

# Public Document Pack



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Tuesday, 8 June 2021

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## CABINET

You are summoned to a meeting of the Cabinet to be held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney on **Wednesday, 16 June 2021 at 2.00 pm.**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Giles Hughes".

Giles Hughes  
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Cabinet

Councillor Michele Mead (Leader), Councillor David Harvey (Deputy Leader), Councillor Suzi Coul, Councillor Merylyn Davies, Councillor Jane Doughty, Councillor Jeff Haine and Councillor Norman MacRae MBE

Recording of Proceedings – The law allows the public proceedings of Council, Cabinet, and Committee Meetings to be recorded, which includes filming as well as audio-recording. Photography is also permitted. By participating in this meeting, you are consenting to be filmed.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings please let the Committee Administrator know prior to the start of the meeting.

# AGENDA

1. **Notice of Decisions** (Pages 5 - 10)  
To receive notice of the decisions taken at the meeting held on 26 May 2021.
2. **Apologies for Absence**
3. **Declarations of Interest**  
To receive any declarations from Members of the Committee on any items to be considered at the meeting.
4. **Participation of the Public**  
To receive any submissions from members of the public, in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure.
5. **Receipt of Announcements**  
Purpose:  
To receive any announcements from the Leader of the Council or Members of the Cabinet.
6. **Service Performance Report 2020-21 Quarter Four** (Pages 11 - 68)  
Purpose  
This report provides details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2020-21 Quarter four (Q4), and enables Councillors to assess operational performance and gain assurance on progress towards achieving the Council's priorities. The Financial reporting usually included in this report has been delayed to allow officers to concentrate on meeting the audit deadline and will follow at the next meeting of Cabinet.  
Recommendation  
That the 2020-21 Q4 service performance be noted.
7. **Community Facility Grants - 1st Round 2021/2022** (Pages 69 - 74)  
Purpose  
To consider applications for grant aid from the Community Facilities Grant Scheme.  
Recommendation  
That the Council agrees to award grants in accordance with the recommendations set out in ANNEX A.
8. **Commercial Tenancy Arrears Review** (Pages 75 - 84)  
Purpose  
To consider the commercial tenancy arrears position in light of the statutory limitation on recovery action against tenants.  
Recommendations
  - a) *That Cabinet notes the arrears position on the commercial portfolio; and*
  - b) *That Cabinet grants delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for Finance to utilise the tools set out in section 3 on a case by case basis to protect the commercial interests of the Council.*

# Public Document Pack Agenda Item 1

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### CABINET

Record of decisions taken at the meeting of the **Cabinet** held  
on **Wednesday, 26 May 2021** at 2.00 pm

### PRESENT

Councillors: Councillor Michelle Mead (Leader), Councillor Suzi Coul, Councillor Merilyn Davies, Councillor Jane Doughty, Councillor Jeff Haine, Councillor Norman MacRae MBE and Councillor Michele Mead

Also in Attendance: Councillors

Officers: Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Senior Strategic Support Officer), Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer), Giles Hughes (Chief Executive) and Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica)

#### **1** Notice of Decisions

The decisions taken at the meeting on 21 April 2021 were noted.

#### **2** Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cabinet Member, Councillor David Harvey, and non-Cabinet Members Councillors Good and Levy.

#### **3** Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

#### **4** Participation of the Public

There was none.

#### **5** Receipt of Announcements

##### Welcome

Councillor Mead welcomed everyone back to the Council Chamber for the first time since lockdown restrictions eased and highlighted that this was her first meeting as Leader in the Chamber and the first Cabinet meeting for her newly appointed Cabinet Members.

##### Regulatory Excellence Awards 2021 - finalists

Councillor McRae addressed the meeting and advised that The Oxfordshire Coronavirus Regulatory Partnership had submitted a nomination to the Local Government Awards and had been selected as a Regulatory Excellence Awards 2021 Coronavirus Category finalist.

He highlighted the work undertaken by three members of West Oxfordshire staff who had pulled together, worked across the county, broken down barriers and improved relationships. These staff members were Liz Walters – Hospitality and Events Officer, Andrew Bartlett – Covid Support Officer, Maria Harper – Covid Business Support and Ruth Levett – Service Leader. Councillor MacRae then shared some extracts from the nomination form which explained the achievements and the legacy left by the team. He finished by thanking all involved for the fantastic work and the achievement in being selected as finalists for the award.

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**6** Appointments of Representatives to Outside Bodies

Members received a report from Democratic Services which advised that appointments to Outside Bodies were a responsibility of Cabinet and this exercise was carried out annually in May. The proposed appointments for 2021/22 had been included in an annex to the report, however, a revised version was circulated prior to the meeting, following Group Meetings and discussions with Group Leaders.

The report asked any Councillor who did not wish to continue with an existing appointment appointed; or who wished to be considered as an appointee to one or more particular bodies, to let Democratic Services know as soon as possible.

Councillor Mead introduced the report as Leader and proposed the appointments as per the revised Annex A. This was seconded by Councillor Haine.

**Resolved** that the appointments to Outside Bodies listed in the revised Annex A to the report, be approved.

**7** Ubico Business Case for Expansion and Extension of the Partnership to Gloucester City Council

Members received a report from the Business Manager – Contracts, which presented them with a proposal for Gloucester City Council to become an equal shareholder in Ubico Limited and presented the findings of a due diligence appraisal of the business case.

Councillor MacRae outlined the report and explained that West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) and Cotswold District Council (CDC), along with Forest of Dean District Council (FoDDC), and four other partners in Gloucestershire were shareholders in Ubico Limited, a teckal company designed to deliver environmental services, offering better value for money than commercial contracts. Ubico had submitted a tender bid to Gloucester City Council (GCi) for its environmental services contract, which had been successful and would mean that GCi would join the partnership and become an equal shareholder in the company.

The appraisal of the business case had taken the form of an assessment of three key areas of risk –the Environmental Services Innovation Programme, the business support costs to Publica whilst integrating GCi into Ubico and the ongoing business support costs to Publica. These were detailed individually in the report under sections 3, 4 and 5.

Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC), and the other Ubico shareholders were performing their own reviews whilst Stroud District Council and Forest of Dean District Council had already agreed to GCi joining the partnership. In order to effectively review the business case, senior officers from Waste, Finance, HR, ICT, Legal, and South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) had been involved in the appraisal.

Following the review, it was concluded that Ubico had provided sufficient assurance to the Council to enable the Cabinet to recommend that the Leader approve the admission of GCi to Ubico as a shareholder. In addition, there would be a financial benefit to the Council through an estimated reduction of £33,000 per annum in corporate overhead costs.

An alternative option was that the Council could choose to oppose GCi joining the Ubico Partnership as an equal shareholder, however, the final decision would be made based on the majority.

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Councillor MacRae, therefore, proposed the recommendations in the report as laid out and this was seconded by Councillor Davies.

In response to a query from Councillor Graham, Councillor MacRae confirmed that £33,000 was West Oxfordshire Council's share of the savings across the partnership. In addition, Councillor MacRae provided clarification on the potential for depot sharing with Gloucester and the opportunities this could provide with regards to a larger workshop for servicing the fleet of vehicles. There were also discussions to be had about the potential of covering each other's outlying, rural collection areas, when these were located within easy access of one another, offering up carbon reduction and fuel savings.

Councillor Graham also asked what mechanism would be used to review and monitor the changes. Councillor MacRae advised that the Environmental Services Innovation Programme would be looking at the service improvement and there would be constant reiterations.

In response to a comment from Councillor Postan, Members were reminded that the performance of the Ubico contract was reviewed annually by Council.

Having read the report and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

**Resolved** that the proposal contained within this report is endorsed and the Leader (As the Ubico Shareholder Representative) formally supports Gloucester City Council joining Ubico Limited, as an equal shareholder.

## 8 Local Development Scheme (LDS) Update

Members received a report from the Planning Policy Manager which requested approval of an update of the Council's Local Development Scheme (LDS). This provided information on which planning policy documents the Council intended to prepare and when, to ensure transparency and enable effective community engagement. The LDS also provided information on Neighbourhood Planning.

The report highlighted that a Local Development Scheme (LDS) was required under section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011). The LDS must specify the development plan documents which form the development plan for the area. The LDS must be made publicly available including on the Council's website and kept up to date, being revised at least annually or more frequently where the need arose. The Council's most recent LDS was approved in November 2020, however, a number of issues had arisen which meant that it was necessary to agree a further update.

An updated version of the LDS was attached at Annex A to the report and covered the period May 2021 – May 2024 and a summary of the main changes was provided in the report.

Councillor Haine outlined the report and explained the need to review the Local Plan every five years, work for which was on schedule. He also provided an update on the latest situation regarding the examination hearings for the Salt Cross development and the ongoing discussions within government relating to their intention to abolish CIL and Section 106 and replace with a new, nationally set, value-based flat rate charge. Councillor Haine reiterated that unfortunately, there was still no clarity from government on this.

With regards to the Supplementary Planning Documents, Councillor Haine signposted Members to paragraph 2.13 of the report which advised that in light of the legal advice received, the updated LDS no longer referred to the preparation of SPD's for the four

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strategic areas. Councillor Haine then proposed the recommendations as laid out and this was seconded by Councillor Davies.

Councillor Graham raised a concern that the work undertaken so far on the SPD's would be put aside and noted that there would have been a cost incurred in producing them. In addition, he queried how prepared the Council was to act once the Government announced its changes with regard to CIL and Section 106. In response, Councillor Haine recognised that there had been a cost involved in preparing SPD's, particularly in relation to officer time and repeated that as yet, there was no clarity from Government on their plans moving forwards.

The Chief Executive, Mr Hughes, addressed the meeting and stated that he did not feel the work that had gone into preparing the SPD's would be wasted because of the legacy of communication and idea harvesting that had been borne from the process. He echoed the frustrations felt at the lack of clarity from government and highlighted the work being carried out on the Oxfordshire Plan which the government were very supportive of.

Councillor Graham also wondered when consultation would be carried out, if the masterplans were to be created by the developers. In response, Councillor Haine advised that officers would be providing guidance to the developers and the plans would need to come to Council for approval. In addition, these were all strategic sites and would any proposals would undergo public consultation.

Having considered the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

**Resolved** that the updated Local Development Scheme attached at Annex A to the report is approved.

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## Opening Woodstock Outdoor Pool

Members received a report from the Business Manager – Contracts which sought approval for a revised outdoor pool opening programme for the 2021 season, allowing the Woodstock Outdoor pool to open as an addition to the GLL planned Covid 19 recovery programme.

Following the announcement of the Government Roadmap (the Roadmap) GLL were asked to provide a schedule of the re-opening of facilities in accordance with the relaxation of lockdown restrictions. This resulted in GLL establishing the minimum viable offer (MVO) which was a forecast of the allowed activities and the order in which the services could be opened whilst minimising the risk that the business could become insolvent through lack of income.

As part of establishing the MVO, GLL identified that the Woodstock Outdoor Pool operated at a financial loss of £57,000 annually, however, the benefits could still be delivered in normal circumstances as the deficit was covered by GLL as part of the contracts overall financial arrangement.

The report detailed two options for consideration – the pool remain closed resulting in zero subsidy but the potential of costs associated with dilapidation; or open for the school summer holidays resulting in a £19,000 subsidy.

The legal implications relating to any amendment to the contract and the risks associated with the proposals were outlined at sections 4 and 5 of the report. A table at paragraph 5.4 demonstrated the benefits and weaknesses of the options.

An alternative option was that the Council could choose to explore different timeframes for the re-opening, although each would have a different effect on the modelling. The report, therefore, recommended a revised opening programme as detailed at Annex A and asked

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Members to decide if the amendment to the contract be for the remainder of 2021 or if it should be extended to cover future years.

Due to the recent change in portfolio remits, it was recognised that Councillor Doughty had only just taken ownership of this service area and therefore, Councillor Coul presented the report as the previous Cabinet Member for Health and Leisure.

Councillor Coul outlined the report and assured Members that this was a positive move in order for residents to enjoy the health and wellbeing benefits the facility provided. She highlighted the offers that would be publicised to encourage the public back to the pool and hoped that opening for the summer holidays would be a good compromise.

She therefore proposed recommendations a), b) and c) i and this was seconded by Councillor Doughty.

Councillor Cooper addressed the meeting and stated his disappointment at hearing about this decision from a third party and not from Cabinet members. He advised that the pool had been in existence for over 50 years and had served Woodstock and surrounding areas including Cherwell. He queried if the model operated by Hinksey outdoor pool had been considered, which included staying open longer to provide a facility for cold water swimming.

In response, the Leader noted the request for Ward Members to be consulted in future but reminded the meeting that until this report had been considered, no decision had been made.

Councillor Davies was not convinced that the comparison of the Woodstock pool with the Hinksey facility was fair as they were very different facilities. However, it was agreed that a re-think of the future provision at Woodstock would be beneficial in order to encourage future usage.

Councillor Graham raised a concern that schools had not been consulted with as previously stated but had instead been advised that the pool would not be available to students. The new Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery, Councillor Doughty assured him she would look into this and had taken the comments relating to Ward Members on board.

Having considered the report and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

**Resolved** that

- a) the proposed school summer holiday opening programme for Woodstock Outdoor Pool for the 2021 season, is approved;
- b) the forecast additional cost of this addition to the Recovery programme of the Leisure Contract, is acknowledged; and
- c) authority is delegated to the Head of Paid Service, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer and Cabinet member, to allow an amendment to the minimum opening hours of the leisure contract via an exchange of letters for 2021.


The Meeting closed at 2.42pm

Leader of the Council

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# Agenda Item 6

 <p><b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b></p>	<p><b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b></p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p><b>Cabinet: Wednesday 16 June 2021</b></p>
<p>Report Number</p>	<p><b>Agenda Item No. 6</b></p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p><b>Service Performance Report 2020-21 Quarter Four</b></p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>Cllr Suzi Coul, Cabinet Member for Finance Email: <a href="mailto:suzi.coul@westoxon.gov.uk">suzi.coul@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Tel: (01993) 861658 Email: <a href="mailto:giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk">giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>This report provides details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2020-21 Quarter four (Q4), and enables Councillors to assess operational performance and gain assurance on progress towards achieving the Council's priorities. The Financial reporting usually included in this report has been delayed to allow officers to concentrate on meeting the audit deadline and will follow at the next meeting of Cabinet.</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Annex <b>A</b> – Council Plan Annual Statement Annex <b>B</b> – Performance Indicator report</p>
<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>That the 2020-21 Q4 service performance be noted.</p>
<p>Corporate priorities</p>	<p>Climate Action: Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity</p> <p>Healthy Towns and Villages: Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone</p> <p>A Vibrant District Economy: Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Local Industrial Strategy</p> <p>Strong Local Communities: Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities</p> <p>Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population: Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for a wide range of householders making their home in West Oxfordshire</p> <p>Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance: Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council</p>
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Exempt</p>	<p>No</p>

## **I. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1. Each quarter, the Council monitors its progress towards achieving its aim and priorities, service delivery and financial performance.

## **2. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK - PERFORMANCE REPORTING**

- 2.1. A new Council Plan 2020-2024 was approved by Council in January 2020. Due to the impact of Covid-19 on the economy, community, climate change, service delivery and finances, a Local Recovery Plan was approved by Council in October 2020 to complement the delivery of the Council Plan 2020-24. The Covid-19 recovery themes are closely aligned to the six Council Plan priorities to ensure that actions prioritised as part of the Covid-19 recovery will also positively contribute to the achievement of the Council Plan. A report on progress will be provided on a six monthly basis; at the end of Q2 and Q4.

- 2.2. A high level Commissioning Framework was approved by Cabinet in October 2020. The Commissioning Framework identifies that the provision of robust performance data – quantitative and qualitative, together with a robust analysis of that data and evidence – is vital to ensure that the Council has the information to assess whether its commissioned services are being delivered to a high quality.

- 2.3. A new performance management framework has been developed; a much broader framework than previous frameworks. It sets out six key strands of information on which assurance needs to be provided, with a key shift in focus from performance monitoring to performance management:

- Business analytics and service assurance
- Place based measures and comparators
- Publica Business Plan strategic actions
- Council Plan priority actions
- Project and programme management assurance
- Risk and opportunity management

- 2.4. The quarterly performance report will continue to evolve in line with the Performance Management Framework as well as feedback from senior officers and Members.

- 2.5. As an example of this, a selection of publically available benchmarking data has been included in the Q4 Performance Indicator report on a trial basis. Benchmarking can be a useful tool for driving improvement; by comparing our performance with other similar organisations, we can start a discussion about what good performance might look like, and why there might be variations, as well as learning from other organisations about how they operate (process benchmarking).

Two comparator groups that are commonly used to benchmark Councils' performance are: all shire districts councils and CIPFA Nearest Neighbours (NN). Whilst performance benchmarking can be useful as a tool for driving improvement, it is important to remember that performance needs to be viewed within context i.e. a range of both internal and external factors contribute to the level of performance achieved; therefore benchmarks should be used as a 'guide' and as a starting point for discussion.

- 2.6. The Commissioning Framework also sets out the relationship between Publica and the Council and their respective responsibilities. Publica's Executive Director (Commissioning) is

accountable to the Council for the services commissioned from Publica, and also for the services commissioned by Publica from third parties on behalf of the Council. Publica must ensure that it provides the necessary information to the Council so it can assess whether the commissioned services are being delivered in accordance with the agreed quality and standard. The Council's Chief Executive is responsible for reviewing and approving the information provided in this report prior to its publication.

- 2.7. The Council's Chief Executive has received a report on progress on delivery of the council priorities and service performance, and he has assessed it in line with the high level Commissioning Statement. He has noted the progress that has been made to deliver the actions in the Council Plan as well the lower level of operational performance in Q4 as a result of the ongoing pandemic and its impact on resources and the delivery of services. The Chief Executive has also noted the continued impact of Covid-19 on communities, businesses, customers, services, and staff as the nation moves from response to recovery and back to response again. He has drawn particular attention to the following:
- i. The nation entered its third lockdown on 5 January 2021. Many services continue to support residents, communities and businesses that have been impacted by Covid-19 as part of their every day job. Enormous efforts continue to be made by a number of services in supporting businesses to access grants, carrying out 'track and trace', and operating the Community Response hub (call handling, outbound calling, complex welfare support and problem solving, food parcel delivery and welfare checks, and signposting those that need support to the relevant organisations). In 2020-21, the Council distributed a total of £39,595,446 in business grants;
  - ii. The Council's leisure centres have been severely impacted by Covid-19 and three national lockdowns, when the facilities were required to close down. Following the end of the third lockdown, leisure centres were re-opened for some outdoor activities on 29 March 2021, and potentially all facilities and activities could be fully re-opened from 21 June, subject to the Government agreeing to the stage four easing of the national lockdown. The Council agreed a contract variation with the service provider and further financial recovery packages to cover the period until March 2021. Some government grant funding has been available to cover Council losses; and a further tranche of funding was made available through Sport England to cover costs incurred by leisure operators during the lockdown, and to support the re-opening;
  - iii. Affordable housing has continued to be delivered in the District and demonstrates the success of the strategic sites included in the Local Plan in bringing forward housing numbers. During the year, 374 affordable homes were delivered exceeding the Local Plan target by 100 units;
  - iv. Similar to other councils throughout the country, the Council's business rates collection figure (in year) has been understandably impacted by Covid-19. The Government has gone some way in helping certain businesses such as retail with 100% business rate relief, but there are still businesses that are struggling financially. The Council is distributing a number of support grants to eligible businesses, however, there is no requirement to use it to pay for business rates.

### 3. COUNCIL PRIORITIES

3.1. The West Oxfordshire District Council Plan Annual Statement (attached at **Annex A**) presents a narrative of progress towards each of the Council priorities, drawing together specific examples of successful actions, such as:

- Adoption of Carbon Action Plan and Climate Change Strategy by Full Council;
- Submission of Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan to the Planning Inspectorate, setting out strategic planning policy for zero-carbon development;
- Appointment of Market Towns Officer to work with Witney, Chipping Norton and Carterton on Town Plans as a means of supporting economic recovery from Covid-19;
- Application of Health Impact Assessments to major planning applications as a means of delivering 'healthy place-shaping';
- Scoping work underway to explore the establishment of well-being hubs, as a means of enabling partner organisations (other public service providers and the Voluntary and Community Sector) to work alongside each other to provide accessible and joined up services for residents.

#### **4. SERVICE PERFORMANCE**

4.1. Since the start of the pandemic, many services, both customer facing and support services have been impacted by Covid-19; the Council's leisure facilities have had to close during multiple lockdowns and tier restrictions, while other services including housing, revenues and benefits, planning, land charges and customer services have experienced higher workloads due to customer demand or because colleagues were supporting residents, communities, and businesses through the crisis. Support services such as ICT, Accountancy and Accounts Payable have also played a part in supporting the administration of business grants and other payments. The majority of staff have continued to deliver services from home, which has meant that services have had to adapt and find new ways of working. This has presented a major challenge for some services such as planning and food safety and resulted in backlogs. The impact of these challenges coupled with delivering key projects such as the new revenues and benefits system has affected performance in some areas.

4.2. A full report is attached at **Annex B**.

#### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1. None

#### **6. RISK ASSESSMENT**

6.1. None

#### **7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

7.1. None

#### **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

8.1. None



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL PLAN ANNUAL STATEMENT  
**April 2020 - March 2021**

Our vision is to support West Oxfordshire to be fit for the future through:



**1. Climate Action**

Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity.



**2. Healthy Towns and Villages**

Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone.



**3. A Vibrant District Economy**

Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy.



**4. Strong Local Communities**

Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities.



**5. Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population**

Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for the wide range of householders making their home in West Oxfordshire.



**6. Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance**

Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council.

## Introduction

Following the launch of the [West Oxfordshire Council Plan 2020 – 24](#) in January 2020, Officers have embarked on delivering the projects defined as a means of achieving the Council Plan vision to support West Oxfordshire to be fit for the future through delivery of its priorities.

The context for delivering the Council Plan has changed significantly given the Coronavirus pandemic that required the Council to pivot its focus towards responding to the sudden challenges posed by the pandemic, principally supporting West Oxfordshire residents, its business and economy, and community and voluntary sector during the series of lockdowns experienced over the first year of the Council Plan. This involved redeployment of 100+ staff and in so doing enabled support for vulnerable members of the community at the same time as continued delivery of key public services. Whilst focus shifted to the pandemic, work has continued to progress against each of the priorities, albeit perhaps in a different way to that anticipated during the creation of the Council Plan. This agility and ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and indeed the unprecedented situation, reflects well on the Council and its staff and demonstrates that they have remained true to the vision in the Council Plan to be ‘fit for the future’.

This Annual Statement details progress against each of the 6 Council Plan priorities and should be read in conjunction with the [WODC Annual Monitoring Report \(AMR\)](#) for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. The AMR is structured around the 6 Council Plan priorities, setting out progress against the Local Plan as the strategic development framework for the District. By priority, an outline of the current district context in terms of background/contextual information and what has happened during the AMR period is provided. Facts and figures are used to illustrate the Council’s progress/patterns of change against a number of indicators – such as carbon emission reductions, amount of recycling, visitor numbers to leisure centres, and local workforce structure. This detailed overview also highlights what is on the horizon by way of activity, which aligns with the actions that underpin the 6 Council Plan priorities and delivery of the Council’s vision to be ‘fit for the future’.

## Covid-19 Response and Recovery Planning

A short summary of the Council's response to the pandemic is provided below which illustrates the far reaching impact of the pandemic and efforts to meet the needs of West Oxfordshire's local economy, the voluntary and community sector and local residents.

### WODC Covid-19 Response Summary:

Given the Council's responsibility for delivering services to over 100,000 residents, Covid-19 has been an unprecedented challenge which required us to react quickly to changing circumstances in order to support local business and economy, the voluntary and community sector and local residents. We have maintained essential services whilst redeploying staff to new areas of work to help deal with the crisis.

There has been a dynamic and inspiring community sector response across West Oxfordshire to the challenges introduced through the pandemic. Local groups, towns and villages have mobilised to support their communities and the Council has developed a Community Hub team to work effectively with voluntary sector partners and volunteers.

Collaboration with our partners at a County-wide level was required in order to respond to the crisis. In particular, close coordination and good communication between the County, City and District Councils, with the NHS and OxLEP, to support vulnerable people and align programmes to support local businesses.

The following statistics for the 2020/2021 financial year outline some of what the Council has achieved during the Covid-19 lockdown period working with key partners:

- 1,430 residents have been given support with complex needs
- 1,017 vulnerable residents have been contacted by Councillors
- Grants totalling £39,595,446 paid to businesses in West Oxfordshire
- 6,217 shielded residents called during lockdown.

In tandem with supporting local business and economy, the voluntary and community sector and local residents through the pandemic, considerable effort was invested in planning for recovery from the impacts of the pandemic and in the longer term, the District's renewal. It was recognised that the joint work with local communities, and with Oxfordshire's partners, undertaken in the early months of the pandemic provided strong foundations from which to develop a recovery plan.

A cross-party Covid-19 Advisory Group was established comprising Councillors working with Officers to consider how we will address challenges and opportunities arising from the pandemic through support to enable communities and businesses to thrive in a post-Covid world. A series of workshops were held to devise four Covid-19 Recovery Themes of Economy, Community, Climate and Council, Service Delivery and Finance. These are closely aligned



with the 6 Council Plan priorities as a means of ensuring that actions prioritised as part of the District's Covid-19 recovery effort and investment in this will also positively contribute to achieving the vision of the Council Plan. Full Council considered the [West Oxfordshire Covid-19 Recovery Plan](#) in October 2020 and this provides the Council with a helpful framework for ensuring that the wide ranging impacts of the pandemic are mitigated against and adapted to.

Whilst this Annual Statement focuses on progress against the Council Plan, activity underway and what is on the horizon in relation to achieving the Covid-19 Recovery Themes is also referenced due to the close alignment of these two areas of activity.

## Climate Action: Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity

### Covid-19 Recovery Theme: Climate

Over the last year Full Council approved two commitments in the Council Plan:-

- The Carbon Action Plan (October 2020), incorporating the Pathway to Achieving Carbon Neutral by 2030
- Climate Change Strategy (February 2021), focussing on climate action.

Together these set out a comprehensive, clear and robust strategy for the Council's response to the climate and ecological emergency.

[The Carbon Action Plan](#) defines 'The Pathway to Achieving Carbon Neutral by 2030'. It:

- Presents extensive data on WODC's Green House Gas (GHG) emissions
- Presents the GHG account as a baseline and measure of WODC's current impact on climate change, thus calibrating the success of future action taken to reduce/remove emissions
- Defines a set of Guiding Principles for planning future activity by WODC towards its target
- Sets out a process for the monitoring and review of action in progress and planned, keeping the Plan live and responsive to external influences, technological changes and innovation
- Leads by example, establishing an assessment methodology and Guiding Principles that other partners working across the District can apply to their own projects.

[The Climate Change Strategy](#) provides a framework for achieving the Council's clear and robust strategic priorities for climate action. Informed by extensive consultation, the Strategy enables the targeting of resources in a structured way. It enables WODC to contribute strategically to climate action for Oxfordshire and the South East whilst also taking local, grassroots action on five core themes of activity: 1) Protect and restore natural ecosystems, 2) Energy, 3) Active travel and low carbon transport, 4) Standards in new development, and 5) Engage, support and educate.

With the Strategy in place, the Council has the means to:

- Influence and shape strategy and policy for climate at County and Regional level
- Communicate its local response for the purposes of sharing best practice
- Contribute positively to the national effort – channelling any funding to achieve local outcomes

- Listen and respond to community views on climate action.

The Council has focussed on producing planning policy to achieve net-zero carbon development of 2,200 homes at Salt Cross Garden Village. The [Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan](#) (SCG VAAP) has been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate for hearing in Summer 2021. If the policies for the Salt Cross Garden Village remain intact then this will provide a template for other developments within the District.

In addition to the SCGV AAP, a Sustainability Standards Checklist has been developed by an internal working group with input from planning policy, development management, biodiversity, landscape, climate and conservation heritage specialists. This was approved by Full Council in February 2021. The Checklist incorporates all elements of environmental sustainability for consideration in planning, including an expectation on applicants to consider tree planting and biodiversity. A commitment to securing the benefits of the Checklist has been made by the Council through the funding of a Sustainability Planning Specialist for 12 months to ensure that these are applied to development proposals going forward. The Standards relate to Water use and flood risk; Biodiversity; Green and Active Travel; Aligning with net-zero carbon; Sustainable construction; and Materials and waste.

Planning permission has recently been granted for a Solar Farm on land to the west of Eynsham, within proximity to the Strategic Development Area West Eynsham and the Salt Cross Garden Village.

Turning to the Council's overarching goal to enhance our natural environment and boost biodiversity through the establishment of robust, resilient, and well-functioning ecological networks several strands of activity have been underway over the last year.

WODC has played a proactive role as a District partner of the Oxfordshire Growth Board which has recently engaged in a draft Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire which commits specifically to protecting and enhancing our natural environment, whilst pursuing a zero-carbon future. The Environment Advisory Group, on which the District lead executive member sits, exists to embed critical environmental thinking across the Growth Board's programmes (e.g. Healthy Place Shaping) and link closely with other existing partnerships such as the Local Nature Partnership which is currently in formation.

The establishment of an Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership is particularly relevant to the Council achieving its ambition to safeguard West Oxfordshire's natural environment. This strategic forum will exist to guide nature recovery in an integrated way to produce multiple benefits for local people, the economy and the environment. Stakeholder engagement in December 2020 and March 2021 confirmed strong support for an Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership and detailed work is now underway on its Governance arrangements with its formal launch anticipated in September 2021.

A further Oxfordshire-wide partnership approach towards biodiversity enhancements is the Nature Recovery Network of which WODC is a contributor. The Nature Recovery Network is working to produce a Nature Recovery Strategy (a statutory requirement of the Environment Bill) that will endeavour to protect and enhance the natural environment as well as guiding the development of planning policies. An overarching aim of the NRN is to double the extent of land of high value for nature by 2050. The [Oxfordshire Plan 2050](#) provides an opportunity to use the [draft Nature Recovery Map](#) and [recommended associated policies](#) to help plan for nature's recovery at a county-wide level and to set the framework for future Local Plans. WODC sits on the NRN and actively supports the maintenance of Oxfordshire's Conservation Target Areas and Local Wildlife Sites Projects through their consideration via the planning process. Recent examples include delegation of authority to Woodstock Town Council to take forward an application via Natural England to

designate the Local Wildlife Site 'Woodstock Water Meadows' as a Local Nature Reserve and additionally has provide £4,000 grant funding to the Local Wildlife Trust and Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre who run the Local Wildlife Sites project.

The Windrush in Witney and Lower Windrush Valley Project are a key policy consideration for the development of the East Witney Strategic Development Area, informing new access arrangements between the new built area of Witney and the landscape surrounding it. Of particular note is the landscape and ecological value within the Windrush Valley just north of the A40 which forms part of the East Witney SDA area.

A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Mechanism for securing a positive contribution to biodiversity is required of major (and some minor) applications for compliance with Local Plan Policy H3 'Bio-diversity and Geo-diversity'. The [Interim Biodiversity Net Gain Guidance for Developers and Ecological Consultants](#) has been in operation since April 2020, providing guidance to developers to ensure that sufficient information is submitted to demonstrate Biodiversity Net Gain. Furthermore, the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre has supported WODC to screen biodiversity metric calculations submitted to ensure that they achieve a Net Gain for Biodiversity. The first Biodiversity Net Gain payment has been made to fund off-site BNG provision arising from development of the Windrush Industrial Park. The payment of £112,290 was secured for the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment to deliver 9.41 biodiversity units which represents a significant step for the financial contribution towards nature's recovery within West Oxfordshire.

At March 2021, 15 planning applications were applying the BNG approach. This progress is being fed into a [national research project](#) at the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology to identify how BNG is contributing towards nature's recovery at the UK level and inform what happens when BNG becomes mandatory.

Work has also progressed on a draft Green Infrastructure Strategy Supplementary Planning Document which would guide where investment is required for people and wildlife e.g. BNG payments could be used in specific locations. This will incorporate [Building with Nature](#) principles to provide planners and developers with evidence-based, how-to, guidance on delivering high-quality green infrastructure. In support of this approach, a Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (NEIRF) bid has been submitted by WODC in March 2021 to fund a Natural Capital Investment Strategy for West Oxfordshire. This Strategy will develop investment and revenue-stream opportunities for Green Infrastructure, natural capital, biodiversity net gain, and carbon balance within key strategic opportunity areas for the district. The £99,000 bid (outcome due in June 2021) is supported by the Council's partners Oxfordshire County Council, District/City Council partners, BBOWT, Lower Windrush Valley Project, The Wychwood Project, Evenlode Catchment Project and the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment. This collaborative effort between climate and planning Officers demonstrates an understanding of revenue stream models for natural capital with benefits for habitat creation for both biodiversity and natural flood risk management.

Finally, early work has commenced on a WODC Biodiversity Plan. This will define a biodiversity work programme to include development of Land Management Plans for land within the Council's stewardship, with ecological enhancement a key priority identified in the Covid-19 Recovery Plan. A Biodiversity and Countryside and Land Management Officer has been funded as part of the Council's investment in the recovery to deliver these benefits for the Council's estate.

## What's on the Horizon?

- Continued partnership work to further develop the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, including further exploration of how the Draft Oxfordshire Nature Recovery Map can be used to inform the Oxfordshire Plan 2050 and the proposed review of the West Oxfordshire Local Plan due to commence in autumn 2021.
- Continued development of land management plans and ecological appraisal to conserve and enhance the ecological condition of Council's own land.
- Implementation of the Sustainability Standards Checklist to planning applications.
- Appointment of an Energy Projects Specialist to assist in realising the ambition of the Carbon Action Plan.
- Sustainability assessment of Council offices, involving modelling of energy performance and assessment of waste, water and cycle storage facilities undertaken. Recommendations for retrofit to be considered.
- Launch of the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership.
- Consultation on draft Green Infrastructure Strategy Supplementary Planning Document.

## Healthy Towns and Villages: Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone

### Recovery Theme: Communities

The value in adopting a ‘healthy place shaping’ approach in new and existing developments is highlighted in the Council Plan. A [Health Impact Assessment \(HIA\) toolkit](#) and methodology has been approved by the Oxfordshire Growth Board in January 2021 and is now to be applied to the delivery of the local plan and major developments. HIA is a practical approach used to judge the effects a proposed development may have on the health and wellbeing of different groups of people. It is a tool used to identify the health impacts of a plan or project and to develop recommendations to maximise the positive impacts and minimise the negative impacts, while maintaining a focus on addressing health inequalities. By bringing such health considerations to the fore, HIAs add value to the planning process. The findings of HIAs are used to make recommendations to decision makers as to how any negative health impacts of a development can be reduced, and any positive health impacts maximised.

It is intended that this methodology will be used by developers and consultants when preparing major development proposals to help shape and inform design choices. The Council has recently requested HIAs for major development applications in Witney and Woodstock which were submitted and are currently being assessed against the Toolkit and Methodology for conformity. Further efforts to augment healthy place-shaping in the District through development is evident in the draft Supplementary Planning Document for the East Chipping Norton Strategic Development Area. This new development of 1,200 homes, along with around 5 hectares of business floorspace and a range of supporting services and facilities and green space and biodiversity enhancements, presents a further opportunity to create an area which puts the health and well-being of its residents (incoming and existing) at its heart.

Healthy Place Shaping has been further augmented by Policy 4 in the Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan which requires a ‘Rapid Health Impact Assessment’ to accompany any planning application for major development at the garden village. This must demonstrate alignment with the emerging Oxfordshire HIA methodology, to fully identify the needs of everyone in how they live and work, access and use all types of infrastructure, services and networks.

Consultants were commissioned to undertake a Built Indoor Leisure Facilities Strategy for the District in March 2020 and significant steps have been taken towards achieving this key action identified in the Council Plan. Initial work involved an audit of current indoor leisure facilities stock across the District. Sport England are modelling leisure facility need against projected population growth for the District (due April 2021). In addition to this preparatory work towards the Built Indoor Leisure Facility Strategy, a Focus Group to consider need in the Witney area and scope for a relocated Windrush Leisure Centre (‘Windrush 2’) is imminent and the outcomes of this will be supplemented by a resident’s online survey to help inform the required facility mix for any new Windrush 2.

Collectively the outputs of the initial audit, modelling against population growth and stakeholder consultation will inform a needs analysis of indoor Leisure facilities – addressing current, latent and unmet need for built leisure facilities across West Oxfordshire. This will form the basis of the Built Indoor Leisure Strategy & associated Action Plan.

Turning to measures of health and well-being across the District, the March 2021 [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(JSNA\)](#) provides information about Oxfordshire's population and the factors affecting health, wellbeing, and social care needs. A strong feature of the JSNA is a consideration of the wider determinants of health which is valuable to the District in planning its support to local health and well being. It is informed by research undertaken between November 2020 – February 2021 and is endorsed by the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board.

Community profiles for West Oxfordshire are provided on the [places page of Oxfordshire Insight](#), presenting a range of population and health and wellbeing statistics including:

- Population by age
- Deprivation and children in poverty
- Public Health indicators
- Physical activity and child obesity
- Unpaid care and care homes
- GP practice data for selected health conditions (diabetes, dementia and depression)
- House prices and commuting

Of particular note is a February 2021 updated community profile for [Witney](#).

### **What's on the Horizon?**

- Deployment of a Healthy Place Shaping Partner funded by Sport England via Oxfordshire County Council's Public Health Team to WODC to support the adoption of a Healthy Place Shaping approach.
- Built Indoor Sports Facility Strategy (including proposals for relocation of Windrush Leisure Centre) to Cabinet for Adoption in Summer 2021.
- New Playing Pitch Strategy for the District to provide an assessment of the need for playing pitches and recommendations for improving provision, informed by consultation with user group representatives.
- Developing, with partners, a masterplan for the redevelopment of Hanborough Station.

## **A Vibrant District Economy: Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Local Industrial Strategy**

### **Recovery Theme: Economy**

The Council Plan identified two strategic areas for economic growth which the Council is also committed to delivering through their inclusion in the Local Industrial Strategy: the Carterton Technology Hub and the Garden Village Science Park. Progress has been made on each.

*The Carterton Technology Hub* seeks to unleash the economic role, potential and value of Carterton through a new Technology Hub. Local market strengths include many small businesses with specialisms in high-tech manufacturing and engineering in addition to RAF Brize Norton. There is a local imbalance of jobs to workers leading to around 60% out-commuting (including to nearby Witney), indicating both the need and opportunity to diversify the local economy. A strategic outline case has been developed which has informed a proposition paper to the OxLEP, thus further evolving the business case for the project which was successfully made through its inclusion in the adopted Local Plan. Next steps include a detailed feasibility study and SWOT analysis informed by input from a wide range of stakeholders previously engaged in the concept through the Local Plan process. Carterton Town Council is identified as a potential lead partner – supported by WODC and involving the MOD, RAF, OxLEP, local businesses and residents. This endeavour will be further supported through Oxfordshire County Council's 'Access to Carterton Strategy'. Work on this to date has identified a 'preferred options package' comprising three distinct schemes to improve Carterton's strategic connectivity: B4477 Carriageway Improvement Scheme; West Facing Slips at B4477/A40 Junction and wider benefits schemes and; Witney to Carterton cycleway along Witney Road.

*The Salt Cross Science and Technology Park* allocated as part of the new 'Garden Village' strategic development area in the adopted Local Plan, includes a 40 hectare science and technology park that will attract high growth businesses giving them the space to grow and create high value jobs in line with the ambitions of the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy. The Area Action Plan includes a policy detailing the requirements of the park which will deliver, within an extensive network of green and blue infrastructure, 80,000m<sup>2</sup> of science, technology, engineering and high tech related business floor space. Concurrently an Outline Planning Application has been received by site promoter, Grosvenor Estates, which proposes 57,000m<sup>2</sup> of B-Class land uses as part of an employment area with the proposed uses to be determined at the Reserved Matters Application stage of the planning process. Once the Area Action Plan has been adopted this will be used to set the policy context against which the planning application for Salt Cross will be determined, of which the Science and Technology Park is part.

In close proximity to the Salt Cross Science and Technology Park is Hanborough Station and this is identified within the Council Plan as a focus for partnership effort to secure new and upgraded infrastructure, including short and long-term enhancements to the Cotswold railway line. The Hanborough Station Sub-Group of the North Cotswold Line Task Force has been established, bringing together the five county councils and Local Enterprise Partnerships covering the 86-mile route between Hereford, Worcester and Oxford, together with the Cotswold Line Promotion Group, Network Rail and the Great Western Railway.



In January 2020, the Task Force submitted its case to the government for a doubled two trains per hour North Cotswold Line service between Worcestershire, Oxford and London and we are awaiting the assessment of the case by the Department for Transport and Network Rail. In parallel, the Task Force set out its aspirations for additional local trains as a metro-style service between Hanborough and Oxford to support West Oxfordshire housing growth, the visitor economy and to encourage a shift from road to rail for journeys to Oxford or London. The Sub-Group will develop the case for these local services, plans for expanded passenger facilities at Hanborough Station, and engage with local stakeholders and communities.

On the theme of lower carbon transportation, the value of provision of Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP) as a means of improving the public realm in our town centres was identified as an action towards achieving a vibrant district economy, in addition to meeting zero carbon ambitions. Two approaches to this are underway:

1. WODC direct procurement of Electric Vehicle Charging Point (EVCP) in Council-owned car parks: Viability assessments of car parks within the Council's stewardship for installation of EVCP have been undertaken in partnership with the Oxfordshire Park and Charge team. Six car parks have been selected as part of Tranche One for EVCP during Spring and Summer 2021: Hensington Road, Woodstock; Back Lane, Eynsham; Woodford Way, Witney; Woodgreen Offices, Witney; Black Bourton, Carterton; and New Street, Chipping Norton.
2. An Oxfordshire Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy (OEVIS) is being developed to set a consistent design and technical standard for EV infrastructure across the County. WODC is inputting to the strategy which is being coordinated by the iHub Innovation Team at Oxfordshire County Council.

The Covid-19 pandemic has expedited the need to target efforts to support the vitality and viability of our market towns and this is captured in the West Oxfordshire Covid-19 Recovery Plan. The Council has funded a dedicated Market Towns Officer to work with Witney, Chipping Norton and Carterton to develop Town Covid-19 Recovery Plans which respond to the specific needs of each. Town Centre Covid-19 Recovery Groups have been established to engage key stakeholders to identify the unique impacts of the pandemic on their town, the (short and longer term) opportunities that have arisen, and identify a set of initiatives that will help realise the potential of the town. This activity will inform the Covid-19 Recovery Plan for each town, aiming to support local businesses and strengthen the visitor economy.

In addition to the Town Covid-19 Recovery Plans, the Council is procuring a place promotion app to support local business, with the predicted impact being an increase in footfall across the town centres by encouraging repeat purchases and attracting new visitors to West Oxfordshire. The loyalty app will list events and interactive trails in addition to presenting users with discounts and offers at local businesses. The Council has also partnered with Makespace Oxford as part of a launch of a £1.7 million programme to breathe life back into high streets through the [Meanwhile in Oxfordshire Project](#). This initiative is designed to encourage selected vacant units in our high streets to be filled with a variety of offerings, from retail to creative and co-working spaces as a means of mitigating the negative impact of empty units on the high street.

The Council has submitted in January 2021 a representation to a Government consultation on proposals to allow all uses falling within the Use Class E to be converted to residential use under permitted development (i.e. no planning permission required for change to residential use), irrespective of scale and

location. The Council has advised Government that whilst fully supportive of housing delivery where need is evidenced, key uses in town centres including currently occupied commercial properties, will be lost to residential creating an imbalance of uses that harms town centre vitality and viability and that beyond town centres, key uses in rural areas will be lost to the detriment of local communities (leading to unsustainable patterns of development and commuting). The Council will continue to seek to protect the vitality and viability of town centres and rural economic sustainability through its role as Local Planning Authority.

The Council is continuing to support local businesses who are having to adapt to changing Covid-19 restrictions, and multiple lockdowns through the distribution of a large range of business grants made available by central government. A total of £39,595,446 has been paid over the 2020 - 21 financial year. Financial support has also been made available to those individuals having to self-isolate under the Test and Trace support payment. Since 5 November 2020, a number of grants has been made available to businesses that have been required to close under the Tier system or national lockdowns, or were able to remain open but were severely affected by Tier restrictions:

- Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed, Mandatory) – a total of £5,690,759 was paid out to 3214 businesses in retail, leisure, hospitality, accommodation and events which were mandated to close between 5 November 2020 and 31 March 2021;
- Additional Restrictions Grant (Discretionary) – a total of £1,310,902 was paid out to 834 businesses from November to the 4 April 2021. This grant is available for businesses that do not have a business rate assessment of their own as well as other businesses with a rateable value that have remained open but have been severely impacted by the pandemic. This category includes charity properties and regular market traders;
- Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open) - a total of £ 769,273 was paid to 1,515 businesses that remained open but were severely impacted by restrictions;
- Christmas Support Payment for wet-led pubs scheme – one-off grants of £1,000 were paid to 37 businesses between December 2020 and February 2021;
- Closed Businesses Lockdown payment – 779 businesses were supported with a one-off payment. A total of £3,821,000 was paid out between 5 January 2021 and 4 April 2021.

### What's on the Horizon

- 'Access to Carterton' – public consultation on 'preferred options package'
- Installation of Electric Vehicle Charging Points in the aforementioned six WODC owned car parks across the District
- Development and implementation of Town Centre Covid-19 Recovery Plans for Carterton, Chipping Norton and Witney
- Launch and roll out of Loyal Free place promotion app
- Development of Masterplan for Hanborough Station

## Strong Local Communities: Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities

### Recovery Theme: Communities

The response to the pandemic has really shone a spotlight on the importance of this priority – we have witnessed a dynamic and inspiring community sector response across West Oxfordshire to the challenges introduced by the pandemic. Local Groups, towns and villages have mobilised to support their communities and the Council established a Community Response Hub to further augment these efforts and work effectively with voluntary sector partners and volunteers. There has also been a strong collaborative effort to tackle the crisis, where the Council has sought, together with the County, City and District Councils, the NHS and OxLEP to support vulnerable people and align programmes to support local businesses.

These collaborative efforts between ourselves and partners, and the communities we serve must continue and be built upon in order to respond to any local Covid-19 outbreaks, address any local food security issues (£59k of funding has been awarded to Food Banks and community food projects), and meet any duties to support those who are vulnerable. This work will complement delivery of other aspects of the Council Plan identified under this priority, as described further below. Examples of efforts include:

- Recruitment of staff to work with new Mutual Aid groups to sustain them as an invaluable resource to tackle loneliness and isolation in our communities
- Research into the establishment of Wellbeing Hubs is underway, as committed to in the Covid-19 Recovery Plan. This model would see the co-location of statutory and Voluntary/Community sector partners alongside housing associations to deliver easy to access services. Early conversations are underway, and current and planned provision has been mapped so that gaps in provision can inform where there is opportunity to complement and support existing service delivery to residents.
- West Oxfordshire Citizens Advice working on behalf of the Council to provide £63,655 to those struggling to afford food under the Covid-19 Winter Grants Scheme (funded by Oxfordshire County Council)
- Recruitment of additional staff to allow the Community Response Hub to continue to support residents with significant wellbeing challenges
- Approval of funding for Oxfordshire '[Reducing the Risk](#)' charity to provide Domestic Abuse Champion training in addition to securing a two year extension to the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse contract
- Approval of funding for two local West Oxfordshire charities, the [Witney Hub](#) and the [APCAM Group](#), to deliver mental health services for young people and their families
- The Go Active Get Healthy Diabetes service has moved online and provides help for residents to become more active as a means to manage their diabetes.

A commitment in the Council Plan to direct our management of property assets through a new Asset Management Plan to achieve improvements in the joint use of sites through the [One Public Estate](#) programme has moved a step forward with completion of a series of feasibility reviews of sites in Welch Way, Witney. Following this scope for feasibility work on partnership owned sites to consider options for development that suit all partner's needs is to be

assessed – in accordance with the principles of the One Public Estate programme. The next action will be to undertake a draft scoping exercise to which input will be invited from all partner organisations.

Further to the focus on assets at Welch Way, Witney, a number of public sector partners (District and Oxfordshire County Council and the NHS) with offices in Witney are assessing the scope for co-location of office space as a means to reduce office space requirements. This conversation has been expedited by the disruption to established ways of working by the Covid-19 pandemic. The next step is to undertake an appraisal for the repurposing of local authority office space in Witney in order to enable and promote flexible working across agencies. Careful consideration will be given to how we can work more efficiently on a smaller footprint whilst garnering the benefit of a significant reduction in town centre office footprint and a reduction in travel time for staff through the facilitation of greater home working.

A further commitment to working with partners to promote West Oxfordshire as a visitor attraction (whilst protecting its essential character) is made in the Council Plan and the pandemic has placed a new emphasis on the visitor economy as tourism patterns have changed with a drop in international visitors to the District (and the wider Cotswolds) against a backdrop of greater domestic tourism demand.

A grant of £90k was secured from the Discover England Fund which will contribute to the roll out of the [Uncover the Cotswolds](#) project, increasing exposure of new/little known experiences to a wider market. Engagement with local tourism businesses provided an overview of some of the challenges faced by the visitor economy in the wake of the pandemic and this continues to inform the Council's approach to supporting the visitor economy to recover and renew post-Covid. Given the significant contribution the visitor economy makes to West Oxfordshire it is evident that there is a particularly acute need for support.

Early focus has been on improving the online capabilities of local tourism businesses, including to become bookable online (e.g. via Visit England's Tourism Exchange Great Britain platform). A partnership initiative '[The Real Cotswolds](#)' project has been launched (with Wake up to Woodstock for Woodstock and with the Witney Chamber of Trade for Witney) to enhance destination marketing. This project will continue to develop digital town guides for Burford, Chipping Norton, Witney and Woodstock. A suite of [free training modules](#) for local tourism businesses has also been commissioned.

### What's on the Horizon?

- Roll out of scheme 'Move Together' from May 2021 which has been externally funded to improve mobility amongst the most frail and lonely residents
- West Oxfordshire Citizens Advice Bureau will continue to support the community through a dedicated funded role to provide guidance on benefits, welfare and debt advice.
- Roll out of Visit England funded promotion of businesses that are fully bookable online from May 2021.

## Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population: Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for a wide range of householders making their home in West Oxfordshire

### Recovery Theme: Communities

A significant step towards achieving this priority has been accomplished with the publication of the draft [Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document](#) (AH SPD) which has been subject to two rounds of consultation to address stakeholder representations. Once adopted, the detailed guidance it provides will steer the successful implementation of Local Plan Policy H3 on the delivery of affordable housing. At this stage the AH SPD will become a material planning consideration.

Local Plan Policy H3 requires the provision of on-site affordable housing as part of larger market housing schemes of 11 or more units varying by location from 35% - 50%. In addition, smaller market housing schemes of 6-10 units within the Cotswolds AONB are required to make a financial contribution towards the provision of affordable housing within the District. The policy also addresses the issue of housing mix and the provision of affordable housing in rural areas including through rural exception sites. By providing additional guidance on the implementation of these requirements, the AH SPD seeks to set out a range of options and requirements to secure delivery of successful affordable housing schemes across the District that meet the housing needs of our changing population.

Options for delivery are presented including criteria for identifying qualifying sites; the size of affordable homes needed, the preferred tenure mix, rural exception sites and self and custom build schemes. Delivery is addressed through requirements relating to design criteria, accessibility and adaptability, space standards, zero carbon homes and modern methods of construction. Specific delivery mechanisms are articulated including housing options for the Armed Forces and also Key Workers and Community Led Housing.

Finally, exploration of two new routes to affordable housing in the District are presented:

- A) *The Blenheim Approach*: WODC is working closely with Blenheim Estate on an innovative model for delivering an increased level of affordable housing at between 60 – 80% of market rental costs. This model has been successfully implemented in Long Hanborough and will also be offered on their other sites for development at Woodstock East. It is the intention of Blenheim to retain ownership of the rental properties so they can be held in perpetuity for local people, especially those within the key worker categories.
- B) *Partnerships with Legacy Landowners*: WODC is also interested in partnering with other legacy landowners to accelerate delivery of affordable housing in the district and the AH SPD invites those landowners (particularly in smaller rural settlements) who are considering development as part of their long term legacy planning to engage with them to explore the scope for delivering affordable housing through rural exception sites.

Further to the achievement of the AH SPD, progress towards the delivery of Shared Ownership of Affordable Housing in Witney has been made. In partnership with the Oxfordshire Growth Deal and Heylo Housing, WODC has been able to pursue the acquisition of 4 apartments of affordable housing

rather than them being sold on the open market as originally intended. As a partner on the Oxfordshire Growth Deal, the Council has benefited from their partnership with Registered Provider, Heylo Housing, who are able to negotiate bulk purchase of new homes from developers for use as shared ownership housing. Over the longer term the ambition is for 100 new affordable homes across all Growth Deal partner authorities to be acquired this way, of which it is anticipated 20% of these will be within West Oxfordshire.

In 2020-21 374 new affordable homes have been completed in the District, far greater than the Local Plan identified need of 274. It is anticipated that this target will again be exceeded in 2021-22. In addition to this the Council is exploring a range of housing products for existing and upcoming developments to broaden the range of Low Cost Home Ownership products available. These include [Discount Market Sale](#), [Build to Rent](#), and [Rent to Buy](#).

The Council is working directly with Blenheim Estates to bring forward strategic sites and rural exception schemes that propose low carbon development and additional affordable homes. It is also working with other landowning organisations who are seeking to develop and manage their own affordable housing stock and with specialists and co-housing groups to bring forward self-build co-housing on large strategic development sites. Also in partnership, the Council is collaborating with Parish Councils and Registered Providers to bring forward smaller schemes to help meet local need for affordable housing.

Within the West Oxfordshire Local Plan there is a requirement for sites of over 100 homes to provide suitable [self-build/custom finish plots](#). Self-build is also promoted through a Council maintained [self-build register](#) which can be accessed on the Council website and additional guidance is provided in the aforementioned Affordable Housing SPD.

In terms of fulfilling the Council's obligations to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsy and Travelling Communities, two planning consents have been given to intensify the use of two existing sites in Minster Lovell and Bampton to provide more accommodation for this group.

### What's on the Horizon?

- Adoption of Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document late Summer 2021.
- The Council is working with Registered Providers to assist and also partner with a Registered Provider Housing Company planning for strategic sites that will provide 100% affordable schemes. Year 2021/22 will see delivery of additional affordable homes that have been funded using Oxfordshire Growth Deal funds (facilitated by WODC), and in some cases with S106 receipts. These will include Extra Care and General Needs apartments and houses for affordable rental and shared ownership at: Rockhill, Chipping Norton; Lavender Place, Bampton and additional shared ownership properties in Witney and Minster Lovell. Delivery will continue on further schemes beyond 2022.
- WODC has commissioned a study into the potential for a 'living rent' from Oxford Brookes University that will identify how it may benefit certain groups of people in need of affordable housing. Once these findings are known, Officers will work on incorporating these into guidance/policy.

## Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance: Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council

### Recovery Theme: Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance

Achievement of the aforementioned 5 Council Plan priorities are dependent on the Council having a sound financial footing. It has been the case for some time that local government finances have been constrained in part by local government finance grant cuts and increasing service costs pressures. These have been further amplified by the pandemic (greater draw on Council services, extraordinary service costs and lost revenue streams) and this, coupled with future limitations to incentive based funding such as the New Homes Bonus, present the Council with a challenge to match delivery ambitions to our revenue stream.

An [Investment Strategy](#) was approved by Full Council in October 2020 which sets out a range of tools and activities to help improve the general approach to matching income and expenditure across the activities of the District Council. The strategy starts from a premise that there is a significant funding gap that needs to be closed and capital investment is a major tool available to the Council to achieve this so long as it covers the revenue implications of that investment and makes an appropriate return. Capital Investment provides a route to delivering the ambitious programme of the Council set out in the Council Plan.

The priorities for the Investment Strategy were identified as:-

- Climate Change and Green Infrastructure
- Economic Development and Jobs Infrastructure
- Housing Infrastructure

The strategy identified the need to provide a revenue return in the order of 3.5% above borrowing costs in the long term to ensure that the investments were financially sustainable and helped bridge an emerging forecast budget gap. An amount of £15m was set aside in the 2021/22 capital programme to support the strategy.

To date two acquisitions have been completed in addition to an item that was approved prior to the investment programme.

- A property to provide emergency housing accommodation was purchased with a net cost to the Capital Programme of just over £1m. This will not only deliver 16 units of emergency accommodation but will also deliver a return on capital of in excess of 12%.
- An opportunity arose to marry the freehold of land the Council already owns with some industrial units on land in a growth area of the district. This provided a strategic opportunity for the Council to increase its control over the site which will provide future redevelopment opportunities. The investment of circa £2.5m will not only secure the site and support jobs in the district but also deliver a return on capital of approaching 10%.
- The Council invested £2m in a solar project within the district which delivers both renewable energy and local community benefits. The loan delivers a return on capital of 3.85% in addition to the climate and community benefits.

Taken together these three items deliver strongly on each of the Council priorities and also contribute almost £375,000 to closing the revenue funding gap set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Turning to modernisation of Council service delivery, provision of digital options for businesses and residents as a means of offering more choice for accessing services have been progressed in this first year of the Council Plan. Customers can access Council services more conveniently via a range of online self-serve tools, whilst still having access to an advisor on the phone or face to face if preferred.

Central to this digitalisation of Council services is the Salesforce platform which has enabled the following:

- Salesforce BOT available 24/7 to answer customer queries or signposts to necessary information. It can transfer the enquiry to Customer Services if unanswered. 80% of all enquiries have been answered by the BOT without any need for transfer to Customer Services demonstrating efficiency. The BOT's performance will be continually monitored and its configuration modified as new services are added to its functionality.
- Salesforce Live Chat capability launched on the Council's website allowing customers to interact in real time with Customer Services. This was particularly valuable in supporting the CS team to handle the Covid-19 demand as well as particular events such as the change to the waste contract.
- Support the administration of the Discretionary Business Grants under Covid-19. An online form/flow was built in less than 2 weeks to perform eligibility checks so we only received valid grant applications. Salesforce was used by both Customer Services and back office staff to process applications and create necessary payment files for progressing through the General Ledger and our BACS payment systems.

The Business Grants system built in Salesforce will continue to evolve to keep pace with Government changes to grants. Of particular note is the evolution from single payment functionality to allow multiple payments per application. In total £39,595,446 was paid out in the 2020-21 financial year to local businesses.

The roll out of Civica system has enabled modernisation of our Revenues and Benefits system. This will help to streamline processes and improve efficiency by having one annual billing and one benefit uprating process. Additionally, Civica has functionality for customers to be able to self-serve.

### **What's on the Horizon?**

- Council to take a decision on integrating Salesforce with a new digital Waste Management System (Yotta) to enable monitoring of missed bin collections and a means for customer requests for replacement containers. Ubico (waste contractor) is able to via use of tablets in their service trucks to update progress of rounds and identify any exceptions, e.g. households who have not presented their bins for collection.





WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Delivering great services locally

PERFORMANCE REPORT:  
**January 2021 - March 2021**

## KEY PERFORMANCE METRICS LIST

Finance and Management O & S Committee	Economic and Social O & S Committee	Environment O & S Committee
Customer satisfaction – face to face	Number of households living in emergency accommodation for under 28 days	Number of fly tips collected
Customer satisfaction – web	Number of households living in emergency accommodation for over 28 days	Percentage of fly tips that result in an enforcement action taking place
Customer satisfaction – telephone	Number of Long Term Empty properties	Percentage of high risk notifications risk assessed within one working day
Customer satisfaction - email	Percentage of major planning applications determined	Percentage of high risk food premises inspected within target timescales
Percentage of calls responded to within 20 seconds	Percentage of minor planning applications determined	Residual household waste per household (kg)
Percentage of telephone calls abandoned by the customer	Percentage of other planning applications determined	(Cumulative) Percentage of household waste recycled
(Cumulative) Percentage of council tax collected	Percentage of planning appeals allowed	(Cumulative) Percentage of household waste by waste streams
(Cumulative) Percentage of business rates collected	(Cumulative) Number of affordable homes delivered	Number of missed bin per 100,000 scheduled collections
(Cumulative) Average number of days taken to process new housing benefit claims	Percentage of land charge searches dispatched within 10 working days	Total hours spent undertaking on and off-street parking enforcement visits
(Cumulative) Average number of days taken to process housing benefit change of circumstances	Number of visits to leisure centres	
(Cumulative) Percentage of housing benefit overpayment due to LA error/Admin delay	Number of gym memberships	

## A note on performance benchmarking

Benchmarking can be a useful tool for driving improvement; by comparing our performance with other similar organisations, we can start a discussion about what good performance might look like, and why there might be variations, as well as learning from other organisations about how they operate (process benchmarking).

A selection of publicly available benchmarking data has been included in the 2020-21 Q4 performance report on a trial basis. Two comparator groups that are commonly used to benchmark Councils' performance are: all shire district councils and CIPFA Nearest Neighbours (NN). The CIPFA NN Model is based on family groups; it adopts a scientific approach to measuring the similarity between councils taking into account a range of demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The standard model provides the 15 nearest neighbours to each council. In contrast, the all shire districts comparator group is a much larger dataset of 192 councils, and there will inevitably be a much greater variation between the councils in this group.

When we embark on performance benchmarking, it is important to understand that we are often looking at one aspect of performance i.e. the level of performance achieved. Although the CIPFA NN Model groups councils on the basis of similarity, these factors are external and based on 'place'. The model does not take into account how services are resourced or compare in terms of quality or level of service delivered, for example, how satisfied are residents and customers? Furthermore, each council is unique with its own vision, aim and priorities, and services operate within this context.

Therefore, the benchmarking data provided in this report should be viewed as a 'guide' and as a starting point for discussion. It is important to understand performance within context, and there will be a variety of internal factors that determine performance including costs, workloads and quality.

### Note

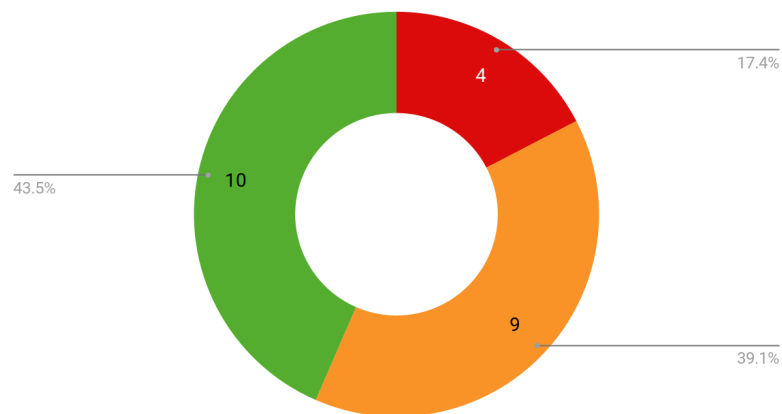
The data has been extracted from LG Inform, a benchmarking tool, which contains a range of routinely published data. It should be noted that:

- the extracted data may differ from the Council's own data;
- the median and top (best 25%) quartile lines are based on annual outturns but applied to the quarterly data;;
- 2020/21 benchmarks are not yet available, so the previous year's benchmarks have been used

# KEY PERFORMANCE METRICS

## At a glance...

Summary of Performance



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### OVERALL PERFORMANCE

Many services have been impacted by Covid-19, and have had to either cease or find new ways of working during multiple national lockdowns. Other services have experienced higher workloads to meet customer/client demand or are supporting communities and businesses which are affected by the pandemic.

Some services continue to be significantly impacted by Covid-19 such as business rates collection, leisure facilities and food safety inspections. In addition, the implementation of a new revenues and benefits system combined with year end activities, has placed additional burdens on the service.

To comply with Covid-19 guidance and restrictions, the majority of staff are still working from home. Although many services have been able to deliver services 'virtually' and customer satisfaction for services delivered by phone remains high, other services such as Planning have found the process less efficient

Indicator	Status
Customer satisfaction - phones	Green
Customer satisfaction - F2F	n/a
Customer satisfaction - website	Orange
Customer satisfaction - email	no target set
% calls responded within 20 secs	Red
% abandoned calls	Red
CT collection rate	Orange
NNDR collection rate	Orange
Average days to process HB new claims	Red
Average days to process HB change events	Green
% HB overpayment	Orange
Households in Emergency Accommodation under 28 days	Orange
Households in Emergency Accommodation over 28 days	Orange
% major applications determined within time	Green
% minor applications determined within time	Green
% others applications determined within time	Red
% planning appeals allowed	Green
Affordable homes delivered	Green
% land charge searches dispatched within time	Green
% high risk notifications assessed within time	Green
% high risk food premises inspected within time	Orange
Residual waste per household (kg)	Green
% overall recycling rate	Green
Missed bins per 100,000	Orange
Leisure visits	no target set
Gym memberships	no target set
Parking enforcement hours	Orange

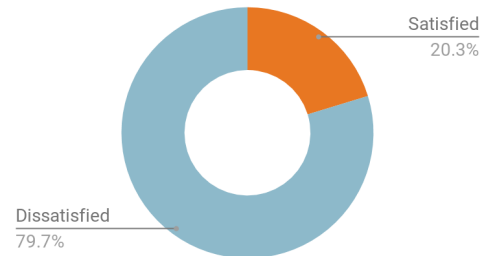
# CUSTOMER SERVICE

## Customer satisfaction

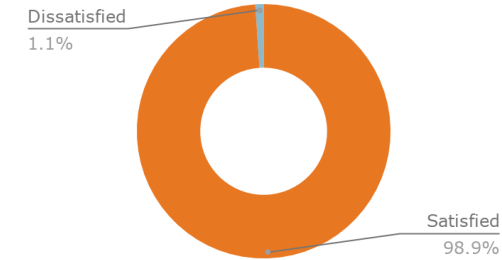
Face to face - no surveys due to Covid19



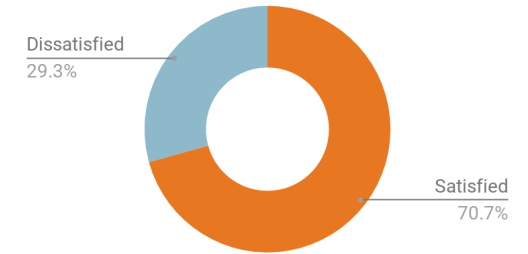
Website - 148 respondents



Phone - 1023 respondents

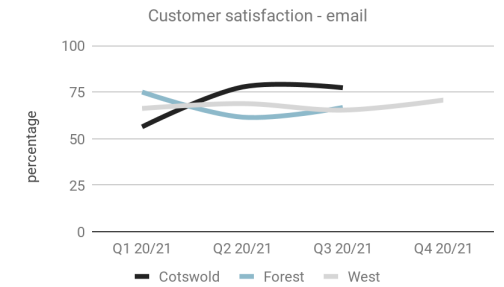
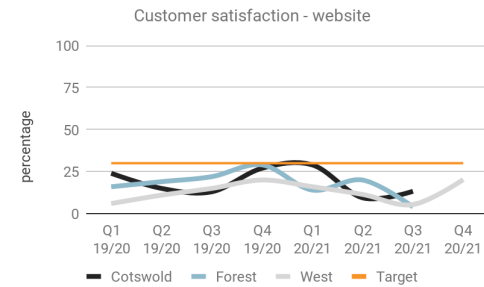
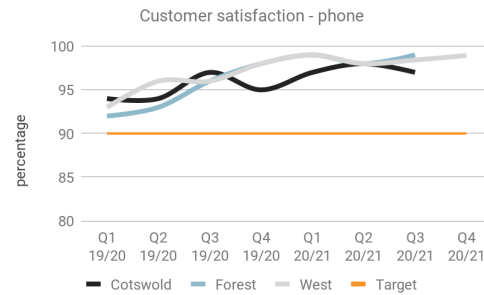


Email - 266 respondents



## What's the trend?

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### OBSERVATION

The nation emerged from the third lockdown on the 29 March 2021 in phased stages. Although Woodgreen and the Town Centre shop re-opened to customers from 12 April 2021, footfall is currently low. Satisfaction surveys for services delivered by phone, website and email continue to be conducted.

Satisfaction for services delivered by the Council's website has shown improvements this quarter. Projects to review web content and improve the customer experience are in progress. However, the number of responses to the website survey, although up on the previous quarter at 345 (from 56) remains an extremely small proportion of the 594,893 visitors despite the process for rating the website and leaving feedback being simple. It is likely that the results from the survey are unrepresentative. An analysis of the survey data was completed to understand the issues and to determine whether satisfaction is with service provision or the website. A significant proportion of the qualitative feedback was found to be about service provision or were categorised as user error e.g. mistyping a postcode rather than comments about content or website functionality improvements. Therefore, this indicator has been set to 'Amber'. A new framework to measure the effectiveness of the Council's website and gather customer feedback is planned.

Satisfaction ratings for services delivered by phone continue to be high.

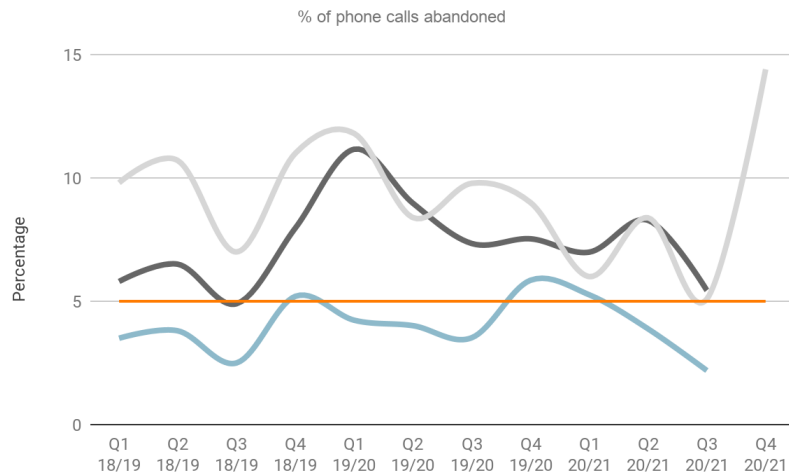
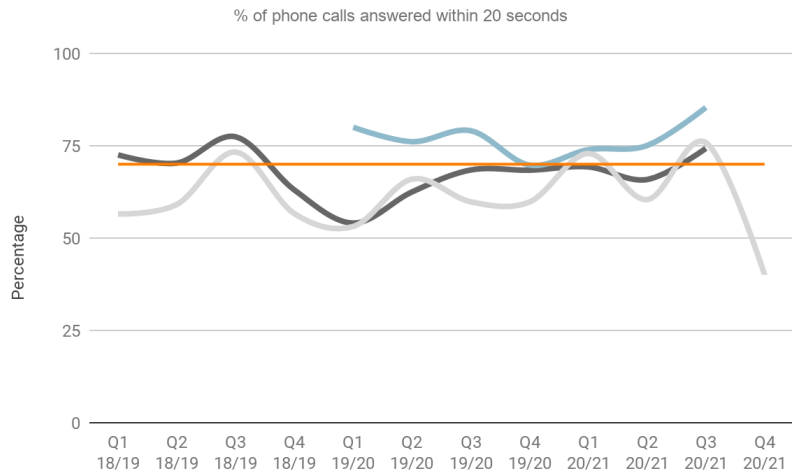
## Telephone calls - response and abandonment

Target

Cotswold

Forest of Dean

West Oxfordshire



### OBSERVATION

The service is currently reviewing its indicators and targets in preparation for 2021/22 to ensure that they are appropriate to customers' needs; so for example, ensuring that satisfaction for our services remains high while also taking into account the benefits of channel shift and providing more options for accessing our services.

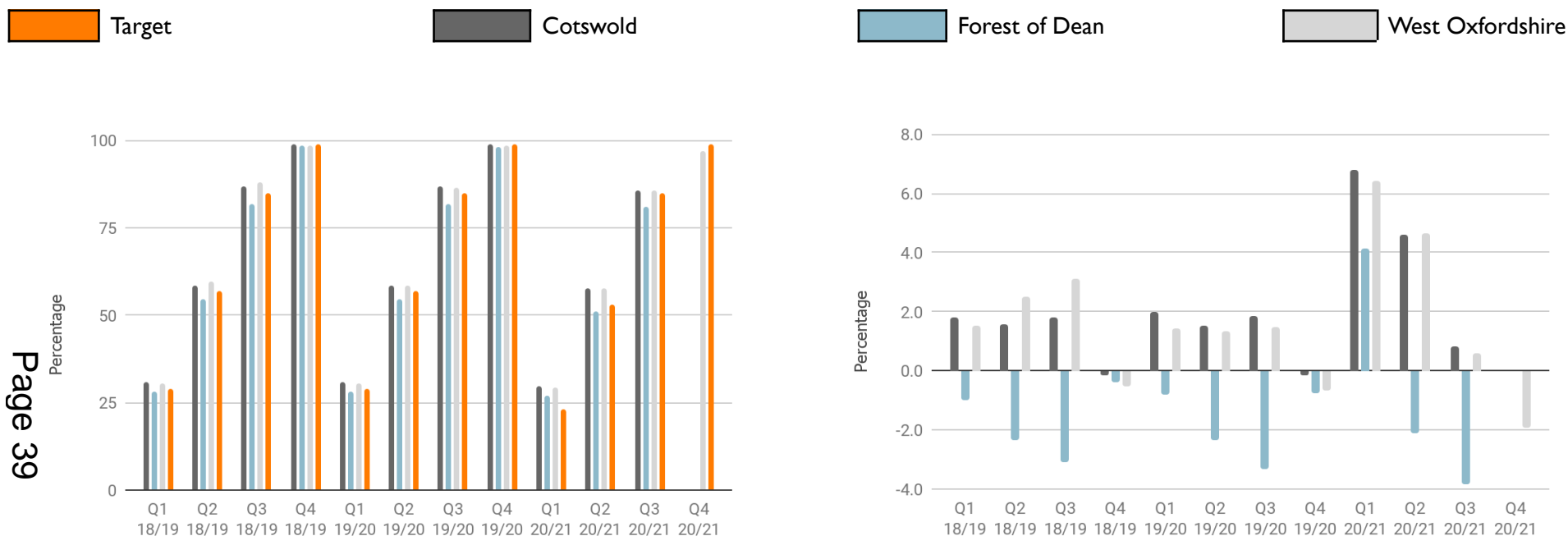
Workloads are generally higher in Q4 due to normal annual billing processes. However, performance has reduced significantly due to staff turnover during the quarter and higher call volumes related to Covid-19, for example, responding to Covid-19 business grants calls and supporting calls to the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable, as well as taking garden waste payments and queries.

In addition, the time spent on a call increased as staff supported calls from revenues and benefit customers which involved the manual collection of information while the new system was being implemented. The call abandon rate increased due to the service managing call volumes by revising call waiting messages which provided advice /sign post customers to alternative ways to complete their transactions. Advisors are working to reduce the backlog of voicemails and emails that have built up; and recruitment to vacant posts has just taken place.

Note: a high abandon rate is not a sign of poor performance as customers may abandon their calls for many reasons including completing their transactions on the Council's website

## Revenues and Benefit

### (Cumulative) Percentage of council tax collected & the difference between the percentage of council tax collected and the target



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#### OBSERVATION:

At the end of Q4, the collection rate was just over one percentage point lower than previous years.

Due to the impact of Covid-19, all recovery action was paused initially following government guidance and Member decision; and the service worked with customers to re-align payment instalments. The service had the go-ahead at the end of September 2020 to re-commence recovery actions such as reminders and final payment letters. Some householders' income will have been impacted by job loss and furlough; the service is contacting customers by phone and email, as well as including a letter with reminders to encourage customers to contact the Council if they are experiencing problems with council tax payments. Furthermore, those residents in receipt of council tax support received an additional payment to their accounts from the government's Covid-19 Council Tax hardship fund.

Currently, the Magistrates Courts are not holding any liability order hearings which will mean the Council is unable to enforce any debts incurred in 2020/21. The debt will be rolled over into the new financial year, and added to residents' new payment schedules; and recovery action will continue

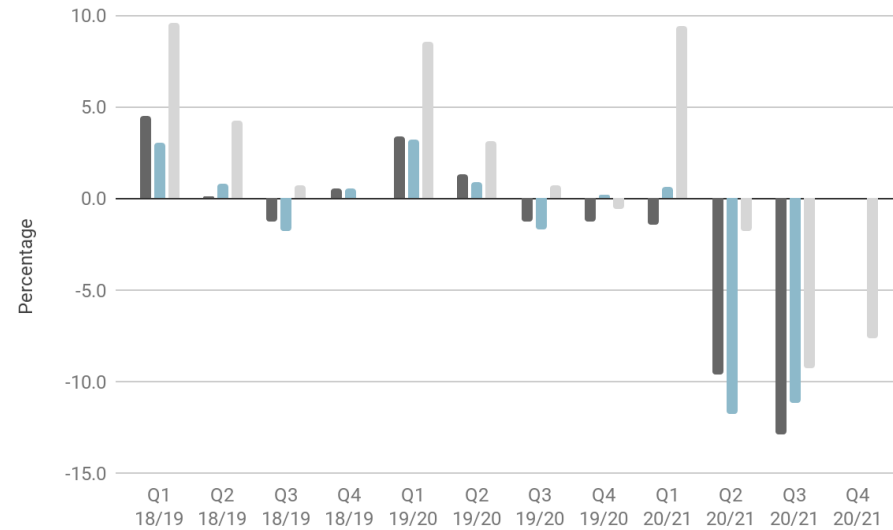
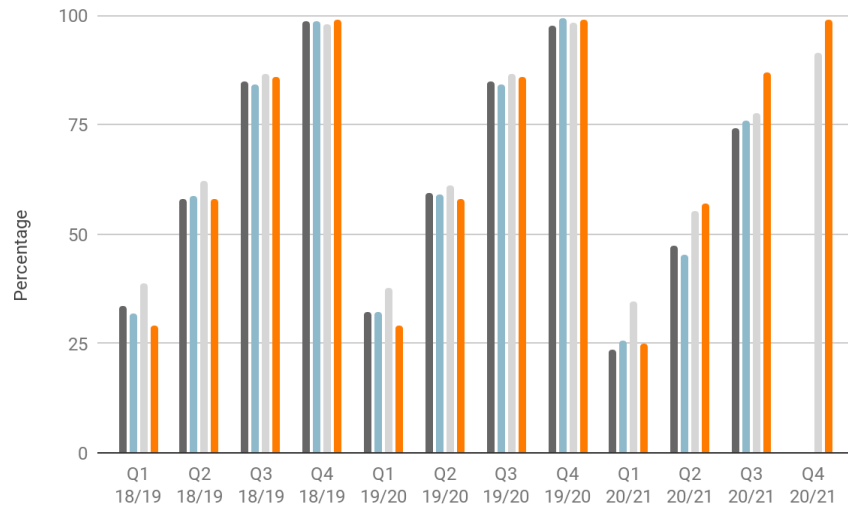
**(Cumulative) Percentage of business rates collected & the difference between the percentage of business rates collected and the target**

Target

Cotswold

Forest of Dean

West Oxfordshire



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**OBSERVATION:**

The collection rate at the end of Q4 was around six percentage points lower than previous year; Covid-19 is having a major impact on business rate collection figures throughout the country.

Due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions and three national lockdowns, many businesses had to close for several months of the year or operate under restrictions. Following an initial pause in undertaking recovery action, the service is sending out reminders, phoning and emailing businesses to encourage them to contact the Council so that we can support them via manageable repayment plans. Currently, the Magistrates Courts are not holding any liability order hearings which will mean the Council is unable to enforce any debts incurred in 2020/21, so the debt will be rolled forward into the next financial year, and added to the new payment instalments for 2021-22.

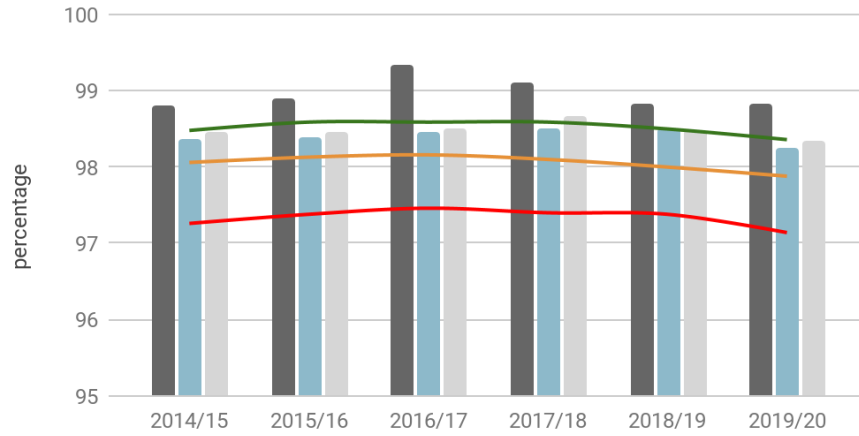
Government has gone some way in helping certain businesses with 100% business rate relief, but there are still those businesses which have seen an impact on their out turn which have not received any assistance and are therefore struggling financially. A further tranche of business grants became available to cover the second and third lockdowns, and the Council is continuing to distribute a number of grants that are available to eligible businesses.

Note: central government funding to cover business rates relief is not included in the outturn



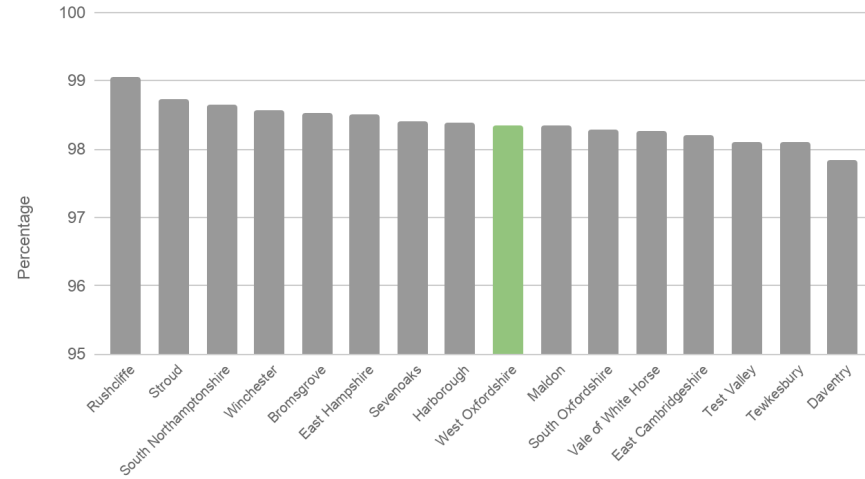
# Benchmarks against all Shire Districts and Cipfa nearest neighbours for council tax collection rates and business rates collection rates

## Percentage of council tax collected



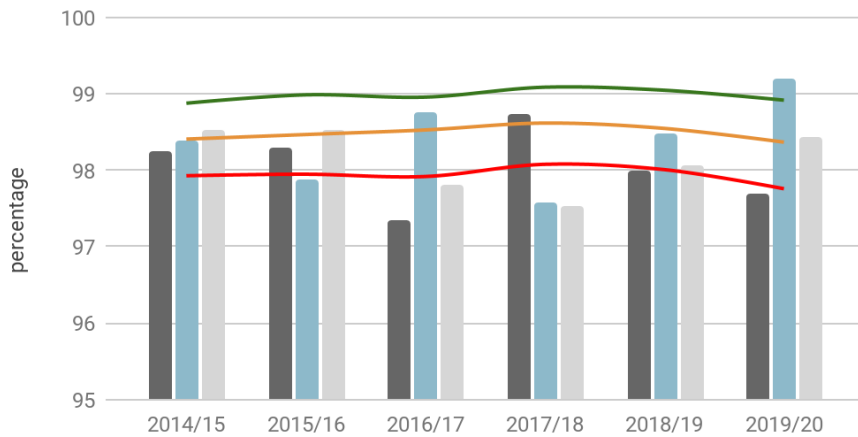
Cotswold
  Forest
  West
  Shire District Median
  1st quartile
  3rd quartile

West's Cipfa nearest neighbours (2019/20)



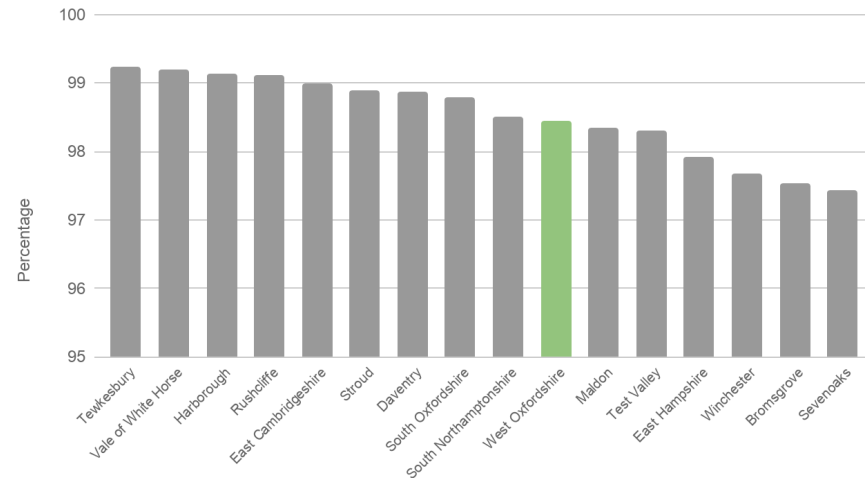
Page 44

## Percentage of business rates collected



Cotswold
  Forest
  West
  Shire District Median
  1st quartile
  3rd quartile

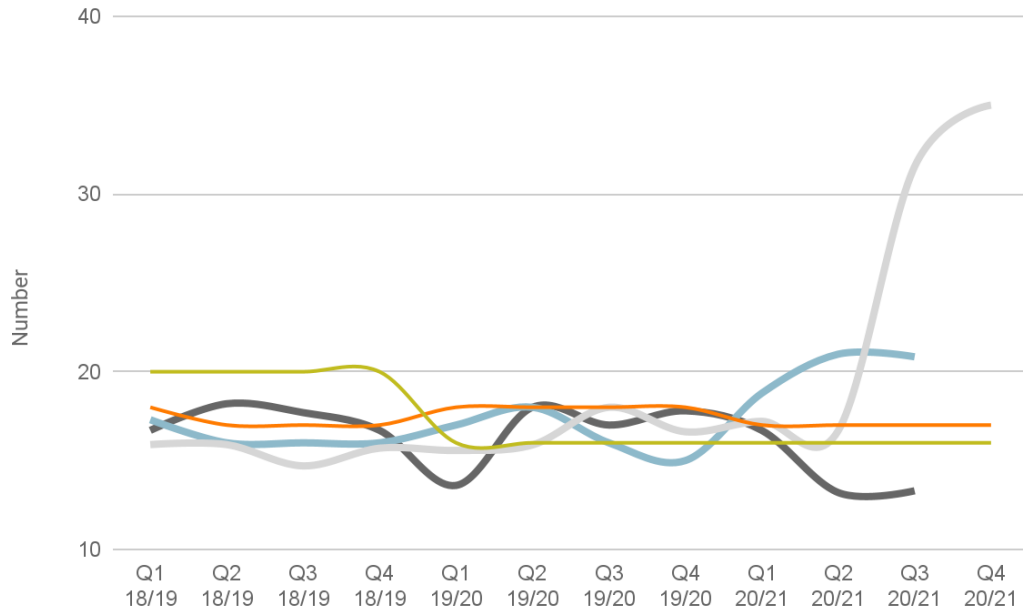
West's Cipfa nearest neighbours (2019/20)



**(Cumulative) Average number of days taken to process new housing benefit claims**

Target
  Cotswold
  Forest of Dean
  West Oxfordshire
  Shire Districts' Median

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**OBSERVATION:**

At the end of Q4, processing times have increased significantly due to the implementation of a new revenues and benefits system on 4 February. Prior to 'go live', there was a period of downtime between switching the old system off and the new system on, which created a backlog of applications which staff have been working through. During Q4, a range of end of year activities are administered including the benefit uprating and rent increases which require system parameter changes and testing, which has placed additional burdens on staff.

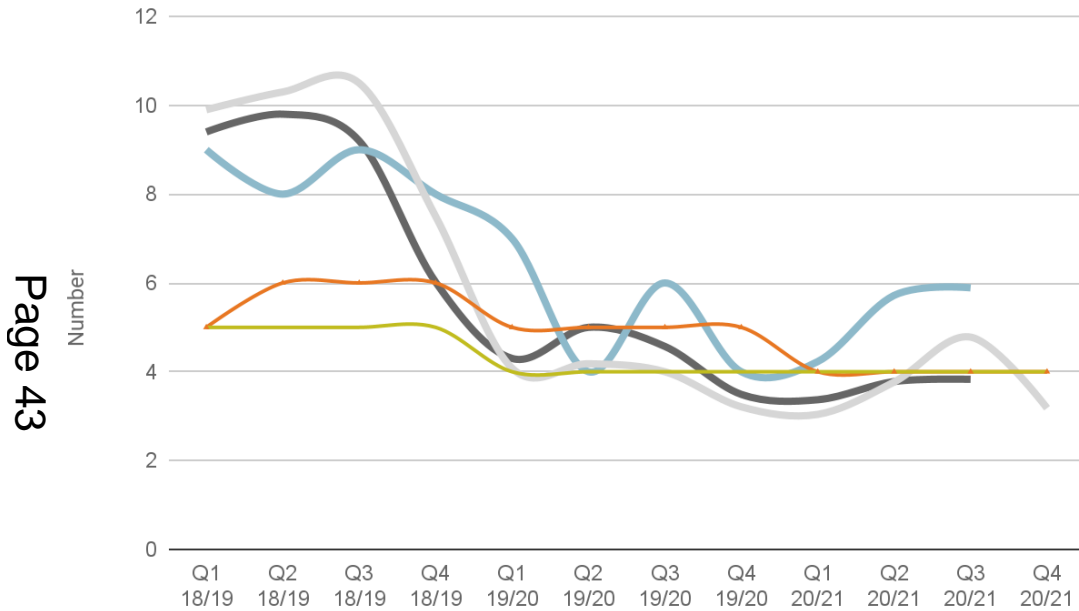
Furthermore, capacity has been reduced in the service as staff have taken time out to train Customer Services Advisors, while other officers have supported 'Track and Trace'. However, there are benefits of the new system including the ability to make online applications, and once the open portal is implemented later in the year, the back office system will be automatically updated.

Although performance was off target due to many external factors, assurances can be given that not one claimant suffered any financial loss or experienced any threat to their new or ongoing tenancy. If there was any threat to the claimant because of delays in administering their claim, the Council would have provided an emergency payment.

To manage workloads, the service has accessed support on demand from an external source.

Note: due to the significant reduction (over 70%) in new housing benefit claims since the implementation of Universal Credit in November 2017 in West Oxfordshire District, this indicator has become obsolete. It is proposed that a new indicator to measure Council Tax Support processing times is introduced as the majority of Universal Credit claims will have an associated CTS claim

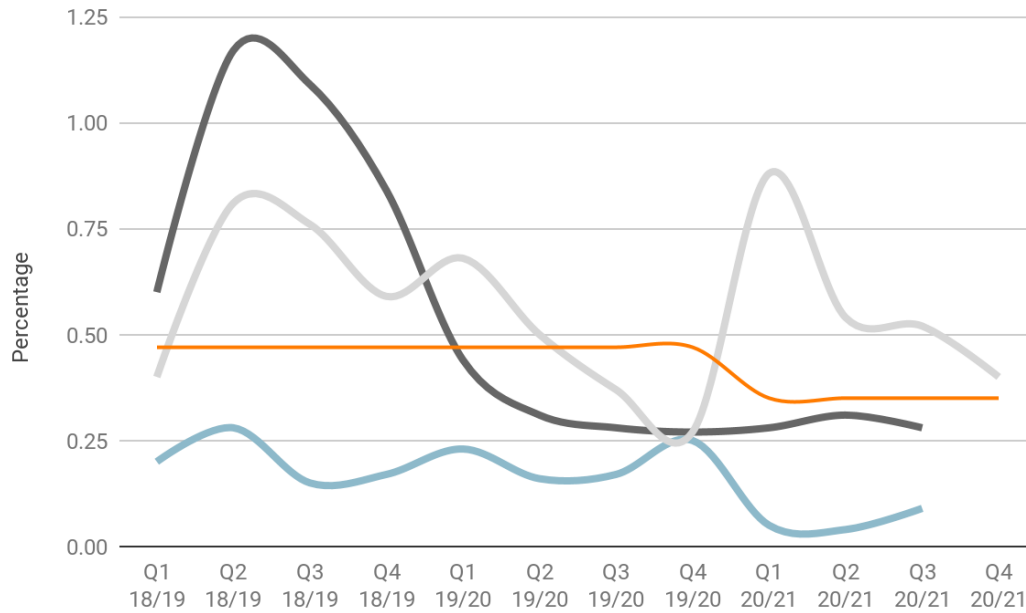
**(Cumulative) Average number of days taken to process housing benefit change of circumstances**



**OBSERVATION:**

Despite the additional workloads associated with the implementation of a new revenues and benefits system and year end activities, performance has come in on target at the end of Q4. Some of the annual changes such as rent increases are simple to process and can be applied in bulk which has helped to reduce the average processing time

**(Cumulative) Percentage of housing benefit overpayment due to LA error/Admin delay**



**OBSERVATION:**

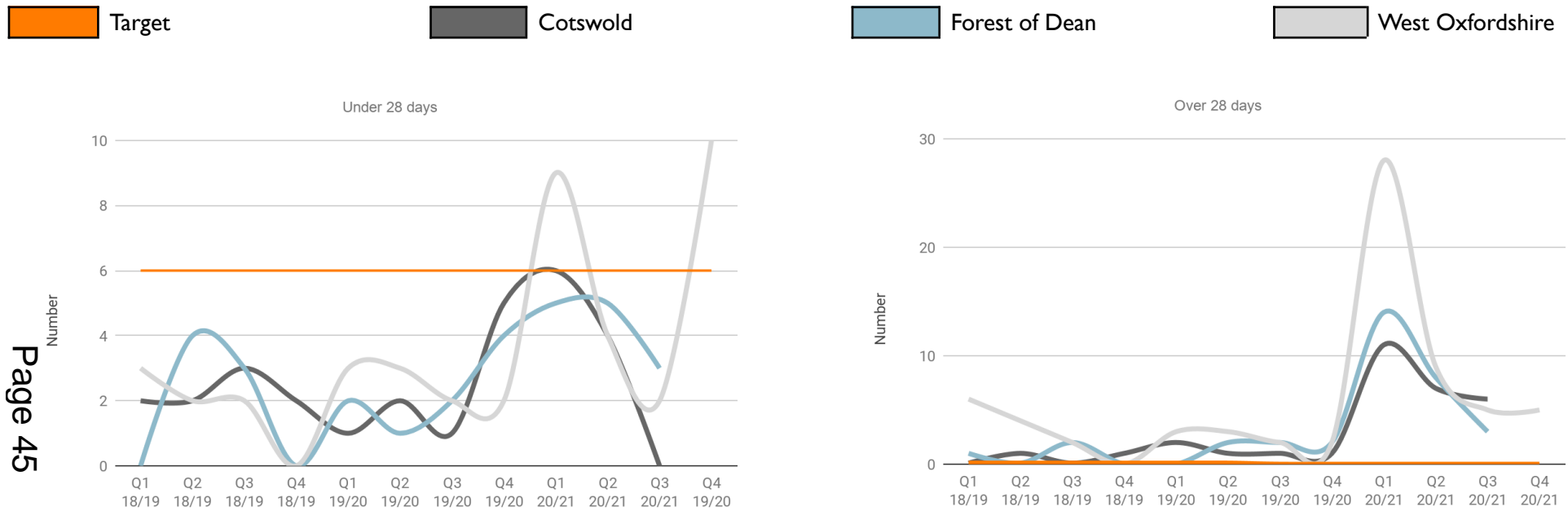
The service continues to involve a number of staff in quality assurance. Due to the high volume of change of circumstances, a sampling approach is taken, and areas which have high error rates such as calculation of earnings, are targeted

There was a small number of errors relating to high value overpayments in Q4 of the previous year which were amended in Q1. We were expecting the spike to flatten out over the course of the year, and to achieve the annual target; however, the backlog created by the implementation of the new revenues and benefits system resulted in an increase in admin delay.

The bulk processing of some end of year changes in Q4 such as rent increases has helped to bring the outturn closer to the target

## Housing Support

### (Snapshot) Number of households living in emergency accommodation for under 28 days & over 28 days



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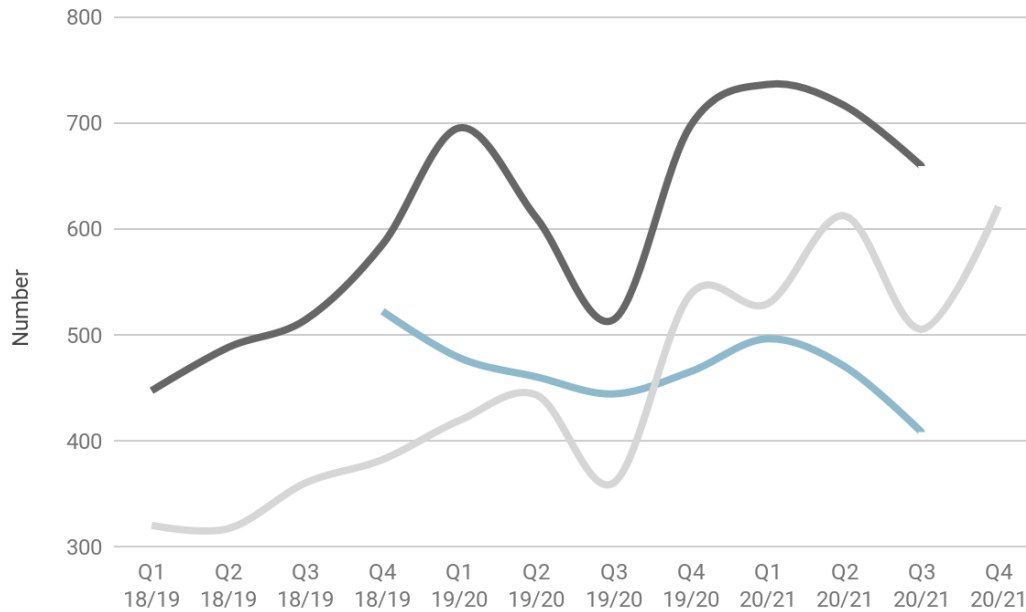
#### OBSERVATION:

At the beginning of the first lockdown, councils were required to place all clients who are rough sleeping or at risk of imminent homelessness regardless of priority need who have approached the Council, into emergency accommodation, which resulted in a spike in numbers.

The number of households living in emergency accommodation started to decrease as exit plans were created to move households into more secure tenancies including private rented, housing association, and supported accommodation. In addition, some households and rough sleepers chose to leave emergency accommodation.

In Q4, the number of homelessness presentations started to increase again as the nation entered the third lockdown, and as a result of the cold weather. The majority of the households in emergency accommodation over 28 days tend to be single people affected by the pandemic (rather than in priority need) who are difficult to move on due to the lack of one bedroom accommodation. The Oxfordshire councils are working together to the same standards; and hostels are helping to move people on creating greater fluidity and throughput

**(Snapshot) Number of Long Term Empty properties**



**OBSERVATION:**

Overall, the number of long term empty properties in the District is increasing which is likely to be due to a number of factors.

Initially, there was a pause in house moves which is likely to have contributed to the increase. In addition, no site visits to inspect properties were being undertaken by the LTE officer due to Covid-19.

The LTE post is responsible for monitoring properties and working with landlords to support them to bring their properties back into use. This post became vacant in September but has recently been recruited to. The new post will concentrate on those properties where the Council might be able to influence or take action, rather than on those properties that are being well maintained.

Cottsway has re-commenced the planned demolition of housing association properties, but there are still some retirement properties that have not sold

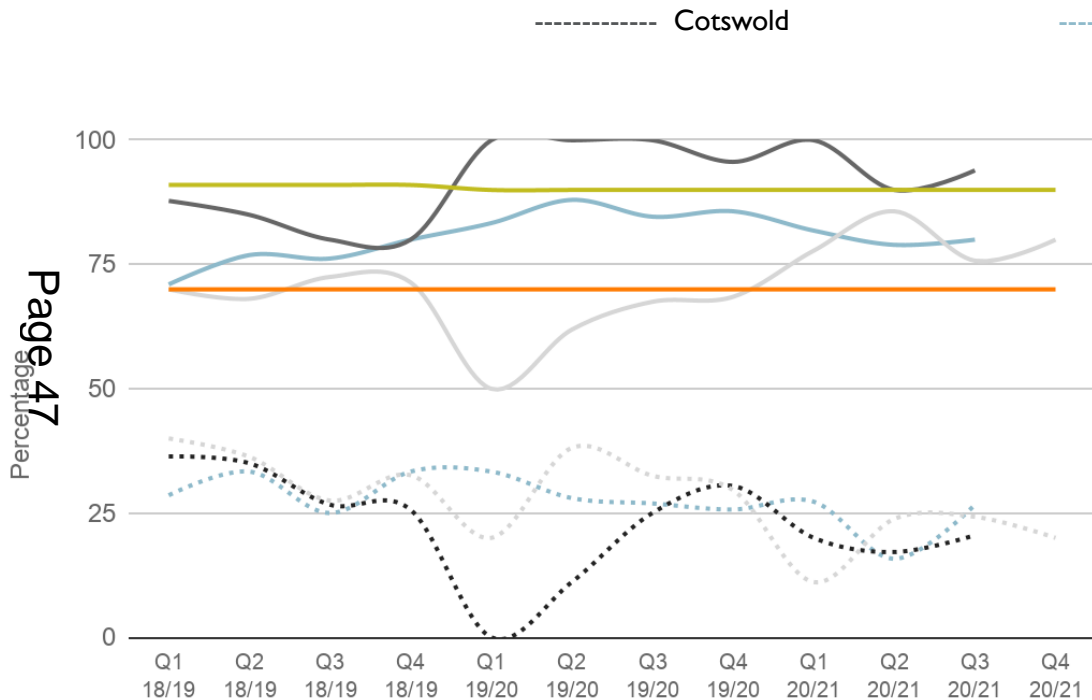
## Planning and Strategic Housing

### (Cumulative) Percentage of major planning applications determined

% of all applications completed within an agreed timeframe



% of all application completed within 13 weeks



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#### Note

The charts for the planning performance measures have been separated to demonstrate the number of applications that are completed within the set time frames and the number that are completed as a result of an agreed extension of time.

Extensions of times are often a result of consultees requesting changes to the scheme or because the consultee response is essential but has not been received within the timetable. They are also used where officers are working proactively with applicants to improve schemes and make developments acceptable

#### OBSERVATION:

Seven major applications were determined in the quarter; and 40 for the year compared to 54 for the same period a year ago.

The service has reported that the number of applications received over the summer and then throughout the rest of the year has been a record nationally and that this trend is reflected locally. The increasing numbers coming through combined with reduced efficiency in the planning process as a result of Covid-19 has created a backlog. The departure of two senior planners and a planner has placed additional pressure on the team which is already overstretched. Recruitment is in hand but performance is slipping, and recruitment of agency staff is under consideration to fill the gaps.

The Planning team has found home working and the restrictions imposed by Covid-19 has created additional burdens as not all aspects of this statutory process can be or are best achieved electronically. In addition, home working has reduced communication between officers, and therefore there is less support for officers which is affecting morale. Validating planning applications for accuracy has proved particularly problematic as a home based exercise as details of the application have to be cross checked against a number of plans and maps which can be achieved much easier using paper versions in the office. A new validation process was implemented over the Christmas/New Year at all three partner Council sites which should help to improve performance generally. Other tasks that are achieved more easily in the office include redacting and printing documents e.g. site notices.

The restrictions imposed by Covid-19 have resulted in additional preparation time required for committee meetings, and site visits which need to be unaccompanied and pre-arranged, often with a follow up online meeting or phone call.

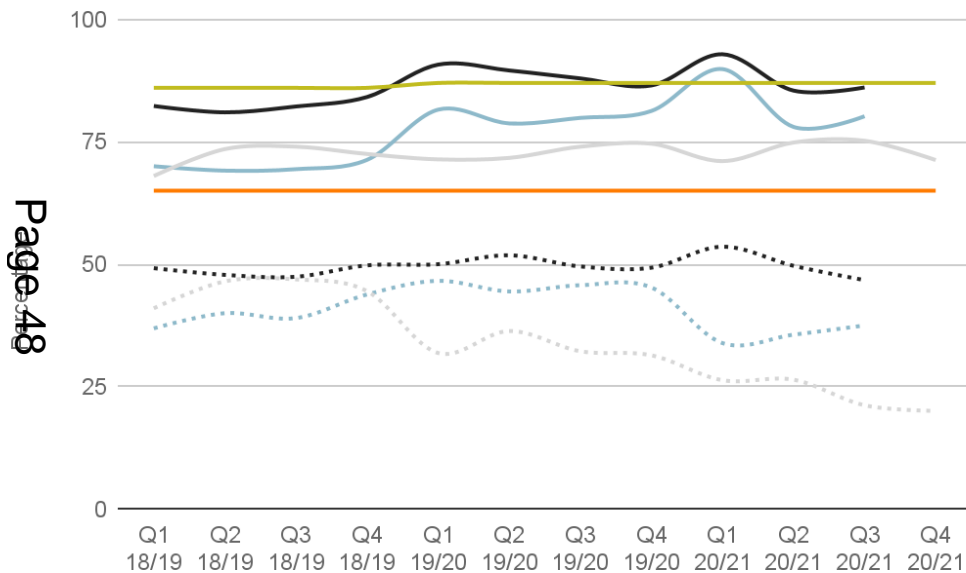
Some consultees such as the County and the Environment Agency are struggling to meet response target dates which is also impacting on determination times.

## (Cumulative) Percentage of minor planning applications determined

% of all applications completed within agreed timescales



% of all applications completed within 8 weeks



### OBSERVATION:

Eighty-four minor applications were determined in the quarter and 334 for the year compared to 382 for the previous year.

The challenging work conditions coupled with vacant planning posts and higher volumes of applications coming through has created a backlog which is impacting on performance. Planning officers are typically dealing with twice as many 'live' applications than in pre-covid times.

Registration/validation has proved particularly problematic as a home based exercise; although a new validation process was implemented at all three partner Council development management services over the Christmas/New Year period which once embedded should help increase resilience and performance generally. In addition, a number of improvement projects are scheduled which the Customer Experience Improvement Team (CEIT) will help deliver alongside the planning service. However, with such high workloads in the Planning service, the current focus for both the CEIT and the Planning teams is to clear the backlog of applications awaiting validation

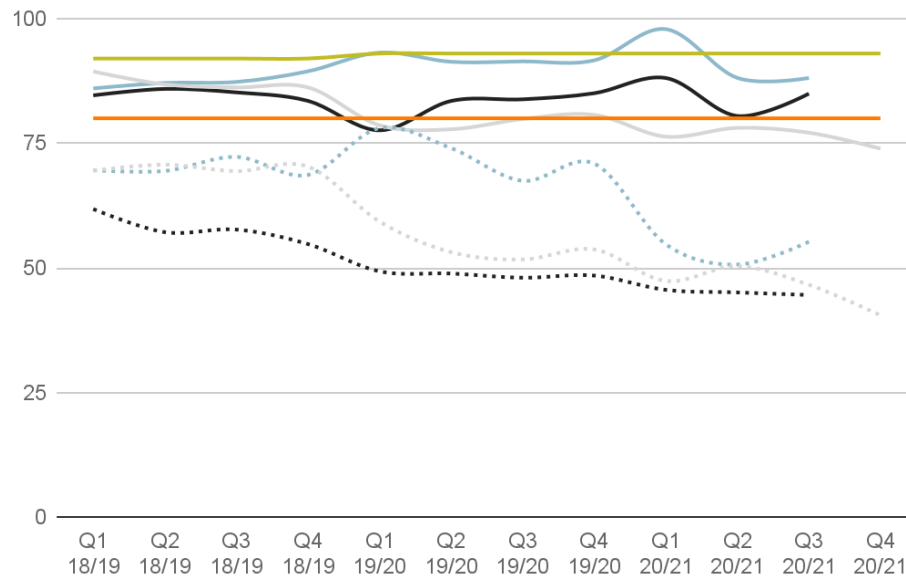


## (Cumulative) Percentage of other planning applications determined

% of all applications completed within agreed timescales



% of all applications completed within 8 weeks



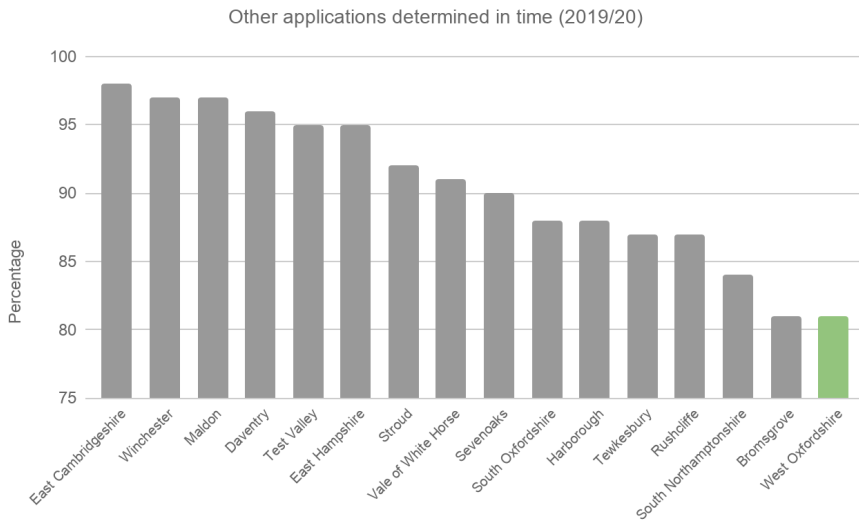
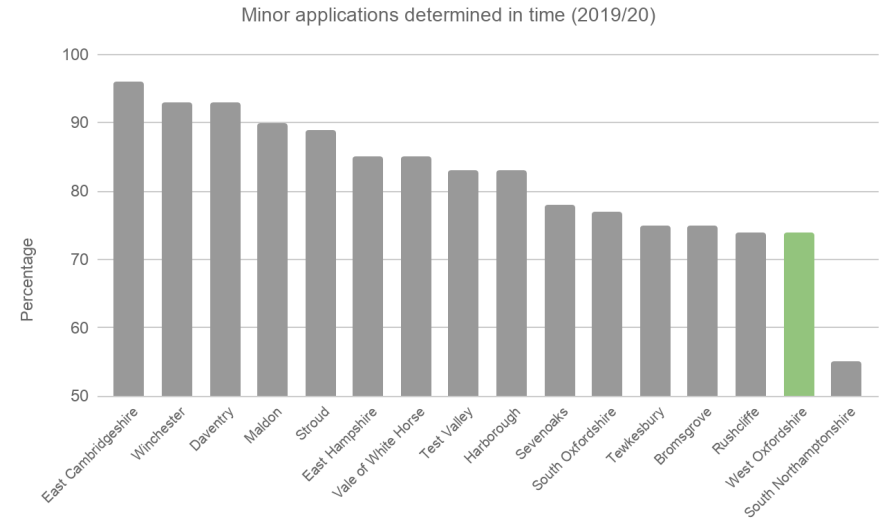
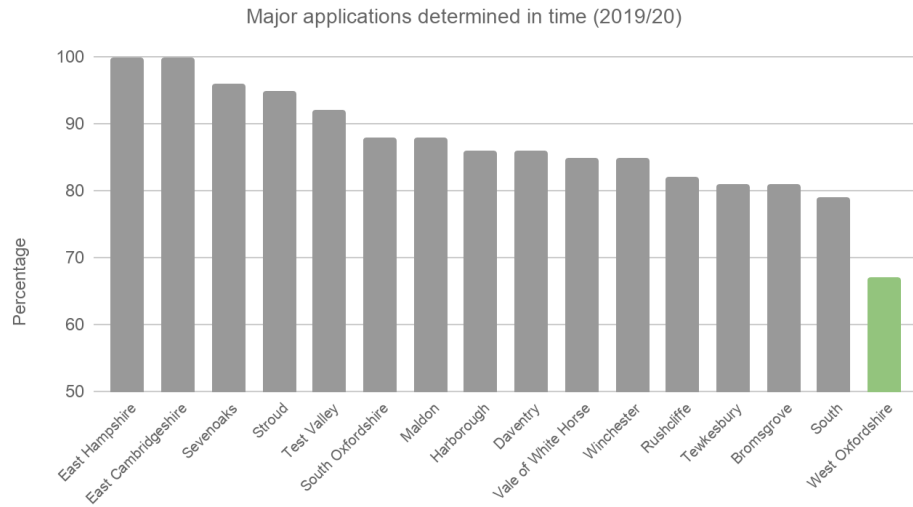
### OBSERVATION:

283 other applications were determined in the quarter and 991 for the year compared to 895 for the previous year.

The challenging work conditions coupled with vacant planning posts and higher volumes of applications coming through has created a backlog which is impacting on performance. Planning officers are typically dealing with twice as many 'live' applications than in pre-covid times.

Registration/validation has proved particularly problematic as a home based exercise; although a new validation process was implemented at all three partner Council development management services over the Christmas/New Year period which once embedded should help increase resilience and performance generally. In addition, a number of improvement projects are scheduled which the Customer Experience Improvement Team (CEIT) will help deliver alongside the planning service. However, with such high workloads in the Planning service, the current focus for both the CEIT and the Planning teams is to clear the backlog of applications awaiting validation

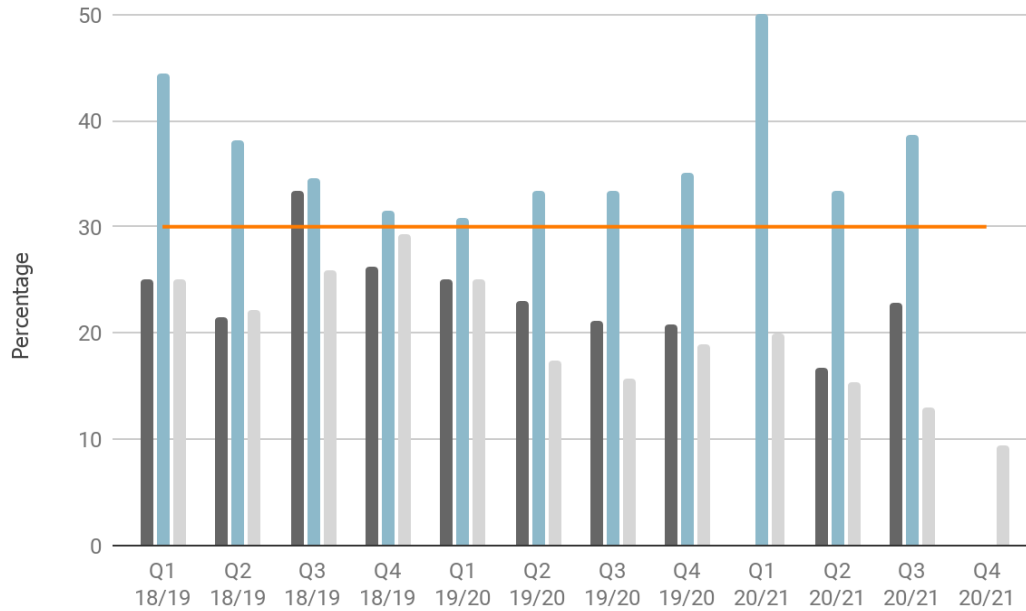
## Benchmarks against Cipa nearest neighbours for % of planning application determined within agreed timescales



**(Cumulative) Percentage of planning appeals allowed**

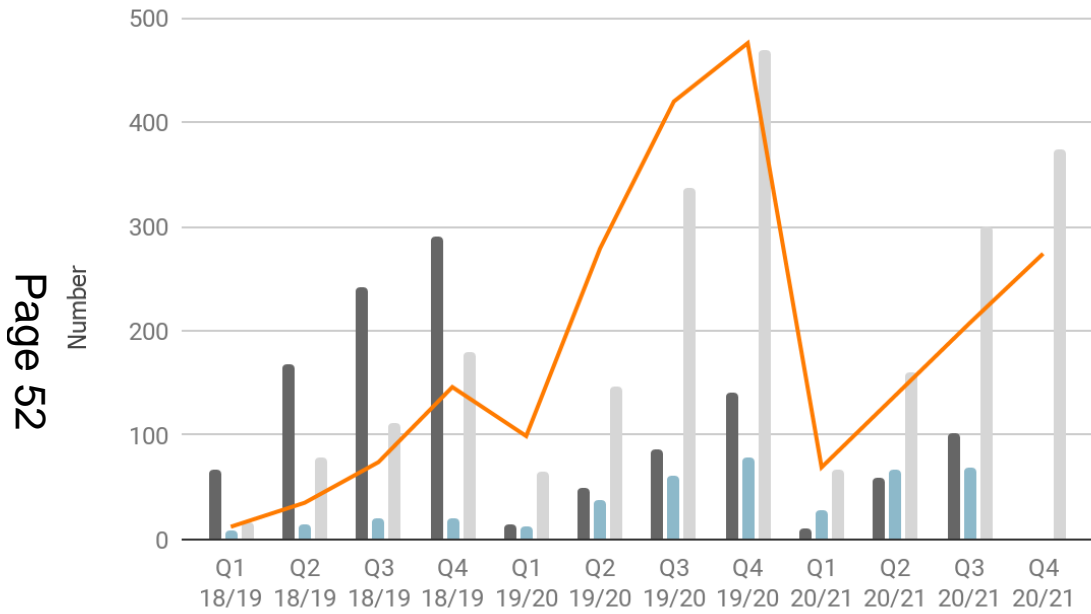


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**OBSERVATION:**  
 None of the fifteen planning appeals determined in Q4 were allowed.  
 During 2020-21, three out of 32 appeals were allowed

**(Cumulative) Number of affordable homes delivered**

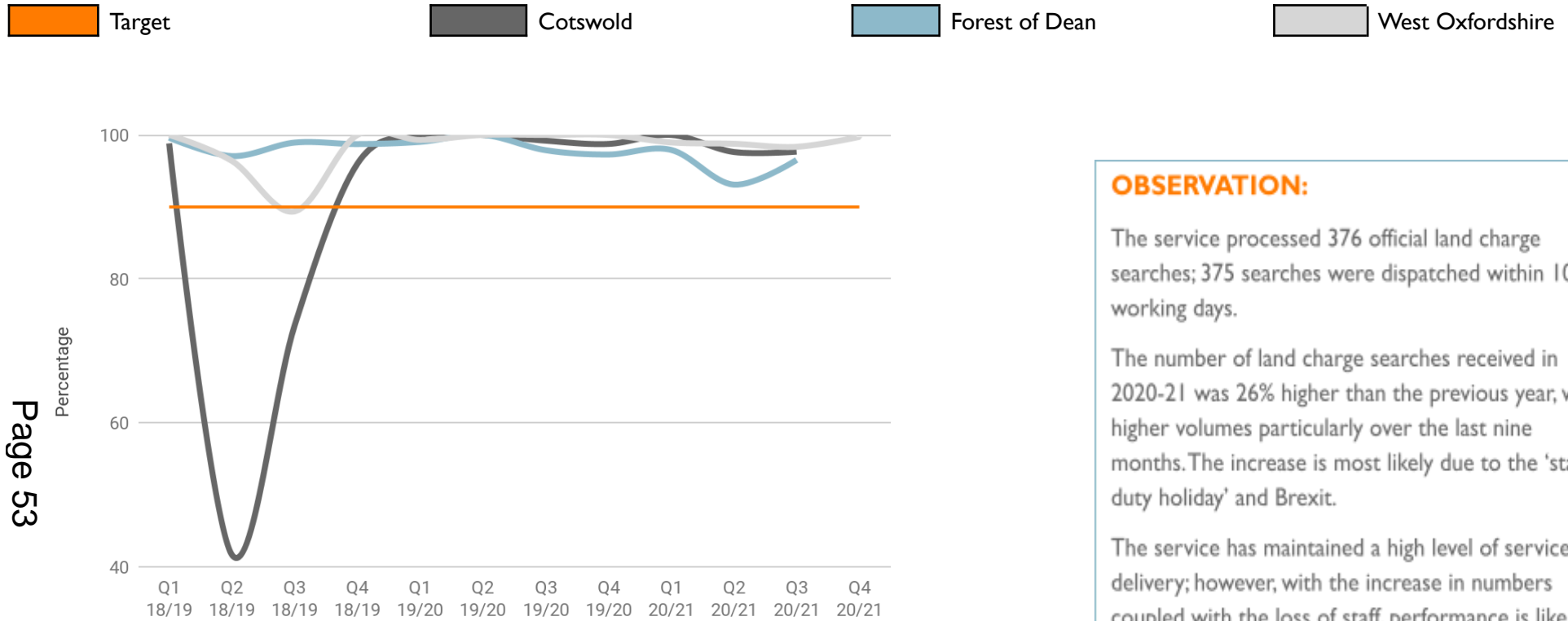


**OBSERVATION:**

Seventy-four affordable homes were delivered in Q4 for rent (53) and low cost home ownership (21), and a total of 374 for the year. 116 affordable homes were delivered by Cottsway, 123 by Sage, and 51 by Aster. The remaining units were delivered by Sovereign, Clarion and Blenheim (10 homes at Long Hanborough). Additionally, seven discount market sales have been delivered in Witney.

Clarion and Greensquare report that their Q4 completions for sites in Minster Lovell and Burford are lower than expected due to issues with material supply and staffing related to Covid-19 and a general labour shortage. These homes are now likely to be completed in the first six months of 2021/22

## Percentage of land charge searches dispatched within 10 working days



### OBSERVATION:

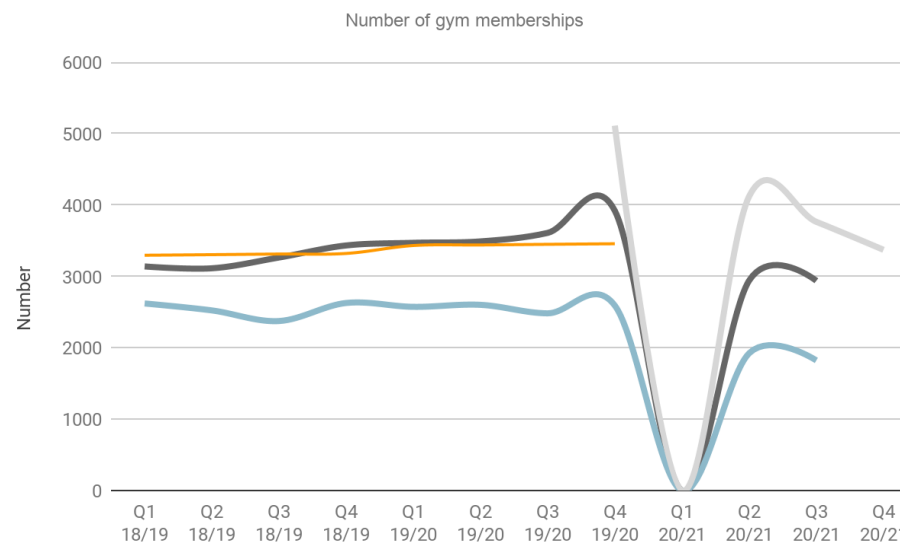
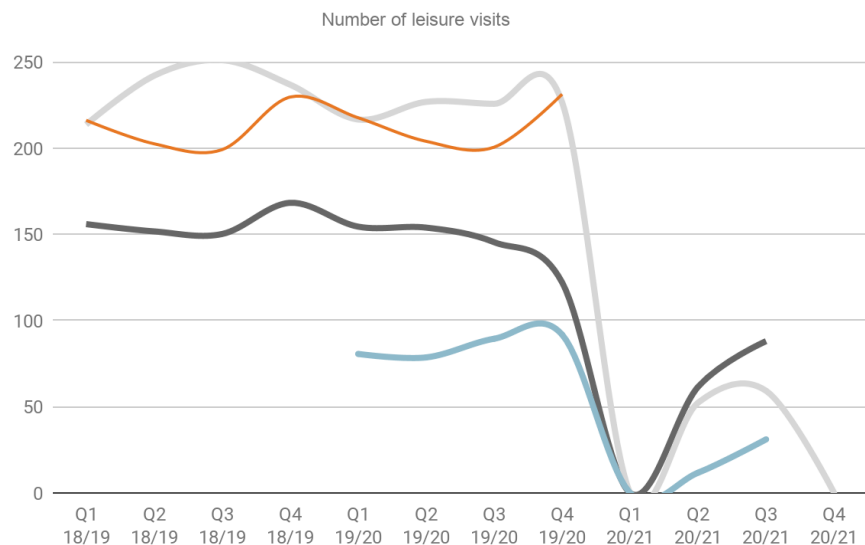
The service processed 376 official land charge searches; 375 searches were dispatched within 10 working days.

The number of land charge searches received in 2020-21 was 26% higher than the previous year, with higher volumes particularly over the last nine months. The increase is most likely due to the 'stamp duty holiday' and Brexit.

The service has maintained a high level of service delivery; however, with the increase in numbers coupled with the loss of staff, performance is likely to fall

## Leisure

### Number of visits to leisure centres & (Snapshot) Number of gym memberships



Page 54  
Number (000)

#### OBSERVATION:

During the 2020/21, there have been three national lockdowns; March to June 2020, November 2020, and January to March 2021 which resulted in the closure of the Council's leisure facilities.

The Government set out the roadmap for 2021 for emerging out of the third lockdown which allowed leisure centres to re-open from 29 March (for outdoor activities with limited numbers and social distancing), this was followed by the return of indoor swimming and gym sessions from 12 April 2021. The current forecast is for a full return of all activities with no social restrictions from 21 June.

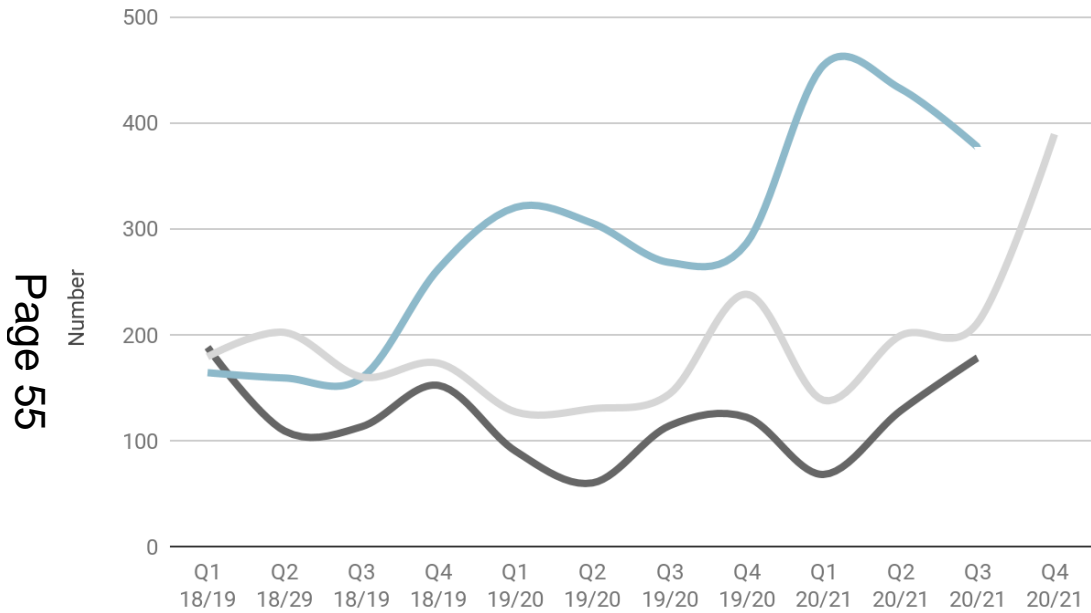
During 2020/21, the Council has given financial support packages to leisure operators to ease cash flow issues. Some grant funding has also been available from the government to cover Council losses through waiving management fees. A further tranche of funding was made available through Sport England that was directly applied to covering costs that the leisure operators were experiencing in lockdown, and to support re-opening.

Note: Gym memberships were frozen during the first and third lockdowns. No targets were set for 2020-21

## Environmental and Regulatory

### Number of fly tips collected

Cotswold      Forest of Dean      West Oxfordshire



#### OBSERVATION:

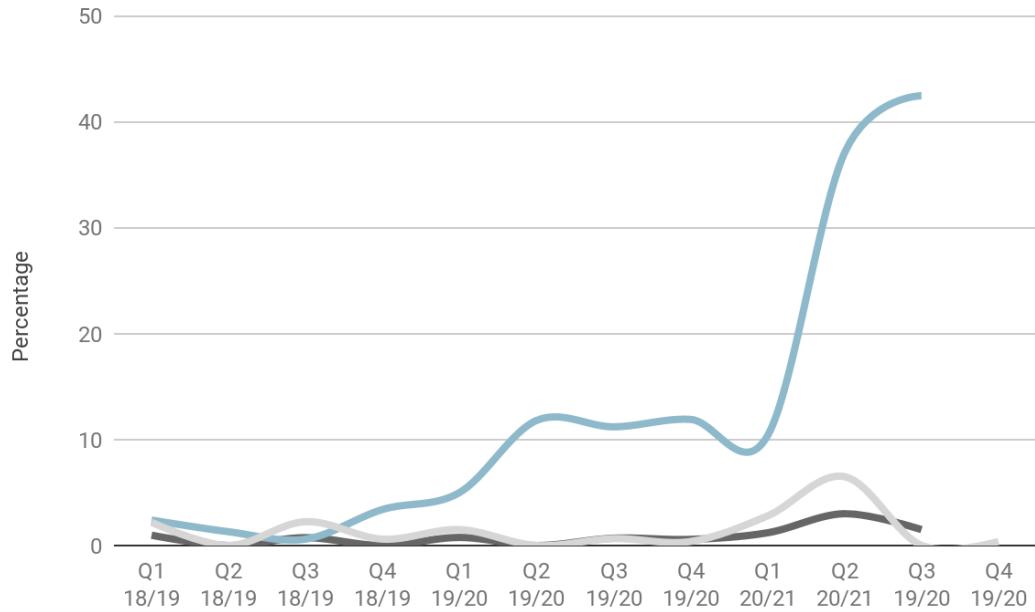
Due to Covid-19, increases in fly tips have been reported nationally which appears to be reflected locally in particular over the last quarter. Recycling centres were closed in the first lockdown but have since been operating a booking system.

In addition, the fly tipping service was redesigned in Q3 with the introduction of new on-line forms and web pages making it easier and quicker for residents to report fly tips.

A high percentage of the fly tips at the Forest of Dean are at recycling sites, which are not counted by West and Cotswold

Percentage of fly tips that result in an enforcement action taking place (defined as a warning letter, fixed penalty notice, simple caution or prosecution)

Cotswold
  Forest of Dean
  West Oxfordshire



**OBSERVATION:**

In Q4, there were 521 notifications of fly tips, up from 301 notifications in the previous quarter. Two enforcement actions were issued, one Fixed Penalty Notice and one warning letter. In addition, officers have been focussing on tackling fly tips at bring banks, and issuing letters to residents.

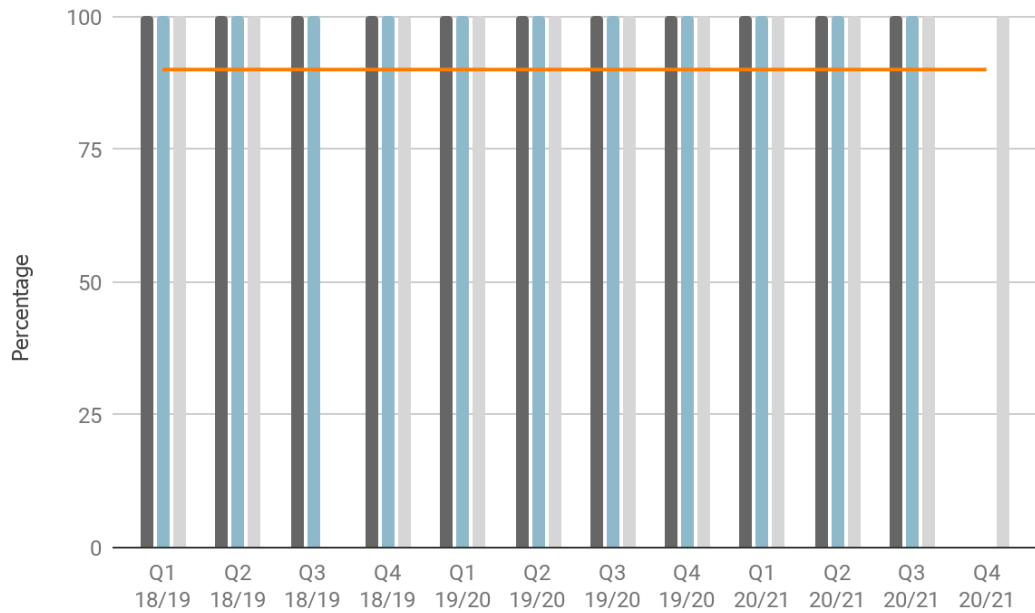
There was an increase in enforcement activity in Q2 following the implementation of a new enforcement pack allowing cautions to be issued via the post. However, a short term loss of experienced resources in the team has resulted in less enforcement activity over the last six months. Recruitment to the vacant post is expected to commence shortly.

In addition, the fly tipping service was re-designed for Cotswold and West. A 'support service triage' has been set up to free up specialist officer time to deal with the fly tips that can be investigated further. In Q4, 34 fly tips were referred to ERS specialists for further investigation. The change in service will require time to 'bed in', and it is likely that the referral criteria will need to be broadened to ensure that a sufficient number of referrals come through for investigation.

Cotswold and West operate a small multidisciplinary team. In contrast, at Forest of Dean, there is a dedicated Community Warden team, which has also implemented a new enforcement pack

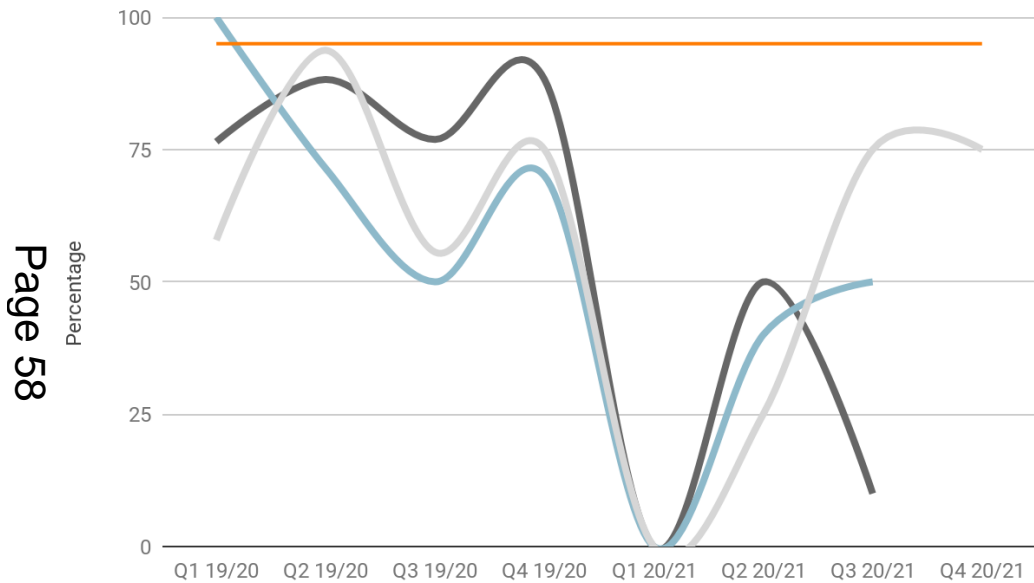


**Percentage of high risk notifications (including food poisoning outbreaks, anti-social behaviour, contaminated private water supplies, workplace fatalities or multiple serious injuries) risk assessed within 1 working day**



**OBSERVATION:**  
 Five notifications in Q4, one oil spill, one report of flooding, two reports of sewage problems and one campylobacter case.  
 All notifications were assessed within one day

## Percentage of high risk food premises inspected within target timescales



Page 58

### OBSERVATION:

This indicator has been set to 'amber' to recognise that the service has been impacted by Covid-19 restrictions.

During the year, there have been three national lockdowns. During these periods, remote inspections have been conducted, and site inspections were undertaken when the Covid infection rates had reduced to a level when it was safe to go out.

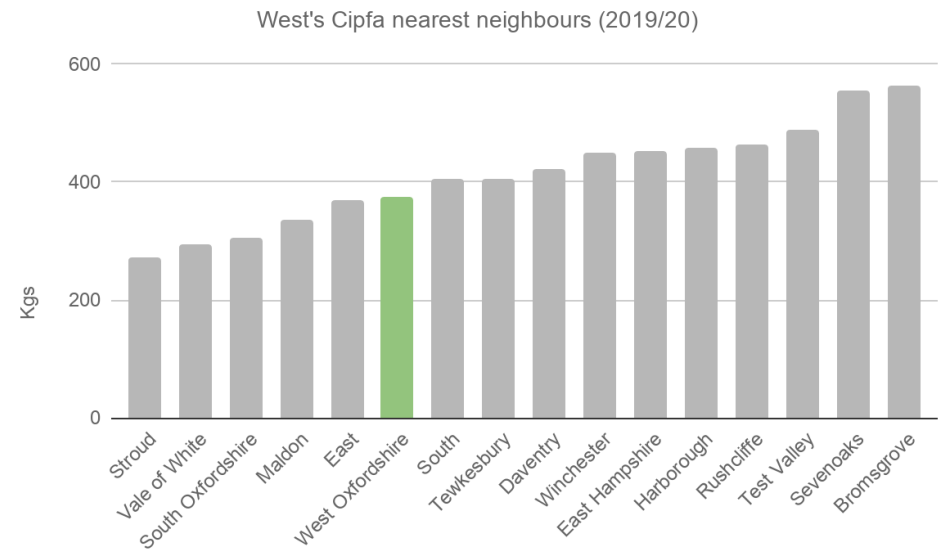
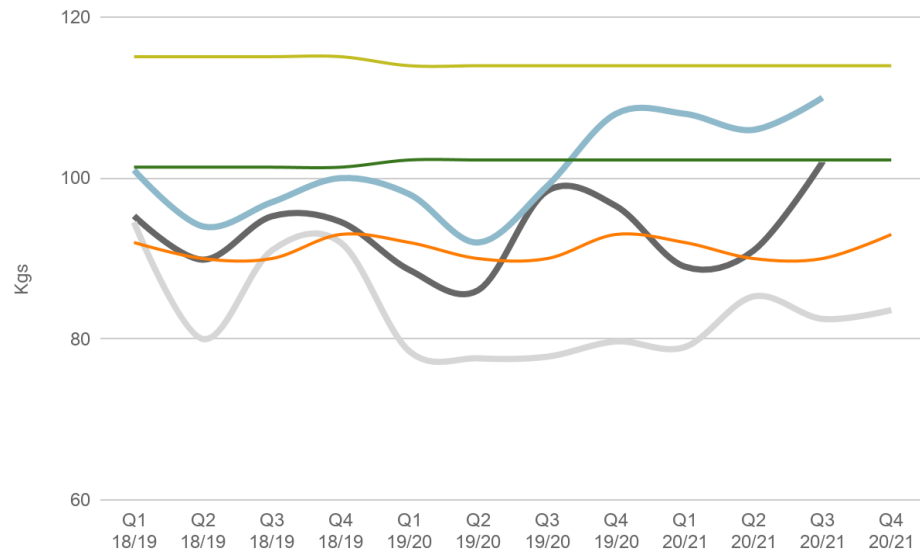
Four high risk food inspections were due in Q4, and all four received a remote inspection.

Following a risk assessment on site visits, and staff consultation, some staff commenced site inspections at the beginning of March 2021 (with the use of PPE) as the infection rate in Oxfordshire had reduced significantly. Two of the four food inspection due have been completed, although one was completed outside of the 28 day timescale. The two outstanding inspections relate to care homes which are excluded from site visits unless deemed necessary.

A backlog of other types of inspections including the inspection of new food businesses, has built up over the year, and the service is awaiting further guidance from the FSA in June on how to deal with the backlog.

All work deemed 'high priority' by the FSA has been undertaken and a site visit has taken place when required.

## Residual household waste per household (kg)



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### OBSERVATION:

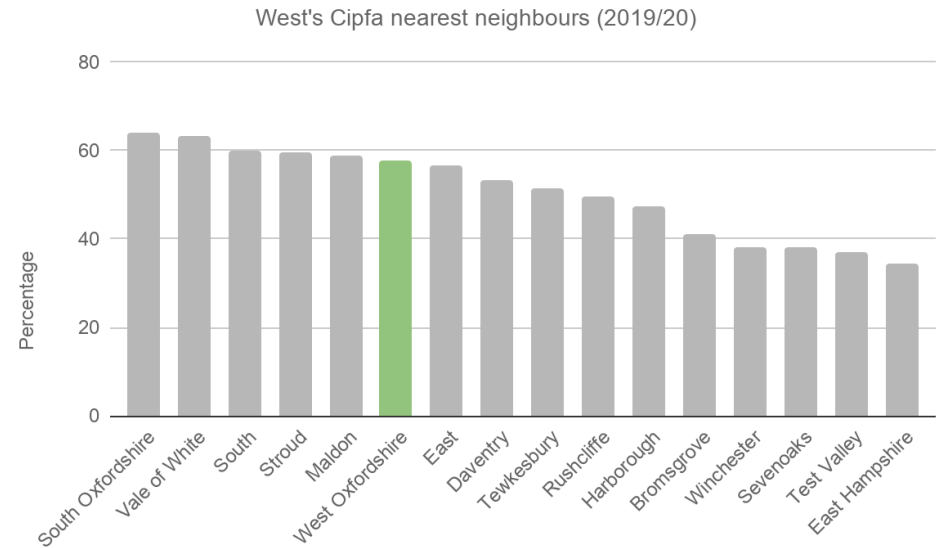
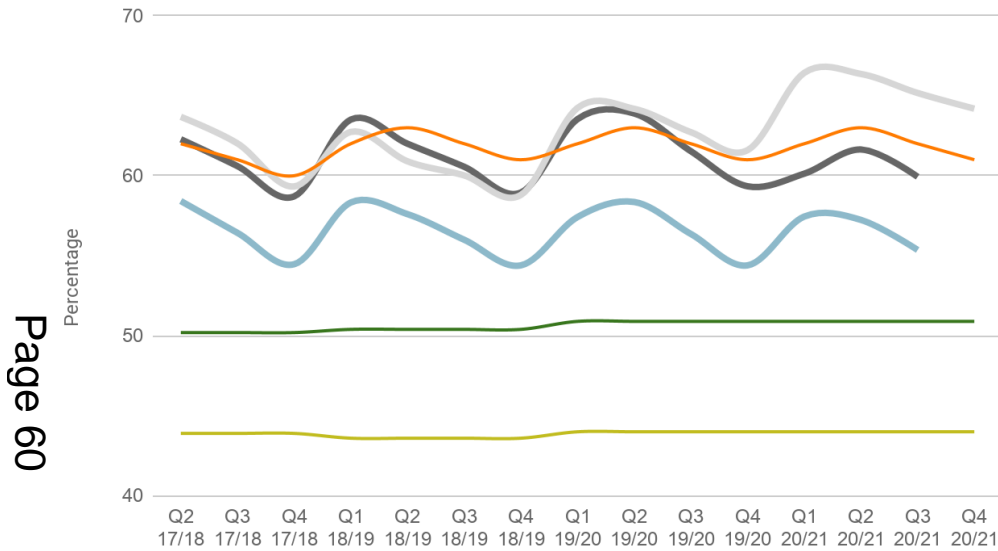
Due to the impact of Covid-19, all waste and recycling stream tonnages have increased, and reached a peak in October 2020 but appear to be slowly reducing again.

The amount of residual waste produced during the year increased by over 10% compared to the previous year. All excess recycling and food waste is being collected at the kerbside if presented correctly.

Both the Council and the Oxfordshire Recycles (OCC partnership work) are using their social media channels to promote waste reduction

Note: These figures are provisional

**(Cumulative) Percentage of household waste recycled**



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**OBSERVATION:**

Due to the impact of Covid-19, residents are presenting higher amounts of all types of waste.

Dry recycling tonnages for the year were up over 35% on the previous year, garden waste tonnages were up 15%, and food tonnages, nearly 16%.

The combined recycling rate for the year was 64.2% compared to 61.6% a year ago; the increase was mainly driven by the increase in dry recycling.

The dry recycling rate was 29.6% (up 2.7 percentage points on the previous year), the composting rate was 24.4% and food waste sent for anaerobic digestion was 10.2%. Note that these figures are provisional.

The service is working closely with UBICO; and all additional recycling and food waste presented correctly at the kerbside by residents is being collected.

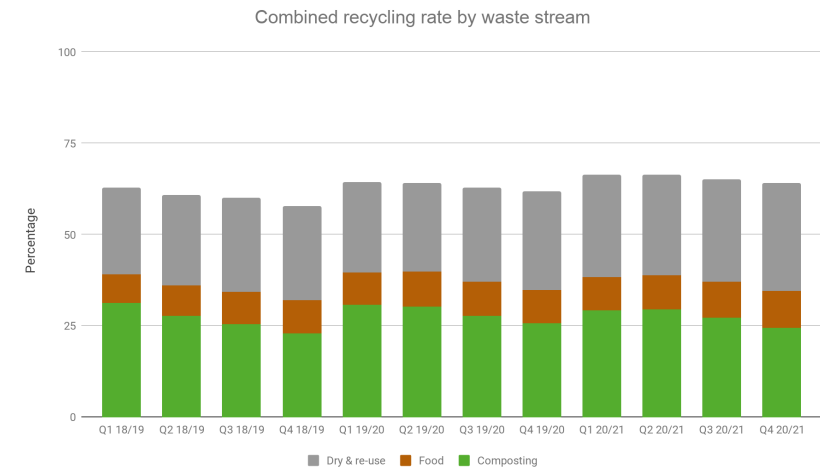
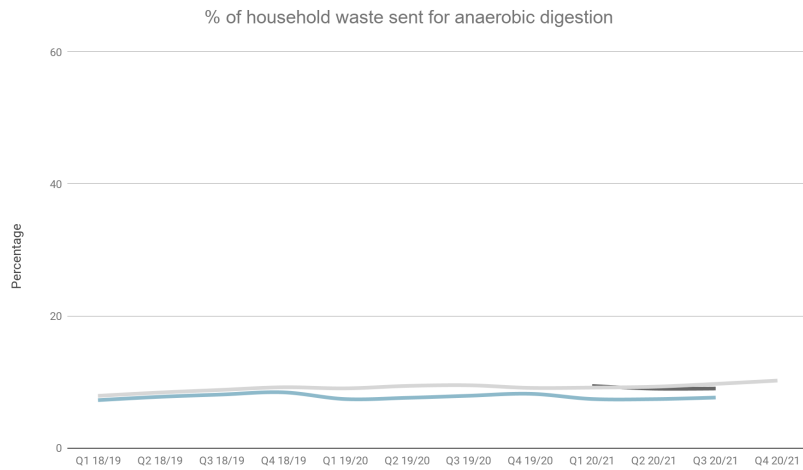
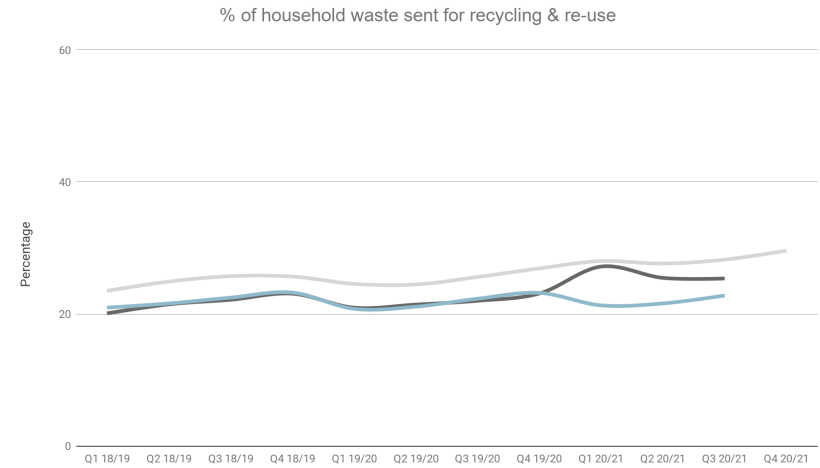
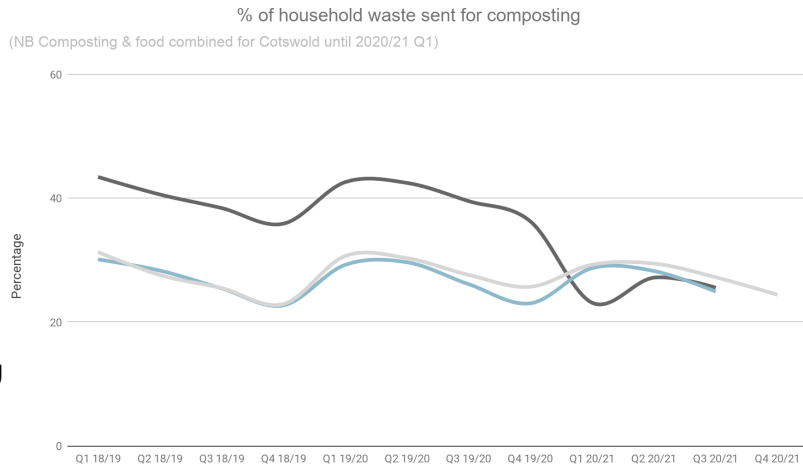
Note that the quarterly recycling targets are profiled to account for seasonal differences. The data is also presented cumulatively which will flatten out some of these differences

# (Cumulative) Percentage of household waste recycled by waste stream

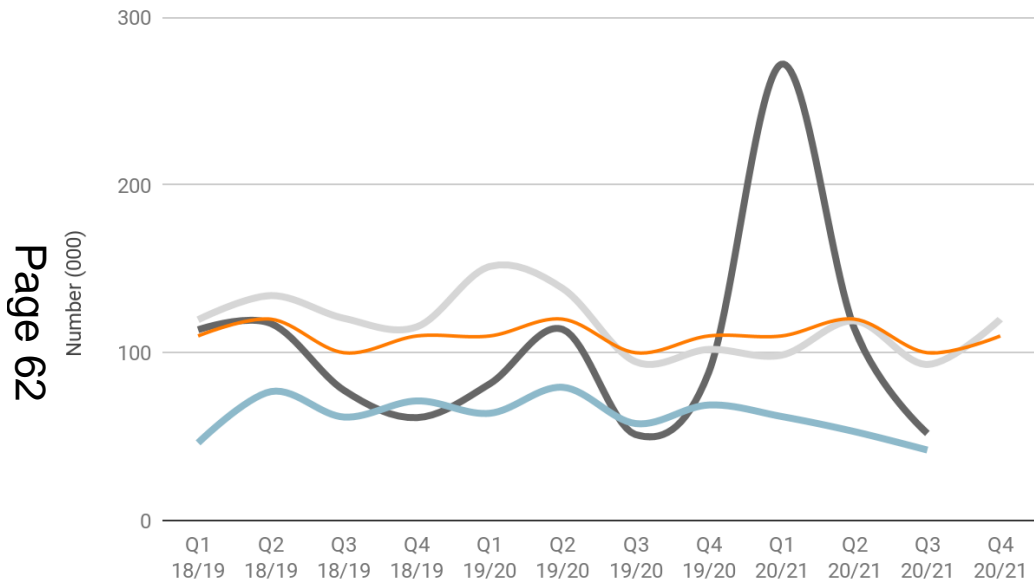
Cotswold

Forest of Dean

West Oxfordshire



## Number of missed bin per 100,000 scheduled collections



### OBSERVATION:

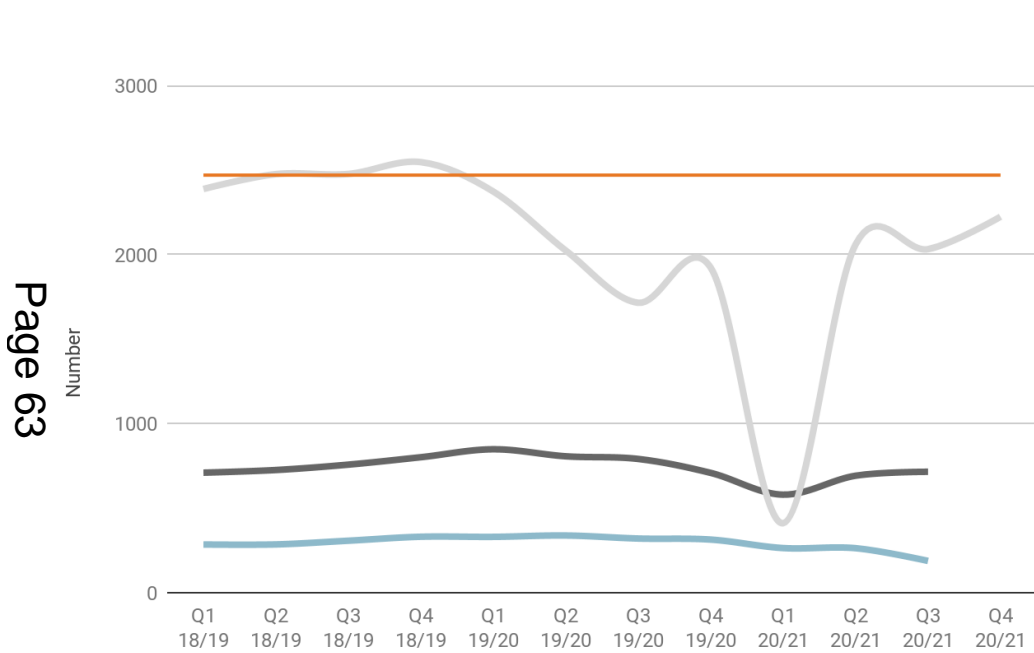
Overall, there have been improvements over the last year, and performance has generally remained within the target despite an increase in the number of misses in the early part of the financial year due to staff absences related to Covid-19, and the use of more agency staff who did not possess local knowledge.

The number of misses also increased in Q4 which was due to a lack of capacity in customer services who would usually challenge reports of missed bins where appropriate, as well as a delay in distributing waste and recycling containers which can result in residents leaving out excess waste in sacks for collection.

The service is working closely with UBICO to reduce the number of missed bins

## Parking

### Total hours spent undertaking on and off-street parking enforcement visits



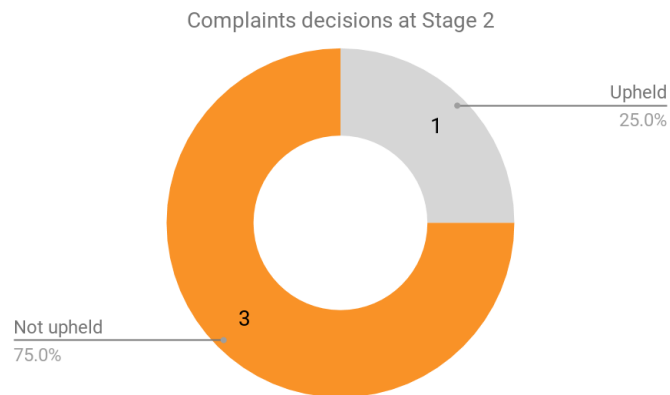
#### OBSERVATION:

All enforcement activities were suspended on 23 March until 15 June 2020 due to Covid-19. Following the first lockdown, enforcement officers have been taking a light touch approach to enforcement with the issuing of warning notices; and staff were redeployed to support communities.

The nation entered a third lockdown in January 2021. Although usage levels in car parks continue to be relatively low, enforcement officers have been patrolling the car parks and ensuring that they are safe, while supporting food deliveries and track and trace when requested.

From April 2021, there will be a return to full enforcement activities

## COMPLAINTS - ARE WE DOING THE 'DAY JOB' REALLY WELL FOR OUR COUNCILS?



### OBSERVATION:

A new Customer Feedback Procedure went live on the 1st July 2020. The Corporate Responsibility team is managing all complaints allowing services to focus on delivery.

The new process has the following stages:

Stage 1: Acknowledgement and Assessment

Stage 2: Investigation

Stage 3: Appeal

The complaints shown below only include upheld or partially upheld complaints

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Service area	Description	Outcome/learning	Stage	Decision	Response time (days)
Revenues & Benefits	Inaccurate advice on Covid Business Grants resulting in the complainant feeling unfairly disadvantaged	On investigation, it was found that some information regarding the case had not been logged on the system resulting in inaccurate advice being given. An apology was offered, and the Grant Assessment Team processed the application as a matter of urgency	II	Upheld	5





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 <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	<p><b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b></p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p><b>CABINET – 16th June 2021</b></p>
<p>Report Number</p>	<p><b>Agenda Item 7</b></p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p><b>COMMUNITY FACILITIES GRANT 1st ROUND 2021/22</b></p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>Stonesfield and Great Rollright</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>Cllr Jane Doughty, Cabinet Member for Customer Delivery Email: <a href="mailto:jane.doughty@westoxon.gov.uk">jane.doughty@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Scott Williams, Business Manager - Contracts Tel: 01285 623654 Email: <a href="mailto:scott.williams@publicagroup.uk">scott.williams@publicagroup.uk</a></p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>To consider applications for grant aid from the Community Facilities Grant Scheme.</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>ANNEX A – Community Facilities Grant Applications 2021/22 – Round 1</p>
<p>Recommendation/s</p>	<p><i>a) That the Council agrees to award grants in accordance with the recommendations set out in ANNEX A.</i></p>
<p>Corporate priorities</p>	<p>Healthy towns and villages Strong local communities</p>
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p>YES</p>
<p>Exempt</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Consultees/ Consultation</p>	<p>None</p>

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. This report represents the first of two rounds of funding for the Community Facilities Grant scheme.

## 2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1. All Members are invited to submit additional information or comments in respect of any of the applications prior to or at the meeting.

## 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. The proposed costs arising from this report are detailed in ANNEX A. If all the grants are approved as recommended the total financial commitment will equal **£11,562.50** and all grants can be met from the existing capital budget. ANNEX A also indicates the closing balance for the grant budget if all the proposals are accepted.
- 3.2. All applications were scored against a matrix and funding allocations are proposed in line with this.
- 3.3. Detailed in the following table is the financial commitment if all applications are taken into account and the amounts recommended are approved:

Reference	Applicant	Recommended
CFG/2122/01	Great Rollright Parish Council	£10,000
CFG/2122/04	Stonesfield Cricket Club	£1,562.50
<b>Total Grant Allocation</b>		<b>£11,562.50</b>

- 3.4. This grant award results in a total investment of **£56,250** into local schemes, with the leverage effect of the Council's grant being that for every pound grant aided **£3.86** of external or community funding is being released into the District's economy and cultural facilities infrastructure.

## 4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. None

## 5. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. The main risk to the Council is allocating funding to these projects, while the applications to the various other funding partners are unsuccessful. In mitigation the Community Facilities Grant criteria states that the grant will only be paid following successful awards from funding partners.
- 5.2. Risk to the Council will be mitigated by making payment only on satisfactory completion of key stages of the project and upon the provision of relevant invoices and certification by the applicant.

5.3. Should Members decide not to grant fund these projects a gap will be left within the project funding which could affect the successful draw down of external grants which ultimately could cause the project to be cancelled.

**6. EQUALITIES IMPACT (IF REQUIRED)**

6.1. None

**7. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS (IF REQUIRED)**

7.1. None

**8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

8.1. The Cabinet could choose to offer differing levels of grant aid than those proposed in ANNEX A, but within the budgets established for these purposes, although this may result in the projects not being viable due to insufficient funding.

**9. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

9.1. None.

**ANNEX A**  
**Community Facilities Grant Applications 2021/22 – Round 1**  
**(Annual Grant Allocation £200,000 – unallocated grant balance £200,000)**


Amount Requested	Total Scheme Cost	WODC Contribution		Rate Relief received	Applicant and Grant Use Additional notes and recommendations
£10,000	£50,000	£10,000 (5% of annual grant allocation)		n/a	<p><b>CFG/2122/01 – Great Rollright Parish Council</b></p> <p>Great Rollright Playground</p> <p>Following a recent ROSPA inspection the Parish Council have become aware of the need to replace the playground equipment and bases.</p> <p>The Parish Council have met with equipment suppliers and discussed what is required to meet their requirements and to remove safety issues highlighted by the ROSPA report.</p> <p>The project will deliver a modern, well equipped playground that meets the requirements of the children in the village.</p> <p><i>An award will be made subject to achieving the required partnership funding</i></p>
<b>Funding Breakdown</b>					
<b>Funding Source</b>		<b>Status</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>% of Scheme Cost</b>	
West Oxfordshire District Council			£10,000	20%	
Applicant Organisation		Definite	£5,000	10%	
OCC		Definite	£5,000	10%	
Mrs Ambler		Estimated	£20,000	40%	
A.Peters – fund raising blog		Estimated	£8,000	16%	
Village residents contribution		Estimated	£2,000	4%	
		Total	£50,000	100%	

Amount Requested	Total Scheme Cost	WODC Contribution	Rate Relief received	Applicant and Grant Use Additional notes and recommendations
£1,562.50	£6,250	£1,562.50 (0.0025% of annual grant allocation)	N/A	<p><b>CFG/2122/04 Stonesfield Cricket Club</b></p> <p><b>New electronic scoreboard.</b></p> <p>Stonesfield Cricket Club have previously received funds from our capital grant schemes. The most recent being 2006/07 for £800 towards new wicket covers.</p> <p>The current scoreboard is no longer useable and has been deemed a health and safety risk.</p> <p>A replacement scoreboard is required in order to fulfil fixtures at both adult and junior levels, as it is a compulsory requirement for participation in league cricket.</p> <p>The project contributes to the Council's priorities and has a good level of support from the County Cricket Board.</p> <p><i>An award will be made subject to achieving the required partnership funding</i></p>
<b>Funding Breakdown</b>				
<b>Funding Source</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>% of Scheme Cost</b>	
West Oxfordshire District Council		£1,562.50	25%	
Applicant Organisation	Definite	£4,687.50	75%	
<b>Total</b>		<b>£6,250</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Grant balance unallocated: £188,437.50

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 <b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>	<b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
<b>Name and date of Committee</b>	<b>CABINET – 16 June 2021</b>
<b>Report Number</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>
<b>Subject</b>	<b>Commercial Tenancy Arrears Review</b>
<b>Wards affected</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>Accountable member</b>	Councillor Suzi Coul Cabinet Member for Finance Email: <a href="mailto:suzi.coul@westoxon.gov.uk">suzi.coul@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
<b>Accountable officer</b>	Jasmine McWilliams Asset Manager Tel: 01285 623255 Email: <a href="mailto:jasmine.mcwilliams@publicagroup.uk">jasmine.mcwilliams@publicagroup.uk</a> Suzanne Barton Senior Estates Officer Tel: 01285 623245 Email <a href="mailto:Suzanne.barton@publicagroup.uk">Suzanne.barton@publicagroup.uk</a>
<b>Summary/Purpose</b>	For Cabinet to consider the commercial tenancy arrears position in light of the statutory limitation on recovery action against tenants.
<b>Annexes</b>	Annex A – Covid Business Support Terms March 2020 Annex B – Criteria for Further Commercial Tenant Support
<b>Recommendation/s</b>	a) <i>That Cabinet notes the arrears position on the commercial portfolio;</i> b) <i>That Cabinet grants delegated authority to the Cabinet Member for Finance to utilise the tools set out in section 3 on a case by case basis to protect the commercial interests of the Council.</i>
<b>Corporate priorities</b>	A Vibrant District Economy: Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Local Industrial Strategy  Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance: Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council
<b>Key Decision</b>	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Exempt</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Consultees</b>	<b>Senior Officers and Cabinet Members</b>

## **I. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 In response to the Covid-19 crisis, in March 2020, the Council issued Business Support Terms to its commercial tenants. The Terms, attached at Annex A, allowed all commercial tenants (except those able to continue to trade, headlessees and Government organisations) a 3 month rent deferral.
- 1.2 In August 2020 the Council decided to extend the rent deferral for a further 3 months for only those tenants that were still unable to trade. The decision included the offer to tenants to enter into a monthly payment plan for the deferred rent. The aim being to bring their rent accounts up to date by the end of March 2022, or the end of lease, whichever occurs first.
- 1.3 The CIPFA Asset Management Team monitored English and Welsh authority responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in respect of their commercial tenants. The Team have advised the following:
  1. Most Councils have given a 3 months' deferment with some offering longer periods;
  2. Most Councils have refused rent free period requests except where the tenants are within buildings owned by the Council that have had to be closed e.g. leisure centres;
  3. Most Councils did not proactively offer support to tenants (they waited for tenants to contact them);
  4. Most Councils have dealt with tenants on a case by case basis or by sector;
  5. Most Councils have suspended debt recovery with the timing of reinstatement to be determined;
  6. Some Councils are offering rent free periods to specific types of tenants or on a case by case basis.

## **2. MAIN POINTS**

- 2.1 Some commercial tenants have contacted the Council, as a result of the deferred rent and payment plan discussions requesting further support . The Council is not obligated to grant any further support but may wish to consider adjusting the arrears position if it is in the commercial interest of the Council.
- 2.2 The draft Policy at Annex B, is intended to provide a policy for both the November 2020 trading restrictions and the further trading restrictions implemented by the Government at the end of December 2020 as a result of the response to Covid-19.
- 2.3 The current arrears position is in the order of £1m against annual income of £3m - an average therefore of around 4 months.

## **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1 Over the last decade or so the Council has moved a significant proportion of its cash reserves into property assets that have delivered a return many times greater than available in the money markets. The performance of the property portfolio is reviewed annually by the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The average performance of the portfolio over the last decade is in excess of 7% excluding any capital appreciation.
- 3.2 The rental stream from the assets has been fundamental in allowing the Council to meet its strategic objectives over that period including maintaining service delivery levels, levying a low Council Tax to residents and keeping key policy objectives in place such as free car parking.

- 3.3 Given the importance of the rental stream to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy it is important that any decisions on rent arrears take account of the commercial objectives of protecting the rental income over both the short and medium term and also avoiding voids. This should be the key criteria in determining any arrears adjustments. The following paragraphs outline the financial implications of a number of policy choices that impact on the finances of the Council in this regard.

### **Rent Deferrals**

- 3.4 Rent deferrals will not impact the Council's revenue budget as the rent will remain due from tenants and will be recognised as a debtor in the financial year-end statements. There will be a small impact upon the Council's cash flow and a reduction in investment income. However, with interest rates on cash deposits of less than 0.1%, the financial impact of rent deferrals will be insignificant on the Council whilst being of significant benefit to businesses who would pay significantly higher interest charges to their bank or other funders.
- 3.5 There remains a risk that rent deferrals will ultimately lead to rental loss if businesses are unsuccessful in recovering from the pandemic and this impact will be felt in the revenue account via bad debt provisioning.

### **Lease Re-gear**

- 3.6 Often carried out by statutory means such as Company Voluntary Arrangements (CVA) lease re-gears are often used to amend lease terms when they are deemed to be unaffordable. Outside of CVA's it is possible to utilise such tools to assist businesses by reducing their arrears in exchange for the removal of the option to break or to extend the lease period thereby providing more long term stability for the landlord. For example a one month rent free period has recently been negotiated at Units 9 & 10 Talisman Business Centre in exchange for the removal of the option to break thereby reducing risk and delivering longer term certainty.
- 3.7 The type of lease re-gear is dependent on individual lease terms and is subsequently case dependent. There could be a short term impact on the Council's income in exchange for a longer period of rent security for the Council.

### **Rent Free Period**

- 3.8 A rent free period without any lease adjustments would impact the Council's commercial income without the opportunity to gain longer term security of tenure and is therefore only recommended in exceptional circumstances.

#### **4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Council has no obligation to take any action and under leases, it is the tenants responsibility to ensure they have any appropriate business continuity insurance. However the Council may wish to assist its commercial tenants to support them through these unprecedented times, whilst seeking to preserve its future rental income and support the local economy.
- 4.2 The government has recently updated its legislation to remove the landlord's right of forfeiture in respect of unpaid rent now until 30th June 2021 which effectively prevents landlords taking any action until then.
- 4.3 A Code of Conduct has been provided which advises that where the tenant is able to, it should pay full rent. The Code puts the onus on the tenant to contact the Landlord with sufficient information to show that their business has been affected in such a way that the Landlord should provide support. The Council is under no obligation to provide any rent free periods or further deferment but is encouraged by the Code to enter discussions with its tenants.
- 4.4 A recent High Court Decision ref EWHC1013 Cineworld and Others decided that tenants had to pay rent regardless of the impact of the pandemic.
- 4.5 Legal Services will provide any necessary formal agreements with tenants reflecting any agreement made under the further support for commercial tenants..

#### **5. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 5.1 There is a general economic risk to the Council's income from commercial tenants defaulting or going into administration. By approving the further support for commercial tenants, officers can protect the Council's commercial rent income in an equitable manner.
- 5.2 Due to current market uncertainty, should any of the Council's commercial premises become vacant due to business tenants going into administration, it is anticipated that the premises could remain vacant for a significant period of time. During this period, the Council would be responsible for any costs of void properties including business rates, repairs and maintenance, insurance and security.

#### **6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 6.1 The Council could provide no further support over and above the previously agreed rent deferrals.
- 6.2 The risk of the alternative option is the increased potential for reduced future income if the tenants are unable to make rent payments.

#### **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None



**COMMERCIAL TENANTS - RENT  
SUPPORT OF COUNCIL TENANTS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

### Commercial rent support

In support of Council tenants' cash flow issues during the COVID 19 pandemic the Council has agreed to the following actions:

1. All rental invoices to be sent out in line with the lease requirements.
2. All tenants, with the exception of those listed at Annex A, now referred to as 'Qualifying Tenants', are entitled to the following deferment of rent:
  - a. The Council will not take any action for non-payment of rent during the period 25th March 2020 – 24<sup>th</sup> June 2020 for tenants on quarterly billing arrangements;
  - b. The Council will not take any action for non-payment of rent during the period 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020 for tenants on monthly/ weekly/ other billing periods

Thus providing deferment of rent payments during this period. However, all rents will remain due in line with the lease.

3. Qualifying Tenants can continue paying rent if they prefer and can now pay on a monthly in advance basis rather than quarterly in advance payments to support any cash flow issues.
4. Qualifying Tenants with a rent review which is currently outstanding or is due to commence prior to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2020 to be advised that these will be put on hold. After this date all rent reviews will be progressed in line with the terms of the lease.
5. All tenants should seek a claim under their insurance for business continuity for any costs, including rent, associated with the effect on their business due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
6. All tenants should refer to support available to businesses via the government website and are expected to seek all government support available to them <https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/coronavirus-business-support/>
7. Any queries please contact [estates@publicagroup.uk](mailto:estates@publicagroup.uk)

## ANNEX A – list of excluded tenants

The following tenancies are exempt from this deferment of rent:

- Residential
- cultivation
- play areas
- grazing
- contractor leases – leisure/waste etc
- other non- business tenancies/ licences
- leases to Government Organisations



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

**COMMERCIAL TENANTS - RENT**  
**FURTHER SUPPORT OF COUNCIL TENANTS DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**  
**JUNE 2020**



## **Commercial rent support**

To protect the Council's commercial property portfolio and supporting its commercial tenant during the Covid-19 pandemic the Council has decided that the following criteria must be met in order to agree to any requests for

- further rent deferrals
- lease regear or
- rent free period

### **1. Supporting Accounts**

Tenants must provide a full proposal outlining current circumstances and supporting accounts showing that further support is required to enable the continued operation of business and their ability to pay future rent

### **2. Unable to Trade**

Tenants must have been unable to trade or had significant reduction in trade due to Government response to Covid-19.

### **3. Government Covid-19 Grants**

Tenants must have applied for all appropriate Government grants and must provide evidence of the value of grant received. The tenant must show how this grant is utilised.

### **4. Business Rates Relief**

Tenants must have applied for all relevant business rates reliefs and must provide evidence of the value of any relief awarded.

### **5. Government Covid-19 Support**

Tenants must have applied for all relevant Government financial support. The Council's website provides information on the various forms of support available.

Tenants must provide evidence of Government Covid-19 support and show how this has been utilised.

### **7. Level of Risk**

The following circumstances will be investigated against the suitability and risk of a further support in terms of the following:-

- lease length
- tenants ability to pay
- tenants status (individual/limited company)

Where there is a significant risk of the tenant defaulting on rent repayments in the future, the Council's Estates team may refer the request for a rent deferral to the Council's Chief Finance Officer for a decision.

## **I. Exclusions**

The following tenancies are exempt from this deferment of rent:

- ground leases
- retail tenants who remain operational
- residential
- cultivation
- play areas
- grazing
- contractor leases – leisure/waste etc
- other non- business tenancies/ licences
- leases to Government organisations