



**LGA Peer Challenge 2023 - Action Plan**

Recommendations	Watford Borough Council Actions	Timescales	Lead	Portfolio
<p><b>Recommendation 1a</b></p> <p>The council has identified significant revenue savings for 2024-25, however there still remains a revenue gap for 2024-25 and further savings are required in 2025-26. The council should continue at pace to agree all required 2024-25 savings before the end of 2023-24 and during 2024-25, identify the savings opportunities for 2025-26. Implementation of 2025-26 savings during 2024-25 would further reduce revenue pressures and provide a contingency against unforeseen budget issues.</p>	<p>The council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set a balanced budget for 2024/25, with the identified revenue gap met through the development and implementation of a detailed savings plan, income generation opportunities and the prudent use of reserves</li> <li>• Continue work commenced in mid-2023 to scenario plan for 2025/26 and 2026/27, building on an understanding of the extent of further savings required to address the budget gap in future years and implementing identified in-year savings in 2024/25</li> <li>• Continue work commenced in mid-2023 to embed its approach to developing its budget for 2024/25 and for 2025/26 and 2026/27 that ensures there is appropriate governance, engagement, scrutiny and challenge, including:</li> </ul>	<p>Complete, subject to Full Council approval in January 2024</p> <p>Budget setting for 2025/26 by January 2025</p> <p>Budget setting for 2024/25 complete, subject to Full Council approval in January 2024</p> <p>Budget setting for 2025/26 by January 2025</p>	<p>Chief Finance Officer CMT</p> <p>Chief Finance Officer CMT</p> <p>Chief Finance Officer CMT</p>	<p>Resources Cabinet</p> <p>Resources Cabinet</p> <p>Cabinet</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Retaining the dedicated Budget Planning Programme Board set up in 2023 to lead on implementing and monitoring budget proposals, reporting into CMT to agree recommendations for reporting to Cabinet and Finance Scrutiny</li> <li>○ Regular communications and engagement with staff, UNISON and members, led by the Chief Executive</li> <li>○ Testing budget planning and setting, through scenario planning, consistently reviewing and updating assumptions as pressures and opportunities are identified</li> </ul>	<p>Ongoing regular Board meetings</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing reporting to CMT, Cabinet and Finance Scrutiny</p>	<p>Director of Place Chief Finance Officer CMT</p> <p>Chief Executive</p> <p>Chief Finance Officer CMT</p>	<p>Resources Cabinet</p> <p>Elected Mayor</p> <p>Resources Cabinet</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 1b</b></p> <p>The council has a relatively large capital programme that is subject to inherent risks associated with external factors such as interest rate changes, construction cost inflation, demand for residential and commercial premises and the cost of living. The council must continue to monitor these external factors, manage these risks and implement appropriate mitigating actions in order to ensure that the council is not overly exposed to new financial pressures.</p>	<p>The council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Continue work commenced in mid-2023 to review its capital budget as part of budget setting for 2024/25, including a risk assessment of the programme and prioritising the delivery of programmes and projects, in light of budget pressures</li> <li>● Undertake a review of its risk register to ensure that all risks identified with the capital programme are fully reflected and are part of the regular reporting of</li> </ul>	<p>Complete, subject to Full Council approval in January 2024</p> <p>By January 2024</p>	<p>Chief Finance Officer CMT</p> <p>Group Head of Democracy &amp; Governance Associate Director Customer &amp;</p>	<p>Resources Cabinet</p> <p>Resources</p>

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	risks to Cabinet and Audit Committee (also see Recommendation 2)		Corporate Services CMT	Cabinet
<p><b>Recommendation 1c</b></p> <p>Portfolio holders are briefed on the council's financial position and the quarterly budget monitoring report is provided to the Finance Scrutiny Committee. In order to improve transparency and provide a more robust management process, the quarterly report should also be provided to cabinet and timeliness of reporting should be improved (the 2023-24 Q1 report was presented to committee in September 2023).</p>	<p>The council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present the quarterly budget report to Cabinet</li> <li>• Review the timetable of reporting against the council's annual meeting cycle for the next municipal year</li> </ul>	<p>From January 2024 (starting with Period 8 2023/24)</p> <p>By April 2024</p>	<p>Chief Finance Officer CMT</p> <p>Group Head of Democracy &amp;Governance CMT</p>	<p>Resources Cabinet</p> <p>Cabinet</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2</b></p> <p>A significant slippage of capital expenditure during 2023-24 indicates that the risks referred to above have already impacted upon project delivery. In order to manage expectations both externally and internally and ensure that objectives remain realistic and time-bound, a review of project milestones and risk mitigation actions should be undertaken. The results of this review should be published both internally and externally by the council.</p>	<p>The council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review its capital programme, continuing the approach implemented in 2023, to test and build assurance of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Objectives</li> <li>○ Delivery timescales</li> <li>○ Project milestones</li> <li>○ Risk mitigation (also see Recommendation 1c)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Include in the regular review of the budget and reporting to Cabinet from January 2024</p>	<p>Chief Finance Officer CMT</p>	<p>Cabinet</p>

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<p><b>Recommendation 3</b></p> <p>The council should review its approach to communications to ensure that all members of the community are able to access council services. For example, the provision of a simple approach to gaining access to benefits including housing benefit. This review should include engagement with community groups in order to determine the efficacy of the communications plans.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The council will:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Engage with our voluntary and community sector partners to understand the best channels for providing information, advice and guidance, building on their experiences and understanding</li> <li>▪ Include the council’s approach to communications at a meeting of Watford’s Community Network to test ideas and solutions with the network</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>By March 2024</p> <p>By March 2024</p>	<p>Associate Director Environment Community Commissioning Lead Communications &amp; Engagement Lead</p> <p>Community Commissioning Lead Communications &amp; Engagement Lead</p>	<p>Community</p> <p>Community</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 4</b></p> <p>In view of the fact that the shared services arrangements with Three Rivers District Council have been in place for many years, these arrangements should be reviewed to ensure that they meet the current objectives and business needs of the council whilst providing value for money and giving a springboard for future growth of shared service arrangements.</p>	<p>The council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build upon the existing work that Local Partnerships have been commissioned to deliver in relation to the future growth of shared service arrangements within South West Hertfordshire</li> <li>• Review shared service arrangements with Three Rivers District Council</li> </ul>	<p>Complete autumn 2024 to inform budget setting for 2025/26</p>	<p>Director of Partnerships</p>	<p>Resources</p>

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<p><b>Recommendation 5</b></p> <p>In view of the fact that the council is operating in a dynamic and fast-changing environment, strategic risks should be reported more frequently than the current annual report to the Audit Committee and a separate report should be provided to cabinet on a regular basis.</p>	<p>The council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take the corporate risk register to Cabinet quarterly and to Audit Committee twice a year – with the risk register going to Audit Committee initially then to Cabinet</li> <li>• Develop a proposal for Audit Committee setting out a programme of in depth reviews for particular risk areas to start in the new municipal year</li> <li>• Appoint an independent member to the Audit Committee</li> </ul>	<p>Audit Committee by March 2024 Cabinet by June 2024</p> <p>By April 2024</p> <p>By May 2024</p>	<p>Group Head of Democracy &amp; Governance Associate Director Customer &amp; Corporate Services</p> <p>Group Head of Democracy &amp; Governance Associate Director Customer &amp; Corporate Services</p> <p>Group Head of Democracy &amp; Governance Associate Director Customer &amp; Corporate Services</p>	<p>Resources</p> <p>Resources</p> <p>Resources</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6</b></p> <p>Significant work has already been undertaken in the development of the strong "Watford Actually" brand. Whilst being cognisant of the current economic challenges, work should now continue to identify and work with external brand ambassadors and roll out the branding strategy.</p>	<p>The council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an implementation plan with clear delivery milestones and associated actions, including developing relationships with key sectors to effectively embed the brand</li> <li>• Identify key external brand ambassadors to champion the "Watford Actually" brand</li> </ul>	<p>By February 2024</p> <p>By March 2024</p>	<p>CMT Communications &amp; Engagement Lead</p> <p>CMT</p>	<p>Elected Mayor</p> <p>Elected Mayor</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop the brand assets into a toolkit that enables the ambassadors and other key businesses and organisations to use and adapt the brand alongside their own brand and marketing strategies</li> <li>• Embed the brand within the scope of the One Watford Place Board so that it is understood and championed across the borough’s key partner organisations</li> </ul>	<p>By March 2024</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>CMT Communications &amp; Engagement Lead</p> <p>Chief Executive</p>	<p>Elected Mayor</p> <p>Elected Mayor</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 7</b></p> <p>The council is to be commended on its plans to deliver an ambitious and far-reaching programme of activities. It will be essential that the council's plans for organisational development ensure that the skills of the workforce and internal capacity continue to be aligned to these growing aims and ambitions.</p>	<p>The council will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch our People Strategy that was in draft in November 2023 to support the growth and development of our people so that they align with our council’s aims and ambitions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Approval by Cabinet</li> <li>○ Launch with staff</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Provide quarterly updates on progress against the Strategy to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee</li> </ul>	<p>By March 2024</p> <p>By April 2024</p> <p>Starting from June 2024</p>	<p>CMT</p> <p>Executive Head of HR &amp; OD CMT</p>	<p>Resources</p> <p>Cabinet</p>