

**Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead
Financial Improvement and Sustainability Plan
One year on delivery report
December 2025**

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Executive summary

The council's comprehensive [Financial Improvement and Sustainability Plan](#) (FISP) was adopted by Full Council in November 2024 to provide a framework for the actions and decisions needed over the short to medium-term for the organisation to become sustainable. This report provides an update to Cabinet on progress made against the delivery of the plan, against its five themes. This delivery report will also be shared with government, CIPFA and external auditors.

Action RBWM has taken over the last year to:

Strengthen governance and financial control

Recognising CIPFA's recommendation that the council treats its financial crisis as an emergency event and puts in appropriate governance, an independent Financial Improvement and Sustainability Board was established to support the council's recovery, in December 2024.

In addition, the 2023/24 accounts were closed in January 2025 and the 2024/25 accounts were closed by mid-June 2025, six months earlier than the prior year, and a more robust process was introduced for the 2026/27 budget setting.

In September, the council's external auditor - Grant Thornton – published its value for money report for the 2024/25 financial year, showing good progress being made in RBWM's financial and organisational recovery.

Further service and organisational transformation and efficiencies

Building on the momentum of the first phase of the council's 'Future Shape RBWM' organisational transformation programme, further proposals for service transformation to improve service quality and reduce costs have been developed.

The council has also embraced digital and technology-led transformation, with a cross-directorate Digital and Technology Board established in September.

Significant progress has been made as part of the transformation and savings programme for adult social care, including a new case management system, Mosaic, successfully going live on time and within budget in January 2025.

Similar progress has also been made in the delivery of the council's children's services - including a reduction in agency staff, from 33 to 19.

The first phase of a new children's social care database, Liquidlogic, has been implemented within timescales and budget, enabling better tracking of service performance and budget management.

A new children's residential care home opened in November, the first time the council has opened and operated its own direct care provision for young people. Meaning that the council is developing less reliance on the external care market where costs are high, and quality varies.

With temporary accommodation remaining an area of acute pressure for the council, significant transformation to improve delivery, increase operational efficiency, and reduce financial pressures was approved by Cabinet – aiming to reshape the service to meet the homelessness challenges which all councils are facing.

Optimise income and commercialisation

The council has continued to look for opportunities to diversify its income streams and increase income from across a wider range of areas over the last year, while ensuring due diligence and that the approach is consistent with the council's values and ambitions as set out in the Council Plan.

This has included a proposal for the council to work in partnership with the ICB to support the delivery of a new health hub in Ascot, and an Advertising and Sponsorship Board being established - to maximise the potential financial benefit of having large, multi-national companies operating in the borough

Refine our capital programme

Work to ensure the council's annual and medium-term capital investment programme reflects the priorities of the borough, is deliverable, and funded as far as possible from a range of income sources has been a focus - with a new internal Capital Board established to improve governance and oversight of the development and delivery of the capital programme

Drive value from our assets

The RBWM Property Company was formally abolished in 2025 with property services and regen functions brought back in house from May 2025, which has created savings and enabled the start of a comprehensive review of council assets and the development of an overarching strategy, working with CIPFA property specialists.

A targeted programme of asset sales is continuing, which will generate significant capital receipts over the next couple of years. Agreement has been reached to sell the council owned Reform Road industrial site in Maidenhead and convert the site at Imperial Road in Windsor from day care centre to supported accommodation via a long-life partnership with a registered provider.

The FISP remains a live document and will be updated as the council's circumstances, and the context within which we and all local councils are working, continues to evolve.

Introduction

1. Responding to the recommendations from the 2024 independent CIPFA financial resilience review, and concerns raised by external auditors, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead Council (RBWM) developed a [Financial Improvement and Sustainability Plan \(FISP\)](#) to provide a framework for the actions and decisions the council will take over the short to medium-term, as part of its plan for financial and organisational recovery.

2. The FISP is based around five themes which aim to improve governance, control expenditure, reduce cost, prioritise resources, maximise value and better utilise the council's asset base:

Theme 1: Strengthening governance and financial control

Theme 2: Service transformation, efficiency and contract savings

Theme 3: Optimising income and commercialisation

Theme 4: Refining our capital programme

Theme 5: Driving value from our assets

3. This report provides an update on delivery against each theme of the FISP since it was adopted by Council in November 2024. The report will be presented to Cabinet for discussion in December 2025.

4. The report will also be shared with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), CIPFA, and external auditors as part of the council's ongoing commitment to external engagement relating to its organisational and financial recovery. It has also been shared and discussed with the council's independent Financial Improvement and Sustainability Board.

Theme 1: Strengthening governance and financial control

5. This theme is focused on improving the council's governance and financial control environment, recognising that many of the problems at those authorities subject to government intervention stem from poor governance and financial oversight. Indeed, many of the current challenges that RBWM faces today can be traced back to historic poor governance and financial control in previous years, with issues such as significant areas of revenue spend being wrongly classified as capital, failures to close down accounts in a timely way, and infrequent budget reconciliations.
6. The 2024 CIPFA review focused heavily on the need to strengthen governance and financial control, which is why the council has prioritised delivery against this theme. Significant progress has been made over the past 12 months, including in the following areas:

Positive liaison with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government's stewardship and interventions team

- In May 2025, RBWM received a positive visit from senior civil servants in the Stewardship and Interventions Team at MHCLG to discuss the council's progress against its financial and organisational recovery.
- The team welcomed the council's open, transparent and proactive approach to tackling the significant challenges it faces and the clear and positive actions being taken to improve.
- Given the scale of RBWM's challenges and the increase in Best Value notices being issued to other authorities by government this year, together with further formal intervention measures in the form of commissioners, the fact that MHCLG has not used statutory intervention powers with RBWM up to now is positive. It is recognition of the proactive approach the council has taken and the progress being made.
- That said, it is vital that progress continues in order to provide government with ongoing confidence and avoid the risk of more formal intervention which will remain a risk for any council in such a position.
- Senior officers are continuing to meet with MHCLG officials and CIPFA on a regular basis to update them on the council's progress and this progress report will also be shared with the department.

Successful close-down of historical accounts

- Significant work has been done to close historical accounts over the past year. The 2023/24 accounts were closed in January 2025 and the 2024/25 accounts were closed by mid-June 2025 (six months earlier than the prior year).
- Closing down historical accounts and improving processes to prevent further backlogs is an important step by the council, given that delays to previous accounts closures and associated delays with budget reconciliations meant that accounting mistakes made in previous years did not come to light until years later.
- This, in turn, led to significant material impacts on the budget in areas such as revenue spending being wrongly classified as capital and the council stating that it had access to a level of financial reserves which, in reality, did not exist. A large

proportion of the £62m of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) granted by government to balance prior-year budgets has been required to rectify historic errors as part of an overall total of £103m EFS required to date to allow the council to balance its budget (£41m for the current financial year). Lessons have been learned and changes implemented to prevent a repeat.

Implementing a more robust process to set the 2026/27 budget and refresh the council's Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP)

- In May, [Cabinet approved](#) a more detailed and thorough process for 2026/27 budget setting, with the process starting much earlier than in previous years and a series of budget challenge sessions involving Cabinet and senior officers taking place in the autumn to maximise transparency and the scrutiny of emerging budget plans and proposals.
- As part of this, in July, Cabinet considered a detailed report updating the council's MTFP which has supported a more robust approach to budget management and long-term planning.
- At the start of the 2026/27 budget process in May, a budget workshop was held with Extended ELT (CEO, Exec Directors, Assistant Directors) to ensure the new process was understood and that responsibilities were clear. In addition, an all colleague briefing on the council's approach budget setting was delivered by the CEO and S151 officer which saw high levels of attendance.
- An Extended ELT workshop also took place, facilitated by Impower using benchmarking data (the Impower index) to see how RBWM spending on core services compares with other authorities and to identify opportunities further service improvement, efficiency and transformation to feed into the budget process.
- The new approach to budget setting, which started earlier in the year than in previous years, gives more time to develop proposals structured around the main themes of the FISP and helps maximise early 'budget challenge sessions' for Cabinet and senior officers to scrutinise growth, savings and income proposals.
- The first round of challenge sessions was held in September and October and a further round of challenge sessions took place in November, ahead of the draft budget being presented to Cabinet in December.
- The independent Financial Improvement and Sustainability Board has been called on to play an advisory role in scrutinising the council's approach to budget setting, including providing external challenge to assumptions, plans and proposals.
- Conversations with government have continued over the summer and autumn of 2025, with the council being clear that RBWM will go as far as possible on savings, transformation and income for 2026/27 and over the medium-term, but that it will not be enough to close the structural budget gap, meet growing service demand and deal with the significant additional pressures resulting from the outcome of the government's Fair Funding Review.
- As such, access to further Exceptional Financial Support (EFS) and a council tax increase above the referendum threshold will be needed to set a balanced budget for 2026/27. The council has continued to be transparent about this position, which was reiterated in the budget report to Cabinet in July.
- Also in July, on the back of the report to Cabinet, the CEO formally wrote to MHCLG to proactively start engagement on EFS/council tax setting for 2026/27. Meetings

between RBWM and MHCLG finance restarted in July, together with separate meetings with CIPFA to ensure the council is transparent about the scale of support it will need and its work to bring the budget deficit down.

- RBWM formally submitted its response to the fair funding consultation over the summer. The recent response from government on the outcome of the Fair Funding Review has revealed that RBWM will be amongst the worst hit in terms of reductions to government grant. This will have a significant impact on the council's budget and overall sustainability, with the forecast impacts set out in the draft budget report to December Cabinet.

Implementing detailed savings trackers, with improved savings delivery

- For the first time, RBWM has developed and implemented detailed savings trackers for each savings and income line in the 2025/26 budget, in order to improve the council's approach to savings delivery. A similar approach is being taken for 2026/27 savings.
- Savings trackers are regularly scrutinised by ELT to provide a more effective mechanism to determine when action/intervention is needed to support delivery.
- This strengthened approach has directly led to a positive direction of travel on savings delivery across all areas, with savings delivery reported to Cabinet in-year as part of monthly budget monitoring reports. At the time of writing – and according to the month 6 finance monitoring report - only £179k out of a savings target of nearly £6m is rated as 'red' and being reported as off track.

Positive external audit annual opinion and 2024/25 VFM report

- In September, the council's external auditor - Grant Thornton – published its [value for money report](#) for the 2024/25 financial year. The report, which was considered at Audit and Governance Committee in September, shows good progress being made in RBWM's financial and organisational recovery.
- The number of significant areas of weakness and associated key recommendations have reduced from nine in Grant Thornton's 2023/24 external audit report to six in the most recent report. RBWM's transformation will take time and will be achieved incrementally, which is what the auditor's report shows. Crucially, the report does not identify any new additional weaknesses as the council makes progress to address significant legacy issues.
- The external audit report also includes the council's response to the recommendations they have raised, and the actions being taken. It is positive that many of the recommendations have already been addressed and that other actions will be delivered over the next few months.
- The following quotes from the executive summary are particularly positive:
 - ✓ 'Since we reported on 2023/24, the council has made rapid progress to establish corporate grip and align the organisation behind its improvement and recovery. The significant weaknesses which we identify in this report should be viewed in the context of this substantial progress'.
 - ✓ 'Our 2024/25 report affirms the positive direction of travel in terms of organisational improvement and capacity building. The council took effective

action to resolve historical accounting errors and clarify its financial position (subject to the conclusion of the 2024/25 post-statements audit) using external support to present a credible case for EFS from Government’.

- ✓ ‘We recognise the rapid progress the council has made to re-build its capacity, support effective financial management and put in place a Financial Improvement and Sustainability Plan (FISP) and a Financial Improvement and Sustainability Board (FISB)’.
 - ✓ ‘The council’s officer and political leadership has been open and transparent about the challenges it faces. A relatively new political administration is realistic about the scale of the change required. This is likely to require stamina and focus for some years to come’.
 - ✓ ‘Stronger financial leadership has helped to increase the pace of improvement, and we note that the Council continues to engage with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government which is encouraged by the progress being made and has not decided to intervene more formally, although that remains an option’.
- The report provides evidence that the council's hard work is paying off, but that further work at pace is needed over the years ahead. At this stage, however, it is important to reflect that such incremental progress is the result a council-wide ‘one team’ effort.

Independent ‘improvement board’ established

- Recognising CIPFA’s recommendation that RBWM should treat its financial crisis as an emergency event and put appropriate governance in place, in December 2024 the council proactively established an independent Financial Improvement and Sustainability Board (FISB) to provide independent assurance, support and challenge to the council’s recovery.
- The FISB – which meets every six weeks – includes independent experts from across the local government sector to challenge and support the council’s recovery, including the delivery of the FISP. The board is chaired by Gavin Jones, an experienced former local government CEO who is currently Lead Commissioner at Slough Borough Council and Thurrock Council and chairs Cheshire East’s independent improvement board.
- The board supports the council’s recovery by providing independent critical challenge to elected members and the senior leadership team on the council’s transformation, financial recovery, and budget plans.
- The board’s [first public report to Cabinet](#) in September shows a positive direction of travel whilst recognising there is considerable work still to be done and will take many years.
- The report clearly sets out some of the council’s most pressing challenges and recognises that many of these are due to historical decisions:

‘RBWM faces major financial and organisational challenges, largely due to past decisions to cut council tax and accounting errors which date back many years. These

actions have led to decisions that have limited corporate capacity and organisational effectiveness’.

- The independent report also makes clear that it will take time and ongoing focus to address the scale of the challenge, with the authority having to continue to adapt to ongoing and emerging threats as it tackles legacy issues:

‘The challenges for RBWM are very significant though and will take many years to resolve. They will require continued strong leadership both politically and organisationally. As a council, RBWM is trying to resolve a wide range of historic issues whilst trying to adapt to current and future demands. Rising homelessness, a general increase in service demands and emerging national policy changes will all add to the complexity of issues the council is facing. It is also likely that the government’s fair funding review will not favour RBWM’.

- Despite the challenges, the board is positive about the council’s approach to date, with the report stating that:

‘The council has engaged very well with the board throughout and it is particularly pleasing to see the active engagement of the Leader, Deputy Leader, Chief Executive and other members of the senior team. To help familiarise the board with service issues, members of the senior leadership team facilitated ‘deep dives’ into their services. These proved very informative and council officers demonstrated their openness and willingness to learn from others and accept constructive challenge’.

Spending Control Panel continues to scrutinise all spend over £500

- The council continues to take affirmative action in response to the 2024 CIPFA review of the council’s financial resilience. This has included the role of the council’s Spending Control Panel (SCP) being reviewed and terms of reference updated to reflect the CIPFA recommendation to ‘re-emphasise the importance of the panel to staff and ensure consistency of approach across the whole organisation’ so that it can continue be used to cut back discretionary expenditure and review all essential expenditure as part of the short-term recovery plan.
- The SCP has been in place since October 2023 and remains an important mechanism for controlling spend and changing the culture of the organisation in relation to sound financial management. The SCP is mirrored by the council’s children’s services, delivered by Achieving for Children (AfC), who also approve all spending over £500 via a similar panel.

Improving procurement and contract management

- Significant progress has been made to improve procurement and contract management across the council through the Contract Optimisation Strategy and associated improvement programme, which was initiated this year. The programme contains a number of important themes and actions, many of which have been implemented this year.

- Services have been working with the Crown Commercial College to provide contract management foundation training for all contract managers across the council.
- Because effective contract management is so important, all contract managers – no matter their level of experience – are required to complete the training. Training will also be made available to colleagues in Achieving for Children.
- Building on this, a new Contract Management and Excellence Forum has been established which is intended to be a space for contract managers, and those with contract management responsibilities, to come together from across the council to break down silos and foster a more consistent approach to procurement and contract management.
- The forum aims to build understanding about tools, documents, processes and best practice in procurement and contract management and be a place where key statutory and regulatory information and updates can be shared and discussed.
- The programme aims to build on work done over the past year or so to increase capacity in the corporate procurement team, improve procurement processes and develop a comprehensive pipeline of future procurement activity.
- The strategy has also created a more robust approach to contract procurement and a clearer 'gateway' process, meaning services discuss the specification of a contract at an early stage with relevant councillors - improving collaboration and effective working through to the contract award.

Governance improvements to council-owned companies – establishing commissioning boards for AfC, Optalis and the RBWM Asset Holding Company

- Governance improvements have been implemented this year which are designed to strengthen oversight of RBWM's three partly owned and wholly owned companies.
- A commissioning board has been established in relation to Achieving for Children, the council's children's services delivery agency jointly owned with LBs Kingston and Richmond. The new board meets quarterly, with senior RBWM officers (CEO, DCS, S151) and relevant AfC officers in attendance to scrutinise AfC performance, budgets, delivery and risks.
- Similar boards are being established in relation to Optalis (ASC delivery company partly owned with Wokingham Borough Council) and the wholly owned RBWM asset holding company (which holds council-owned buildings).

Improvements to other areas of internal governance

- To further improve governance, track and resolve outstanding actions from internal audit reports and share lessons learned, an Audit Board has been established. The board – chaired by the Executive Director of Resources – brings together senior officers from across council directorates to provide greater focus on the importance of internal audit and ensure the council is tackling an inherited backlog of outstanding audit recommendations.
- An internal Capital Programme Board is also now in place, overseeing delivery of the RBWM capital programme following the recommendation in last year's CIPFA financial resilience review. This has driven improvements to the delivery of capital

projects across the council and has contributed to a closer alignment of spend against budget.

- Additionally, a Place directorate specific Capital Assurance Board has been established to consider proposals and projects in more detail - supporting better oversight and reporting back to the corporate capital programme board.
- Specific, time-limited project boards have also been established to oversee the delivery of major projects in each directorate and across the organisation. This includes cross-service project boards to oversee the successful delivery of new case management systems in both adults and children's Services. In both cases, the new systems were delivered on time and to budget due largely to the robust governance put in place.

External review of risk management conducted

- The council's insurers - Zurich Municipal – were commissioned, at no extra cost, to conduct a review of RBWM's approach to risk management and support a refresh of risk registers. The report – which was finalised in September – shows that the council's approach to risk management is good overall, with evidence of much stronger leadership over the past couple of years.
- Actions for further improvement – including exploring opportunities for training to greater imbed the importance of strong risk management across the organisation – are now being taken forward, led by the risk management team.

New consultation policy and approach adopted

- In July 2025, Cabinet agreed a new [RBWM consultation policy](#) to improve engagement and evidence-based decision-making. Effective engagement with local communities is central to many aspects of the council's ambitions. It provides a stronger understanding of the needs, views and assets of the borough's communities and contributes to better informed, evidence-based decision making.
- The new policy builds on existing guidance, ensuring that the council's approach to consultations is clear, legally sound and reflects LGA best practice. To develop the policy, input was sought from the council's Consultation Panel, the Consultation Champion, the Disability and Inclusion Forum and the Executive Leadership Team.
- The policy is supported by a new consultation toolkit which includes links to all of the relevant templates, guides and contact details for colleagues to be able to easily navigate the process of designing a consultation.

Continued strong performance against delivery of the RBWM Council Plan

- Over the last year, performance has continued to be good against service Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and Council Plan deliverables. The first update following the annual refresh of the Council Plan, adopted in April 2025, showed that overall performance remains strong in 2025/26, with 81% of KPIs rated green or amber and 72% of deliverables completed or on track. This reflects sustained delivery across directorates despite ongoing financial and capacity pressures.
- This follows equally strong performance in 2024/25 with the year-end position showing 74% of KPIs completed or on track and only 1% red.
- A 'Supertracker', to monitor the delivery of all audit recommendations and Council Plan deliverables, has also been rolled out, as part of a quarterly process.

Theme 2: Service transformation, efficiency and contract savings

0. Delivering the FISP involves working at pace to achieve further service and organisational transformation, alongside developing a clear budget strategy and complete clarity on future priorities.
1. Building on the momentum of the first phase of the council's 'Future Shape RBWM' organisational transformation programme – which was developed from scratch in 2023 in the absence of a corporate transformation programme - services have continued to develop and implement further proposals for service transformation to improve service quality and/or reduce costs.
2. Notable successes in this theme include:

Embracing digital and technology-based transformation, with governance arrangements established

- A cross-directorate Digital and Technology Board was established in September to oversee the development of proposals to digitally transformation services and develop a prioritised programme of investment and delivery which feeds into the annual budget setting process and MTFP.
- The new programme works in collaboration with each directorate and the Future Shape Transformation Board, to provide greater alignment with service transformation priorities and the budget process.
- The programme includes projects which are sufficiently developed to go into the budget for 2026/27 as well as projects which are in the digital transformation pipeline, but are not sufficiently developed and therefore not ready to go into the budget build for next year.
- The board is using a 'weighted matrix' to develop a short-list of digital transformation priority projects from the original long list of ideas received from services over the summer (nearly 130 ideas). This is being done in collaboration with each directorate to provide alignment with service transformation priorities and the budget process.

Adult social care transformation

- Significant progress has been made as part of the transformation and savings programme for adult social care. The programme is delivering tangible savings and improvements in service delivery and positioning the council well to meet both financial and quality goals.
- Overall, the directorate's transformation has put RBWM on a confident path to achieve transformation savings and improve service quality.

New Mosaic case management system delivered on time and to budget

- A new case management system, Mosaic, successfully went live on time and within budget in January 2025, supporting more effective social care recording and efficient

working practices. The implementation of the new system represents a significant and long overdue transformation for the council, as it replaced an antiquated system and provides financial management of the authority's largest budget, replacing an approach based mainly on a number of separate spreadsheets.

- The first payments to suppliers using the new automated system in Mosaic took place in March 2025, which has already led to more effective budget monitoring and forecasting.
- Work to improve the efficiency and timeliness of social care billing and payments to providers is progressing well. During November, the new system was used to electronically process all Homecare invoices - directly matching each visit claimed to those commissioned (thousands every month) - which will free up resource in both the ASC directorate and the finance team to resolve issues and work on improving contribution collection.
- This focus will improve the timeliness of bills being issued, improve budget forecasting and create real efficiencies through the removal of manual processing.
- The new Mosaic system has also allowed the senior leadership team in ASC to put in place tighter spending controls in relation to the approval of care packages. The system is being used to ensure that all care packages require approval by the senior leadership team, based on the professional advice of front-line social workers.

Effective proactive management of the care market to deliver savings

- In the area of care market management – which continues to be a significant challenge for all councils who are grappling with rising costs and varying quality – the council established a clear timetable to negotiate funding with domiciliary care providers, offering an uplift below the level we had budgeted for this year.
- Over the first five months of this year, the council's approach has paid dividends, with the vast majority of care packages being arranged within 24 hours and securing a 1% saving against budget.
- Negotiations with other providers are nearing completion and the council will realise the £225,000 in savings from this activity by month six of the current financial year.
- Further work is being discussed with neighbouring east Berkshire local authorities to consider the opportunity of a 'spot purchase framework' to further control costs in the wider market.

Workforce improvements

- On the staffing front, eighteen months ago the service faced a critical shortage of permanent social work applicants at all levels, leading to high agency costs. A targeted recruitment campaign for management-level posts has taken place recently, supported by video materials promoting the council's inclusive and supportive workplace culture.
- Since recruiting a permanent senior leadership team earlier this year, including three Assistant and Deputy Directors, there has been a marked increase in interest for permanent roles via the recruitment campaign, that have resulted in four team managers and both the Principal Social Worker and Principal Occupational Therapist all set to begin roles in early 2026.

- The service has reduced the number of agency posts and expect to generate a £78,000 reduction in this year's spend, with further reductions on track for next year.

Transforming service practice in adult social care

- The council's strength-based practice transformation, supported by the transformation partner Impower, has involved strength-based assessment training for all adult social care colleagues over the summer.
- This approach encourages staff to focus on individuals' strengths to keep them independent for longer and ensures that care packages are appropriately sized. This new approach is already being used in new care package assessments, with all new care packages requiring approval by the ASC senior leadership team to help improve financial control and scrutiny.
- Early exploration of the potential to transition individuals from residential care to private rented housing has identified market capacity challenges which will take a medium-term approach to resolve. The team is developing a proposal, with the Future Shape RBWM transformation board, to consider a short to medium-term approach for some residents already receiving support.
- Steady progress is also being made with the hospital team to identify those to revisit post discharge to make sure they continue to get the right services rather than being stuck with dis-empowering support.
- Strength Circles has begun to be rolled out, enabling practitioners to challenge each other about providing enabling services and reducing statutory costs. This is supported by 24 voluntary groups now directly connected to the ASC front door, taking referrals.

Using AI tools to increase efficiency and improve practice

- The service is embracing AI as a tool to help social workers carry out their duties more efficiently. New technology, [Magic Notes](#), is being used improve the quality and consistency of care assessments while significantly reducing the time taken to produce them. This project was based on research supported by other councils and took just three-months from initial idea to first activity with residents.
- The technology has been adopted by social workers to enhance the accuracy and quality of care assessments, with 48 of the team using it in its first month and now over 100 staff have been trained.

Implementing new tools to support independence

- The [AskSARA website](#), launched in collaboration with Slough Borough Council in September 2025, and funded for five years, enables carers and individuals to complete guided self-assessments online, helping them access resources and support to maintain independence longer, delaying the need for council care.

Public health transformation

- In public health, a re-focused public health team has ensured cross-council and system-wide leadership and development of the ten-year Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2026-36) and updating of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment process.
- The strategy takes a life course approach with a focus on the best start in life, living well, healthy ageing and healthy place. A needs-led, evidence-based and outcomes-

focused approach is being taken to promote prevention and early intervention, reduce inequalities and will support an invest to save approach to future budget planning.

- Public health continues to closely monitor and effectively manage major contracts ensuring services reflect need and any additional grant funding (Drug and Alcohol Treatment Recovery and Improvement Grant and Local Stop Smoking Services Grant) is spent in line with nationally determined criteria.
- On a broader geography public health has initiated input to the emerging Thames Valley ICB to support population health, strategic commissioning and Neighbourhood Health Plan requirements.
- Closer working with the Thames Valley Public Health Specialty Training Programme has resulted in a speciality registrar placement this year with a further placement planned for early 2026.
- Public health successfully bid this year for National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) funding for a Local Authority Research Practitioner. This role will pump prime the development of a research and academic function across the council.
- Public health is ensuring, through robust programme budgeting, it can respond to requirements for increased assurance around the Public Health Grant as indicated in the national Ten-Year Health Plan.

Children's services transformation

- Significant progress has also been made during the year in the delivery of the council's children's services transformation and savings programme.

Reducing agency staff numbers

- While the number of agency staff remains a continuing pressure for the service – and children's services across the country – significant reductions have been made to the number of agency posts in the service over the course of the year, with numbers reducing from 33 last year to 19 currently.
- Work continues to reduce numbers even further, with the service on course to reduce agency numbers to a target of 14 by the end of the year and to 8 by March 2027.

New case management system implemented on time and to budget

- The first phase of a new children's social care database, Liquidlogic, has been implemented within timescales and budget, with the project now in its next phase. All data has been migrated to the new database and as a result the old system, PARIS, has now been decommissioned.
- Similar to the Mosaic in adults, the new system enables better tracking of service performance and budget management. A significant improvement in the quality and reliability of management information is already being seen by the service.

Addressing sufficiency of placements for young people needing care and after care

- To better respond to the children's social care reforms and prevent children and young people coming into care in the first place, by exploring other viable alternatives,

significant projects are in train to address placement sufficiency for our children in care cohort.

- This includes improving and better targeting support to enable more children and young people to remain within their extended families and increase the number of in-house foster carers to help 'step them down' into more cost friendly and child-friendly arrangements (foster carer or back to their family/network).
- The council's Families Together Team has prevented more than 14 children coming into care, through robust intervention with wider family networks.
- By addressing capacity within the service, resource to focus on this significant and complex area of work has been increased – with savings already achieved in 2025/26 of £1.5m and a potential savings pipeline for the year of £1.8m.

New RBWM owned and operated children's residential care home opened

- A new children's residential care home – operated by Achieving for Children (AfC) – opened in November and will provide first class accommodation and support to children and young people who we have a responsibility to look after as corporate parents. It is an impressive new venture for us at RBWM – the first time the council has opened and operated its own direct care provision for young people.
- This means that the council is starting to develop direct access to its own care provision which makes the service less reliant on the external care market where costs are high and quality varies. It also keeps the young people who live there in the borough, close to their school, friends and wider support networks.
- The emphasis has been on making it a 'home' and that outcome has been achieved. It's a warm, welcoming and homely environment on a safe residential street which will provide the young people who live there with stability, support and the opportunity to flourish.
- The new home was delivered at pace, from an initial business case agreed in June 2024, to getting the keys to the property last November and the doors opening recently. The project has been a tremendous effort to move so quickly, which is testament to the council's focus on team working, delivery and getting things done.

Securing access to placements via the new South-East regional care cooperative

- AfC's placement sufficiency strategy is focused on addressing the growing demand for high-quality, local care placements for children in care and care leavers, with an emphasis on reducing reliance on high-cost, distant residential placements. Central to this approach is ensuring that children and young people remain close to their communities, families, and support networks.
- The children's services directorate has a robust transformation programme to deliver on the council's sufficiency strategy and make associated savings. This includes building a sustainable kinship care approach, increasing the number of local foster carers, and stepping down targeted children and young people from residential care into fostering or family-based alternative arrangements.
- Through these efforts, RBWM, in partnership with AfC, is committed to meeting the increasing demand for placements sustainably, ensuring improved outcomes for children and young people while optimising costs.
- The Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) is one integral part of AfC's approach to meeting the sufficiency demands for care placements. The RCC was established to address

rising costs and the limited availability of quality placements for vulnerable children and young people across 18 local authorities in the South-East region, including RBWM.

- Selected as one of two Department for Education (DfE) pilot pathfinder areas, the South-East Regional Care Cooperative (RCC) will centralise data-sharing and market management to improve placement quality, accessibility, and cost-efficiency.
- The RCC's efforts are expected to result in long-term financial savings by reducing reliance on high-cost external placements, curbing sector-specific inflation, and increasing access to new regional fostering and residential placements. This will sit alongside the government's plans, announced in 2024, to end profiteering in the external residential placement sector.
- The RCC aims to create approximately 40 new regional beds funded by a £5m DfE capital grant. This investment will yield long-term savings by stabilising costs, improving market leverage, and addressing placement shortages that currently drive overspending.
- RBWM's development of a children's home and participation in the RCC are essential parts of a broader strategy to ensure that vulnerable children in care receive safe, quality care placements.
- The RCC will help RBWM to reduce costs and increase placement options through regional collaboration, while the borough's own children's home will also address longer-term sufficiency needs.
- Together, these initiatives, alongside the other transformation projects, will create a more resilient, sustainable care system that benefits children and young people both locally and regionally.

Launch of #Thisisfostering foster care recruitment campaign

- Work continues to drive the fostering recruitment and retention communications campaign, as part of the children's services transformation programme.
- The campaign launch was aligned to Fostering Fortnight in mid-May with engagement pop-ups, social content on council channels and media engagement. Further social media content, including videos and targeted advertising, and more direct communications and engagement activity have also started – focused on myth busting perceived barriers to becoming a foster carer, the benefits of being one and sharing first hand experiences from those that foster care.
- Eight families have recently started the assessment process to become foster carers which is higher than we have ever seen in RBWM. Many have cited the recent communications campaign as a factor in their decision to begin the process.

Improving financial support to foster carers – council tax reimbursement

- In January, Cabinet agreed a [new policy](#) to offer a full council tax reimbursement to in-house foster carers when they have a child in placement.
- This proposal allows AfC's fostering service to compete in both recruitment and retention with other local authorities who have already offered their foster carers a full council tax exemption.
- All local authorities and external fostering agencies are struggling to recruit new mainstream foster carers, and this decision allows AfC to compete on a level playing

field and ensure its overall support and financial offer to prospective foster carers is an attractive one.

Review of short breaks and day care packages delivering savings

- A review of short breaks/day care packages for children and young people with disabilities created £62k savings last year and the forecast savings for 2025/26 is £125k. A needs analysis has been undertaken, shortly to report back, and a business case is being developed for a further invest to save opportunity.

Place services transformation

Successful re-procurement of RBWM leisure contract

- A new 15-year leisure contract has been agreed – following an open procurement process – with Leisure Focus Trust to run the council's six leisure centres and provide wider leisure services across the borough.
- The decision to award the contract to a charity, additionally means that any surplus raised by the company is put back into the facilities available to borough residents.
- As part of the council's commitment to support people to live healthy and independent lives, the Leisure Focus team will work closely with partners to support the health and wellbeing of the community, increase the number of users across all sites and enable more active lifestyles through a range of initiatives including discounted membership rates for under-represented groups.
- The new contract provides RBWM with an annual (average) management fee of circa £4m over the life of the contract – a considerable increase to income generation compared to previous contract and presents an improved leisure provision across the borough.

New highways contract

- A new highways contract has been signed with Marlborough to start in April 2026.
- This is a major contract, with work to handover from the existing supplier having started and the new approach set to drive efficiencies and savings to the service alongside service improvements.

Commencement of parks and grounds maintenance contract procurement

- In April, Cabinet approved the approach to open procurement of new parks and grounds maintenance contract on the back of new gateway process developed as part of the place contracts transformation programme.
- Following the recent procurement on new multi-year contract to improve services and identify scope for efficiencies, a new contract to set to commence in September 2026

New Temporary Accommodation Strategy adopted

- A new RBWM [Temporary Accommodation Strategy](#) was agreed by [Cabinet](#) in July 2025, setting out a range of projects and actions the council will take at pace, as it responds to a major area of financial pressure.
- This includes helping to mitigate the cost of expensive nightly rates of placing people in temporary accommodation by developing 12 new accommodation units at John

West House in early 2026, and additional rough sleeper accommodation and support facilities.

- This follows 14 new accommodation units at St Edmunds being converted into temporary accommodation housing, with a mix of one and two-bedrooms to support some of our most vulnerable residents.
- The Housing team is also working with the borough's registered providers to utilise the Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) through a purchase and repair scheme. This will mean that the housing association will refurbish the properties and lease them to RBWM for a ten-year period so that the council can let them to a homeless household who will pay rent within Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance (LHA) limit.
- In recent months, in-year budget monitoring has shown that the number of people in temporary accommodation has stabilised which demonstrates that our more proactive approach is starting to pay off, although significant risks remain for all councils in relation to housing pressures.

Housing Transformation Review and business case approval

- RBWM's housing services requires significant transformation to improve service delivery, increase operational efficiency, and reduce financial pressures on both the service and wider council, particularly in relation to temporary accommodation.
- Like many RBWM services, housing services suffers from a significant lack of capacity compared to other unitary authorities. This has contributed to poor service delivery in a number of areas which goes back many years as well as outdated policies and increasing financial pressures.
- Although the service has made improvements over the past two years, significant investment is required to enable the council to meet its statutory duties and help manage rising demand.
- In response, the service has developed a business case for investment and service redesign. The redesign and associated business case focuses on two workstreams - transformational initiatives (funded via flexible use of capital receipts) and business as usual improvements ((funded via grants/revenue growth).
- Transformational initiatives include more proactive and effective estate management, traveller site reform, dedicated housing receptionists, landlord engagement, and strategic contract management.
- Business-as-usual improvements focus on homelessness operations, streamlined housing allocations, expanded estate management, and strengthened policy/legal support. Expected outcomes include reduced TA spend through improved prevention, quicker move-on, and increased council-owned provision. Service effectiveness will improve via enhanced customer care and fewer complaints.
- The report and business case was [approved at Cabinet](#) in November and the team are now focused on recruiting to additional posts to fill capacity gaps and deliver the programme.

Housing transformation - MHCLG progress check

- In November, RBWM's Housing team received a progress check visit from MHCLG's Housing and Rough Sleeping team. The visit was part of an ongoing series of monitoring visits to support RBWM in its Housing and Rough Sleeping challenges and see the progress made since their last visit some months ago.

- It was a positive session and MHCLG were particularly impressed with RBWMs direction of travel and progress made in recent months, with a full business case and report to deliver the Housing transformation coming to Cabinet in November, a new TA and RS facility at John West House coming on stream in the coming months and wider success with new social housing enabling a relief on TA pressures as people are transferred to new properties (around 90 by March 2026).
- Several areas of development remain and all recognised this is work in progress, greater attention to strategy development and use of data key, but with the stabilisation of TA in tandem with new staffing resource being realised it is seen as an ideal opportunity create a new normal and decrease both financial and housing pressure in RBWM.

Planning Service Improvement Plan

- The Planning team has begun to look to streamline the planning process, to create a transparent, measurable process, and improve the customer experience.
- A consultation on the National and Local Validations List and the Local Enforcement Plan Terms of Reference has now concluded with responses being reviewed and presented to Cabinet in December.
- Final legal checks are underway for the draft Model Planning Conditions, as well as the templates for Section 106 Agreements, Planning Performance Agreements (PPA), and unilateral undertakings.
- Workflow management enhancements continue through the Enterprise system reconfiguration and a foundational framework is now in place, supporting further development.
- The team has continued to provide strong performance across the year, consistently delivering against KPIs in relation to planning approvals and wider service priorities.

Resources transformation

Finance improvement programme established and delivering results

- A transformation programme covering all aspects of the council's financial management has been established to drive improvement and embed good practice. Finance transformation remains a priority work programme for the council and good progress has been made, responding to the recommendations of the 2024 independent financial resilience review by CIPFA.
- Although capacity within the finance team remains a challenge, new business partners have been recruited to the team alongside seven finance graduates as part of a 'grow our own' approach. This has brought much needed resilience and a new energy to the team.
- Finance systems and processes continue to be improved following the separate CIPFA systems review commissioned last year, which has been demonstrated by more timely closure of historic accounts.
- The team are moving to monthly balance sheet reconciliations to avoid the mistakes made in previous years where a backlog going back several years occurred which caused a material impact on revenue budgets.

- A permanent Executive Director, Resources (S151 officer) has been successfully recruited and is now in post to bring longer-term stability to the council.

Debt recovery programme leading to more money being recovered

- A transformation project has been taken forward this year, which is focused on improving bad debt processes, recovering outstanding amounts and implementing additional software to allow debt to be segmented by an individual's propensity to pay.
- As part of this, a diagnostic review conducted on debt has led to further actions being added to the debt recovery project plan, and a series of quick-win actions aimed at recovering outstanding customer debt are being prioritised.
- Initial work has led to successful recoveries and the project continues to prioritise and investigate remaining cases to identify further recovery opportunities.
- Overall additional debt recovered to date through the project totals £5.6m.

Improving workforce stability

- In September, RBWM was accepted onto the LGA's 'finance workforce planning programme 2025/26' alongside 13 other authorities nationally, which is anticipated will help the council plan for a more stable finance workforce, learning from best practice and benchmarking.
- The learning from the programme will be used to continue to improve the council's finance function, embed best practice and respond to the independent review by CIPFA.

New Project Management tool to be implemented

- Software demonstrations have been conducted with three shortlisted vendors to implement a new project management tool which is designed to improve transformation and programme delivery across the authority, as part of a set of measures to improve organisational performance and transformation delivery.
- Following the demonstrations, an internal evaluation of the three systems has been completed and a preferred provider has been identified. A formal request has been sent to the selected supplier to submit their updated pricing schedule.

Improving RBWM's finance management system – migration to the Cloud

- The resource requirements to deliver the migration of the main finance system to the cloud – which will ensure project continuity and delivery of the new system in 2026 - has been mapped out and is in the process of being guided through the relevant governance.
- Improving the council's financial management system and creating more resilience is a crucial part of the wider transformation programme as the organisation continues to move away from outdated systems and management of data based on spreadsheets and outdated processes.

Temporary agency worker master vendor contract delivering savings and improved processes in the recruitment of agency workers

- A new contract and process to ensure a compliant organisation-wide approach to agency staffing with more cost-effective rates, minimal agency margins and closer alignment to our pay scales, went live in August 2025.
- This includes greater oversight of ongoing agency placements and Spending Control Panel review and approval by managers, through an improved system to request approval for renewals every three months.
- As of 1 November 2025, 36 of 58 workers (62%) are now supplied via the standardised Reed contract. While the goal is to see every worker supplied via the Reed managed service, this is still a significant improvement from 0% prior to launch. Further progress is expected as the new approach continues to embed across the organisation.
- This new approach to agency staff recruitment and management brings more consistency and allows for a greater level of savings to be realised through a central contract than 'off-contract' arrangements across the organisation.

Theme 3: Optimising income and commercialisation

0. This theme of the FISP is focused on looking at opportunities for the council to diversify its income streams and increase income from across a wider range of areas.
1. In doing so, it will be crucial to ensure due diligence has been carried out and that the approach is consistent with the council's values and ambitions as set out in the Council Plan.

Agreement with NHS on construction of new Ascot health hub

- Earlier in the year, Cabinet agreed a proposal for the council to work in partnership with the ICB to support the delivery of a new health hub in Ascot, to replace outdated local GP surgeries.
- The new facility is to be fully funded by NHS with RBWM having agreed to provide delivery support and will earn a share of interest on the capital funding held by the council on behalf of the NHS and further income in admin fees negotiated.
- These additional income streams will help to offset service pressures.

Advertising and Sponsorship Board established

- RBWM is fortunate to have a number of large, multi-national companies operating in the borough and there is an opportunity to maximise the potential financial benefit.
- To help with this and bring appropriate governance and due diligence to the process, a new advertising and sponsorship policy has been developed – agreed by Cabinet - which looks to harness these opportunities in a structured way which manages risk.
- The new policy has been discussed at Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a new internal board has been established to identify opportunities for generating revenue from advertising and sponsorship across the borough.

Adult Social Care aged contributions review

- A cross-council team has been established, to review the outstanding contributions for adult care services and identify which could be collected.
- This new approach has resulted in £287k being collected by March 2025 and a further £557k expected by March 2026 which represents an increase in direct income received by the council.
- The project has also identified several process improvements which are being implemented to reduce the likelihood of missed contributions.
- Further work to improve systems is also being taken forward which is looking at opportunities for a digital, online system to support the management of an individual's care contributions which would increase transparency, provide for greater control and help reduce accumulated debt.

Collaboration with the NHS for Continuing Health Care reviews

- A single panel process has been established with the Frimley Integrated Care System to consider Continuing Health Care (CHC) applications along with care assessments so that appropriate care is established at one time and with correct sharing of costs from the start of a package.

- This new panel and approach is reducing the number of interim arrangements which are more costly for the council and, often, not a good match for the resident.

Theme 4: Refining our capital programme

3. This theme is focused on the work taken forward to ensure that the council's annual and medium-term capital investment programme reflects the priorities of the borough; is deliverable; and is funded as far as possible from a range of income sources – including developer contributions and external grants – in order to keep additional borrowing to a minimum.
4. The following actions have been taken so far this year:

New corporate Capital Board established

- A new internal Capital Board has been established and chaired by the Executive Director of Resources to improve governance and oversight of the development and delivery of the capital programme.
- Whilst a high degree of focus is placed on the annual process of budget setting and capital project proposals, the board has repositioned the ability for services to come forward 'in-year' with business cases to support new project delivery.
- The Capital Board is also helping to embed a better understanding of capital accounting and the expenditure that is properly treated as capital or revenue – in order to prevent mistakes of the past - as well as a greater emphasis on the medium-term plan for capital projects.

Place directorate Capital Assurance Board up and running

- Within the Place directorate, a new capital assurance board has been established which sits alongside the Directorate Leadership Team (DLT) and provides for additional oversight of capital project delivery, scrutiny and risk management.
- This new approach – and additional governance – has been established in recognition that the vast majority of the council's capital projects fall within the Place directorate. The board is attended by project leads across all services.
- The board provides oversight to the directorate leadership team (DLT) on a monthly basis and the wider monthly and extended DLT on a quarterly basis.
- The work of the board feeds into the wider corporate Capital Bboard and was felt necessary considering the range of capital programmes in this service area.

A more refined and realistic RBWM annual capital programme has led to reduced underspends

- A significant amount of work has taken place this year to improve and refine the council's overall capital programme. The objectives of the work are to ensure a greater focus on the council's priorities – as set out in the Council Plan – and to develop a more realistic programme with more realistic delivery targets and reduced slippage.
- At month 6 in 2025/26, the capital forecast is showing underspends of £0.485m have been identified against a total capital budget of £60m this year which represents an improved performance compared to previous years.

- This is due to improved governance through the capital board, a continued focus on delivery and following the work to refine the capital programme to make delivery more realistic.

Minimising additional borrowing

- By prioritising and focusing capital investment on essential health and safety work and maximising the use of external grant funding – including contributions from developers - to fund investment, the council has been able to minimise the revenue costs of any additional borrowing used for capital programme maintenance and delivery.
- The Place directorate continue to deliver the majority of its capital programme with the sole use of external funding, meaning no additional external borrowing.
- For the programmes that may require additional borrowing, these are subject to further scrutiny via business case and evidence of longer-term return on investment before funding is approved.
- Together, these improvements represent a significant strengthening of the governance in relation to the council's capital programme.

Theme 5: Driving value from our assets

14. This theme is focused on utilising council owned buildings, land and other assets to maximise income, generate capital receipts (where it is appropriate to consider a sale), improve energy efficiency and improve utilisation.

Closure of RBWM Property Company (Prop Co) and in-sourcing of property and regen services

- Following a decision by Cabinet, the RBWM Property Company (Prop Co) was formally abolished in 2025 with property services and regen functions brought back in house from 1 May.
- This has been extended to incorporate the facilities team that manages the council's day to day building operations of Town Hall, Tinkers Lane and other sites.
- Savings of £200k+ have been achieved from abolition of senior management posts within Prop Co.

Asset Strategy Review

- Property services being brought back into the council has enabled the start of a comprehensive review of council assets and the development of an overarching strategy.
- By working with CIPFA property specialists, the team has been able to start to review assets to better determine which ones to keep and invest in, which can be used more efficiently to generate income or improve service delivery.
- The review is also intended to identify any further assets that the council should consider selling to generate an income or pay off debt in line with the Council Plan. All decisions on asset sales will be subject to Cabinet agreement and only where there is a financial and strategic case to do so.
- This work is alongside the drive to maximise capital receipts through a targeted programme of sales (outlined below) and the income generated by additional council tax through delivering major regeneration schemes linked to the Local Plan.

Sale of Reform Road industrial site, Maidenhead to achieve significant capital receipts

- Work is progressing to finalise terms following Cabinet agreement to sell the council-owned Reform Road industrial site in Maidenhead.
- This decision will secure a significant capital receipt for the council and also lead to the avoidance of significant costs which would be required to maintain the site if the council were to retain ownership.
- The council services which are located at the site are being relocated via a related project which is expected to complete by summer 2026.

Redevelopment of Imperial Road site, Windsor, to create 22 units of supported accommodation

- A business case has been agreed to convert the site at Imperial Road in Windsor from day care centre to supported accommodation via a long-life partnership with a registered provider.
- This brings external investment which offers increased independence for this cohort of residents along with a cost saving compared to the market cost of such care. Cabinet approval has been granted to progress the scheme and work to select an RP partner underway.
- The location has been registered as an 'asset of community value' and that process is running in parallel with the service work to ensure that the council has the appropriate governance and information for the resulting decisions due in early 2026.

Novello theatre sale (capital receipt and avoided costs)

- The sale of the Novello theatre in Sunninghill to a community group has been completed, securing a capital receipt and avoiding a further demolition costs to the council.
- The new ownership is bringing forward plans to bring derelict theatre back into community use.

Windsor Yards shopping centre - sale of freehold for a significant capital receipt and to support development

- Cabinet agreement has been secured to proceed with the sale of the freehold in the Windsor Yards shopping centre.
- This decision is intended to release a significant capital receipt for the council to help reduce debt and borrowing.
- The decision to sell the freehold is also intended to enable the necessary regeneration of the shopping centre to include commercial units, apartments and a cinema.
- The regeneration will also unlock additional council tax and business rates revenues. **Diversifying use of Maidenhead Town Hall**

- Mid-June saw Leisure Focus starting to run pay-as-you-go health, wellbeing and fitness classes from Desborough Suite in Maidenhead Town Hall.
- This is the first step in using Town Hall space more effectively and has seen over 84 classes and 533 participants in the last five months.

Maidenhead Nicholson's shopping centre redevelopment – sale of council-owned assets agreed

- The scheme, which consists of a mixed-use regeneration of the current Nicholsons Shopping Centre, was approved by planning committee in November 2025.
- A previous Cabinet decision was taken to dispose of the remaining council owned assets across the site, which will return a significant capital receipt to the council as the development progresses.

Maidenhead Golf Course redevelopment – outline planning permission granted

- The planning application for developing [Elizabeth Quarter](#) received outline planning approval for a residential led mixed use development
- This is set to deliver more than 1,400 homes, including 30% affordable homes, public open space, community hub and supporting infrastructure.
- Within the Joint Venture Development Agreement, the council will also benefit from significant capital receipts over the medium to long-term from land sales made to the developer as each phase of the scheme comes forward

Other areas of significant progress outside of the FISP themes

Devolution

- Responding to the Devolution in England White Paper, RBWM has been working with other councils in the region to develop proposals for a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority and associated devolution agreement.
- MSAs are combined authorities with an elected Mayor who oversees a larger, often city-region-wide area, existing MSAs include Greater Manchester, West Midlands, West Yorkshire. They are formed when multiple local authorities come together with a directly elected Mayor who has powers over strategic issues which cut across local council boundaries. Whereas a local authority governs a single, specific local area (a town, city, borough, or district), an MSA covers multiple local authority areas combined into a larger region (Greater Manchester has 10 councils).
- The MSA has powers to manage and direct regional or metropolitan-level functions across multiple local authorities in areas of responsibility which are regional issues, such as spatial planning and regional housing growth, transport networks and infrastructure which cuts across multiple local authority areas, economic development and investment, adult skills and employment, and police and fire services.
- MSA provides regional leadership, setting a long-term vision for the region and ensuring coordination between multiple local authorities. The MSA represents region at national level, advocating for the area's interests in Parliament and with government.
- Over the past few years, government has channelled significant funds for growth and strategic infrastructure through MSAs which means that the South East – and therefore RBWM – has not benefitted because there is no devolution agreement in place. This will continue and the borough will continue to lose out if it is not part of a devolution deal and an MSA.
- Councils across the region are getting ready to submit an expression of interest to government regarding a devolution deal before the end of 2025. Agreement to sign up to this expression of interest will be sought by each individual council.
- If government agree, a business case will be worked up to develop formal proposals for an MSA with final decisions taken by Full Council at a later date and after public consultation.

Positive RBWM People Survey results

- Results from the 2025 RBWM People (staff) survey show positive direction of travel across all areas surveyed compared to 2023.
- Almost three-quarters of staff completed the survey and said that there is a clear direction – with most understanding the Council Plan priorities and how their work fits within the council's strategic goals.
- They also said that the council has a positive culture, and most employees feel their work is meaningful and they understand how it fits within the council's strategic goals

– but they are keen to feel more valued and have opportunities for development and career growth.

- To build on this momentum, a series of focus groups were also held, to explore key areas of areas of the survey. Sessions were well attended, with attendees proactive and keen to see and be part of the future at RBWM.

All- colleague conference held

- On 24 September, RBWM held its first in-person all staff conference since 2021 with nearly 450 colleagues attending. As well as celebrating recent achievements, the focus was on where the organisation wants to be in 2030.
- Building on the earlier employee engagement, the event included insights and ideas from both the service and resident perspectives, focused on what needs to be different for colleagues, services, and residents – as part of the drive to ensure staff to feel the council is a supportive and rewarding workplace, and residents to feel empowered, informed, and proud to live in the borough.
- The conference marks the start of a series of engagement events through to April next year where the council will define a more compelling vision for the organisation and what that means for the people of the borough we are here to serve. This will draw on the work already started on a future target operating model for the organisation.

Conclusions and next steps

15. It is clear from the significance and volume of work detailed in this report that the council has continued to take significant action, at pace, over the last year, to deliver savings and transform how services are designed and delivered – making them more efficient with the aim of supporting the council to be on a pathway to sustainability.
16. This action has included putting historical problems right, correcting budget irregularities from previous years and improving governance. This is alongside reviewing services and exploring every opportunity to create savings and generate income - even when it has meant the council taking some tough, and potentially unpopular decisions, about services and assets.
17. Tracking service performance and delivery has shown that overall performance over the last year remains strong, reflecting sustained delivery across services despite ongoing financial and capacity pressures.
18. Despite all this, the council will need further financial support from government to set a balanced budget in the years ahead and conversations with government continue.

Next steps

19. This FISP One Year On report will be presented to Cabinet for consideration on 16 December 2025, alongside the draft budget for 2026/27.
20. The council will continue to be transparent about the action needed, including by communicating the council's plans and progress – and by demonstrating delivery to residents, councillors, staff, partners, businesses, and stakeholders.
21. Building on the all-colleague conference that took place in September, this report will be shared with all council colleagues to help demonstrate delivery against the council priorities and the role each team plays in the council's success – as part continuing to embed a positive culture, clear vision and purpose, and ensuring staff and councillors are involved in and champion the council's plans for improvement.
22. While much of the content of this report has already been shared with MHCLG, it will also be provided as part of the council's ongoing conversations with government on continued financial support and with CIPFA.