

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
COUNCIL – WEDNESDAY 24 FEBRUARY 2016
COUNCIL PLAN 2016-2019

REPORT OF THE JOINT HEAD OF BUSINESS INFORMATION
AND CHANGE SERVICES

(Contact: Mike Clark, Tel: (01993) 861197)

1. PURPOSE

To consider the Council Plan for the period 2016 to 2019.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Council considers the recommendations made by Cabinet and adopts the Council Plan 2016 to 2019.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1. Cabinet at its meeting on 14th October 2015 approved a draft Council Plan for the period 2016 to 2019 for consultation purposes.

3.2. The draft Council Plan sets out the Council's Aim and Priorities as follows:

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

Priorities:

- To protect the environment whilst supporting the local economy;
- To meet the current and future needs of residents;
- To provide efficient and value for money services, whilst delivering quality front line services.

3.3. Consultation was carried out with the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, with Town and Parish Councils and with businesses and residents, through a website based questionnaire. The responses are summarised in Appendix B. Although comments have been made on some aspects, there is general support for the proposed Council Plan.

3.4. The draft Council Plan attached at Appendix A has been updated since Cabinet approved the original draft for consultation. A summary of the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the set of performance indicators which will be reported to Cabinet quarterly have now been included. A further change is the updating of information about deprivation in the District following the publication of the latest Index of Multiple Deprivation in October 2015. Finally, the Key Tasks have been updated to reflect the latest position. No changes have been made as a result of comments made during consultation.

3.5. Cabinet considered the updated Council Plan together with the responses received during the consultation period and resolved:

“That the Council be recommended to approve the draft Council Plan 2016 - 2019 appended to the report, subject to any amendments arising from consideration of responses to the consultation exercise.”

4. ALTERNATIVES/OPTIONS

The Council could choose to amend the Council Plan.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The draft Council Plan 2016 - 2019 has been developed having regard to the Council's financial position.

6. RISKS

None.

7. REASONS

To review and update the Council Plan to reflect local and national changes.

Phil Martin

Head of Business Information and Change Services

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Date: 12 February 2016

Background Papers:

None

DRAFT

West Oxfordshire District Council

Council Plan 2016 – 2019

Introduction from Sir Barry Norton, Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council

Welcome to West Oxfordshire District Council's Plan for 2016 to 2019.

It is a privilege to call this area home. The district combines beautiful countryside with a thriving local economy and enviable visitor attractions boosted by initiatives such as free parking. There is high jobs growth and, despite an expanding population, rates of unemployment and crime are among the lowest in the country.

Since 2008, our enduring aim has been:

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

This Plan sets out how we will continue to develop that vision. Of course there are many challenges but our priorities for the next four years are:

- To protect the environment whilst supporting the local economy
- To meet the current and future needs of residents
- To provide efficient and value for money services, whilst delivering quality front line services

Key action points highlighted in this Plan include improving the provision of affordable housing, facilitating effective road and transport networks and improving access to key services such as GPs' surgeries and schools.

At the same time we must ensure the environment is protected and improved where possible, for example through waste reduction and further promotion of recycling while local businesses are supported through initiatives such as the continuing roll-out of high speed broadband.

All this has to be achieved in the most cost-effective way as our grant from central Government has continued to reduce. As a result, we have sought greater efficiency through joint working with Cotswold District Council and we are now also sharing services with Forest of Dean and Cheltenham Councils.

This project known as 2020 Vision will be developed further to ensure we continue to deliver the services people expect while maintaining our economic and environmental goals.

I am fortunate and proud to live and work in this District and I hope this Plan shows how much we as a Council are doing to ensure that it continues to be one of the best places to live, work and visit in Great Britain.

Sir Barry Norton
Leader of West Oxfordshire District Council

Background

People

West Oxfordshire is the second most rural district in the south-east of England, with a population of 108,000. The main towns are Witney, Carterton and Chipping Norton, though the majority of the population (57%) lives in rural areas. The population has increased by 31% in the past 30 years, with just under half of this growth taking place in the past 10 years.

The District also has an ageing population. Estimates from 2014 to 2024 show the 65 years and over age group increasing by a further 5,300 people, with two thirds being outside the main towns. This will affect things like the demand for suitable housing (eg extra care housing), home adaptations, other service provision and associated demand for key worker housing. However, the younger population is also expected to increase.

- Those aged 85+ represented 2% of the district's total population in both 1993, and 2013 but this is predicted to rise to 7% by 2037.
- As of mid-2014 it is estimated there was a total of 24,700 children and young people aged 0 to 19 resident in West Oxfordshire. This is expected to increase by 11% to 27,400 over the 10 years to 2024.
- In 2011, most residents were White British (92.6%); this compares to 95.6% in 2001.
- The total number of residents of West Oxfordshire born outside the UK increased from 5,600 in 2001 to 8,500 in 2011

West Oxfordshire Quality of Life

West Oxfordshire people are more likely to experience a good quality of life than in other parts of Britain. No parts of the District are in the most deprived 20%, according to the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation. However, some parts of the District have elements of deprivation, with part in the 20% most 'deprived' nationally in terms of access to housing and services such as GP's surgeries, post offices, shops and primary schools and some areas in the 10% most deprived in relation to education and skills.

Housing

In 2013, the cheapest (lower quartile) market housing in the District was around 9 times the lower band gross salary. This ratio is well above the national average.

Between 2001 and 2011 the total number of households in the District increased by 4,800 (13%), with the highest percentage growth in private rented households. There are now more people in private rented accommodation than social housing. Therefore, the demand for affordable housing continues to be an issue in this District.

The Local Economy

Throughout the recent recession unemployment (as measured by Job Seekers Allowance claimants) was within the lowest 25% of Districts in the South East. The number of jobs in the District has risen in recent years and is now above the last peak in 2007. Between 2012 and 2013 there was an increase in jobs of 6,000 (12%) in West Oxfordshire, which is higher than the percentage jobs growth in other districts in Oxfordshire. Some of this change is due to the expansion of RAF Brize Norton. Jobs in the private sector have risen at a higher rate than public sector jobs.

Technology is also allowing increasing numbers of people to work from home. This is highest in the rural parts of the District. There is also significant commuting in and out of the District for work, especially in the Woodstock and Eynsham areas.

We recognise the importance of the local economy and endeavour to support local businesses. We also work to encourage tourism and we will continue to invest in the availability of high speed broadband, (having contributing £xx in 2014/15) which is increasingly important to businesses.

We are also aware that the south east quadrant of the District (ie the Eynsham, Woodstock, Long Hanborough area) is becoming increasingly important in economic terms, with the second highest number of jobs after Witney.

- The percentage of people claiming Job Seekers Allowance in June 2015 was 0.5%, compared to 1% in the South East and 1.7% nationally.
- In 2013, 21% of employment (not including self-employment) was in education, public administration, care, social work and other health occupations.
- Between 2001 and 2011 there was an increase in the net outward commuting of workers, up from 7,749 in 2001 to 8,326 in 2011.
- According to the 2011 Census, 7,500 residents of West Oxfordshire commuted to work in Oxford. This was 13% of employed residents. In the areas around Woodstock and Eynsham, around 30% of workers commuted into Oxford.

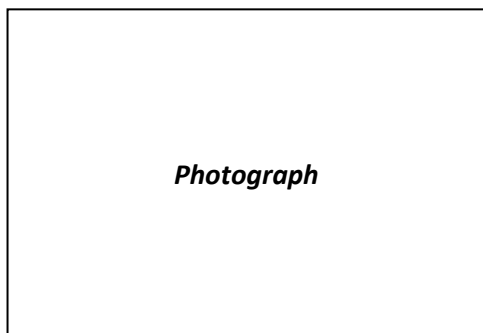
Priority – Protect the environment whilst supporting the local economy

West Oxfordshire is a pleasant area in which to live and work, with a good quality of life. It also attracts high numbers of tourists, who make a significant contribution to the economy.

The Council has an important role in ensuring the District remains an attractive area and in protecting the environment. We are able to do this through our planning policies, and have worked hard to produce a Local Plan which seeks to protect our unique landscape and built environment as well as promoting local economic growth and allowing for a mix of housing. After extensive consultation, this Plan was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for examination in summer 2015.

Economically, the Eynsham, Woodstock, Long Hanborough area is 'heating up' and we are aware that we need to secure economic growth which is appropriate for the District, given the pressures of the wider economic area. We also recognise that we must continue to promote the area for tourism.

We are conscious of the many other contributions we can make to the environment, for instance through continuing to promote recycling and reducing the amount of waste we send to landfill, as well as working to keep the District clean.



Objectives

Our objectives for the next four years are to:

- Protect the natural and built environment
- Reduce waste and increase recycling
- Secure economic growth appropriate for the District
- Work in partnership to increase the economic value of tourism to the District
- Make best use of any opportunities through devolution for the benefit of the District
- Continue free parking and consider how to meet any additional demands as identified by the forthcoming Parking Strategy

Key Tasks

- Implement a new waste and recycling contract from October 2017
- Complete and, when adopted, implement the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031.
- Develop and put in place an economic development strategy for the District
- Investigate means of increasing international visitors to the Oxfordshire Cotswolds by the end of this Council Plan.
- Consult on and approve a new Parking Strategy for the District by March 2017

Priority – Working with communities to meet the current and future needs and aspirations of residents

West Oxfordshire is known for having a good quality of life. For instance it has scored well in a number of national quality of life surveys in recent years and it is one of the least deprived parts of the country as defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation. However, we are aware that we need to work with communities to maintain that quality of life.

It is important, for instance, that we work to secure the infrastructure to provide quality of life and well-being for communities. We are aware that access to services such as GPs surgeries, Post Offices and shopping facilities is difficult in some areas and that improvement to the major road network and public transport is needed. Currently, we provide free parking throughout the District and we will continue to do this as well as investigating any additional parking demands.

The Council will continue to support the rollout of superfast broadband and we have invested £1.6m to ensure it is available to homes not covered by other rollout programmes.

Affordable homes are also a major element in providing a good quality of life and something which would help people of all ages live in our communities, at a time when the population is ageing.

Along with other District Councils we will be engaging with Public Health services at a County level and with the NHS at a local level around health and wellbeing, and supporting our own residents through changes to health services.

Communities can also do things themselves to meet their needs and priorities, and we will work with them to help in this. We are supporting them in the development of Neighbourhood Plans and to use their community rights under the Localism Act.

Photograph

Objectives

Our objectives for the next four years are to:

- Secure the infrastructure to support the quality of life and well-being of communities now and in the future (including strategic infrastructure, utilities and services).
- Ensure appropriate infrastructure is provided for new housing developments
- Ensure better and increased use of s106 and Community Infrastructure Levy to benefit local communities
- Enable communities to provide services themselves
- Campaign to improve access to services in rural areas, improvements to the major road network and a better transport policy
- To build capacity and develop partnerships with statutory and voluntary organisations to increase resilience to enable communities to help themselves

Key tasks

- Work with providers to ensure better broadband and mobile phone coverage by the end of 2017.
- Promote working at home
- Deliver a total of 133 affordable homes in 2016/17 and 134 affordable homes in 2017/18.
- Deliver Phase 2 of the Carterton Leisure Centre within the life of this Council Plan.

Priority - To provide efficient and value for money services, whilst delivering quality front line services

We believe it is important that we help local people by keeping Council Tax as low as possible, whilst at the same time providing high quality services that people need.

There have been significant reductions in our grant from central government since 2010, but we have been able to freeze Council Tax for the past five years. To do this we have worked hard to find ways to be more efficient and develop new ways of working.

A key part of this has been the development of joint working with Cotswold District Council, and we are now sharing most services. We have also joined with Forest of Dean and Cheltenham Councils to share some of our services.

We now aim to develop this further in a project with those three other councils known as 2020 Vision. This Vision is for each of the four Councils to retain their independence and identity, but working together and sharing resources to maximise mutual benefit leading to more efficient and effective delivery of local services. We expect to save £1.29m over 5 years, but our aim is to make sure that the public see no reduction in the services they receive.



Photograph

Objectives

Our objectives for the next four years are to:

- Continue to be in the lowest ten councils nationally for the level of Council Tax
- To provide high quality services at the lowest possible cost to Council Tax payers
- Reduce the costs of services by initiatives such as 2020 Vision
- Avoid making cuts in services valued by residents

Key Tasks

- Implement the 2020 Vision to deliver £1.29m per annum savings by 2020.
- Implement a new shared Public Protection service by the end of 2016.
- Implement a new contract for the management of our Leisure facilities by 31st December 2017
- Continue to improve the use of our assets to obtain further efficiency savings, for instance income from letting office space.

Our Finances

Medium Term Financial Strategy

Local government funding was significantly changed from 1st April 2013 when the Government introduced the new Local Government Resource Regime. Under the new regime, around 40% of the Council's Government funding comes directly from Business Rates with the balance from Revenue Support Grant and New Homes Bonus. This is a key strand of the Government policy to localise financing of local authorities and brings the potential for increased risks or increased rewards depending upon the Council's ability to raise business rate income.

The Council has prepared a three-year financial strategy which takes into account likely reductions to its funding from central government and other changes which will have a financial impact upon the Council.

A summary of the 2016/17 Budget is set out below:

| | 2016/17 |
|---------------------------|----------------|
| Net Operating Expenditure | £ xxx |
| Financed by:- | |
| Investment Income | £xxx |
| Business Rates | £xxx |
| Net Government Grant | £xxx |
| New Homes Bonus | £xxx |
| Reserves | £xxx |
| Council Tax | £xxx |
| Band D Council Tax | £xx.xx |

(This page will be completed when the Budget is approved)

Measuring Our Performance

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 indicators are:

- Crime rate per 1000 population
- Residual household waste per household
- Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting
- Number of affordable homes delivered (gross)
- Number of households living in Emergency Accommodation
- Unemployment Claimant Count
- Total number of Leisure Centre Visits per annum (excl Schools)
- Tourism - Economic impact of tourism activity on the district per annum
- Revenue Spend as % of Budget
- The number of working days/shifts lost to the Authority due to sickness absence per FTE.
- Overall cost of Council services per head of population (from Revenue Estimates)
- % of Council tax collected

Council Plan 2016 – 2019

Consultation Responses

I. Overview and Scrutiny Committees

The relevant minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees are set out below:

Economic & Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 19th November 2015

The report of the Joint Head of Business Information and Change Services was received and considered, together with the revised Council Plan for 2016 – 2019.

Mr Handley expressed the hope that Phase II of the Carterton Leisure Centre development could be delivered within the life of the plan.

Mr Beaney questioned whether reference to Primary Schools in the section regarding 'Quality of Life' ought just to refer to schools. In response, the Strategic Director advised that this was a specific measure of deprivation. In response to a further question, she acknowledged that there was an error in the date of the 'Key Task' regarding means of increasing international visitors to the Oxfordshire Cotswolds, indicating that this should relate to the term of the Plan.

Mr Beaney also questioned the impact of the projected increase in levels of Council Tax within the Medium Term Financial Strategy upon the Council's objective to continue to be in the lowest 10 councils nationally. The Strategic Director undertook to investigate further and respond to Mr Beaney directly.

In response to a question from Mr Handley, it was confirmed that the financial support offered by the Council to Cotswold Broadband to facilitate the provision of high speed broadband throughout the District was to be by way of an interest bearing loan, not a grant.

In response to a question from Mrs Little, the Strategic Director advised that the Council would be prepared to consider assisting in the preparation of master plans if appropriate to do so.

RESOLVED: That the draft Council Plan 2016 - 2019 be endorsed.

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 26th November 2015

Mr Howard referred to the commitment to construct Phase 2 of Carterton Leisure Centre and expressed the hope that it be built to the highest environmental standards with any initiatives such as solar panels being incorporated at the construction stage and not retrospectively. Mr Howard asked that this be reflected in the plan.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be advised that the committee endorses the Council Plan subject to consideration of the addition regarding Carterton Leisure Centre

Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 2nd December 2015

The report of the Joint Head of Business Information and Change Services was received and considered, together with the revised Council Plan for 2016 – 2019.

RESOLVED: That the draft Council Plan 2016 - 2019 be endorsed.

2. Town and Parish Council consultation

Town and Parish Councils were consulted on the draft Council Plan at the Liaison meeting on 1st December 2015. The Council's proposals were noted and no amendments to the Council Plan were suggested.

3. Responses to Website Consultation

A website consultation was carried out in December 2015/ January 2016. A total of 205 people responded. The questions and the percentage of who agreed or strongly agreed are set out below:

1. Do you agree with the Council's Aim 'To maintain and enhance West Oxfordshire as one of the best places to live, work and visit in Great Britain' ? - **Agree or Strongly Agree 82%**
2. Do you agree with the Priority 'To protect the environment whilst supporting the local economy' ? - **Agree or Strongly Agree 65%**
3. Do you agree with the Priority 'To meet the current and future needs of residents'? - **Agree or Strongly Agree 64%**
4. Do you agree with the Priority 'To provide efficient and value for money services, whilst delivering quality front line services' ? - **Agree or Strongly Agree 76%**

A total of 52 other comments were made. These comments are available in full in the Members' Room, but those issues raised by more than one person are summarised below:

- The Council Plan should reflect that the Local Plan is a major issue (2 comments)
- Infrastructure concerns (5 comments)
- Deal with problems of A40 (5 comments)/ transport strategies are a priority/congestion problems generally (3 comments)
- Protect environment from overbuild/ large scale developments in villages (3 comments)
- Affordable Homes – current proposals acceptable but not larger developments; build more housing (5 comments)
- Do not cut funding to voluntary organisations (5 comments)/ use voluntary sector more (2 comments)
- Retain free parking (6 comments)
- Let spare office space (2 comments)
- Improve Leisure Centre facilities (2 comments)
- Sharing services could lose West Oxon identity and distance council from residents/ losing local voice (2 comments)
- Increase Council Tax instead of cutting services/ don't cut services (2 comments)
- The Council Plan does not provide enough detail (5 comments)