

Appendix 6: Council Plan Projects Q1 2025/26

Green = on track, Amber = at risk, Red = off track

Council Plan Priority	Project	Q1	Comments
Equal Communities	Deliver the Education Strategy to reduce education inequality and increase school attendance and attainment for those groups who experience the most disadvantage.	On track	<p>Reading Education Partnership Board have expanded to include early years and HE and FE education, as well as engaging local public schools. School-to-school support and challenge is in place with local school clusters developing local improvement plans. School effectiveness framework in place and used to address issues in specific schools, successful Rapid Improvement actions have supported improved outcomes in schools. Annual School Standards presented to Adults Children and Education Committee, June 2025 provides further detail on the following improvements.</p> <p>Key Stage 2 Reading Writing Maths outcomes improving at a faster rate than national and gap Reading v national reducing. Children with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) more positive increase from 2023 to 2024. Children with SEND support significant increase between 2023 and 2024, above national performance for 2 years. Disadvantaged children improving at a faster rate than national but significant gap remains. Black and/or Black mixed heritage children improving at a faster rate than national but significant gap remains.</p> <p>Persistent Absence is a priority area, including for vulnerable pupils. BFfC restructure has brought attendance support into Education department. Continued promotion of Therapeutic Thinking in Schools and training offer, behaviour reviews in schools.</p> <p>ACE Committee task and finish group established to consider what further partnership and community action can be taken to reduce suspensions and improve attendance.</p>
Equal Communities	Deliver support to help people stop smoking, particularly those working in professions with higher rates of smoking.	At risk	Our stop smoking core contract is in place alongside the enhanced service contract to support our ambition to increase the number of people quitting smoking in Reading. There is a data lag to be considered in reports, and the contract and fiscal year are different. The complete data for Q1 will be updated in Q2.
Equal Communities	Develop approaches to ensure that health and wellbeing is considered across all policy areas.	On track	There has been some substantive progress made to initiate Health in All Policies (HiAP) with the launch of the Public Health HiAP Fund to SLG on 7/7/25 and HiAP overview session facilitated by LGA (overview session on HiAP to Members will take place in the Autumn). The Public Health Restructure proposals consulted on until 3/8/25 will support the HiAP approach across directorates. Leadership and Members commitment

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			needs to be demonstrated in practice to embed HiAP and Health Impact Assessment (HIA) at the formulation stage of projects/policies.
Equal Communities	Deliver the voluntary and community sector compact action plan, including small grants funding.	On track	VCS Compact action plan delivery is continuing. Refresh of the VCS Compact is scheduled for later this year. SGF proposal for 2025/26 to be considered by Leadership Briefing in July - with a view to delivering the SGF during September and December 2025.
Equal Communities	Develop and deliver our place-based approach to enhance access to education, skills, and training.	On track	PBP delivery of existing projects nearly completed. Refresh of PBP actions is currently taking place and scheduled for reporting to Social Inclusion Board in July 2025.
Equal Communities	Provide advice and guidance to residents regarding the cost of living and direct financial support through the Household Support Fund.	On track	HSF scheme for 2025/26 in place and delivering against objectives. Approx. 1400 households supported through the application element, and £75,000 distributed to local VCS organisations. Work to distribute the first round of vouchers to PPFSM and Care Leavers in place.
Equal Communities	Support the Community Safety Partnership and facilitate Safer Neighbourhood Forums to reduce crime and antisocial behaviour.	On track	<p>The Community Partnerships Service have started the annual Community Safety Survey on behalf of the CSP, which will run until the end of August. This will provide information about how residents feel about crime, ASB and safety in the town and will be compared to last year's responses. The service will undertake analysis of this year's results in the next quarter and will present initial findings at the CSP Executive Group in September.</p> <p>The Community Partnerships Service has also been working on an annual report for the CSP that will be published during Quarter 2. This now forms part of an annual programme of work to coincide with an update on activity conducted by the CSP at the summer HNL Committee every year.</p> <p>The Community Partnerships Service has also been working with the Council's Web Team to develop a dedicated Community Safety Partnership Section of the Website, which will launch in July.</p> <p>Safer Neighbourhood Forum Dates have now been set for Autumn and Winter. A review will be undertaken by the Community Safety Team as to impact of the forums under the new model, in preparation for a report to Housing, Neighbourhoods and Leisure Committee in November, which will set out how the Forums have been working under the model introduced last year.</p>

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Equal Communities	Support plans to tackle knife crime, domestic abuse and violence against women and girls.	On track	<p>Domestic Abuse: A procurement exercise has commenced to bring in a consultant to undertake a Strategic Needs Assessment and to develop the new strategy and Action Plan for 2026 - 2029. This work is on track to start in September. A review of the DA Partnership Board has been commissioned and will run from the beginning of July for 6 weeks to determine how effective the Board is working and if improvements are required. This will be presented back to the DA Board and Community Safety Partnership with a view to developing an improvement plan, if required.</p> <p>Knife Crime - The Community Safety Manager is now a member of the TVP Berkshire West Knife Crime meeting, which monitors trends and emerging issues relating to knife crime.</p> <p>Violence Against Women & Girls: Through the work of the Community Safety Partnership, Young Voices is working with Reading Buses on safety in the public realm around buses being a safe space and bus drivers being the safe person.</p> <p>Members of the Community Safety Partnership have met with the Oracle to discuss children's safety. Brighter Futures for Children is meeting with the Children's Society to arrange a training programme with The Oracle security staff.</p> <p>Through Partnership Funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner, the My Way app has had a redesign, for context this is an app we have been recommending to students which has safety tools to help them get home safely. A focus group with students took place in June to provide their thoughts on the redesign.</p> <p>DA Conference: Supporting Survivors for 50 Years Conference was held on 21st May, led by Berkshire Women's Aid & the Community Safety Partnership. It provided vital information for professionals, as well as providing victim survivors to talk to professionals about their experiences and how services could be improved.</p>
Equal Communities	Continue work to prevent and reduce homelessness.	On track	Working with partners, Q1 25-26 has realised 89 successful preventions of homelessness.

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Economic and cultural success	Through the Local Authority New Build programme, deliver 362 new homes at Dee Park and other sites by December 2028.	On track	Delivery progressing with key sites at Hexham Road and Amethyst Lane now on site. Dwyer Road is expected to start on site in the next few weeks. Battle Street Pre Construction Services Agreement has now commenced. Demolition underway at Southcote Lane. Brief developed to appoint contractor to undertake the planning application for Dee Park Phase 3.
Economic and cultural success	Complete the acquisition of Homes for Reading housing stock into the Council by the end of 2026 and re-let the homes to households on the Council's Housing Register.	On track	This project is progressing to plan, with efficient and effective cooperation between many Council teams. Of the 101 homes, 39 have now voided of which 29 have been purchased. 21 of the purchased properties are already being let – 13 by key workers and 8 as temporary accommodation as a meanwhile use for homeless residents. The remaining 8 purchased properties are being advertised and let currently. Work continues to support remaining tenants in finding suitable alternative accommodation. Notices to Quit are being served on properties with expired tenancies on a rolling monthly basis. The decision to retain the Queen's Rd properties has introduced an additional workstream.
Economic and cultural success	Increase the number and timeliness of repairs delivered by our Housing Repairs & Property Services teams.	At risk	Improvement plan is ongoing following the audits and grading by the Regulator for Social Housing.
Economic and cultural success	Progress an updated Local Plan towards adoption to provide a framework to guide decision making on the planning applications for homes and infrastructure.	On track	Local Plan Partial Update submitted for examination on 9 May, and hearings likely to take place in the Autumn. This should enable adoption during 2026, but this will depend on the issues that arise during examination.
Economic and cultural success	Introduce the Additional Licensing Scheme in the private rented sector to improve housing conditions for tenants.	At risk	The scheme is currently going through the Tender process although there is a delay in approving the contract and designation.
Economic and cultural success	In partnership with other Berkshire councils, facilitate the Connect to Work programme to support residents with long term health conditions into work.	On track	This is a Berkshire wide project with Wokingham as the Accountable Body and lead. The delivery plan for the programme has been approved via the Berkshire Prosperity Board and was submitted to the Department for Work and Pensions on 27th May for review. Commissioning arrangements for a prime provider with sub providers across Berkshire are being led by Wokingham Borough Council who are drawing up the specification document as the Accountable Body for Berkshire and Reading will be represented on the procurement decision making panel.
Economic and cultural success	Work in partnership to secure devolution for Reading and the wider area through a new Mayoral Strategic Authority.	At risk	Positive engagement continues between Oxfordshire, Berkshire, and Swindon local authorities. Workstreams have been identified and align with Government criteria and the Berkshire Prosperity Board priorities.

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			The project is rated as amber as the timescales are still uncertain, and details are awaited from Government on future rounds of devolution.
Economic and cultural success	Deliver a new Civic Centre, including a new Central Library and improved Registrars and Customer provision.	At risk	In this quarter delivery of Decarb Works ended. Handover from MSC to RBC was completed. We are completing works following discovery of an issue in an area of the plant that was out of scope but as the fault impacts the wider operations a process of fault finding has been done with MSC design and M&E contractors, and RBC MEP Engineers / RBC Property Services. This has led to replacement pump required. Work has commenced closing out snags which have been identified. Main Works construction has progressed this quarter and we are on week 24 of 60 work programme. Works include the construction of main entrance facade and roof works are progressing well. The courtyard works progressing following completion of scaffold bird cage hoist frame. External Works are ahead of programme with tarmac to the perimeter hardstanding, this will provide MSC access to the elevated platforms which MSX use to fix rain screen cladding. Furniture options for Customer Service and Library have gone on display for staff to review and have been finalised with an order to be placed in July. Attendance to the Disability Forum and Old Peoples Working Group also took place to share designs and get feedback. Public survey was launched updating residents on the Library Design and how feedback from the original consultation was taken into account. Leadership attended site to walk through and view progress and do an official signing of the steel structure. Cartwheeling Boys sculptures fixing method design has been completed by the Structural Engineer and calculations have been provided for MSC fabrication of the subframe.
Economic and cultural success	Improve the technology offer and access to library services funded through the Libraries Improvement Fund.	On track	Progress continues to be made, the purchasing arising is split into 11 lots and 5 are complete with 6 to go. The next purchases should be cabinets for library provision at community centres. All library sites will see installs this quarter and these will be publicised in Q3.
Sustainable and Healthy Environment	Deliver the Bus Service Improvement Plan to improve the reliability of bus services by increasing bus priority.	On track	The revenue elements of the BSIP have been successfully delivered, including investment of £6m into reduced fares to passengers, Figures released in November 2024 showed there had been an 11% increase in bus passenger journeys to 19.5m in 2023/24. The BSIP capital programme continues to progress well, with 3 new bus lanes opened in 24/25 and the new A33 Bus Lane (and pedestrian cycle bridge) due to be complete in October 2025. Further investment has been received from DfT, which has

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			been incorporated into the new BSIP programme, approved by Members and the Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators.
Sustainable and Healthy Environment	Deliver funded active travel schemes to encourage more walking and cycling.	At risk	The Councils (funded) Active Travel Programme is continuing to progress. In terms of behavioural change initiatives, our Active Travel officer engages with schools to support their travel planning, alongside which the Council offers bike ability training through schools, as well as offering adult cycle training. We have also introduced a new pilot "wellbeing walk" programme, providing self-guided walks around the town. In relation to our capital programme, the main scheme being progressed is castle hill / bath road cycle scheme. This is currently going through a design-review alongside members and key stakeholders. This has been identified as "amber" until such time as member feedback and challenge has been resolved, and subject to a financial assessment of the final scheme. Officers continue to manage expectations and are progressing revised designs in line with the feedback received.
Sustainable and Healthy Environment	Complete the £8 million programme of work to improve residential roads and pavements.	On track	Residential road micro asphalt surfacing programme completed. Phases 1, 2 & 3 of 5 completed on the Major / Main Road resurfacing underway and on programme.
Sustainable and Healthy Environment	Adopt the Town Centre Public Realm Strategy to secure funding and improvements to Reading's streets and open spaces.	On track	Still to be adopted in year but delayed due to priority given to Local Plan hearing and amendments required following concerns from Reading Buses. Likely to move from November to March Strategic Environment, Planning and Transport Committee (SEPT) for adoption.
Sustainable and Healthy Environment	Develop electric vehicle charging infrastructure, including charging points, to move away from fossil-fuelled vehicles.	On track	Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) tender in progress. Project timescale is for contract signing by end of 2025. First charge points expected April 2026.
Sustainable and Healthy Environment	Reduce carbon emissions from our buildings, operations, and fleet, including investing in solar panels, energy efficiency in our buildings, and electric vehicles.	At risk	The first quarter of the year involves collecting data for the previous year's carbon footprint calculation. The actions include the full electrification of the civic offices building and this should reduce the emissions associated with this. Other projects are progressing, but carbon savings only materialise once the operational phase is reached and so the currently position of 73% reduction from baseline at 23/24 year remains the most up to date data but is unlikely to be at target levels in 24/25.
Sustainable and Healthy Environment	Work with partners to deliver the Climate Strategy for 2025 to 2030 to achieve a net zero Reading resilient to climate change.	At risk	Data is released at UK level in July each year for the calendar year ending 18 months prior (2023 published July 2025). The 2023 data shows that the emissions were 468kT from Reading Borough which is a reduction of 7% on the previous year but remains above target for the 2030 pathway.

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Sustainable and Healthy Environment	Dispose of property and land that no longer contribute towards the Council's objectives to invest in assets and service transformation.	On track	In this quarter the asset disposal policy has been drafted and went to Transformation & Efficiency Board. Following further input from the Assistant Director of Legal, the final draft will be shared with Corporate Management Team officers for comment and then it will come forward to Leadership before going to Policy Committee for approval. Within the Asset Strategy Action Plan the Community Assets workstream is progressing within the officer group. A one-million-pound sale completed at 16 Bennet Road which is near two thirds of the 2025/26 MTFS Target. Officers will be preparing to market one of the commercial assets – Friars for sale once approval is received.
Sustainable and Healthy Environment	Introduce changes to the waste collection service in line with the 'Simpler Recycling' legislation.	At risk	Report presented to Policy Committee July 21st, report sets out consideration of the Council's options to meet the legislative obligations of simpler recycling and will seek approval to consider in further detail the preferred options, with a further detailed timeline and financial implications paper to be presented to policy Autumn 2025. As with a number of councils across the country, including several in Berkshire, full compliance by April 2026 is challenging for a number of practical and procurement reasons. In particular, the need to secure vehicles and the long lead times expected for delivery. Whilst the project itself is on track, it remains amber as we are unlikely to deliver the project in line with government timelines.
Adults and children	Deliver Family Hubs to bring together a range of support services in one place, reducing escalation of need and the number of children entering care.	At risk	Family Hub design and development has been challenged by the impact of inspection activity and an initial lack of partnership engagement. In response to this and in the wider context of Families First national reform, a new strategic lead has been identified to oversee and energise developments at pace. Following discussion with Statutory and Voluntary sector leaders, partnership support has been secured, and 11 partnership leaders are actively working together to co-design the Family Hub offer. This will allow four Family Hubs to be stood up in the course of 25/26. A Change Delivery Consultant from the Programme Management Office has been identified to provide a clear partnership PMO plan.
Adults and children	Redesign and commission an integrated 0-19 child health programme.	At risk	West Berkshire and Reading currently jointly commission these services from Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust, along with Wokingham. The

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			<p>current contract ends in March 2027, and we have initiated a project for recommissioning beyond this point.</p> <p>We are currently exploring options around the service model, joint commissioning, and procurement route.</p> <p>As a first step a health needs assessment has been drafted that outlines the needs, current service, and are triangulating the initial findings and provisional recommendations for improvement.</p> <p>Due to the current high level of concern about delivery – and the need to be clear about how the risks in the current provision need to inform the 0-19 redesign.</p>
Adults and children	Increase the number of Brighter Futures for Children/Council foster carers to increase the proportion of children in care living in Reading wherever possible	At Risk	<p>The plan for 2025/26 is for 6 - 8 foster carers to be recruited, to also provide care for children presenting with greater needs. We have approximately 8 carers leaving (5 placements).</p> <p>We have 7 assessments of new carers underway and based on recent recruitment we anticipate receiving around a further 4 applications by the end of December (which could achieve approval by the end of March 2026).</p>
Adults and children	Deliver an in-house assessment home and children's homes in Reading to ensure that children in residential care remain living in Reading wherever possible.	Off track	<p>The project is reporting a red status, driven by two critical factors: Budgetary pressures and schedule delays. Mitigating actions are underway, including value engineering and cost rebase lining. This exercise is underway to reduce expenditure while preserving core functionality. Despite these challenges, progress continues across regulatory engagement, recruitment, and planning, with a focus on maintaining delivery confidence and alignment with strategic objectives.</p>
Adults and children	Enable more children with special educational needs and disabilities to be educated in mainstream schools and deliver new special school places	At risk	<p>There are several initiatives currently in motion to explore the sufficiency of SEN placements both locally and nationally. The new school build is in the design phase with a proposed delivery date within 2028. Architects, assets, and the schools are having regular meetings to explore usage and current as is set up of the buildings.</p> <p>To ensure a full system approach to SEN provision we are reviewing the current provision of children with an Education, Health, and Care Plan's inclusive of the social care package to ensure decisions taken do not shift need to another part of the system. We are exploring all avenues to provide education in settings which meet need and are sustainable, ensuring that</p>

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			strategic school placed planning is in place and ensuring children are moved across provision type to build capacity within the system. Work is underway to ensure SEND is brought into other projects to ensure sufficiency across the entire system.
Adults and children	Promote independent and active travel to school for children with special educational needs and disabilities.	On track	We have successfully travel trained 10 young people so far since July 2024. We have 2 on the case load of the Travel Trainer and a further 2 on the waiting list. The time taken to ensure young people are independently and safely travelling can be lengthy. However, if delivered successfully we can provide the tools and skills for lifelong independence. We are currently in the process of reviewing a number of previously trained young people to establish the impact this has had on them. There is a risk to the RAG status in that the Travel Trainer has given notice, and the post will soon be vacant. How we provide travel training moving forward is under review
Adults and children	Implement technology systems to support people to live independently at home.	On track	Reading TEC service is underpinned by a person-centred, outcome-based approach. We consider how TEC can enable people to remain as safe and independent as possible in the place they call home. The Technology Enabled Care (TEC) team offer over the last quarter has delivered monitored and unmonitored devices and includes in-home call systems, pendant alarms, movement sensors, medication dispensers and devices to manage the risks of fire. Our TEC offer remains one of our key preventative offers.
Adults and children	Deliver four new adult social care services to support people with complex needs, replacing existing buildings that are no longer fit for purpose.	On track	The Amethyst and Hexham projects are progressing well on site with no reportable issues and remain on track for completion in mid-2026. All key planning conditions have been met, and no significant risks to delivery have been identified. A recent safety inspection at Amethyst confirmed satisfactory health and safety arrangements. Meanwhile, the Battle project has completed early design and planning agreements with Graham Construction and preparations are underway for a site start in spring 2026. Overall, the projects are progressing well and remain aligned with programme expectations.
Adults and children	Support children into adulthood, promoting greater independence and confidence.	At risk	There is an established process for supporting children into adult social care services. However, the number of young people who transition into adult social care services is a small proportion of those supported within children's social care and SEND due the differences in legislation they are bound by. There is additional work underway between BFFC, Health partners, voluntary sector, and other partners to promote the independence

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			of those that do not meet the statutory threshold of Adult Services but require support in greater independence
Adults and children	Implement our improved carers offer, including employing a dedicated carers lead and delivering carers' breaks.	On track	The Carers Lead has been in post for 3 months and has contributed extensively to a successful Carers Week. The Carers Break Service commission is progressing well and opportunity for joint work with Wokingham is being explored to improve the offer. The commission for the Information and Advice Service is progressing well through Closing the Gap with new contracts on track for 1st November 2025.
Adults and children	Improve the process of discharge from hospital to prevent patients being readmitted.	On track	Adult Social Care are active members of the RBH Discharge Improvement Group. The group has undertaken some deep dives into several areas of concern in the discharge pathway, these include Integrated Care Board funding delays, equipment and Technology Enabled Care delays and transport on discharge.
Adults and children	Refresh the existing Home Care and Supported Living Framework to ensure sufficient supply.	On track	Adults, Children and Education Committee (ACE) has granted delegated authority to award the tender once completed. The tender documents are in development, and both are on track to go out for Procurement in September. For supported Living they have a working group with 8 services users, but no service users have been found for home care but alternative options for engagement are being considered. Both tenders are holding engagement with providers in designing the specifications.
Fit for the Future	Continue to develop our new IT systems in customer services and housing repairs to enable residents to resolve queries at a time that suits them.	At risk	Housing repairs web application has updated with an auto update feature for documents, so staff have access to updated risk assessments, asbestos register, etc. The mobile Arcus app being tested for field access to Case and Customer Management (CCM).
Fit for the Future	Review the content of our website to ensure it is accessible and to drive customer self-service.	On track	Following the success of two previous in-depth content reviews, the Web Content team recently partnered with the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to improve how residents access information on the council website. Through workshops, user research, service feedback, and daily collaboration, we mapped out the journeys and identified areas for improvement in content, navigation, structure, and accessibility. We worked collaboratively across the organisation to ensure changes were grounded in evidence and aligned with resident needs. The CSP team organised a service-wide workshop to gather additional feedback and insights into the journey's pain points, which was great for extended engagement.

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Fit for the Future	Ensure continued good services for children by bringing Brighter Futures for Children (children's services) back into the Council.	On track	All Projects are on track to meet the transition date of 1st October. Risks are being sufficiently managed.
Fit for the Future	Implement an improved telephone system that routes customers effectively and improves the customer data we collect to help continually improve how we support residents.	On Track	Timelines are in place; tender has been published. Evaluation is underway in quarter two.
Fit for the Future	Deliver and embed our social care customer front door through enhancing our systems and working with the voluntary sector in providing support.	On track	The Voluntary Community Sector work is progressing well, with recruitment underway to fill Local Connector Service vacancies and a Community Activator Service contract award targeted for September 2025 following provider engagement. The Working for People programme remains on track, with key case management forms and flows due for deployment in August and further service mapping aligned to the Mosaic upgrade later this year. The Provider Portal is nearly complete, with a live pilot launching in August involving selected care providers and first payments planned for October. Overall, these initiatives are progressing strongly and remain on schedule.
Fit for the Future	Deliver additional cemetery space in order to continue offering a burial service to all residents	On track	The plan to reclaim the allotments by 2028 is on schedule. Engagement with allotment holders on the plan will commence in Q2.
Fit for the Future	Introduce remote technology for staff who work outside of the office to improve efficiency.	On track	The team is currently testing different mobile devices that would work for the field teams. Microsoft has offered trial devices via its partners which is being trialled in Planning, Licensing, Building Control and Housing
Fit for the Future	Introduce artificial intelligence to improve customer service and reduce administration costs in line with our strategy.	On track	Rolled out comms for Copilot Chat on 8th May. Tracking usage and statistics with monthly reporting to Digital Technology Board. Legal Business case for M365 Copilot signed off. Magic Notes joint procurement with Housing, ASC and Children business case signed off. Currently in procurement stages.
Fit for the Future	Deliver the new Social Value Policy with our partners to increase the number of contracts delivering spend and social value in the local area.	At risk	Implementation of policy in place - all contracts over the £125k threshold that have passed through procurement governance have included a social value criterion in bid evaluation. Next steps will include further refining of the model, training for the Council and current suppliers/potential bidders, and tracking delivery in active contracts to enable more quantifiable and transparent reporting

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Fit for the Future	Deliver our three-year Medium Term Financial Strategy and the financial savings within to ensure that the Council lives within its means.	At risk	The 2025/26-2027/28 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), approved by Council in February 2025, identified a significant budget gap across 2026/27 and 2027/28 that will need to be addressed as part of the 2026/27 Budget and 2026/27-2028/29 MTFS in conjunction with the Fair Funding Review 2.0 launched by Central Government in June 2025.
Fit for the Future	Ensure recruitment and selection processes support the Council's move towards ensuring the workforce represents the demographics of the Borough.	At risk	Work continues on this priority – including focussed work to continue to improve our recruitment and selection processes and to improve our monitoring of performance. This will enable issues to be identified and addressed.
Fit for the Future	Continue to develop talent within the Council, including through our apprentice and work experience programmes.	On track	In Q1, two work experience programmes were successfully delivered, engaging students from New Meaning College (ages 16+ with Education, Health, and Care Plans), Reading College, and The Wren School. The current rate for new apprentices stands at 2.5% of headcount, exceeding target. In addition, 54 existing employees are actively participating in apprenticeship programmes to gain further professional qualifications.