

London Borough of Waltham Forest

ASSET TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY

2025–2030



Foreword

Like many other councils across the country, the London Borough of Waltham Forest is facing a significant gap in our finances. We are part of a city where almost 90,000 children are living in temporary accommodation, with at least one homeless child in every London classroom¹.

At the same time, more and more residents – often the most vulnerable members of our community – are seeking support from the Council, despite our resources already being stretched to breaking point.

We have no choice but to explore fresh approaches to delivering the essential services that our residents and communities rely on, whilst also ensuring the long-term financial sustainability of the Council.

At Waltham Forest, we are determined to use every tool at our disposal to meet these challenges and achieve our mission of a more equal borough by 2030.

Over recent years, the creative use of the Council's land, buildings and partnerships has enabled us to drive real change for the benefit of our residents. From the transformation of Fellowship Square into a vibrant, new cultural destination in the heart of the borough, to the redevelopment of the Score Centre in Leyton into a new neighbourhood, we have shown that how we use our land and buildings makes a real difference to people's lives.

This Asset Transformation Strategy sets out how we will build on these successes and take the next steps in ensuring our property portfolio acts as an enabler for our missions-based approach to tackling some of the fundamental challenges we and our residents face. That means making sure we have fit-for-purpose buildings in the right locations, where residents can access the services and support they need from the Council, partners, and voluntary and community sector organisations. It means unlocking opportunities within our estate to deliver inclusive local economic growth and provide more affordable homes in which families can thrive. And it means creating a flexible, efficient and sustainable estate that protects council finances and demonstrates our action on tackling climate change.

By making sure our land and buildings work hard for our communities and support the delivery of Mission Waltham Forest, we can continue to improve lives, tackle inequality and create a more equal borough for all.



Cllr Ahsan Khan
Deputy Leader and
Cabinet Member
for Housing and
Regeneration



¹ London's homelessness emergency.
London Councils, October 2024

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Introduction

We have already invested significantly in our assets and local places to help unlock the borough's potential. Since 2021, we have transformed our land and buildings to deliver:



over **1,595** new homes
(61% of which are affordable)



over **9,000 sqm**
of new community and
cultural space



over **2,000sqm**
of new commercial space



These investments include:

- Regeneration of the Marlowe Road estate, which has already delivered **over 300 mixed-tenure homes and a community hub** for Wood Street.



- Fellowship Square Programme, transforming the historic Walthamstow Town Hall into modern and flexible office accommodation, delivering **a vibrant new cultural destination and hundreds of new homes**, and reactivating Walthamstow Assembly Hall.



- Restoration of the Grade II* listed former EMD cinema in Walthamstow to create a **960-seat local live entertainment venue** with a national profile, as well as new commercial units.



- Redevelopment of the former Wood Street Library site to deliver **67 high-quality 100% affordable homes** and a new customer-facing Families and Homes Hub (Sunflower House).



- Extending and reviving the Grade-II listed **Lea Bridge Library** into an award-winning cultural and community hub.



- Redevelopment of the **Score Centre** in Leyton to create Coronation Square – a new neighbourhood with almost 800 new homes, a new nursery, sports centre, market square and commercial units.



- Development of Juniper House, **delivering 91 new homes**, a new nursery and the launch pad for the borough's first higher education offer from the University of Portsmouth.



These examples demonstrate the power that the considered and creative use of our land and buildings can have to transform the borough and the lives of our residents.

This investment into our estate also means our portfolio has grown over the past five years. We now have the opportunity to review the portfolio to maximise its potential to deliver the services and support our residents need in line with our missions-based approach.





This **Asset Transformation Strategy** is a response to the challenges we face as a council arising from growing demand for essential services and ongoing financial pressures.

By reviewing the council's portfolio of land and buildings, we have a major opportunity to explore how they can be better used to meet the current and future needs of our residents and help us achieve our plans set out in Mission Waltham Forest – to create a more equal borough by 2030.

We are focused on making sure our property portfolio is a key enabler to strengthen and sustain an enhanced local offer of preventative council, partner, and voluntary and community sector (VCS) services.

This is about providing the right support, where and when it is needed. Bringing together local services in fit-for-purpose buildings will also create opportunities for greater collaboration with our partners and communities.

We recognise that reviewing our portfolio of land and buildings will also mean making some difficult decisions, divesting of buildings which no longer meet the needs of the local community, or where significant investment is needed to maintain them, which the Council can simply no longer afford.

Reviewing our estate also helps identify where assets could be redeveloped or repurposed to help tackle some of our most pressing challenges, such as the shortage of affordable homes, or where they could be used more effectively by a community group or local business.

This Strategy outlines the context, key principles and objectives of Asset Transformation, as well as the outcomes we want to achieve in support of Mission Waltham Forest.

Asset Transformation Strategy key principles/objectives:

1. Making the most effective use of the Council's land and buildings by providing flexible spaces which enable the delivery of preventative services locally



2. Identifying opportunities for the delivery of new affordable homes



3. Ensuring a manageable, compliant, and financially and environmentally sustainable estate



4. Identify opportunities for acquisitions and land release that enables regeneration and takes into consideration local community benefits



5. Protecting council finances to ensure long-term financial resilience



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Overview of the Council's Portfolio

The Council has over 800 buildings and land held in the General Fund, which help us deliver a range of services to our communities, support the local economy and VCS organisations or provide a source of income to fund essential council services.

In addition, housing and related assets are managed separately through the Council's ringfenced Housing Revenue Account.

Properties from which our council services are delivered:



150

- Operational properties**
 - e.g. offices, libraries, schools, depots, family hubs, car parks, care homes, leisure centres, parks and open spaces etc.



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- Vacant / surplus properties**
 - properties that were previously operational but are currently surplus to requirements.



31

- VCS properties** – buildings occupied by VCS organisations, such as community centres



450

- Commercial properties**
 - held to support an inclusive local economy e.g. retail, industrial, workspaces, nurseries.



44

- Maintained Schools Estate**
 - Community maintained and voluntary-aided schools.



134

- Other** – e.g. toilets, allotments, substations, land etc.



The Council's property portfolio is constantly evolving, as demonstrated in the Property Lifecycle diagram in Figure 1. A key part of our approach to strategic asset management is to 'Optimise & Adapt' assets to align with the needs of the organisation and to support the Council's strategic priorities and missions, as outlined in Mission Waltham Forest.

By doing so, we can support new models of service delivery that respond to local need and identify opportunities to free up land and buildings for affordable homes or for use by new local businesses or community groups, either through land release for regeneration or repurposing of our assets.

This process also helps us achieve a financially and environmentally sustainable estate, which is less expensive to maintain, and which supports our net-zero ambitions.

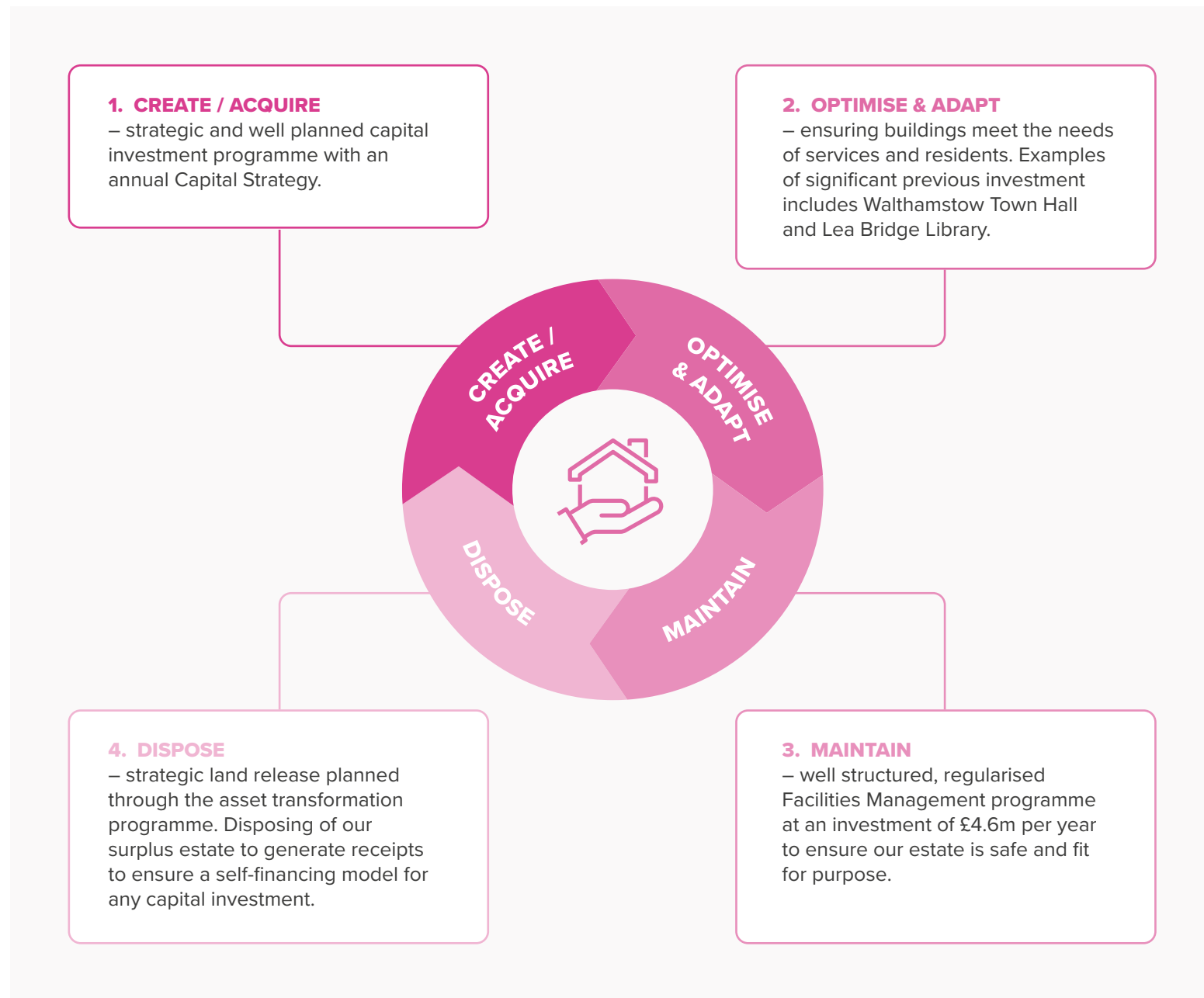


Figure 1: The Property Lifecycle

Case Study 1: Wood Street Library



In summer 2020, the **Wood Street Library** on the corner of Forest Road and Wood Street was relocated to a new purpose-built facility at Marlowe Road, just 500 metres from the former library site. Following an options appraisal and public consultation on the former library site as an Asset of Community Value (which received no community bids), the site was identified as being suitable for the development of a Families and Homes Hub – providing co-located and coordinated services to help residents live more independent lives – along with much-needed homes for Waltham Forest residents and a small commercial unit.

In November 2024, the Council celebrated the completion of 67 new homes at **Precision House**, the residential element of the Families and Homes Hub. All 67 homes are affordable and prioritised for local residents, with 29 social rent and 38 shared ownership homes.

Sunflower House – the new council facility on the ground and first floors of the building, which is due to be completed in 2025 – will give residents access to the Families and Homes teams in a safe and welcoming environment in line with the Council’s missions to “ensure every family and every child are given every opportunity” and “a focus on services designed around residents”.



**67 new
affordable homes
at Precision House**



**New Families and
Homes Hub at
Sunflower House**



New commercial space

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Vision and Strategic Context

Vision statement:

“Making the most effective use of council land and buildings to support and strengthen our communities, build more affordable homes and deliver inclusive economic growth.”



Strategic context

Over recent years, both the demand and cost of delivering statutory council services have increased, with significantly higher spending on children’s and adult’s social care, Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), and providing temporary accommodation (TA) for homeless households. This, together with funding reductions over the last 14 years, has led to a forecast overspend of c.£21 million for the Council in 2024/25 and a predicted funding gap of c.£11 million in 2026/27 and 2027/28, despite significant planned savings.

Children’s social care services nationally are experiencing increasing demand and complexity, with shortages of suitable foster care placements and local authorities often forced to rely on out-of-area and/or high-cost residential accommodation. These challenges are reflected in Waltham Forest, where demand is higher than the national average and placement costs continue to rise, leading to expenditure outstripping available resources year-on year. Like many local authorities, the Council is also experiencing exponential demand and funding pressures to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND in the borough.

Similarly, the Council’s spend on adult’s services, particularly for older adults, is rising. This is due to the number of older people supported in long-term care in Waltham Forest, which has increased over recent years, as well as the high level of need for those requiring care packages.

Compounding all of this, the number of households living in TA is now the highest since records began thanks to the cost-of-living crisis, a shortage of available and affordable private rented sector properties and the slowdown in delivery of new affordable homes. At the start of 2025, Waltham Forest had over 1,500 households in TA, with around 55% of those in out-of-borough placements. Reliance on expensive B&Bs and commercial hotels means the average cost of TA is increasing, threatening the financial sustainability of many local authorities, including Waltham Forest.

While the Council has been working hard to increase the supply of long-term housing through estate regeneration projects, building new homes and purchasing existing properties, we also recognise the need to find new ways to provide more homes in the borough to ensure families can remain close to their local communities, schools and places of work.

We realise that the council is not alone in delivering vital support and services to our residents. As an organisation we need to work closely with public sector partners and our VCS, which is an essential partner in responding to some of the challenges we face and in delivering change. The sector faces its own challenges, however, including a lack of affordable and suitable venues in the borough, which limits the impact our VCS organisations can have.

All of this means we need to move to a position where we maximise the potential of our land and buildings to help reduce these pressures where possible. We also need to ensure this is done without placing any additional pressure on council finances, by carefully balancing community needs with the long-term financial resilience of the council.



A missions-based approach

Mission Waltham Forest sets out the council's commitment to all our residents to tackle the fundamental challenges facing them and drive the change within the council that is needed to achieve this. To deliver our vision of a more equal borough by 2030, the following six **Borough Missions** and four **Council Missions** are embedded in the foundations of everything we do:

BOROUGH MISSIONS

MISSION ONE



Ensure every family and every child are given every opportunity

MISSION TWO



Build an economy that works for everyone

MISSION THREE



Make Waltham Forest a great place to live and age well

MISSION FOUR



Tackle the housing crisis head on

MISSION FIVE



Lead the way for a net-zero borough

MISSION SIX



Safe, green neighbourhoods where everyone can thrive

MISSION SEVEN



A focus on services designed around residents

MISSION EIGHT



A preventative approach for stronger communities

MISSION NINE



An inclusive workforce that reflects our community

MISSION TEN



A firm financial footing

COUNCIL MISSIONS



We are evolving our working practices towards a missions-based approach to delivering services that make a real difference to our residents and foster stronger communities.

This includes working with our VCS, public sector partners and residents to develop a holistic local offer of flexible, accessible and preventative services and activities, which provide the support residents need, where and when it is needed. By doing so, we want to empower individuals and families, prevent crises before they escalate, and shift focus from costly interventions to sustainable community solutions.

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Key principles, objectives and outcomes for Asset Transformation

The Council’s Asset Transformation Strategy is based on the following principles/objectives and outcomes, in support of our Borough and Council Missions:

PRINCIPLE/OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	MISSIONS SUPPORTED			
1. Making the most effective use of the Council’s land and buildings by providing flexible spaces which enable the delivery of preventative services locally	A fit-for purpose, flexible estate, right-sized to deliver co-located Council, partner and VCS services that deliver the right services, in the right places, tailored to the needs of residents locally.	 Ensure every family and every child are given every opportunity	 A focus on services designed around residents	 A preventative approach for stronger communities	 A firm financial footing
2. Identify opportunities for the delivery of new affordable homes	Increased supply of affordable housing, including council-owned TA and specialist housing to meet local need.	 Ensure every family and every child are given every opportunity	 Make Waltham Forest a great place to live and age well	 Tackle the housing crisis head on	 A firm financial footing

Continued overleaf >>

PRINCIPLE/OBJECTIVE	OUTCOME	MISSIONS SUPPORTED	
3. Ensure a manageable, compliant, and financially and environmentally sustainable estate	• Modern, fit-for-purpose buildings that support the delivery of high-quality services and improve community safety through their design and use. • Release of land and buildings for regeneration which are no longer required or affordable to the Council. • Reduced backlog maintenance, lower carbon emissions and improved energy efficiency resulting in lower running costs. • A reduction in borough car parks, supporting delivery of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan and the Local Plan.	 Lead the way for a net-zero borough	 A firm financial footing
4. Identify opportunities for acquisitions and land release that enables regeneration and takes into consideration local community benefits	• Surplus sites re-purposed to support local businesses and generate commercial income or capital receipts for the Council. • Strategic acquisitions to support service delivery and reduce financial pressures	 Build an economy that works for everyone	 A firm financial footing
5. Protect council finances to ensure long-term financial resilience	• A self-financing asset transformation programme, which leverages and reinvests capital receipts from land release and maximises the use of external funding as far as possible. • Assets are released to ensure any investment in the retained estate is self-funded or enables a reduction in service financial pressures.	 A firm financial footing	

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Asset Transformation Roadmap

Our progress so far

Since the adoption of the Property Transformation Strategy by the Council in 2018, as well as the subsequent Strategic Asset Management Plan in 2019, we have made significant progress on transforming the borough through the creative use of our land, buildings and partnerships.

This includes ensuring best use of the Council's office estate through our flagship Fellowship Square programme, which has led to the transformation of Walthamstow Town Hall into a modern, flexible, and open-plan working environment for our staff, whilst also generating surplus buildings through office consolidation. This has allowed us to transform these sites for alternative uses or to generate capital receipts.

Next steps

This Asset Transformation Strategy is an opportunity to build on the significant investment into our estate to date and consider how the remaining land and buildings in our portfolio can be best used to support council services and wider strategic priorities aligned to Mission Waltham Forest. An essential part of this is taking a robust financial approach, which ensures any future investments are self-funding or support service delivery by alleviating pressure on council finances.

This Strategy and the delivery programmes that flow from it also provide an opportunity to fully embed a Corporate Landlord model, whereby properties are treated as a corporate resource and are managed centrally by the Council's Place Directorate, rather than by the services operating out of those buildings. This allows service teams to focus on delivering services to our residents and enables a strategic approach to asset management; ensuring land and buildings are used in the most efficient way and in support of the wider strategic aims of the Council linked to inclusive growth, placemaking and partnership working.

Implementation of this Asset Transformation Strategy will start with a series of strategic asset reviews, aimed at identifying opportunities to optimise and adapt, or where appropriate, dispose of land and buildings owned by the Council. These reviews will be driven by service needs, defined through agreed service strategies and target operating models (TOM). As services are in different stages of developing their operating models and requirements, the asset reviews will take a phased approach.

Each asset review will consider the building's condition, running costs and environmental performance, as well as other relevant council strategies and policies. This includes the Waltham Forest Local Plan, which sets out a vision and framework to guide decisions on where, how much, and what kind of development is needed in order to deliver inclusive growth that meets the borough's needs.

Following each asset review, a detailed Implementation Plan will be developed, setting out a forward plan of activities aimed at delivering the objectives and outcomes outlined in this strategy. Each Implementation Plan will be a dynamic document to ensure that the overarching Asset Transformation Strategy is delivered in an agile way and can respond to current circumstances, risks and issues, and priorities with regards to proposals for specific sites.

The high-level steps for each asset review are as follows:

- 1 Identification of service TOM & requirements
- 2 Data gathering & analysis
- 3 Development of an agreed methodology
- 4 Locational review (where applicable to service need)
- 5 Options appraisal
- 6 Recommendations & business case
- 7 Implementation plan

Asset Review Stages

Figure 2: Key Stages of Asset Reviews

Case Study 2: Fellowship Square

The **Fellowship Square programme** is an exemplar of how the Council is using its land and buildings to create new, high-quality community and cultural spaces, deliver new affordable homes and drive local regeneration and inclusive growth.

The programme has already delivered the restoration of the historic town hall to provide more fit-for-purpose, modern and flexible office accommodation for council staff. This allowed several other buildings owned by the Council, including Rowan House and Cedar Wood House, to be released for redevelopment.

The programme has also delivered hundreds of new homes and created iconic public spaces for all residents to enjoy, such as the fountains and event space in front of the Town Hall and the Queen Elizabeth Memorial Gardens to the rear. The reactivation of Walthamstow Assembly Hall in 2025 will further support new local growth and opportunities as a cultural venue whilst generating income for the Council.



The completion of the new Civic Centre in 2026 will provide ground floor commercial space and upper floor office space to conclude the Council's office rationalisation programme and release surplus sites for new housing. This final stage of the programme will also see completion of a further 164 new homes and a new children's nursery, helping to establish a thriving new community in the heart of our borough.

The Fellowship Square programme will deliver:



572
new homes



A new
children's
nursery



New commercial units
and Civic Centre

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Governance and Performance Monitoring

The Asset Transformation Programme which will deliver this strategy forms part of the Creating Great Places Portfolio within the Council's Corporate Transformation Programme and reports into the Place Transformation Board.

The Place Transformation Board oversees and ensures the delivery of the Asset Transformation Programme. Strategic oversight and decision-making is provided by the Council's Strategic Leadership Team (SLT). Key decisions must be approved by the Cabinet.

Under the Council's Corporate Landlord model all property-related decisions regarding a property or land (except Highways and schools) must be made by the Council's Strategic Asset Management Plan Board (the 'SAMP') which oversees the management of the Council's property portfolio. Capital investment endorsements are sought from the Capital Strategy and Asset Management Group (CSAMG). These two Boards provide direction, decision making and capital finance to enable proposals to be successfully implemented.

Once recommendations are agreed, technical project delivery boards ensure effective oversight of programme, cost, quality, and risk management. These boards report to the Place Transformation Board, SAMP/CSAMG and the Council Modernisation Transformation Board (CMTB).

Elected members provide oversight through engagement with the Portfolio Lead Member (PLM), Cabinet, Scrutiny Committees, and Place Leader's Mission Board.

This structure ensures effective management and alignment with the Council's corporate objectives.

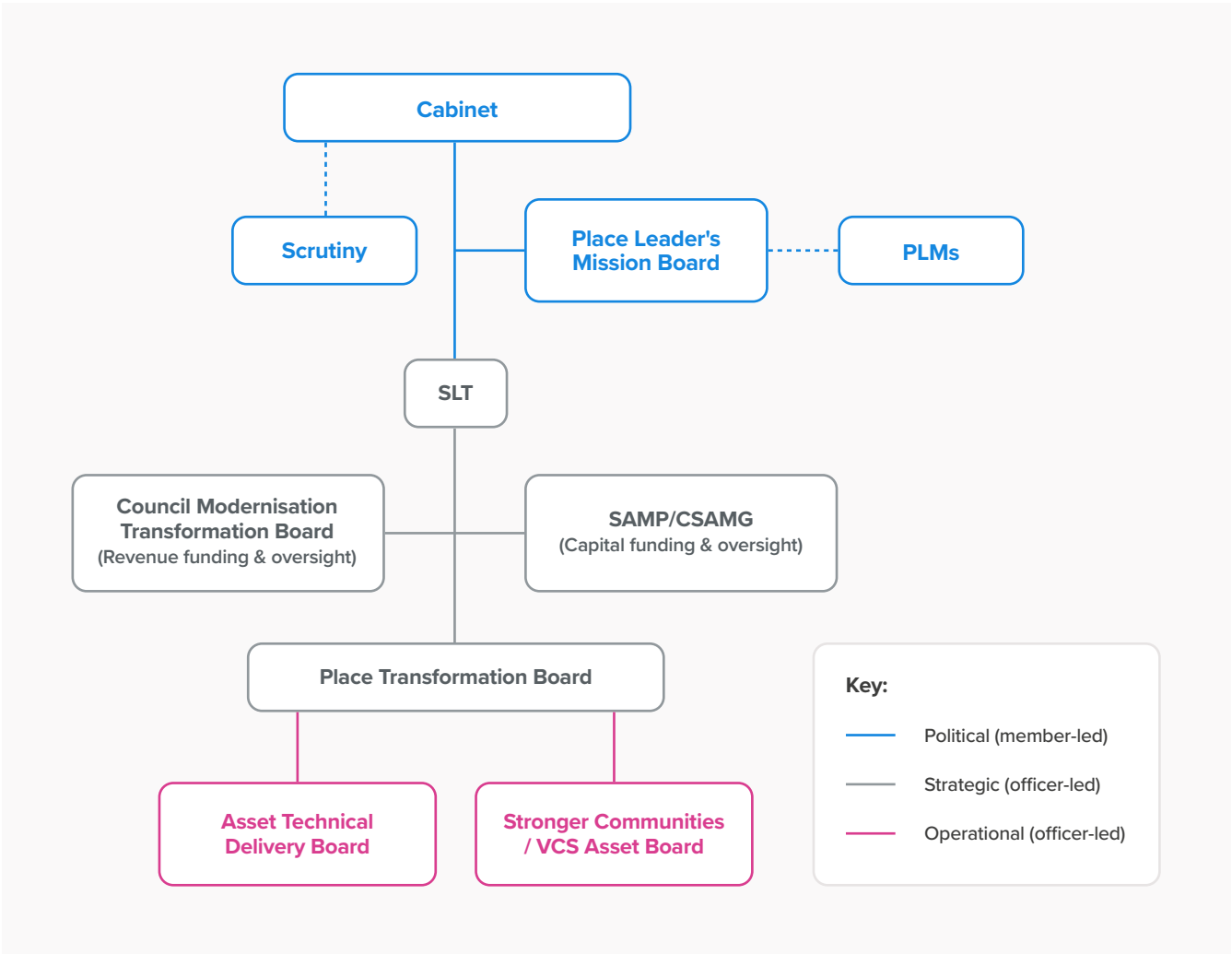


Figure 3: Asset Transformation programme and wider governance arrangements

May 2025