

West Oxfordshire Council Plan 2012 - 2015

2014 - 2015 Update

Introduction from Leader of the Council

To be inserted

Key Issues

The 2011 Census showed that the District's population over 60 has increased more than any other age group and this trend is likely to continue in both rural and urban areas. This will present a challenge as this will impact on the services we provide, for instance in relation to housing, activities at leisure centres and demand for assistance through things like Disabled Facilities Grants. Whilst levels of health are good and average life expectancy is higher than nationally, health needs will increase because of the aging population.

The economic situation of recent years has obviously had an affect on the District. The District has coped better than some areas, for example by having one of the lowest unemployment rates in the south-east, but it is recognised that we need to continue to support and develop the local economy and take advantage of the general improvement in the economy. Retail centres in the District continue to be successful, with our free parking policy considered to be a reason for this. RAF Brize Norton has also expanded to become the single air movement base for military personnel in the UK, with significant development nearby and the need to improve road links to the base.

The District continues to be a popular place to live. Two places in the District were named in the Sunday Times 101 Best Places to Live Guide, and two places were included in The Times' Top 10 Most Glamorous Places to Live. It also came 39th in the annual Halifax Quality of Life survey.

Housing affordability continues to be an issue, with house prices above the national average. Demand for affordable houses is therefore high and we are working to address this issue. We have a target of enabling the delivery of 200 houses between 2013 and 2015 and we are on course to achieve this with schemes either completed or in the pipeline.

It is the Government's aim to reduce public spending and there has therefore been a significant reduction in grants to this Council since 2010. This has meant that we have had to find new and innovative ways to increase our efficiency and make savings without affecting local services.

Addressing the Issues

In order to deal with the reduction in Government grants, we have developed a programme of savings over several years. Our success in doing this has meant that we have been able to freeze Council Tax for four years running and maintain our ranking as the second lowest Council Tax of English shire districts. This freeze means that our element of the Council Tax bill has actually fallen in real-terms by 13% and the amount paid, £81.63 for a Band D property, is now half the national average.

We have also, for 2014/15 produced a balanced budget, for the second year running. This means that we do not have to use reserves to fund services.

A further achievement has been that we are ranked first nationally as the lowest overall cost of council services per head of population. This is based on the figures for 2012/13 which show that the cost of services per head was £74.05.

A major part of our savings is being achieved through the sharing of officers and services with other authorities. It is expected this will save the Council £1.4m per annum by 2017/18. We have a strategic partnership with Cotswold District Council and with them we share our Chief Executive, many other officers and a number of services. The Council has also joined with Cotswold and Forest of Dean District Councils and Cheltenham Borough Council to share financial, human resources and payroll services. This means that many of our services are now shared. We are also looking to go further and will be investigating the potential for more joint working on the basis of the broader partnership with Cotswold, Forest of Dean and Cheltenham Councils in a project known as 2020 Vision for Joint Working.

Work will also be continuing with our local communities, developers and Housing Associations to address housing issues. In 2013/14 we met our target for affordable homes, and are striving to ensure that our target of 200 affordable homes between 2013 and 2015 is achieved.

Progress has also been made in preparing a Local Plan which will address the need for housing and economic growth, but at the same time protect and enhance the environment of West Oxfordshire so that it remains a desirable area. This is being reviewed taking into account new information about local housing need and we will be carrying out further consultation on this in July 2014.

We have also worked with other councils to achieve a 'City Deal' for Oxfordshire which is an agreed approach with the Government to help the local economy.

The Council is also supporting the roll out of high speed broadband across the District, with the aim of achieving as close to 100% coverage as possible. To ensure that this is achieved we have agreed to invest £1.6m from our Capital Programme in this project.

Further details of our achievements in the past year are set out in the following pages.

The Council's Vision and Priorities

Our Vision and Priorities for 2012 to 2015 were set out in our original Council Plan for that period. A lot of progress has been made since 2012 but we think that our Vision and Priorities are still relevant, along with our underlying objectives.

Vision

The Council's Vision is:

To maintain and enhance West Oxfordshire as one of the best places to live, work and visit in Great Britain.

Priorities

Our three priorities are:

- Protect and enhance the environment of West Oxfordshire and maintain the district as a clean, beautiful place with low levels of crime and nuisance;
- Work in partnership to sustain vibrant, healthy and economically prosperous towns and villages with full employment;
- Be recognised as a leading council that provides efficient, value for money services.

Objectives and Key Tasks for 2014/15

We have a number of objectives and key tasks for 2014/15 which will help us to achieve our priorities, as set out below.

Priority – Protect and enhance the environment of West Oxfordshire and maintain the district as a clean, beautiful place with low levels of crime and nuisance

Objectives:

To further:

- Tackle nuisance, anti social behaviour and other locally identified priorities and concerns to maintain the district's reputation as a safe, clean and beautiful place.
- Reduce the Council's own environmental impact on climate change as well as supporting local residents, businesses and groups in reducing their impact and adapting to climate change.
- Reduce the amount of residual waste sent to landfill and increase the levels of recycled household and commercial waste.
- Protect and enhance the unique built and landscape environment of West Oxfordshire.

Achievements in the past year

Last year we made the following progress against the key actions we set out to help us meet the objectives:

Progress the Local Plan incorporating appropriate policies to secure the protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment.

The Local Plan was published for consultation in November 2012 and it had been intended to publish the final plan in summer 2013. However, it was decided to defer publication pending a new Strategic Housing Market Assessment being undertaken for Oxfordshire. This Assessment was published during the year and projected a higher housing requirement from that used in the draft Local Plan. The Local Plan is therefore being reviewed and further consultation will take place in July 2014, with a view to submission in December 2014 for approval and adoption in 2015.

Consultation was also carried out on a Community Infrastructure Levy preliminary draft charging schedule.

Approve the West Oxfordshire Community Safety Strategy (2013-2017) and implement actions to reduce crime and anti social behaviour contained in its Action Plan

The Community Safety Strategy was agreed by Council in September 2013. The crime figures for West Oxfordshire show a 5% reduction in all crime against the 2012/13 figures. This is in line with a 14.3% reduction in violent crime and 4.6 % reduction in Burglary. The Community Safety Partnership has worked very hard at supporting police activity but also by working in partnership to support specific initiatives such as a road safety competition for primary school children , outreach with vulnerable young people through BASE 33, tackling rural crime through Operation Ranger and the theft proof number plate initiative with local garages.

Provide assistance to businesses and homes to have energy efficient premises through a Green Deal Community Interest Company and through the delivery of Warm and Well Plus

The Green Deal Community Interest Company has now been set up and commenced operation in April 2014 with the first 15 households for the pilot being identified. These households will be assisted before the programme is fully rolled out.

Refresh the Carbon Plan and progress the climate change action plan

The Climate Change Policy 2008 – 2012 has now been replaced with a new Low Carbon and Environmental Plan that was adopted by Cabinet in February 2014. The plan includes details of our performance over the last 4 years and an action plan that sets out the Council's aims and actions for the environment and to reduce carbon emissions.

Implement the amended Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy for Oxfordshire in this District

The Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy is embedded within the Council's service plans and annual waste and recycling targets and the Council has continued to work towards delivering the Strategy both at a local level and through the Oxfordshire Waste Partnership. Recycling performance remains very good and initiatives to encourage recycling such as recycling for flats, where residents often have problems storing their waste, have been successful.

Deliver planned flood alleviation schemes for 2013/14.

The following works were carried out in 2013/14 to combat localised flooding issues from watercourses, surface water flooding and groundwater:

- Burford car park-new overflow channel reinstated and damaged sluice profiles blocked up.
- Brize Norton- Watercourse and culvert maintenance adjacent to the pumping house to protect properties on Station Road.
- Ascot- new drain to combat foul sewer flooding on part of the High Street.
- Clearance of all WODC owned watercourses and critical ditches.

- A survey of the Colwell brook catchment to determine what flood defence measures can be recommended.
- Completion of flood defence suite of measures at Broadwell and Kencot.
- Obtaining consent (with Oxfordshire County Council) to clear main rivers in Kelmscott. Work has now started on this.
- Completion of new surface water drain at Lower End, Alvescot.
- Refurbishment of existing culvert and ditch system at Curbridge.
- Installation of replacement filter drain and outfall at Bladon.

Key Actions for 2014/15

- Complete consultation on the Local Plan, which includes securing the protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment, and then publish and submit to Government for approval.
- Promote greater energy efficiency and use of renewable or low carbon energy in developments through the Draft Local Plan.
- Support Green Deal Together to reach their internal targets and will work with them to promote/signpost Green Deal to homes and businesses.
- Support local businesses and residents to recover from the flooding of Winter 2013/2014.

Priority - Work in partnership to sustain vibrant, healthy and economically prosperous towns and villages with full employment

To further:

- Support West Oxfordshire's economy to remain prosperous with full employment.
- Promote the Oxfordshire Cotswolds as an international and domestic tourist destination.
- Support individuals and families to stay in the area by the provision of affordable housing.
- Support public health initiatives within the district focusing on physical exercise and healthy lifestyles.
- Work in partnership to ensure housing related support particularly for older persons, vulnerable young people and persons with mental health related needs is being met satisfactorily.
- Promote and encourage positive activities for children and young people.
- Work with partner organisations to support local communities to meet local priorities.
- Protect access to local services and minimise the additional cost burden associated with rurality.

Achievements in the past year

Last year we made the following progress against the key actions we set out to help us meet the objectives:

Work with the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership to promote and support local businesses

The Council has further developed support to local businesses and has enhanced business support information which is now incorporated in the new Council website. The Local Enterprise Partnership has developed Countywide signposting to sources of business support.

The Council has continued to support small businesses by administering the extended Small Business Rate Relief scheme which gives the very smallest of businesses 100% relief from rates. In addition the Council introduced a retail support scheme across the district offering business support and mentoring at a discount of over 90% to the retailer.

Publish an Economic Statement and Action Plan with the economic challenges, priorities and interventions for the District

Progress in this area of work has so far concentrated on the assembly of relevant evidence following an economy study update and retail needs assessment undertaken in 2012. The work has included employment land monitoring in support of the Local Plan review and the evidence gathered and reported in the Annual Monitoring Report. A further assessment of employment land availability is planned in support of any subsequent statement on economic strategy.

Work with other Oxfordshire Councils to secure a “City Deal” for Oxfordshire

The Council has worked in partnership with other Oxfordshire authorities in the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) in securing a City Deal for Oxford and the surrounding area. The successful City Deal negotiation was secured in January 2014 and it establishes an agreed approach with Government to innovation led business growth in the County and associated investment in strategic infrastructure. The City Deal gives a framework for economic growth; job creation and business support; and investment in improved transport links.

In addition to the partnership work on the City Deal, the LEP partners have worked together in producing a Strategic Economic Plan for Oxfordshire. This work has further developed the approach advanced in the City Deal and it has established an economic ambition for Oxfordshire to 2030. The Strategic Economic Plan was considered at the Council’s Cabinet on 12th March 2014 and Cabinet agreed to support the overarching focus set out in the Plan and authorised the Chief Executive to endorse the final version of the Plan to be submitted to Government. The Strategic Economic Plan complements the City Deal and it provides a bid into Local Growth Funds for the further development of Oxfordshire’s economy.

A further strand of joint work as part of the LEP has been the Council’s involvement in the development of Oxfordshire’s European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF) Plan. This plan sets out proposals for the use of European funds (approximately £20m) that have been earmarked for Oxfordshire for the 2014-20 period. The ESIF plan has been drawn up against the much broader strategy for Oxfordshire which has been developed in the Strategic Economic Plan.

Progress the Local Plan which identifies opportunities for future development, economic growth and a mix of housing and finalise the Community Infrastructure Levy charging schedule taking into account the outcome of public consultation

See page 5 above.

Work with registered providers and other delivery partners to achieve targets set for enabling the provision of new affordable homes to meet housing need in the District

Construction of 51 new affordable homes was completed in 2013/14 on four rural developments and one development in Witney. Also, 158 new affordable homes (inclusive of 84 affordable extra care apartments) commenced construction during the year. The Council is on course to meet its target to enable the construction of at least 200 new affordable homes in the two year period ending April 2015.

Continue to work with the Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnership to develop and plan for the Districts' infrastructure needs

The Council has continued to work in partnership with the other Oxfordshire local authorities through the Oxfordshire Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnership (SPIP) and takes on the role of SPIP chair from the end of May 2014.

Manage the environmental, economic and social implications of the redevelopment and expansion of RAF Brize Norton.

The Council continues to liaise with RAF Brize Norton on issues of redevelopment and expansion. We are also addressing the issues of this development through the Local Plan process and through determining planning applications.

Key Actions for 2014/15

- Work with registered providers and other delivery partners to provide 200 new affordable homes between 2013 and 2015.
- Carry out focussed consultation on housing issues in the Local Plan, and then publish and submit the Plan to Government.
- Work with Town and Parish Councils to enable local people to access opportunities through community led neighbourhood plans.
- Support the roll out of high speed broadband across the District, with the aim of achieving as close to 100% coverage as possible, including investing £1.6m from the Capital Programme in this project.
- Develop Local Support Service Framework, to help manage the impacts of Welfare Reform for our residents.
- Promote the Retail Rate Relief Scheme offering discounts of up to £1000 to qualifying businesses.

Priority - Be recognised as a leading council that provides efficient, value for money services

To further:

- Build the capacity of the Council to ensure effective delivery of the Council's priorities.
- Reduce management and overhead costs by working in partnership with other councils and reviewing how services are provided.
- Provide easy access to services that meet residents', businesses' and customers' expectations.
- Work with local businesses to reduce the level of environmental and other regulation burden upon them.

Achievements in the past year

Last year we made the following progress against the key actions we set out to help us meet the objectives:

Review the Medium Term Financial Strategy in the light of recent changes to the local government finance system

A revised Medium Term Financial Strategy was agreed by the Council in January 2014. This Strategy took into account recent changes, such as the New Homes Bonus, the new Business Rates system, Council Tax capping and the Council Tax Support Scheme. The Strategy also dealt with the levels of savings required in future years of £1.2m. The Strategy has allowed the Council to continue to freeze Council Tax and to set a balanced budget for 2014/15, the second year in a row we have been able to do this.

Deliver the corporate improvement programme, Even Better, to increase capacity and increase service efficiency

The Council's Improvement Programme is now well established with a range of projects all working towards improving the overall efficiency / capacity of the Council. Whilst a number of the projects identified are still progressing, projects such as the Review of Services for Joint Working Opportunities, the establishment of a joint ICT service (with Cotswold District Council) and delivery of a joint website have been completed and are already delivering the savings/ benefits agreed.

Review the Joint Working Strategy, and deliver additional savings of £2.4m over the next five years

The Joint Working Strategy was reviewed by Cabinet in November 2013 and a revised senior management structure agreed. The new structure came into effect on 1st April 2014 and comprises joint services for the majority of the Council's functions, with only Planning & Strategic Housing and Democratic Services not being shared. Savings of £300,000 are expected in 2014/15 with an estimated reduction in senior management costs of £500,000 by 2018/19. A further £700,000 savings is expected from the greater sharing of officers across West Oxfordshire and Cotswold, resulting in a combined saving of £1.2m (£600,000 for each council). Work is also taking place to explore the feasibility of more services being shared within the GO Shared Services partnership (which includes Cheltenham and Forest of Dean Councils).

Further develop the shared ICT service with Cotswold District Council including the development of a shared ICT infrastructure that is flexible, resilient and efficient and the alignment of ICT systems and applications across both Councils

A new joint ICT service was established on the 1st January 2013, which is based at WODC and took over the responsibility of running the ICT services at Cotswold DC from the incumbent external provider. Since its inception the new joint service has not only delivered a joint annual saving of over £225,000 but also undertaken and achieved a wide range of projects for the two councils. These have included, amongst other things, the development of joint ICT policies; the installation of a joint telephone system; improved network resilience; a new Committee management system at West Oxfordshire; a replacement Income Management & Payment system at West Oxfordshire including a new self-service kiosk; started the implementation of a shared Land, Environment, Assets, and Property System (LEAPS); implemented a mobile working solution across both councils; established a joint printing system; and improved disaster recovery.

Enhance access to services through the implementation of a new website focused on our customers and their transactions, with improved content and structure

The delivery of websites for both councils was a complex and difficult project that involved a number of technical components as well as involvement from large number of staff. Since April 2013 the following has been achieved:

- Stakeholder and customer research and consultation.
- Customer journey mapping to understand how both sites were used to help design the navigation which had to be easy to use and intuitive.
- Design of both websites to ensure they were branded appropriately whilst being attractive, clear and 'uncluttered'.
- Development of a single 'back end' using open source technology thus keeping costs low in terms of on-going maintenance and future development / support.

- New functionality – payments and on-line services.
- New online forms package linked to Customer Relation Management systems in both councils.
- Full integration with My West Oxfordshire / My Cotswold for spatial data.
- Supporting the Council's 'Default to Digital' strategy.

Key Actions for 2014/15

- Continue to implement the Joint Working Strategy with Cotswold District Council to deliver savings additional annual savings of £600,000 per annum to this Council within five years (from April 2014).
- Complete a review into the potential for transformational joint working based upon the broader GO Shared Service Partnership of Cotswold, Forest of Dean and Cheltenham Councils (2020 Vision for Joint Working).
- Develop the processes which will support the creating of self service procedures, change channel preferences and achieve a shift to digital services.
- Commence the process to deliver a new leisure management contract for West Oxfordshire.
- Improve Asset Utilisation to deliver further efficiency savings.

Corporate Performance Framework

In order to measure our progress, we have compiled a set of indicators and targets to show how well we are succeeding in meeting the Council's Vision and Priorities. These are monitored on a quarterly basis and considered by the Council's Cabinet. The target to be achieved by 2014/15 and progress so far is shown below.

Target Basis	Indicator	Outturn for 2013/14	Target by 2014/15
Within top 25% of councils in Thames Valley	Crime rate per 1000 population.	In top 25% of councils in Thames Valley but exact data not yet available	In top 25% of councils in Thames Valley <i>(38.7 in 2011/12)</i>
Local	Residual household waste per household.	3712kg per annum	336kgs per annum
County	Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting.	59.2%	67%
Local	Number of affordable homes delivered (gross)	51	200 (over 2013/14 and 2014/15)
Local	Number of households living in Temporary Accommodation	14	5
Top 25% of all councils in the South East	Unemployment Claimant Count (JSA)	1%	Currently 1%
Local	Total number of Leisure Centre Visits per annum (excl Schools)	705,522	692,221
Top 25% UK Rural South	Tourism - Economic impact of tourism activity on the district per annum	£268.2m	£265.3m
Local	Revenue Spend as % of Budget	93.1%	Less than 100%
Local	The number of working days/shifts lost to the Authority due to sickness absence per FTE.	5.8 days	6 days
Local	Percentage of lost telephone calls	5.7%	5%

Local	The percentage of invoices for commercial goods and services paid by the Authority within 30 days of receipt or within the agreed payment terms	86%	98%
Within top 10% nationally	Overall cost of Council services per head of population (from Revenue Estimates)	Data not yet available, but 1 st nationally in 2012/13	Within top 10% nationally
Local	% of Council tax collected	98.5%	99.1%

Our Finances

Medium Term Financial Strategy

A summary of the 2014/15 Budget is set out below:

	2014/15
Net Operating Expenditure	£10,025,700
Financed by:-	
Investment Income	£550,000
Business Rates	£3,363,631
Net Government Grant	£2,071,264
New Homes Bonus	£537,398
Reserves	£98,391
Council Tax	£3,405,016
Band D Council Tax	£81.63

Capital Programme

The Council continues to invest in the infrastructure of the District to help deliver its priorities. Key schemes for the year 2014/15 are as below:

Scheme	2014/15 (£)	Priority
Vehicle Renewal	100,000	Protect and enhance the environment
Parish Loans Scheme	950,000	Vibrant, healthy and prosperous
Disabled Facilities Grant	567,000	Vibrant, healthy and prosperous
Community Grants Fund	200,000	Vibrant, healthy and prosperous
WLC Leisure Equipment	26,000	Vibrant, healthy and prosperous
Abbeycare, Witan House – Public Art	30,000	Protect and enhance the environment
Stanton Harcourt Public Art	2,400	Protect and enhance the environment
Outdoor sport and recreation – Woodstock	34,300	Vibrant, healthy and prosperous
Play Facilities – Woodstock	58,400	Vibrant, healthy and prosperous
Eynsham Public Art	15,000	Protect and enhance the environment
Improvements to Market Square, Witney	50,000	Vibrant, healthy and prosperous
Northmoor Community – Superfast Broadband	184,300	Vibrant, healthy and prosperous
Superfast Broadband across District	1,600,000	Vibrant, healthy and prosperous
Affordable Housing	300,000	Vibrant, healthy and prosperous
IT Provision – systems and strategy	100,000	Efficient, value for money services
IT equipment – copiers etc	40,000	Efficient, value for money services
iWORLD Revenues and Benefits computer system	30,000	Efficient, value for money services
Upgrade of ERP finance management and HR/Payroll computer system	25,000	Efficient, value for money services
Carterton Town Centre Regeneration	155,000	Vibrant, healthy and prosperous
Council Building Maintenance	171,000	Efficient, value for money services
Total Capital Programme	4,638,400	