

Helping to shape our District through transforming our assets



1. Foreword

The West Berkshire Vision 2036 conveys the priorities to demonstrate a collective aim of maintaining West Berkshire's status as a great place to live, work and learn whilst rising to the challenges we will face in the years to come.

These priorities will deliver:

- A West Berkshire where everybody has what they need to fulfil their potential
- A West Berkshire with a housing mix with something for everyone
- A West Berkshire that welcomes business, enterprise and industry into a productive, growing and dynamic local economy
- A West Berkshire where the health and wellbeing of residents of all ages and backgrounds is good
- A West Berkshire with beautiful, historic and diverse landscapes and a strong cultural offering

The Council Strategy 2019 – 2023 supports this Vision and sets out six important areas that we want to improve between now and 2023. Just as importantly, it reaffirms our commitment to continue delivering the core services.

West Berkshire Council has a significant property portfolio which either contributes directly with the delivery of its services (such as libraries, schools, and care homes) or indirectly (such as corporate offices, depots, and investment properties) and contributes to the vision, themes and priorities of the Council Strategy 2019 to 2023.

It is vital that the Council assets are utilised to their optimum capability, both in delivering quality services and in economic terms. This is especially so given that properties are high value and high cost resources.

This Asset Management Strategy seeks to offer a coordinated approach to property and land asset management, to ensure West Berkshire Council continues to properly manage the property portfolio, enabling it to direct capital funding to the right places, whilst embracing new asset strategies and opportunities available to us.

To enable the property assets to work most effectively, West Berkshire Council is pursuing a number of opportunities, working with other public sector organisations. Through the 'One Public Estate' forum we are working with partners including other Berkshire unitary authorities, the Fire Brigade, Police and NHS Estates to develop common asset benefits. We are also seeking opportunities to develop affordable housing by working jointly with Sovereign Housing Association in a Joint Venture.

Additionally the council is pursuing the potential for wider asset opportunities which align with other council strategies including the Environment Strategy 2020 – 2030, and Housing Strategy 2020 – 2036 (draft).

This Asset Management Strategy and the asset plans and actions conducted through it will contribute to the Council's resilience, its working relationship with other partners, and its service delivery.



Councillor Ross Mackinnon

Executive Portfolio Holder for Finance & Economic Development.

Part A – Context and objectives



2. Context and Objectives

The annual refresh (March 2021) of the Asset Management Strategy for 2019 to 2023 builds on and develops the existing strategy, builds on successes and embraces new initiatives which have emerged.

This Asset Management Strategy supports delivery of the Council's overarching vision, themes and priorities and forms part of the Capital Strategy 2021/22 to 2023/24.

2.1 Asset Strategy

This Asset Management Strategy seeks to convey both the context of the West Berkshire Council estate and the drivers and deliverables to ensure that Council assets are utilised to their optimum capability, both in delivering quality services and in economic terms.

The drivers, enablers and deliverables for the Strategy are discussed in more detail within this document but may be summarised as:

Drivers: Operational efficiency and effectiveness across the estate with financial efficiency, opportunity to generate income in accordance with related investment strategies, and alignment of the estate with other new or emerging council strategies such as the Housing Strategy 2020 – 2036 and Environment Strategy 2020 – 2030.

Enablers: To ensure an efficient estate, continuing to commit to maintaining the condition of assets through the capital programme, developing new income streams through the estate and new opportunities through the 'One Public Estate' programme, the wider Place Making activities, the devolution of assets to parish and town councils and potential for joint working with partners.

Deliverables: Actions to ensure the objectives of the strategy are achieved are to include, the review of the estate both operationally and financially through 'asset challenge' and to act on any opportunities which arise from it, to conduct condition surveys to drive the 'needs' based commitment to capital maintenance of our buildings, to consider the transfer of assets through the 'devolution', and the move toward the council acting as a Corporate Landlord.

2.2 Council Strategy

The Asset Management Strategy supports delivery of West Berkshire Council's overarching aims and objectives contained within the Council Strategy 2019 – 2023 'Building on our strengths'.

2.2.1 The Vision

The Council Strategy supports the West Berkshire Vision 2036 – which strives to achieve:

- A West Berkshire where everybody has what they need to fulfil their potential
- A West Berkshire with a housing mix with something for everyone
- A West Berkshire that welcomes business, enterprise and industry into a productive, growing and dynamic local economy
- A West Berkshire where the health and wellbeing of residents of all ages and backgrounds is good
- A West Berkshire with beautiful, historic and diverse landscapes and a strong cultural offering

The Council's vision is 'Working together to make West Berkshire an even greater place in which to live, work and learn'.

2.2.2 Our Themes

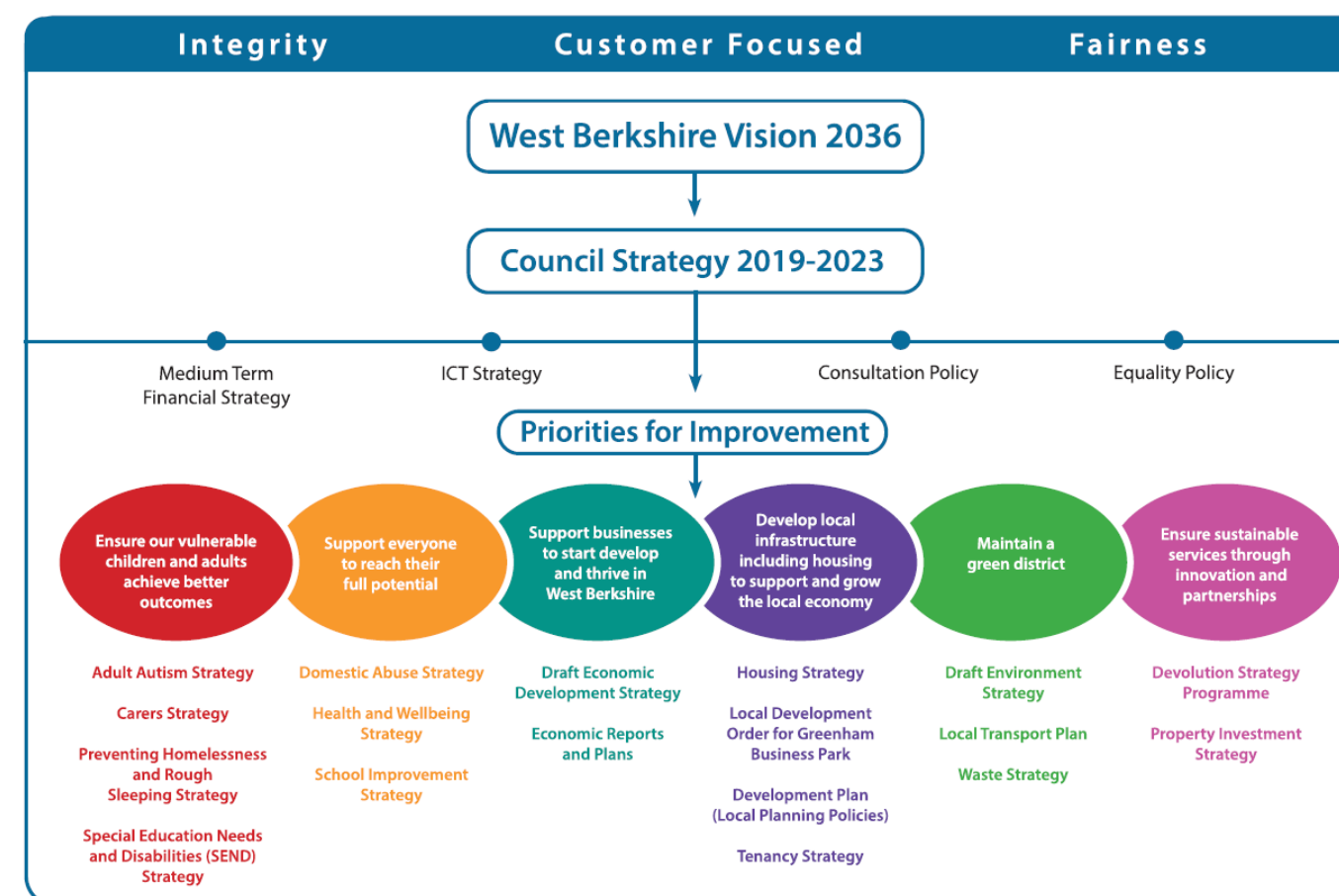
Four themes have been set to support this vision. These are:

- A. Great Place;
- B. Sustainable and Innovative Together;
- C. Protected and Cared for;
- D. Open for Business.

2.2.3 Our Priorities for Improvement

Six key priorities for improvement have been identified to achieve these themes and the overall vision of the council. These are:

- Ensure our vulnerable children and adults achieve better outcomes;
- Support everyone to reach their full potential;
- Support businesses to start, develop and thrive in West Berkshire;
- Develop local infrastructure including housing, to support and grow the local economy;
- Maintain a Green District;
- Ensure sustainable services through innovation and partnerships.



2.3 Council Strategies

The Asset Management Strategy sits within a suite of council strategies, and complements those strategies to achieve the visions within the West Berkshire Council Strategy 'Building on our Strengths' 2019 – 2023 as the primary document in conveying the Council's vision of 'Working together to make West Berkshire an even greater place in which to live, work and learn', which in turn achieves the objectives of The West Berkshire Vision 2036.

The following strategies are relevant to the Asset Management Strategy:

2.3.1 The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2021/22 to 2023/24

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) is a rolling three year strategy which is built to ensure that the financial resources, both revenue and capital, are available to deliver the Council Strategy. The MTFS should be read in conjunction with the Revenue Budget, Capital Programme, and the Investment and Borrowing Strategy reports.

The aim of the MTFS is to:

1. Allocate available resources focussing on those determined as most critical in supporting the Council's priorities and statutory responsibilities;
2. Ensure that capital investment is affordable; and
3. Ensure that the Council has sufficient levels of reserves.

2.3.2 The Capital Strategy 2021/22 -2023/24

provides a high-level overview of how capital expenditure, capital financing and treasury management activity contribute to the provision of local public services along with an overview of how associated risk is managed and the implications for future financial sustainability.

2.3.3 Economic Development Strategy 2019 - 2036

Supports the aims of the West Berkshire Vision 2036 and focuses on people, places, infrastructure and business environment with the key theme throughout that West Berkshire is 'open for business';

2.3.4 Environment Strategy 2020 – 2030

West Berkshire Council has developed an Environment Strategy in response to its declaration of a Climate Emergency in July 2019. The Strategy details the different ways the council, with the help of the local community and businesses, can contribute towards tackling the climate crisis and achieving carbon neutrality by 2030.

2.3.5 Housing Strategy 2020 – 2036

Sets out the vision for the period to 2036 for Housing in West Berkshire in support of the West Berkshire Vision 2036, concentrating on economic growth, housing solutions for all residents, health and wellbeing, independence, and reduced carbon.

This will be delivered through a range of plans which will seek to address housing issues including, reducing homelessness and rough sleeping, affordable housing, empty homes, housing allocations, and gypsy and traveller needs.

2.3.6 Local Plan to 2036 (DRAFT)

The Local Plan sets out the strategic priorities for development of the area and covers housing, commercial, public and private development, including transport infrastructure, along with the protection for the local environment. The Local Plan plans positively for the development and infrastructure communities need, setting out the strategic priorities for the area.

2.3.7 Property Investment Strategy 2021

The Property Investment Strategy was first adopted by the Council in May 2017 and is refreshed annually, with latest revision March 2021.

The council has invested approximately £62m of capital in commercial properties, which brings long term revenue income streams to the council to support its operational services.

The revised strategy seeks to retain the invested portfolio, manage the assets through individual asset management plans, to ensure the long term income as well as preserve the lease and freehold values of the assets.

2.4 Drivers for change/objectives

In supporting both the Council Strategy and Capital Strategy the performance of assets is important to enable:

1. Financial efficiency, budget reduction, generating income, and capital release;
2. Efficient and effective service use of operational buildings;
3. Better coordinated and shared public service delivery points;
4. Improved procurement;
5. Greater community involvement in local services;
6. Energy sustainability standards;
7. Improved staff productivity, retention and recruitment.

2.5 Enablers

2.5.1 *Transforming the estate to create efficiencies.* Intended to ensure services are making most efficient and cost effective use of both operational and corporate assets to deliver services. This will enable potential rationalisation, cost reduction and asset release;

2.5.2 *Asset based long term income streams.* To continue to manage the commercial investment property, through the Property Investment Strategy, and wider asset investment opportunities which align with council strategies;

2.5.3 *Maintaining the quality of our public and corporate buildings.* Through the prioritised allocation of both revenue and capital maintenance budgets across the estate to address condition based repairs. This will ensure assets continue to be fit for purpose and provide a high quality environment for occupants and visitors;

2.5.4 *Supporting communities to do more for themselves.* Working with Town and Parish Councils to establish assets which would benefit from 'devolution';

2.5.5 **Public sector partnering.** Through working with other public sector organisations (other Berkshire LA's, NHS, fire brigade and police) within the 'One Public Estate' environment and 'Place Shaping' to seek shared financial benefits through best use of assets, and to take opportunities to benefit from available grants;

2.5.6 **Supporting regeneration.** Through the support of significant infrastructure and regeneration projects such as the redevelopment of the London Road Industrial Estate and the Newbury Town Centre master planning.

2.5.7 **Joint working to deliver affordable housing.** Working jointly with Sovereign Housing Association, through a Joint Venture to bring forward affordable housing

2.6 Action Plan/deliverables

Action plan for the deliverables proposed to ensure West Berkshire Council achieves the outcomes necessary to achieve its aims and objectives are summarised as:

- 1. Asset Management Strategy, minor update annually, and refresh in line with Council Strategy;
- 2. The Asset Management Strategy is to help inform the Capital Programme to assist with the annual refresh of the programme;
- 3. To bring up to date and then maintain assets data on the Property Database;
- 4. To assist the operational Services to refresh the Service Plans and Asset Management Plans which come from them;
- 5. To establish, set against the service requirements, the efficiency of both the corporate buildings and operational buildings, giving regard to space utilisation and cost when benchmarked against alternative accommodation;
- 6. To review all land/built assets through an 'asset challenge' process;
- 7. To carry out a rolling programme of condition surveys of all assets and offer an annual refresh of prioritised 'condition' based works within the capital programme;
- 8. To agree and progress actions coming from the One Public Estate partnership;
- 9. To work toward the implementation of WBC as a 'corporate landlord';
- 10. To work to promote and develop opportunities for the transfer of assets to the community, including through the 'devolution' programme. [Appendix D](#) offers detail on the asset transfer process;
- 11. To represent WBC as landowner in any opportunities related to the joint venture between West Berkshire Council and Sovereign Housing Association;
- 12. To manage the commercial property portfolio in accordance with the Property Investment Strategy;
- 13. To act for WBC in emerging wider asset investment opportunities, aligning with emerging new strategies (Environment Strategy and Housing Strategy).

Additionally the following section 'Approach to Asset Management' offers detailed information on the elements summarised in this section.

2.7 'Plan on a Page'

The manner in which West Berkshire Council carries out its approach to Asset Management is summarised in the following 'Plan on a Page' offering a single visual representation of the strategy.

Asset Management Strategy 2020 to 2023 'Plan on a Page'		
Key Principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none">1. The operational estate is an enabler, not driver of the service delivery;2. The commercial estate will achieve revenue income streams to benefit council services;3. We will ensure the estate is fit for purpose and maintained in good condition;4. We will make efficient and effective use of the estate;5. We will maximise value for money from the estate;6. We will seek to implement a Corporate Landlord model for the management of the estate;7. We will explore the potential for flexible and shared use of the estate for the public benefit.		
Overview and context: <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ WBC owns and operates from 385 built or land assets;▪ Assets include schools, leisure centres, residential and car parks;▪ A significant number of assets are owned freehold, but leasehold ownership is in place for some assets;▪ Affordable housing stock in West Berkshire is primarily held by Housing Associations but WBC retains ownership of emergency accommodation, DIY shared ownership (DIYSO) and caretaker properties. Drivers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">A. Improved public services;B. Financial efficiency, income generation, budget reduction and capital receipts;C. Greater community involvement in local services;D. Improved staff productivity, retention and recruitment. Enablers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Berkshire 'One Public Estate' initiative;b) The potential for 'Devolution' of assets to Town and Parish Councils;c) Joint working with Housing Associations for the delivery of affordable housing;d) The capital investment in our estate.		Action Plan/ Deliverables: <ul style="list-style-type: none">1) Review the Asset Management Strategy annually, with major refresh every four years;2) Asset Management Strategy is to inform and contribute to the Council Strategy;3) To record and maintain property data on the Asset Management database;4) To review the corporate estate to ensure efficient and economic utilisation;5) To review the Operational Service Plans and assess efficient utilisation of the estate;6) To assess the operating cost of operational and corporate buildings against benchmarks;7) To invest capital funds to ensure the condition of the estate is maintained in suitable condition;8) To continue to progress opportunities through the One Public Estate forum;9) Joint Venture working with Sovereign Housing Association;10) To management the commercial property portfolio in accordance with the Property Investment Strategy.

Part B – Approach to Asset Management



3. Approach to Asset Management

3.1 The estate

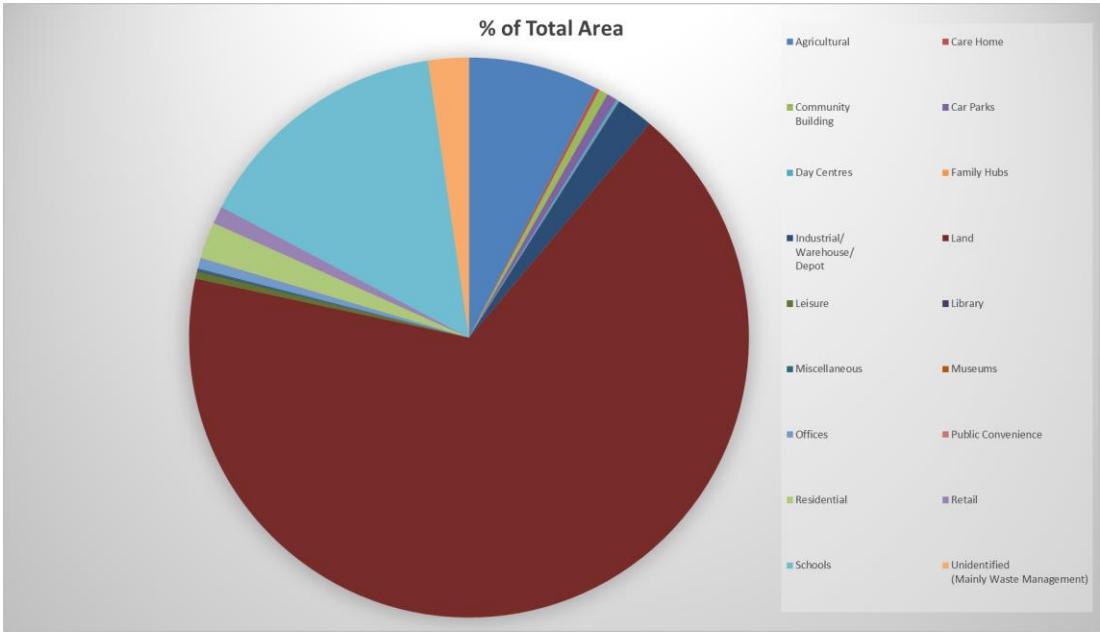
West Berkshire Council owns a substantial and diverse property and land estate, both held in urban and rural locations. Properties are held primarily for the delivery of frontline public services or generally to support the key objectives of the Council whether directly or indirectly.

The diverse portfolio includes not just schools, family hubs, libraries, care homes, museums, leisure centres, waste recycling centres but also commercial property let to other organisations bringing revenue income which directly contributes to the Council’s service delivery, and farms let to tenant farmers.

A significant amount of the land assets either are registered as common land, public open space or are let to other tiers of local government such as town councils and parish councils.

The affordable housing stock in West Berkshire is primarily held by Housing Associations, mainly Sovereign Housing but West Berkshire Council retains ownership of residential emergency accommodation and do it yourself shared ownership (DIYSO) properties as well as caretakers properties for its schools.

The following represents how the asset ownership of the council is shared:

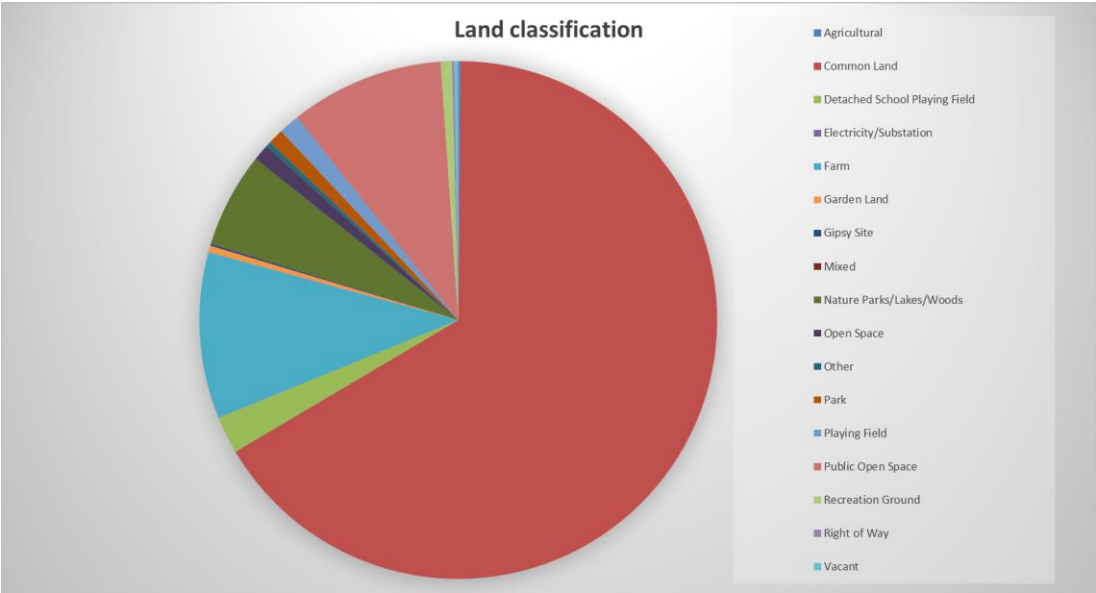


Land 67.2%	Agriculture 7.5%	Schools 14.9%	Care homes 0.2%
Community bldg 0.5%	Car parks 0.6%	Day centres 0.1%	*Family hubs 0.1%
Warehouse/ind 2.1%	Leisure 0.4%	Libraries 0.7%	Misc 0.1%
*Museums 0.1%	Offices 0.6%	*Public conv' 0.1%	Residential 2.1%
Retail 1.0%	Waste management 1.7%		

* Nominal – rounded up to 0.1%

3.2 Land use/classification

A significant amount of the land/property assets of the council is comprised of land/agriculture, largely open and undeveloped. The following shows how this land is classified.



Common land 66.3%	Farm land 10.4%	Public open space 9.6%	Parks/lakes/woods 5.9%
Open space 1.0%	Garden 0.4%	Agriculture 0.1%	Detached schl field 2.3%
*Elec/sub-stn 0.1%	Gypsy 0.1%	Playing field 1.3%	Recreation ground 0.7%
Right of way 0.2%	Park 1.0%	Vacant 0.2%	*Mixed 0.1%
'other' 0.3%			

* Nominal – rounded up to 0.1%

3.3 The decision making process

3.3.1 Roles and responsibilities

To successfully deliver the strategy, through its asset plans, this requires clear roles and responsibilities within the organisation and support from across West Berkshire Council.

Senior Management

The Chief Executive Officer and Executive Directors are to lead on the overall organisational culture for asset management and drive the links between the asset management strategy and the organisational objectives.

The Executive Director for Resources is to be responsible for leading asset management decision making at ‘board’ level, principally Asset Management Group and Capital Strategy Group.

Operational Directors/Heads of Service

Heads of Service are to be the link with the operational business of the Services and form linkages between the Service Asset Management Plans and the Strategy.

Asset Management Lead

The Service Manager for the Property Team is to act as the lead officer for asset management and property matters, both in terms of the planned activities and links with the Services.

Portfolio Holder for Property and Assets

The Executive Portfolio Member for Property is to act as the key contact for and link between the asset management process and the Executive Members.

This will include close involvement in asset management decisions through governance forums. The Property Services Manager is responsible for keeping the Portfolio Holder informed of key aspects of the asset management functions and key decisions required.

3.3.2 Asset Management Group (AMG)

The Asset Management Group (AMG) is the key forum on matters related to the management of the Council's assets. AMG considers and offers recommendation to the Council in its formal decision making.

The group is formed from both Officers from across the organisation and elected Executive Members.

Membership and Terms of Reference for the Asset Management Group is shown in appendix **A**.

3.3.3 Capital Strategy Group

The Asset Management Group is a subordinate group to the Capital Strategy Group (CSG). CSG ensures the Council's capital strategy is being well managed and that the key objectives of the capital strategy are being met, these being:

- Enable the Council's assets and systems to be maintained and improved, to enable the effective and efficient delivery of the Council's key priorities as set out in the Council Strategy 2021/22 to 2023/24;
- To ensure that capital investment is affordable within the terms of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS);
- To target funding at Council priorities, within available resources, in particular to maintain and improve the highways network and schools and to improve the efficiency of Council services through investment in ICT.
- The direction of the organisation through its Asset Management Strategy and associated Service Plans and decisions of the Asset Management Group has a direct influence on the direction of the capital programme.

3.3.4 Other asset management forums

A number of other forums exist for the management of specific asset related activities. These are:

- Corporate Programme Board
- Devolution – Officer liaison group
- Accommodation Group
- Working groups for specific projects
- One Public Estate
- Place Making Group

Each of these groups has the potential to make proposals which relate to or impact the asset management of the Council and proposals made by these groups are to be referred to the Asset Management Group for discussion and where necessary decision.

The route for decisions related to property assets is shown in appendix **B**.

3.3.5 Decision making and the council constitution

All decisions made by the Asset Management Group are required to be within the decision making cycle of the Council's Constitution.

This is particularly relevant when considering either acquisition or disposal of an asset (whether freehold or leasehold).

'Part 3 - Scheme of Delegation' is particularly relevant which gives authority to Heads of Service to make decisions (within thresholds) on matters relating to borrowing of capital, housing and the purchase and sale of land and property.

For decisions which fall outside of the delegated authority thresholds any decision made by the Asset Management Group related to the acquisition or disposal of an asset will require final approval by the Council's Executive.

3.4 The Property Services Team

West Berkshire Council's Property Services Team is an internally resourced team of property professionals. The team is responsible for a range of property based services. These are:

- Strategic Asset Management (including asset data management);
- Property based Technical Compliance (eg – asbestos, legionella and fire);
- Maintenance surveying support for corporate buildings;
- Facilities Management (of the main corporate office buildings);
- Project Management of capital construction projects and capital maintenance projects;
- Health and Safety Services.

Each of the different elements of the Property Services Team's role contribute to the overall asset management strategy.

The Property Services Team works closely with other internal teams in delivering its services, including Planning, Building Control and Legal Services.

The Property Services Team is responsible for the Asset Management Strategy as well as delivering the projects which are formed from it.

A copy of the Property Services team structure chart is attached in appendix **C**.

3.5 Asset data management

The management of data forms an important part of the overall management of the estate and its assets. The volume of data can be considerable.

3.5.1 The Property Services Team is responsible for the data collection and recording for the Council and this system is used to:

- Support the continuous management and maintenance of the property assets;
- To satisfy statutory and other external reporting;
- To maintain an accurate and complete asset register.

3.5.2 The property database records the following key information:

- Unique Property reference Number
- Site address
- Site ownership status
- Size of the site
- Building scale
- Lease information

3.5.3 Collaboration with Services is also key to maintaining accurate data and close communication is required between those managing the operational estate and the Property Services Team managing the data.

3.6 Asset priorities

3.6.1 In achieving the outcomes expected of the Asset Management Strategy and the corporate objectives it helps deliver, there are a number of Council priorities that drive the best use of a given asset.

It can be the case that when deciding the best approach for a site, that these priorities compete for the asset, and it is key that the Asset Management Group considers all of the available options on a site by site basis, but giving regard to the organisations overall objectives.

3.6.2 When deciding on the best approach for any asset, the following priorities exist:

- Retain for the operational use of a Service;
- Retain for Corporate Services;
- Re-assign/redevelop for purposes of revenue income;
- Allocate for redevelopment of affordable housing (including through available Joint Venture housing agreements);
- Transfer the asset (community transfer or devolution);
- Dispose of for capital receipt.

3.7 Reviewing the estate

3.7.1 To ensure the estate is being managed most effectively, the process of reviewing the estate and its assets is a continuous one, by way of 'asset challenge'.

3.7.2 Reviewing the estate is driven by a number of factors:

1. The up to date provision of Operational Service Plans;
2. The outcomes from activities such as One Public Estate and Joint ventures;
3. The outcomes of asset transfers through the devolution process;
4. Changes in legislation relevant to assets.

3.7.3 In property terms the assets require to be assessed in performance terms on a regular basis against the following criteria:

- The cost performance of the building (revenue and capital) as a comparison with other buildings and industry benchmarks;
- Space usage and efficiency of use;
- Surplus space.

As well as the quantitative measures, the review will also give consideration to whether the asset is achieving the objectives of the Service, the customer, and operational demands.

To react to changes over time, the Asset Management Strategy itself and the plans formed under it will be reviewed.

3.8 Asset disposal

3.8.1 The disposal of an asset is one of a number of criteria for assessing an asset and normally disposal of an asset will be on the basis that the asset is surplus.

3.8.2 Any disposal of an asset will be formed on the basis that:

- An assessment of other available opportunities has been completed;
- The asset disposal has received the approval of Asset Management Group;
- Approval has been received either by Delegated Authority or from WBC Executive in accordance with WBC Constitution;
- The disposal demonstrates 'best consideration' or has received approval in accordance with General Disposal Consent 2003 at a value below best consideration.

3.8.3 The review of assets through continuous assessment with operational services, will identify assets which potentially are surplus and available for consideration for disposal.

3.9 Working in partnership

The Council has strong links with a number of organisations both with other Berkshire Unitary Authorities through shared services and external organisations, including community groups and charities, all helping to deliver high quality public services.

This partnership approach is being developed to ensure that the public assets owned by West Berkshire Council with wider assets held within Berkshire are being managed effectively.

3.9.1 One Public Estate

One Public Estate (OPE) is an established national programme delivered in partnership by the Cabinet Office Government Property Unit (GPU) and the Local Government Association (LGA). It provides practical and technical support and funding to councils to deliver ambitious property-focused programmes in collaboration with central government and other public sector partners.

OPE partnerships across the country have shown the value of working together across the public sector and taking a strategic approach to asset management. At its heart, the programme is about getting more from our collective assets - whether that's catalysing major service transformation such as health and social care integration and benefits reform; unlocking land for new homes and commercial space; or creating new opportunities to save on running costs or generate income. This is encompassed in three core objectives:

1. creating economic growth (new homes and jobs)
2. delivering more integrated, customer-focused services
3. Generating efficiencies, through capital receipts and reduced running costs.

West Berkshire Council is working with all of the Berkshire Unitary Authorities as well as Thames Valley Police, the Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service and the NHS Estate in recognition of the opportunities presented through the OPE environment.

Acting as the Berkshire Property Partnership, West Berkshire Council and its partners has been successful in obtaining £500,000 of OPE funding to develop projects and continues to promote Berkshire wide projects through bidding to ongoing rounds of both One Public Estate and Land Release Fund opportunities.

3.9.2 Place making

We are aiming for high quality place-making to support clean and inclusive growth. Our ambition is to protect and enhance our distinctive West Berkshire quality of place, to improve quality of life for our residents and attract and retain those investors, entrepreneurs, skilled workers and visitors who will contribute to future economic growth.

Our aim is for a holistic approach to place that enables inclusive and sustainable growth; a better understanding of the relationship between investment in place and economic performance; development of our environmental assets; attracting inward investment; improving place competitiveness; coordinating activity and strategic funding.

It is clear from recent round table discussions hosted by Thames Valley LEP and from the National Infrastructure Strategy that central government focus on investment is now shifting, with green recovery, decarbonisation and digital at the forefront.

The newly formed West Berkshire Place Making Group has defined specific areas for Place investment aligning to those set out by the TV LEP.

Five areas of 'Place' infrastructure development are proposed:

- Digital Connectivity
- Green Energy and Infrastructure
- Sustainable and Connected Transport
- Economic Recovery
- Skills, Innovation & Human Capital

3.9.3

West Berkshire Council is already operating successful shared services with other local authorities across some of its services including Building Control Solutions (in partnership with Wokingham Borough Council and Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead) and Public Protection Services (in partnership with Bracknell Forest District Council and Wokingham Borough Council).

3.9.4 Asset Transfer and Devolution

West Berkshire Council is working with Community Groups, Parish and Town Councils to help maintain or improve services, which can include best use of property and land assets.

The Council's discretionary powers are now supported by statutory backing, to enable the transfer of its building assets to community groups and town and parish councils.

West Berkshire Council gives consideration to transferring assets through two routes:

1. *Community Asset Transfer Policy*

Community Asset Transfer is the transfer of the Council's land and buildings to community and voluntary organisations at less than best consideration, normally on a leasehold arrangement.

The purpose of the policy is to set out a framework to show how West Berkshire Council will consider requests from the community and voluntary sector to use the Council's land and buildings.

2. *Devolution transfer*

A devolution prospectus has been developed by WBC for the devolution of services and assets.

Devolution is about devolving, primarily to Town and Parish Councils, services and assets which the community feel would add value locally.

Devolution does not include statutory services, it is about those services which the Council has had to reduce or stop altogether and which local communities feel should be delivered at the most appropriate level of government.

As part of the Devolution agenda, a Parish Portal has been developed. This Portal provides Parish and Town Councils with a range of information to support both service and asset transfers.

Summary of the process is attached in appendix **D**.

3.9.5 Joint ventures

West Berkshire Council has a strong working relationship with Sovereign Housing Association (SHA) as the largest social housing provider in West Berkshire. To further develop the provision of affordable housing the Council has formed a joint venture partnership with SHA with the key aim of developing affordable housing.

Part C – Services and the Corporate Estate



4. Operational Services

4.1 Key services

Public services are delivered through a range of distinct Services, some services which rely on the estate to enable them to deliver their service and others which rely only on the corporate offices.

1. Adult Social Care
2. Children and Family Services
3. Education Service
4. Development and Planning
5. Public Protection and Culture
6. Environment

4.2 Other services

In addition to the key operational services which have a direct requirement for assets, further services exist within the Council which do not have wider asset requirements, other than the use of the corporate offices. These are:

1. Commissioning
2. Customer Services and ICT
3. Finance and Property
4. Strategy and Governance
5. Public Health and Wellbeing

4.3 Service Plans and Asset Management Plans

Each Service will conduct its business through Service Plans, offering an expected operational direction for the ongoing and future business of the Service.

Such operational service plans will in turn drive the creation of an Asset Management Plan specific to each Service which relies upon the estate to conduct its business. In some cases this will simply rely upon the corporate offices to deliver services and in other cases requires a specific suite of building assets to deliver the services.

5. Corporate Strategies

5.1 Delivering the Capital Programme

- 5.1.1 A significant amount of the capital programme is delivered by the transport and Countryside Service for the highways improvement programme. The Property Services team manages construction projects for the built asset environment, formed principally from the Education capital programme and capital maintenance.

- 5.1.2 Projects are managed using a formal Project Management Methodology (PMM) based on industry accepted Prince2 process methodology. This offers consistency of method and best opportunity for a positive outcome.

The management of projects is supported by the use of the appointment of external specialist consultants, such as architects, cost consultants, services engineers and health & safety specialists.

- 5.1.3 The appointment of external consultants and contractors is conducted in accordance with public sector procurement legislation and the West Berkshire Council constitution. This can be by way of open tendering or through the use of public sector frameworks.

- 5.1.4 Governance of capital projects is carried out through Project Boards which monitor performance of individual projects and the progress of all projects on the capital programme is monitored by the Capital Strategy Group to ensure spend is being directed in a timely fashion.

5.2 Maintaining the estate

The built asset environment can be expressed in terms of the education estate and the non-education or corporate estate.

- 5.2.1 In the case of schools, the Education Service conducts needs based assessments of sufficiency, suitability and condition. The Education Service continues to be successful in achieving capital grant allocations to address capital maintenance in schools.
- 5.2.2 Additionally a number of successful bids has resulted in significant condition issues in some schools being addressed through the Priority Schools Building Programme 2.
- 5.2.3 For the non-education estate, conditions surveys of all council owned buildings drives the basis for capital maintenance funding, which is distributed to the Services accordingly.

5.3 Corporate Offices

5.3.1 Introduction and objectives

The council has adopted a Mobile and Flexible Working Policy ('Timelord'), which aims to reduce accommodation costs, reduce time for employees spent travelling, and improve face-to-face time for our customers. Employees are provided with the technology to work from the office, at home or from other locations.

This working practice was adopted following a successful project to implement new flexible working practices to offer the benefits:

1. For West Berkshire Council
 - Increased productivity for flexible staff
 - Reduced travel and expense
 - Reduced office foot print
 - Savings in revenue and capital costs

2. For customer
 - Increased face to face advisory time available
 - Quicker and easier for customers to contact WBC staff
3. For staff
 - Improved staff satisfaction
 - Reduced travel time and cost
 - Improved work/home life balance
 - Reduced stress and sickness

The flexible working policy has enabled the council to reduce its office footprint by approximately 30% from the pre-project baseline.

The core corporate buildings the council operates from are Market Street (Newbury), West Street House (Newbury) West Point (Newbury) and Turnhams Green (Calcot).

5.3.2 Strategy for delivery

- The flexible working policy has been operating for some time now and has settled into being 'business as usual'
- The continued efficient use of the corporate office space is monitored through an Accommodation Group, which examines space requirements
- With the change to working practices as a consequence of Covid-19 during 2020 being the requirement for more home working wherever possible, this has lead to further consideration regarding the long term corporate office requirement. Consultation with staff has commenced and a working group is examining the potential for future changes to the flexible working system.
- Exploring opportunities for service partners to benefit from using council office space to deliver services benefitting the people of West Berkshire.

5.4 The devolved estate and Corporate Landlord

- 5.4.1 West Berkshire Council's current model for the management of its operational estate is based on a devolved method of management, with operational services responsible for the revenue and capital maintenance, budget management and health and safety management of the buildings within their service.
- 5.4.2 Following consultation with and guidance from The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), WBC will, over the period of this Asset Management Strategy 2020 to 2023 be migrating its estate to be a Corporate Landlord model.
- 5.4.3 This will identify services within the council which will benefit from centralised control of all estate functions, bringing them within the management of the Property Services team. This will offer a single point of responsibility, and improve prioritisation of budgets across the estate.

5.5 Commercial property

- 5.5.1 Traditionally local authority property acquisition has been for the direct purpose of operational delivery of services. West Berkshire Council's property estate largely comprises properties necessary to deliver public services and has a reasonably small commercial property portfolio located on the London Road Industrial Estate in Newbury and the Kennet Enterprise Centre in Hungerford.
- 5.5.2 However increasing financial pressures combined with significantly reduced resources meant that West Berkshire Council needed to consider the potential opportunities available to it to generate new revenue income streams.
- 5.5.3 On 09th May 2017 the Council approved as an addendum to the Treasury Management Strategy for financial year 2017/18 a Property Investment Strategy to invest capital funds for the purchase of commercial property.
- 5.5.4 The Property Investment Strategy is reviewed annually as part of the Capital Strategy with current review March 2021.
- 5.5.5 The council has spent a total of approximately £62m on commercial property, across a number of sectors including offices, industrial and retail. This has created a diverse commercial property portfolio to protect the rental income.
- 5.5.6 It is proposed to manage the portfolio in its current form, by creating individual asset management plans, to ensure long term rental income, and where required capital investment in the current assets to protect or enhance both the lease value and capital value of the assets.



Appendix A – Asset Management Group, terms of reference

Purpose:	To convey the terms of reference and role of the Asset Management Group and business/expected outcomes for 2019/2020.
Author:	Richard Turner Property Services Manager
1	Purpose/objective of the group
1.1	<p>To ensure that the strategic asset management of the council's land and built assets is adequately managed included but not limited to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Senior Officer and Member oversight of asset decisions; 2. That decisions align with wider political and strategic direction; 3. Cohesive direction for the council's assets; 4. The effective and efficient utilisation of the council's land/built assets.
2	Reporting and Accountability
2.1	AMG does not in itself act as a formal decision making forum within the Constitution of West Berkshire Council, but acts as a significant forum for ensuring adequate control, debate and influence on matters related to strategic asset management of the Council's land and built assets to better inform the decisions of the council.
2.2	AMG is a sub-ordinate group to the Capital Strategy Group (CSG) and reports key strategic issues in to CSG, especially where such issues impact on or have the potential to impact or influence the Capital Strategy or capital programme within it.
2.3	<p>AMG is to receive, consider and make recommendation on reports which relate to a land or building asset proposal which requires formal decision through the corporate cycle.</p> <p>AMG is to have first sight of such reports prior to the reports consideration at any formal governance cycles, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corporate Board • Operations Board • Strategy Board • Executive • Council
2.4	Reporting to AMG is overseen by the Property Services team within the council, with individual proposals reported by operational services where the proposal relates to an asset within a specific service.

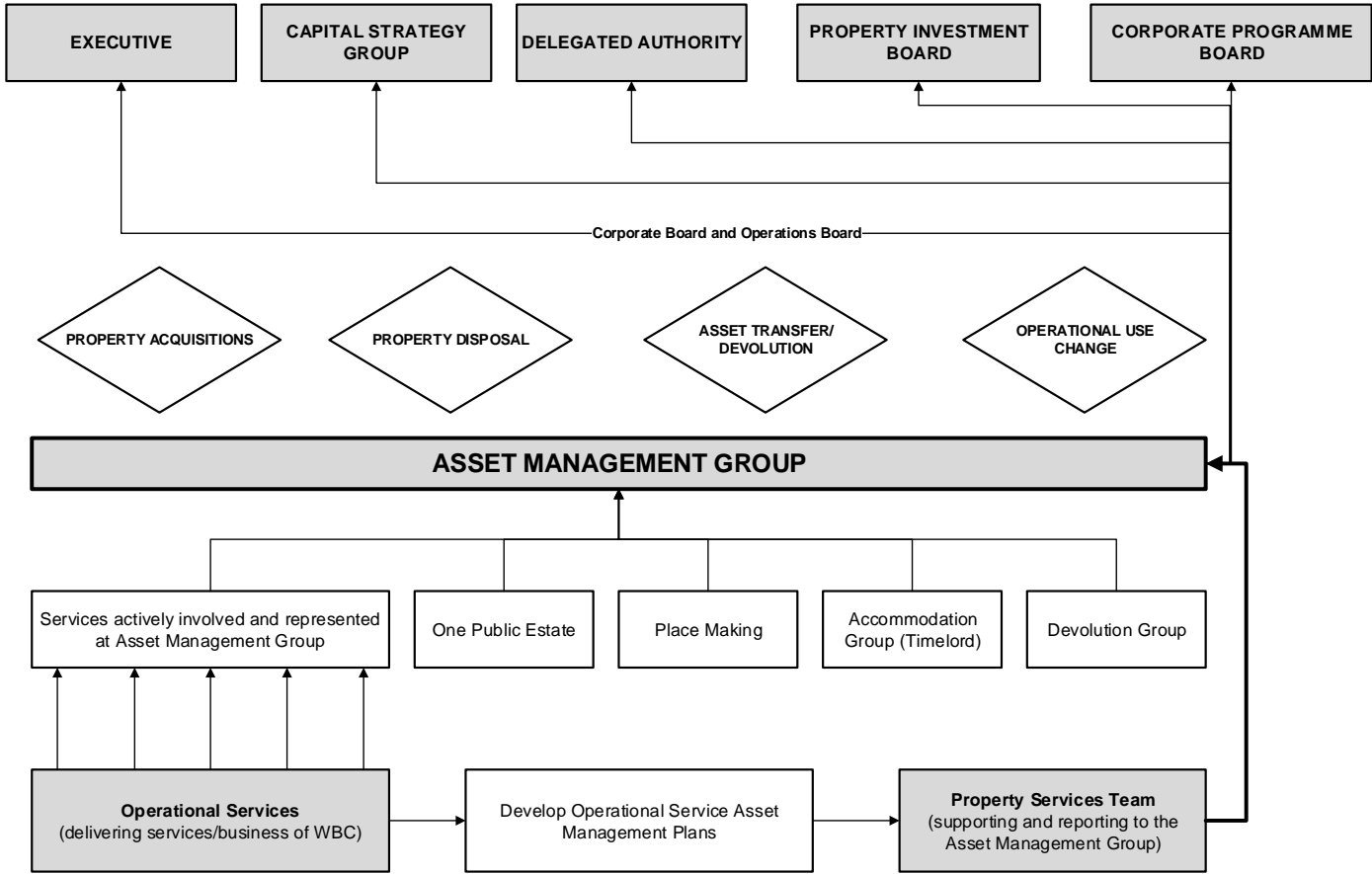
3	Key objectives
3.1	To receive regular reports on the status and progress of key strategic land and property asset decisions.
3.2	To receive regular reports on land/property assets which are or have the potential to become surplus to operational use by the council.
3.3	<p>To receive individual reports ahead of them advancing through the corporate cycle, (in accordance with the WBC constitution) recommending decision which relates to or impacts on a land or built asset.</p> <p>This will normally relate to the acquisition, disposal, lease in or out, or transfer of an asset.</p>
3.4	<p>In circumstances where a decision relating to or impacting on a land/property asset is within the thresholds of Delegated Officer Authority, but is sufficient in nature for the Property Services Manager to wish to bring the subject to the attention of AMG for consideration.</p> <p>This will normally relate to the acquisition, disposal, lease in or out, or transfer of an asset.</p>
3.5	Receive updates on progress with the proposed transfer of land/property assets through the Devolution process.
3.6	<p>Receive individual reports as required on assets based initiatives both from within the council and nationally, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. One Public Estate; 2. Housing development; 3. Energy management initiatives; 4. Fire safety initiatives.
3.7	To complete an asset challenge process to review all assets within 18 months and ensure optimum use of assets.

4	Significant activities 2019/2020		
4.1	The following activities are expected to be of specific interest or significance to AMG in the period April 2019 to March 2020: 1. One Public Estate (shared service, corporate landlord); 2. Housing Development (feasibility of affordable housing development); 3. Joint Venture with Sovereign Housing Association; 4. WBDC Sites for inclusion on Local Plan; 5. Grazeley development.		
5	Routine management of AMG		
5.1	WBDC Property Services team is to manage the AMG in general terms including: 1. Keeping a forward plan of meetings; 2. Arranging attendance and apologies of all members and attendees; 3. Producing minutes with listed actions; 4. To prepare, collate and issue all reports and documents for AMG meetings.		
5.2	The Property Services Manager is to be lead reporting Officer for each AMG meeting, supplemented by reports from individual authors. The Property Services Manager is to keep the AMG Chairman and Executive Portfolio Holder informed of significant issues being brought to AMG, through pre-meetings and portfolio briefings.		
5.3	AMG is to meet with a frequency of approximately eight weekly (or approximately six times in a calendar year), depending on availability of those attending.		
6	Membership and attendance		
6.1	<u>Chairman</u> Joseph Holmes Executive Director Resources Directorate <u>Membership</u> Andy Walker Head of Finance and Property Resources Directorate Cllr. Ross Mackinnon Council Member for Bradfield and Executive Portfolio: for Finance, Property and Procurement Cllr. Howard Woollaston Council Member for Lambourn and Executive Portfolio: Internal Governance Janet Weekes Housing Service Manager Place Directorate Andy Sharp Executive Director People Directorate		

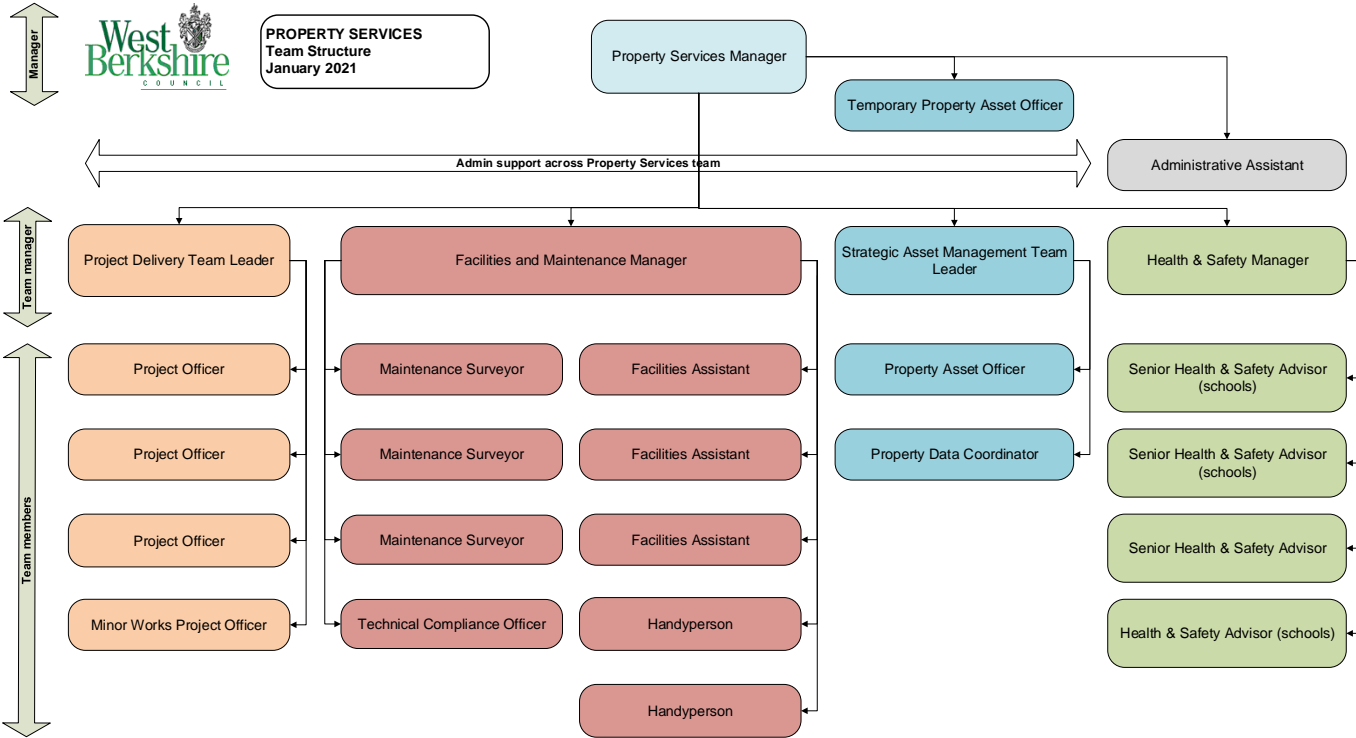
6.2	The following are WBC Officers with regular attendance, who either represents a significant involvement in the council's assets or offer technical support to the group.		
	Richard Turner	Property Services Manager	Property Services
	Ann McManners	Strategic Asset Management Team Leader	Property Services
	Colin Broughton	Strategic Asset Officer	Property Services
	Shiraz Sheikh	Interim Legal Services Manager	Legal Services
	Sarah Mitchell	Senior Accountant – Capital	Accountancy

6.3	Admin support and secretarial support including meeting forward plan arrangements and minute taking		
	Contact:	Sasha Lang	
	01635 519889	Sasha.Lang1@westberks.gov.uk	

Appendix B – Decision route for property assets



Appendix C – Property Services structure chart



Appendix D – Asset Transfer

Devolution

1.0 What is Devolution?

- 1.1 As part of the Council's strategic priority of "Communities Helping Themselves" a devolution prospectus has been developed. The prospectus includes the transfer of services and assets.
- 1.2 Devolution is about devolving, primarily to Town and Parish Councils, services and assets which the community feel would add value locally.
- 1.3 Devolution does not include statutory services, it is about those services which the Council has had to reduce or stop altogether and which local communities feel should be delivered at the most appropriate level of government.
- 1.4 In relation to the transfer of assets, a formal decision making process has been established. This includes the Devolution Officers Group processing and vetting applications followed by the Asset Management Group and then through the normal Executive cycle.
- 1.5 As part of the Devolution agenda, a Parish Portal has been developed. This Portal provides Parish and Town Councils with a range of information to support both service and asset transfers.

Community Asset Transfer Policy

2.0 What is Community Asset Transfer?

- 2.1 Community Asset Transfer is the transfer of the Council's land and buildings to community and voluntary organisations at less than best consideration, normally on a leasehold arrangement.
- 2.2 The policy will apply when either:
 - A community or other voluntary organisation approaches the Council to request the use of a Council property asset, or
 - The Council identifies an asset as being surplus to its requirements and is considering how best to dispose of it.

3.0 Purpose of the Policy

- 3.1 The Council has a disposal policy which is contained in the Asset Management Plan and the general presumption is that disposals will be on the open market for best price. Reference is made in the Asset Management Plan about disposals to not for profit organisations. This community and asset transfer policy is to give fuller guidance on how to achieve that.
- 3.2 The purpose of the policy is to set out a framework to show how West Berkshire Council will consider requests from the community and voluntary sector to use the Council's land and buildings. It is also sets out the information that is required from the community and voluntary sector and the expectations for the transfer fulfilling the Council's strategic objectives and to empower local communities.

4.0 National Policy Context

- 4.1 National Government has, for some time, encouraged local authorities to involve local people in the direct running of their communities and has produced legislation, such as the Local Government Public Involvement Act 2007 and the Localism Act 2011, to create strong communities and deliver better public services through a rebalancing of the relationship between local people and public bodies.
- 4.2 The Localism Act has introduced the concept of the Community Right to Bid. This process allows relevant bodies (e.g. Parish Councils and Community Groups) to ask for assets of community value to be listed. This effectively means that the asset cannot be sold until the relevant body has been given a chance to confirm that they wish to bid for the asset. If so they must also be given sufficient time to submit their bid. A separate process has been introduced to manage this requirement, although the properties and applicants involved are likely to be similar to those affected by the Community Asset Transfer Policy.

- 4.3 The Quirk Review undertaken in 2007 set out the benefits to local groups by the management or ownership of public property assets which, in turn leads to stronger communities. The Quirk review recognised that the voluntary and community groups would need assistance to understand the risks and rewards of community asset transfer.

5.0 Local Context and Links to Council Strategies

- 5.1 Working in partnership with the local voluntary sector should help the Council to achieve some of its own objectives such as those in the Council Strategy including to reshape the way cultural, countryside and other services are delivered, with significantly greater involvement from local communities, the voluntary sector and parish councils and seek to transfer assets and services where these can clearly be delivered more effectively.

6.0 Criteria for community asset requests

- 6.1 When considering requests for a community asset transfer the Council must bear in mind the following in relation to the affected property:
 - The need to raise capital receipts.
 - The loss of any income or opportunity costs.
 - Requirements for the property for direct service delivery by the Council.
 - The benefits to all parties by transferring the property.
 - That, where the property is needed to deliver a service, additional ongoing revenue costs are not incurred.
- 6.2 *The Property*
 - The property must be owned by the Council, either freehold or leasehold and be legally capable of being transferred.
 - It must be surplus to operational requirements.
 - The transfer of the property has been approved by the Asset Management Group.
 - The transfer will deliver a strategic or operational benefit to the Council.
- 6.3 *The Use*
 - The use will support the Council's strategic priorities set out in the Council Strategy.
 - The property will be used for the benefit of the local community to enable local people to have access to services or facilities that meet their local needs.
 - The use will be inclusive of a wide and diverse range of people.
 - The use will deliver a demonstrable social, economic or environmental benefit to the local community.
 - The use is not already provided in the locality.
 - The use to be environmentally sustainable and Disability Discrimination Act compliant.

The Applicant

- Interested organisations must be community led with strong local links.
- Be properly constituted and be capable of being a legal entity.
- Not for profit.
- Be financially viable.
- Have good governance through open and accountable processes.
- Have the skills and capacity to deliver the service and manage the property.
- Have a well prepared business case.
- Have a track record of delivering similar projects either as an organisation or by way of key individuals within the organisation.

6.5 *Basis of transfer of property*

- Transfers will usually be on a leasehold basis. This makes it easier to limit the use for community benefit.
- Freehold will be considered if the applicant pays full market value.
- The applicant will be responsible for all management of the property including health and safety matters and all required surveys.
- The use is to be for community benefit and the organisation is to provide continuing evidence of a community benefit on a periodic basis.
- If planning consent is required then the applicant must obtain this.
- The applicant will be expected to meet all the running, maintenance and repair costs of the property.
- Collaboration and sharing of the property with other community or voluntary groups will be encouraged.
- The Council may be prepared to take back the property in cases where the transfer has been unsuccessful.

7.0 **The Community Asset Transfer Process**

- 7.1 A property asset is identified, either by WBC as being surplus to requirements or by a request by a community or voluntary organisation for a particular property. In the latter case the property may be operational so consultation will be required with the service to see if the property could be released from operational use.
- 7.2 Valuation undertaken bearing in mind that the transfer may be at less than best consideration.
- 7.3 Expressions of interest invited from suitable groups.
- 7.4 Expressions of interest appraised by Asset Management Group to include the relevant portfolio holder and recommendation to be made to Management Board.
- 7.5 Short listed groups requested to submit a business case for the transfer.
- 7.6 Business cases appraised by the Asset Management Group and relevant portfolio holder along with the option of an open market disposal. The assessment matrix shown later can be used to assist in the decision making process.
- 7.7 Decision recommended to Executive if outside the delegation of the Head of Legal Services.
- 7.8 Terms agreed with successful applicant and lease completed.
- 7.9 The timescale for applications will vary depending upon the complexity of the proposal, the number of applicants, the route it needs to take through the Council's governance structure and for the completion of the lease. However, applicants should be aware that the process could take 12 months.

- Proposed use and maintenance of the property.
- Details of the local needs that will be met by the proposal and how the benefits will be measured and reported on an annual basis.
- Details of any new jobs that might be created.
- Evidence of local consultation and that there is a demand and local support for the scheme.
- How the scheme fits in with the Council's strategic objectives.
- Evidence of the ability, skills and capacity of the organisation to run the proposed service, including governance details.
- Evidence of the scheme complying with equal opportunity, sustainability and health and safety requirements.
- Financial details of the organisation and how the scheme will be funded, at the outset and going forward.
- Project plan to show likely timescales to set up and fund the scheme.
- A risk assessment and contingency plan in the case that the scheme is not successful.

9.0 **Risks in Community Asset Transfer**

- 9.1 There is an element of risk in a community asset transfer and the potential risks are listed below. These will need to be considered in conjunction with any application.
- Organisation does not have the capacity or skills to take over the property and provide the service, or loses these at a later date.
 - Reliance on key personnel either within the organisation or at the Council, lack of succession planning.
 - Organisation cannot fund the proposed scheme either at the outset or at some time in the future.
 - Property is not used for community purposes or taken over by a minority interest.
 - Transfer contravenes State Aid or procurement regulations.
 - Confusion over roles and responsibilities between the Council and the organisation.
 - Objectives of the organisation are unclear and not aligned to Council objectives.
 - Scheme is not value for money.
 - Potential liability for Council if the scheme fails.
- 9.2 These risks can be reduced by the provision of clear legal documentation and a summary of expectations by each party at the outset.

