

PUBLICA

Delivering Local Priorities and Improving Services

BUSINESS PLAN 2020-22



FOREWORD

Publica has now reached an important milestone. The underlying business case for the partnership continues to be sound, providing scope for efficiencies, economies of scale and capacity for self-improvement, which individual Councils alone may not be able to achieve. Much has already been achieved in terms of budget savings, but the expectations and service requirements of our partner councils and residents have changed in the years since the decision was taken to establish the company, and we need to continue to evolve to meet these changes.

In a report to the Publica Board in December 2019, the new Managing Director presented an assessment of 'the state of Publica', with a number of high-level recommendations for moving the business forward over the next two years. This Business Plan – deliberately short and concise – aims to convert these recommendations into four priorities and a number of key strategic actions to drive the business forward.

This year, we will focus on supporting the partner councils to deliver the priorities set out in their Corporate Plans, improve our approach to commissioning, continue to improve services and customer experience using digital technology, deliver efficiency savings, and invest in our employees.

Collectively, the strategic actions that support the Business Plan priorities form a cohesive programme to achieve sustainable and embedded change over the business plan period.

This Business Plan has been adopted in accordance with The Members Agreement for Publica Group (Support) Limited.

Information about Publica is available on its website (www.publicagroup.uk)

Cllr Steve Jordan
Leader
Cheltenham Borough
Council

Cllr Joe Harris
Leader
Cotswold District
Council

Cllr Tim Gwilliam
Leader
Forest of Dean District
Council

Cllr James Mills
Leader
West Oxfordshire District
Council

Dave Brooks
Chairman
Publica Group (Support)
Limited

Jan Britton
Managing Director
Publica Group Limited

STRATEGIC FINANCIAL CONTEXT

Our partner councils have set out ambitious plans on behalf of residents in their new Corporate Plans. Climate change, affordable housing and creation of infrastructure relating to jobs and economic development are all priorities. These ambitions will need to be supported by significant investment programmes at a time when funding for local government remains under pressure, and customer expectations continue to increase. This will require us collectively to be creative and innovative in order to deliver our councils' ambitions within the resources available.

After a decade of austerity, local government finances are not as strong as we would like. The Local Government Association has identified a shortfall of £3.1bn in local authority funding, and this is anticipated to rise to £8bn as spending pressures rise over the next four years or so. Many of these pressures fall on authorities with social care responsibilities, and the government has indicated this as their priority for funding.

As a consequence, district and borough councils in particular face a tightening financial position. Incentive-based funding schemes based on house building are being replaced by other streams that are broader-based and less district focused.

Our partner councils are facing extreme funding pressures as set out within their published medium-term financial strategies. They have collectively identified potential budget gaps of over £15m over the next three years – in the order of 15-20% of gross revenue budgets.

This pressure on local government funding comes at a time when residents' expectations are rising, and each partner council has ambitious plans to make a positive impact on their place.

Filling this funding gap after ten years of reduced spending on local services will be challenging, in light of increased service expectations, and will require us all to become more commercial in our outlook. Efficiencies and additional shared services will not fill this gap alone, and run the risk of removing resources needed for partner councils to deliver their priorities. We will, therefore, need to support our partner councils with their commercial ambitions and plans to increase earned income, and keep a sharp focus on existing and new revenue streams through the development and implementation of commercial strategies.

PHOTOS TO BE ADDED

BUSINESS PLAN PRIORITIES

This Business Plan provides the vehicle to carry forward and address the issues identified in the new Managing Director's report over the next two years. The focus of the plan is on supporting the partner councils to deliver their priorities, improve our approach to commissioning, continue to improve services and customer experience using digital technology, deliver efficiency savings and invest in our staff and managers.

Collectively, the business plan priorities form a cohesive programme, achieving sustainable and embedded change over the business plan period. The Business Plan covers the two-year period 2020-22 and will be reviewed and refreshed after the first twelve months; the Business Plan priorities for 2020-22 are:



OUR VALUES

Everything we do will be built on the following values:

Authentic

We act genuinely and transparently. We do the right thing for our customers, our organisation and each other.

Modern

We are not set in our ways. We are constantly looking to find ways to innovate and do things smarter.

Flexible

We are agile - adapting how and what we do to meet the demands of our customers, our colleagues, our local communities and the needs of the modern world.

Thoughtful

We take pride in delivering a great service, taking the time to understand and care about our customers and their needs.

PHOTOS TO BE ADDED

SUPPORT AND DELIVER OUR PARTNER COUNCILS' PRIORITIES

Our primary medium-term objective in relation to this priority is to develop Publica's Executive Management Team and focus Executive Directors on working with partner councils' statutory officers and leading Publica's strategic, organisation-wide response to the priorities set out in the partner councils' corporate plans. This will extend to other managers within Publica and retained employees within the councils.

It is central to the aims of the councils and therefore also the future success of Publica that the greatest part of the efforts of our senior team should align with the priorities set out in the partner councils' corporate plans. These high-priority projects include climate emergency, affordable housing and growing commercial income. Other strategic priorities include commissioning, performance and resource management.

We are committed to supporting each partner council to deliver a number of significant projects, including the roll-out of Cotswold District Council's new waste and recycling service and the development of a Master Plan for Cirencester town centre, Cheltenham Borough Council's Cyber Central Business Park, Forest of Dean District Council's regeneration of Lydney Docks and West Oxfordshire District Council's Garden Village. We are also working with Ubico, a local authority owned waste company delivering services for the partner councils, to implement an improved customer experience for residents using technology.

In our new approach, one member of Publica's Executive team will act as the Relationship Lead with each council and will be responsible for co-ordinating and leading our work to deliver that council's priorities, as outlined in the table below.

Cheltenham Borough Council	Managing Director
Cotswold District Council	Executive Director (Commissioning)
Forest of Dean District Council	Executive Director (Services)
West Oxfordshire District Council	Executive Director (Finance)

PHOTOS TO BE ADDED

The following strategic actions will be delivered to support our partner councils to deliver their priorities:

Support and deliver our partner councils' priorities

1

We will improve engagement with cabinet members, chairs of committees and key partners to translate council priorities into action plans to deliver their desired outcomes. Specifically, we will implement a structured, regular briefing programme to ensure that cabinet members and chairs of committees are fully briefed on plans, programmes, opportunities and risk.

2

We will help our partner councils deliver their priorities by:-

- preparing climate change strategies and actionable proposals that will deliver against those strategies;
- assessing how we might deliver additional affordable homes and bring forward delivery proposals;
- preparing strategies to support the local economy, employment and develop investment proposals;
- supporting them with the modernisation and improvement of services.

3

We will increase residents' awareness of the outcomes and benefits that the partner councils deliver by working with each partner council to develop effective communication strategies and plans.

4

We will assist our partner councils to achieve financial sustainability and deliver their medium term financial strategies, by working with them to develop commercial plans to increase their revenue income.

GET COMMISSIONING RIGHT

Publica is responsible for delivering the majority of services provided by Cotswold, West Oxfordshire and Forest of Dean District Councils. Cheltenham Borough Council, Ubico, Cheltenham Borough Homes and the Cheltenham Trust also receive business support services from Publica; for example our Human Resources and Information Technology Teams continue to support Cheltenham Borough Council in delivering their Transformation Programme. Publica is also responsible for commissioning other services; for example, leisure centres and waste collection, acting as a client agent for the partner councils.

As both service provider and commissioning agent, Publica must provide its partners with robust performance information and analysis so that they can hold both Publica and other third party service providers to account for the services we provide.

A high level statement on commissioning was produced in November 2019 and sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of the Councils' Heads of Paid Service and other statutory officers, shareholder representatives, Publica's Executive Director (Commissioning), and other senior staff within Publica. We will ensure that Publica conforms to the requirements of this statement.

We will support our partner councils to plan, procure, deliver and evaluate the services they provide, using a recognised commissioning cycle to deliver the most appropriate service and allow each partner to make informed decisions about commissioning.

We will develop a new performance framework, including quantitative and qualitative performance indicators together with an honest and transparent assessment of how Publica is performing against the councils' priorities. We will ensure that our governance arrangements are open and transparent, and allow the councils to properly hold Publica to account.

In addition, a new Programme and Project Management Framework will be implemented to ensure that proper rigorous governance arrangements are in place for all major projects carried out on behalf of the partner councils, and to provide assurance that progress is being made as expected in delivering against each Council's high-priority projects.

PHOTOS TO BE ADDED

The following strategic actions will be delivered to get commissioning right:



Get
commissioning
right

5

We will enable our partner councils to properly hold Publica to account for the services we provide on their behalf, by implementing the high level statement on commissioning, which sets out roles and responsibilities in the commissioning function, and producing a robust and transparent performance management framework.

6

We will work effectively with partner councils to drive efficiency savings and increase earned income for each by securing, managing and monitoring contracted services to enable them to deliver their medium term financial strategies.

7

We will ensure that each partner council's high-priority projects are delivered as expected by implementing stronger project governance arrangements for all significant projects, in line with the new Programme and Project Management Monitoring Framework.

PHOTOS TO BE ADDED

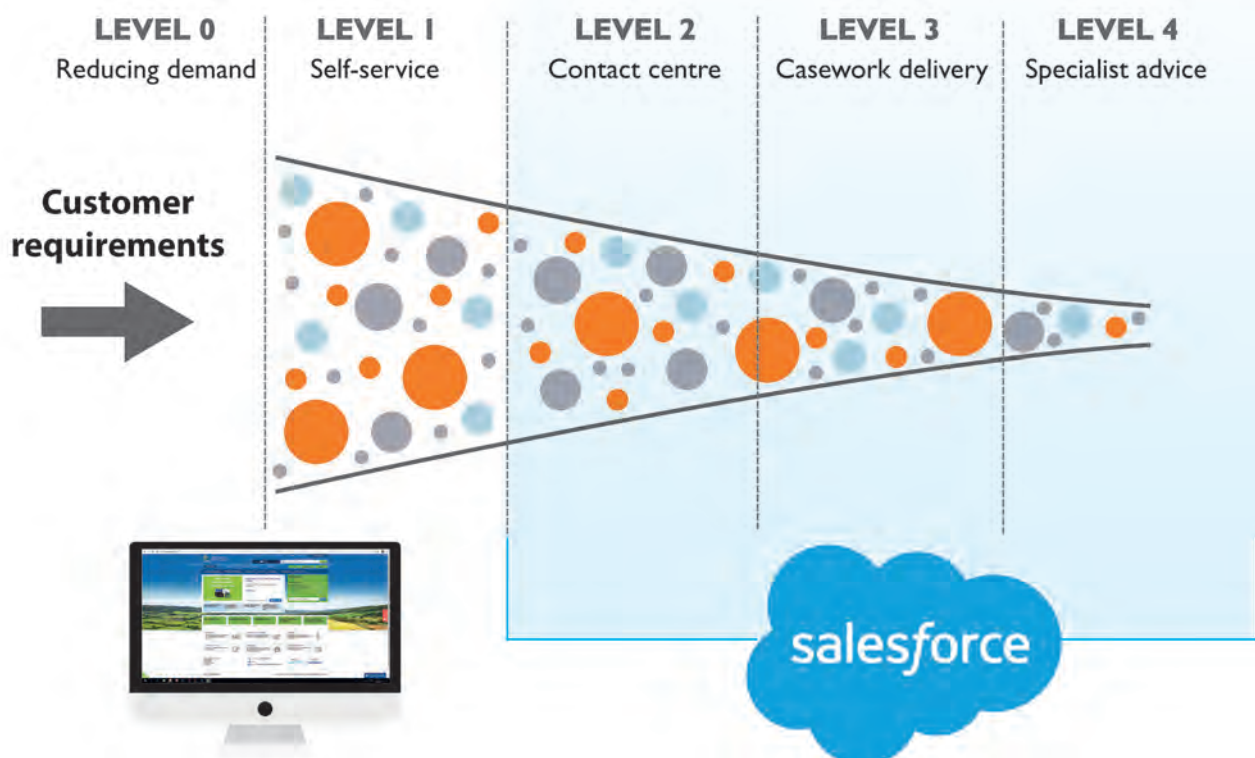
IMPROVE CUSTOMERS' EXPERIENCE

We are committed to providing a positive customer experience in the delivery of services for the partner councils. Over the last year, we have obtained feedback from over 7,000 customers, and this has enabled us to determine exactly what they expect from their council. This information has enabled us to identify six promises that will ensure customers have a great experience; these are:

- Easy access to services when it suits them
- To be kept informed of our progress with their case
- To listen to their feedback and act on it
- To receive a good quality service
- Prompt delivery of services
- To know who is dealing with their case, and for it to be dealt with in a consistent way

To meet the expectations of our partner councils' customers, we need to deliver on these six promises. This will involve making the best use of our skills and resources, and organising ourselves more effectively to ensure customers receive a great service.


We will provide modern digital services that meet customers' needs quickly and deal with customer issues before they have to contact the council e.g. allowing customers to track progress with their case. We are implementing an operating model using the Salesforce platform, which in addition to the new websites at Cotswold, Forest of Dean and West Oxfordshire District Councils, will enable us to deliver on the six promises. This work will be coordinated by a Service Improvement, Customer Experience, and Salesforce Operating Model Group. The diagram below illustrates how we intend to manage demand from the councils' customers. Managing demand in this way will ensure that cases are dealt with quickly at, or before first point of contact (Level 0 - 2); referring only the most complex cases to caseworkers and then specialist employees (Level 3 - 4), and using automation where it is appropriate:



Ensuring that customers have a consistently great experience is at the core of how we work. To achieve this we will make improvements to our services, including introducing new digital capabilities that will improve the experience of council customers. We also recognise that not all residents want to use online digital solutions, so we will maintain our high-performing contact centre and reception areas for those customers who prefer to use more traditional methods of communication and engagement, whilst nudging those, who are willing, towards the internet.

We will also need to improve how we organise ourselves, modernise our outdated processes and develop a customer-centric culture to ensure that all of our staff and services are focussed on meeting the needs of council customers.

The following Strategic Actions will be delivered to support Improving Customers' Experience



Improve
customers'
experience

8

We will provide a positive customer experience in the delivery of services for the partner councils by implementing the customer promises through delivery of the Salesforce Operating Model, and improving outdated processes.

9

We will improve how we organise ourselves, manage our resources and develop a customer-centric culture to ensure that we are focussed on meeting the needs of the councils' customers.

BECOMING AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE

We want Publica to become an employer of choice that people are proud to work for, delivering great public services for our partner councils and local communities. It is our absolute conviction that our employees should be proud to work for the council or councils they serve, and proud to work for Publica. There is no contradiction, we succeed together.

If our employees feel well-led, supported, rewarded, safe, and empowered within a healthy workplace culture, we will have created the right conditions for high performance and productivity and excellent service delivery. In turn, this should improve our ability to attract and retain high quality employees whose commitment and effort are essential to our continual improvement of customer-focused services.

We will encourage and support all of our employees to do their job brilliantly, providing every person with the tools, support and development opportunities they need to excel at the role they perform. This will include regular appraisals to ensure all employees have clear objectives and an understanding of how their work supports our partner councils' priorities and the delivery of this Business Plan.

Publica will also ensure our commitment to health and safety not only meets, but exceeds relevant standards, and will put the welfare of its employees at the forefront of what we do. We will work with the recognised trade unions to help refresh our approach to health, safety and welfare, as we have done with the implementation of new terms and conditions of employment for staff who transferred from our partner councils.

To enhance our reputation as an employer of choice, and support our partners and communities, we also need to demonstrate a clear commitment to our social and environmental responsibilities and make a meaningful impact in these areas. We will implement our Corporate Social Responsibility policy and develop a carbon reduction (climate action) plan for Publica that complements and extends the climate action plans of our partner councils.

We will use the Investors in People (IIP) framework to guide our strategic approach to becoming an employer of choice, through delivering our People Strategy aspirations:

PHOTOS TO BE ADDED

IIP Framework	Publica People Strategy Aspirations
<p>Leading: Leading and inspiring people Living our values and behaviors Empowering and involving people</p>	<p>Great Leadership: Our leaders will be inspirational and role models to ensure we make the lives of residents and businesses easier with services that our staff are proud to deliver.</p>
<p>Supporting: Managing performance Recognising and rewarding high performance Structuring work</p>	<p>Great People: We will attract and retain talented people, develop their strengths and provide excellent opportunities for personal, professional and career development through ongoing investment in them.</p>
<p>Improving: Building capacity Delivering continuous improvement Creating sustainable success</p>	<p>Great Culture: We will aspire to deliver services that are responsive, flexible and focused on our customers' needs. We will create a climate of well-being/support/inclusion so that each individual feels valued and listened to. We will work to create one team, working collaboratively to support our partner councils' priorities.</p>

PHOTOS TO BE ADDED

The following Strategic Actions will be delivered to support becoming an employer of choice

Becoming an employer of choice

10

We will attract and retain high quality employees by ensuring that they are trained, appraised, recognised and rewarded fairly, working in a safe environment with the highest standards of welfare and support. We will achieve this by implementing our People Strategy and working closely with our recognised trade unions.

11

We will implement the pay and grading framework, working closely with our recognised trade unions to ensure the approach is fair, modern, flexible and reflects the diverse nature of the roles performed by Publica employees, to recognise and reward existing employees and help attract high quality individuals.

12

We will inspire, motivate and empower employees by implementing a Leadership Development Programme, based on the principle of “leadership at all levels” including political and commercial awareness.

13

We will create the right conditions for achieving continuous improvement, high performance and productivity, by improving our HR practices using the Investors in People (IiP) framework and attaining IiP accreditation.