over the timing and tone of comms activity to avoid confusing businesses with multiple offers at once, and ensuring messages are highly targeted to gain maximum impact.

10) Contribution to Herts SHDF 2 supply chain support and events £5,000 (revenue funding)

The Herts Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund 2 projects present a significant opportunity to build ‘green’ capacity within our local supply chains and SME’s. However, cross-district collaboration and focus will be required to deliver on that opportunity. Conversations are starting

around sub-regional supply-chain events and business support activity, and a funding contribution is likely to be required to help ensure any such activity is meaningful and brings good benefit specifically to Watford businesses. Therefore, we propose to allocate £5,000 to support such activity.

This funding would only be utilised on the basis of a detailed, viable proposal and facilitated by appropriate procurement processes.

11) Developer skills and employment impacts - assessment of gaps, need and opportunity £12,000 (revenue funding)

It has been highlighted that there could be a significant amount of more positive impact that could be secured from the construction and development industry, in relation to local skills and employment. However, this is based on anecdotal sources, so evidence is required. In order to quantify what the additional positive impact is, and to understand how to harness it, we need to better understand where the gaps are in the local dynamic and seek suggestions about how they could be addressed.

An example is that our Local Plan has some great hooks for requiring developers to deliver more around local skills development and employment, but we have limited tools in place to enable this to happen in practice, or mechanisms to monitor how well developers actually deliver on their skills and employment commitments.

Learning from best practice is key, and anecdotally we know that other areas have far more robust tools and mechanisms in place to help with this.

Therefore, we propose to allocate a £12,00 funding envelope, to enable an appropriate sector specialist organisation to undertake a study on our behalf. The assessment would need to consider where the 'gaps' are, the scale of the local opportunity, identifying opportunities for collaboration, a 'market' scan to gather best practice, and clear recommendations about how we could do things differently in order to harness any additional positive impacts that we may currently be missing. Any recommendation would need to be reflective of the Councils constraints around resources and budgets, and present creative solutions.

This funding would only be utilised on the basis of a detailed, viable proposal and facilitated by appropriate procurement processes.

4.5 Governance (including procurement)

4.5.1 Procurement

The approach to procurement varies slightly across projects, hence there is reference to the approach within each section above. The Councils' procurement process will be followed in all instances. As referenced in previous UKSPF papers, Local Authority procurement rules will be followed by Herts LEP for all contracts that they award, overseen by Herts County Council as their accountable body.

4.5.2 Strategic oversight

UKSPF rules require that a Local Partnership Group oversees the direction and delivery of the funding programme. It also requires that the local MP is updated regularly, if they are not part of the Local Leadership Group.

One Watford for Business, our economy steering group, acts as the Local Leadership Group, amongst other things. They meet quarterly, and a UKSPF programme update is a standing agenda item. This group has the following representation: West Herts College, Watford BID, Watford Chamber, University of Herts, Federation of Small Businesses, Herts Chamber, Herts LEP, HCC/Herts Growth Board, Herts Growth Hub, Watford and Three Rivers Trust, Wenta, Watford Borough Council.

The local MP is updated on programme progress once a quarter through the Chief Executive briefing meetings.

Regular updates are also provided to the Elected Mayor, in his capacity as Portfolio Holder for economy.

4.5.3 Monitoring and reporting

Monitoring and reporting expectations are confirmed at the inception meeting of every project, in order that all projects have appropriate oversight. The Economic Development team will project manage all new local projects, requiring delivery organisations to provide monthly reports on progress and outcomes. Close monitoring by the

team will ensure that any issues are identified early and enable us to work collaboratively to mitigate issues and ensure good quality delivery.

For Herts-wide projects, outcomes and outputs have been agreed between Herts LEP and all participating districts and these are being reported quarterly.

DLUHC require quarterly reports to be submitted setting out programme progress and output and outcomes secured.

4.6 Resource implications

This programme will be delivered from within existing team resource, with funding support from the UKSPF administration allocation.

Resource support will be required from the Procurement and Legal teams to help procure all providers and out contracts in place to enable delivery.

We may explore delivery of the Community Wealth Building work to create a Resource Bank through a short-term internal secondment, otherwise it will be an external procurement. Funding to support either route was approved with Phase 1 proposals.

5.0 Implications

5.1 Financial

This project is fully funded from a central government grant. There should be no additional financial implication to the Council.

5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that the proposals allow for the spending of grant received from Central Government.

5.2 Legal issues (Monitoring Officer)

Support will be required from the legal team to put contracts in place with providers to support delivery of all projects. Other than that, no legal implications are foreseen.

5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the council's contract procedure rules will be followed for any procurements.

5.3 Risks

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested control measure	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)	Risk rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Poor quality project delivery	Reputational damage to the council	Robust procurement up front and thorough project management and monitoring by the team throughout delivery	Tolerate	2
Projects do not secure the required outcomes	Reputational damage to the council, but funding would not be withdrawn	Target outcomes have been estimated conservatively They will be validated with delivery organisations through the procurement process	Tolerate	2
Local organisations challenge approach	Reputational damage to the council	Proposals are created with consideration of the EoI process in June '22. The approach has been consistent and transparent throughout.	Tolerate	2
Claw-back of underspent funds	Loss of UKSPF funding	DLUHC permitted Year 1 underspend to be carried into year 2. Approvals are being sought for allocation of all remaining funds at	Tolerate	2

		now to ensure sufficient time to scope projects and award funding within each annual funding window.		
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5.4 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

5.4.1 Equalities

5.4.1.1 It is considered that several of these projects will have a positive benefit on equalities because they are linked to our Community Wealth Building work or linked with our skills and employment work, through which we seek to bring greater employment opportunities for people with all circumstances and backgrounds. Some of the projects will have a specific focus on inclusion and supporting people in disadvantaged situations.

5.4.2 Human Rights

5.4.2.1 There are no human rights implications related to these proposals.

5.4.3 Data Protection Impact Assessment

5.4.3.1 Data protection implications are considered with every UKSPF project awarded, as there is a need for the Council to retain business data related to delivery of support services that we are funding, and hold this within our CRM system. The team has experience of this and therefore we are confident that UKSPF project activity complies with the council’s obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018.

5.5 Sustainability

5.5.1 The Watford Net Zero decarbonisation project will have a positive impact on Watford’s carbon status. Other than this there are no known implications for sustainability.

5.6 People Implications

5.6.1 There are no known ‘People’ implications.

5.7 Community Safety/Crime and Disorder

- 5.7.1 The proposals include a £20,000 investment in CCTV infrastructure intended to help reduce crime. (in addition to £15,000 from year 1 funds) Otherwise, there are no known implications for community safety and crime/disorder.

5.8 Property

- 5.8.1 The only consideration from a property perspective is potential use of some of the Town Hall complex / Terrapin for the gaming training hub concept. We are working with the EPMO and Town Hall teams to explore possibilities.

6.0 Next steps should recommendations be approved

- 6.1 The next step is to map out a detailed timeline for procurement of all projects liaising with the Procurement Manager. We will begin to scope each project requirements in detail, in order of priority and timeframe.

7.0 Background papers

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.