



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

**Jim McMahon OBE MP**

*Minister of State for Local Government and  
English Devolution*  
2 Marsham Street  
London  
SW1P 4DF

Woking Commissioners  
*By email*

20 November 2024

Dear Tony, Richard, Carol and Mervyn,

I am writing to thank you for your third report, and for the dedication you have shown in overseeing Woking's improvement to date.

As you are aware, historic commercial mismanagement and major governance failures led to Woking Borough Council accumulating an extraordinary level of debt, far exceeding usual levels of borrowing for a council of its size. This is an extreme position for a council to be in, and will require unprecedented support from government to resolve. Woking clearly requires a significant programme of change to ensure it is operating to the required standard. I am grateful to you for working with the Council to improve its strategic financial management and governance, and in charting a path to reduce Woking's debt as far as possible.

I am pleased that the Council remains committed to working with you to deliver fundamental change through its Improvement and Recovery Plan. Woking's strong relationships between the Commissioner Team, the Council and the Ministry is a good example of how we can work in partnership to support a shared focus on recovery and reform. There are lots of obstacles ahead, but I am confident that you and Council have a good understanding of the challenge. Woking's financial challenges require a measured approach to achieving value for money for residents, and I am satisfied with the progress to date in delivering a robust plan of improvement.

I am also grateful to you for supporting the Council as they work to address the recommendations of Grant Thornton's recent Report in the Public Interest on Woking's historic investment practices. I will also be reflecting on this report to consider what lessons it can provide on the drivers of council failure, and I am urging all councils to consider whether they could be doing more to ensure they are delivering the sound decision-making that residents deserve, including considering the characteristics of a well-functioning authority as set out in Best Value guidance. It is imperative that all councils are fit, legal and decent. We are working to fix the foundations of local government; to ensure that government is protecting against failure and working in genuine partnership to deliver better outcomes.

I look forward to meeting you in the coming weeks to discuss the intervention further, and I await your next report later this year. I am copying this letter to the Council's Section 151 Officer and the Interim Monitoring Officer.

**Yours sincerely,**

**JIM MCMAHON OBE MP**  
**Minister of State for Local Government and English Devolution**