

Public Document Pack



Tuesday, 7 September 2021

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CABINET

You are summoned to a meeting of the Cabinet which will be held in the Council Chamber, Woodgreen, Witney, OX28 1NB on **Wednesday, 15 September 2021 at 2.00 pm.**



Giles Hughes
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Cabinet

Councillors: Councillor Michele Mead (Leader), Councillor David Harvey (Deputy Leader), Councillor Suzi Coul, Councillor Merylyn Davies, Councillor Jane Doughty, Councillor Jeff Haine, 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 Democratic Services officers 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 21 July 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. **Update on Community Infrastructure Levy and decision to hold in abeyance in light of the Government's Planning Reforms (Pages 11 - 16)**
Purpose
To provide an update on the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in West Oxfordshire in light of the previous public consultation held in July 2020 and the Government's subsequent proposed planning reforms announced through the Planning White Paper in August 2020 and Queen's Speech of May 2021.

Recommendation
 - a) That the report be noted; and
 - a) That any further progress in relation to the submission and examination of West Oxfordshire's draft CIL Charging Schedule be held in abeyance until further information on the Government's proposed planning reforms have been set out in the forthcoming Planning Bill.
7. **Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc (Pages 17 - 30)**
Purpose
To agree the District Council's formal response to the current MHCLG public consultation 'Creating a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc' which is running for 12-weeks from 20 July 2021 – 12 October 2021.

Recommendation
 - a) That the report be noted; and
 - b) That the suggested draft response attached at [Annex A](#) be submitted as the Council's formal response to this consultation.

8. **Service Performance Report 2021-22 Quarter One (Pages 31 - 64)**

Purpose

This report provides details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2021-22 Quarter One (Q1), and enables Councillors to assess operational performance.

Recommendation

That the 2021/22 Q1 service performance be noted.

9. **Finance Performance Report 2021/22 Quarter One (Pages 65 - 78)**

Purpose

This report provides details of the Council's financial performance at the end of 2021-22 Quarter One (Q1).

Recommendation

That the 2021/22 Q1 finance performance be noted.

10. **Council Tax Section 13A Policy (Pages 79 - 86)**

Purpose

This report outlines proposals to introduce a Council Tax Section 13A Policy to support the Council in making decisions when considering such applications from Council Tax payers in the district.

Recommendation

- a) That the Council Tax Section 13A Policy included at Annex A be adopted; and
- b) That the decision making process detailed within paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 of this report be approved.

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Public Document Pack Agenda Item 1

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Record of Decisions of the meeting of the
Cabinet

Held at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 21 July 2021**

PRESENT

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

Officers: Giles Hughes (Chief Executive), Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer, Deputy Chief Executive and Section 151 Officer), Amy Bridgewater-Carnall (Senior Strategic Support Officer) and Jasmine McWilliams (Asset Manager).

18 Notice of Decisions

The notice of decisions taken at the meeting held on 16 June 2021 were noted.

19 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence received.

20 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

21 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

22 Receipt of Announcements

Councillor Mead addressed the meeting and requested a moments reflection following the sad news of the death of young, 13 year old resident earlier in the week. The young girl had passed away following an incident at Duck Lake and had been a student at Woodgreen School. A moments silence was held by all present.

Oxfordshire Growth Board – Change of Name

Councillor Mead advised that, following recent discussions, it had been agreed to change the name of the Oxfordshire Growth Board to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. It was felt this better reflected the purpose of the group and more accurately suited their remit. She advised that both names may continue to be used during the transition period.

Retirement of Monitoring Officer, Mr Keith Butler

Councillor Mead reminded Members that, although not present at the meeting, this was the last Cabinet meeting with Mr Butler at the helm as Monitoring Officer. She expressed her gratitude to him for all his help and support when she took over the role of Leader and agreed that he would be dearly missed. She wished him, along with the Cabinet Members, all the best for the next chapter in his life.

Councillor Mead also advised that the Cabinet meeting due to be held in August would be cancelled due to a lack of business.

Re-opening of Woodstock Swimming Pool

Councillor Doughty was delighted to announce that Woodstock Swimming Pool was due to reopen imminently. She advised that there would be a special 'pre-opening' of the pool on Thursday 22 July with slots being made available for children and after school attendance. The official opening day was Friday 23 July 2021 and Councillor Doughty reiterated that the pool

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was one of the jewels in West Oxfordshire's crown and all the team were excited to be re-opening their doors.

Launch of Net Zero Carbon Toolkit

Councillor Harvey announced the launch of the Net Zero Carbon Toolkit which had been produced to assist developers and home owners with understanding how they could reduce their carbon emissions. He noted that this was not just for new build properties but included information on retro-fitting existing buildings and was an excellent guide for all aspects of the subject including costings. Councillor Harvey advised that the 90 page document would be circulated to all Members in due course and he encouraged them to disseminate the information widely.

23 Financial Performance Report 2020/21 Year End

Members received a report from the Chief Finance Officer and Deputy Chief Executive which provided details of the Council's financial performance at the end of 2020/21, the key movements to reserves and the capital budget for 21/22, including any unspent funds rolled over from 20/21.

The circumstances of the 2020/21 financial year applied an unprecedented pressure on Council finances in terms of the ability to generate and collect income. The report outlined the early action taken by officers and the biggest impacts on the budget.

The Revenue Outturn was attached as Annex A and the Capital Programme was attached at Annex B.

The report asked for approval to carry forward £3.657m of Capital Budget as detailed in Annex B as well as to approve the transfers to Earmarked Reserves as detailed in section 4 of the report.

There were no alternative options detailed in the report.

Councillor Coul introduced the report and reminded Members of the careful and considered approach the Council had taken with its finances in recent times. This had resulted in the authority being in a better position than many other Council's. However, she noted how challenging the past year had been, with additional costs and loss of income. She reminded Members that there was not an easy journey ahead and urged caution as the District tried to recover from the impact of Covid-19. She proposed the recommendations as laid out.

These were seconded by the Leader.

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

Resolved that the report be noted; and

Recommended that Council

- (a) approve the carry forward of Capital Budget of £3.657m as detailed in Annex B to the report; and
- (b) approve the transfers to Earmarked Reserves as detailed in section 4 of the report.

24 Approval of Proposed Standard Fees for Legal and Estates

Members received a report from the Interim Head of Legal Services which sought approval to set the Legal and Estates fees for property transactions.

The report advised that historically Legal and Estates fees had been charged by the Council where a transaction was at the request of the tenant or other parties but there had been no

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standard fees set formally by the Council, with each case set individually. Private sector landlords and other Councils typically charged standard fees for property transactions where appropriate.

The main points relating to the Legal and Estates fees were summarised at sections 2.1 and 2.2 of the report and it was proposed that the fees be set annually within the Fees and Charges report.

An alternative option was that Members could choose to amend or not approve the proposed standard fees.

Councillor Coul outlined the report, which was considered to be a sensible, housekeeping exercise and proposed the recommendations as laid out. This was seconded by Councillor MacRae who noted the importance of being open and transparent with these decisions.

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

Resolved that the fees detailed at Annex A be approved; and

Recommended that the fees be set annually as part of the Council's Fees and Charges report to Cabinet.

25 Oxfordshire Plan Consultation Document

Members received a report from the Chief Executive which asked them to consider the approval of the Oxfordshire Plan consultation document, which set out a range of planning policy options and a series of spatial strategy options for Oxfordshire.

The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 (OP2050) is being produced by the five local planning authorities in Oxfordshire, working in close partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and OxLEP throughout.

When complete the Oxfordshire Plan would provide a high-level spatial planning framework for Oxfordshire up to 2050 and would be a statutory planning document supplementing Local Plans. The Plan aimed to be transformational and occupied new policy areas, such as climate change, environmental betterment, health impacts and zero carbon transport. It had now reached the Regulation 18 part 2 stage.

The report and consultation document were considered by the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 8 July 2021. The Committee did not raise any objections but noted some points of detail. These points were noted by the Chief Executive and would be taken into account in the context of recommendation b).

The report noted that the proposed Consultation document at Annex B differed from that published for the meeting of the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee but only in relation to the information on page 120 of the document.

An alternative option was that Cabinet could choose not to approve the consultation document.

Councillor Haine outlined the report and reported the content of an email received from the CPRE to all Members. The CPRE whilst supportive in principle had raised concerns that the document was not fit for purpose. Councillor Haine provided an overview of the document and the reasons he felt it should be approved for consultation. He proposed the recommendations as laid out and this was seconded by Councillor Davies.

In response to a query from Councillor Graham, the Chief Executive assured Members that the comments and suggestions from the Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be taken into account, as per the paragraph at section 3 of the report.

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Councillor Enright advised that the County Council had approved the document for consultation at their recent Cabinet meeting and highlighted the importance of joint working. The Leader assured Councillor Enright that the District's response would be delivered by the Chief Executive along with the CEO's of all Council's.

Councillor Postan advised that, alongside his colleague Councillor Levy, the document had been considered by the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel. The Panel had given a clear understanding that the document needed to reflect that the country was in a Climate Emergency and therefore the attitude towards all plans being developed, needed to reflect that view. He also advised of technological developments that had the potential to be interesting and positive, which he intended to brief Members on in due course.

Councillor Cooper raised a query as to what cases had been looked at and consideration given to a buffer zone at Blenheim. He cited the recent situation in Liverpool who had lost their World Heritage Site status. In response, the Chief Executive advised that this document did not look at the detail of locations and this would be considered in more detail, further through the process.

The Leader concurred that once the document reached the Regulation 19 level, it included far more detail. Councillor Postan noted that there was such thing as a Buffer Zone in legal terms.

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

Resolved that

- a) the Regulation 18 (Part 2) consultation document be approved for public consultation as attached; and
- b) the Chief Executive be authorised to make any necessary editorial corrections and minor amendments to the documents, and agree the final publication style, in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, subject to agreement with their counterparts in the other four partner Local Planning Authorities.

26 Options for the future use of 33A High Street, Burford

Members received a report from the Asset Manager and Valuer and Estates Surveyor which asked them to consider the options for the future of 33A High Street, Burford.

The report advised that the Council owned the freehold of 33A High Street, Burford, shown edged red on the plan attaches as Annex A to the report. The property comprised a ground floor retail unit with ancillary storage space and

a single WC. The subject property was located within the same building as the public conveniences which had independent access from the High Street, along the side of the building. The report focused on the future use of the retail shop only which was used by the Council as a Visitor Information Centre up until March 2021.

This service was closed after a decision by Cabinet on 24 March 2021.

As the building became vacant, an options appraisal, shown in the confidential Annex A to the report, was prepared by the Valuer & Estates Surveyor. In addition, the Council had received interest in the property on a commercial letting basis and a

freehold sale basis, also detailed in the options appraisal at Annex A.

The options for the future of the property were to retain and re-let on a commercial basis or sell on the open market. Full details of the options were outlined at 2.2 and 2.3 of the report.

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An alternative option was that the Council could decide to retain the property but continue a community use. However, it was noted that there would be no financial benefit to this option.

Councillor Coul outlined the report and reminded Members of the previous report relating to Council finances and the need to be prudent. She therefore proposed that Option I in the report be supported which would provide the Council with a healthy financial yield and the option of retain the building for future use.

This was seconded by Councillor Doughty.

Resolved that

- a) Option I be pursued as specified in the report, in line with the principles of the Investment Strategy; and
- b) the Group Manager for Commissioning be authorised to approve the final detailed heads of terms for a lease of the site, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance and the Chief Finance Officer.

The Meeting closed at 2.32 pm

LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

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 <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	<p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p>Cabinet: Wednesday 15 September 2021</p>
<p>Report Number</p>	<p>Agenda Item No. 6</p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p>Update on the Community Infrastructure Levy and decision to hold in abeyance in light of the government's planning reforms</p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>Councillor Jeff Haine Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Email: Jeff.Haine@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager Tel: 01993 861686 Email: chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>To provide an update on the introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in West Oxfordshire in light of the previous public consultation held in July 2020 and the Government's subsequent proposed planning reforms announced through the Planning White Paper in August 2020 and Queen's Speech of May 2021.</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>a) That the report be noted; and b) That any further progress in relation to the submission and examination of West Oxfordshire's draft CIL Charging Schedule be held in abeyance until further information on the Government's proposed planning reforms have been set out in the forthcoming Planning Bill.</p>
<p>Corporate priorities</p>	<p>The provision of infrastructure for local communities underpins a number of the core themes of the West Oxfordshire Council Plan (2021 – 2024)</p>
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Exempt</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Consultees/ Consultation</p>	<p>The District Council's most recent CIL Draft Charging Schedule was subject to public consultation from 10 July – 21 August 2020 in accordance with legislative requirements. In response, 171 representations were received and these have been published online.</p>

I. BACKGROUND

- I.1. Members will be aware that the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a charge that may be levied on most forms of development to help fund the infrastructure that is needed to support the future growth of an area. CIL is intended to complement the current system of Section 106 planning obligations.
- I.2. Subject to certain exceptions, CIL is generally payable on all new dwellings and on other forms of development which involve the creation of more than 100m² net additional floorspace. The amount charged through CIL must be based on evidence of viability to ensure that it does not hinder development from coming forward.
- I.3. CIL rates must be set out in a document called a 'Charging Schedule' which sets out what types of development are liable for CIL and the relevant rates that apply. Rates are expressed as pounds (£) per square metre.
- I.4. To progress CIL in West Oxfordshire, updated viability evidence was prepared in late 2019 by independent consultants Nationwide CIL Services (NCS). Their [viability report](#) was finalised in January 2020 and informed a [draft CIL charging schedule](#) which was considered by Members in February 2020 and agreed for the purposes of a 6-week public consultation.
- I.5. The rates proposed through the draft CIL charging schedule for residential uses (£ per m²) were as follows:

Zone	1 to 10 dwellings	11+ dwellings	Extra-care housing	Strategic sites
Low	£200	£100	£100	£0
Medium	£250	£125	£100	£0
High	£300	£150	£100	£0

- I.6. All forms of non-residential development were proposed to be zero-rated other than food supermarket retail, due to viability.

Non-residential CIL (District-wide)

All non-residential uses (excepting retail)	£0 per m2
Food supermarket retail (A1)	£100 per m2

2. CIL DRAFT CHARGING SCHEDULE CONSULTATION (JULY – AUGUST 2020)

- 2.1. Due to the Covid pandemic, consultation on the draft CIL charging schedule was deferred and subsequently took place from 10 July 2020 – 21 August 2020.
- 2.2. The consultation was undertaken in accordance with legislative requirements and in response, a large number of responses were received (171 in total) from a variety of individuals and organisations. The responses are available to view online [here](#).
- 2.3. In terms of the main issues raised, a very large proportion of respondents expressed specific concerns about the draft charging schedule proposal to exempt the five Local Plan

Strategic Sites (North Witney, East Witney, East Chipping Norton, West Eynsham and the Garden Village) from having to pay CIL.

- 2.4. This was a recurring theme, with a large number of respondents (including a joint submission on behalf of a number of Town and Parish Councils) expressing significant concerns that in the absence of CIL payments, these strategic sites will place an unacceptable burden on existing local infrastructure due to the resultant increase in population, with S106 planning obligations being less able to meet wider infrastructure needs than CIL.
- 2.5. A large number of concerns were also expressed about various assumptions made in the Council's supporting CIL viability assessment of the strategic sites including sales and land values assumptions, a miscalculation of assumed development contingency and a lack of clarity on the costs of supporting site-related infrastructure and planning obligations.
- 2.6. Other, more general comments raised included the following key points:
 - Due to the economic uncertainties associated with the impact of Covid-19, the draft charging schedule should remain dynamic until it has emerged through the examination process;
 - Concerns that the viability evidence has failed to adequately consider the differences in types of specialist housing for older people with the draft charging schedule also lacking clarity on what forms of older persons housing would be expected to pay CIL;
 - That the proposed zero-rating for hotels should be expanded to include other forms of holiday accommodation;
 - Concern over the lack of clarity on what CIL will be used to fund and how it will operate alongside contributions sought through Section 106 obligations – it being essential to avoid duplication between the two;
 - Suggestions that the Council should await the outcome of the Planning White Paper before progressing with CIL;
 - Concerns that the S106 negotiation process lacks transparency with a lack of input from local communities;
 - That special consideration should be given to service accommodation and that CIL should not apply;
 - Concerns that the Council's most recent viability evidence was prepared by a different consultancy to that which undertook the Council's previous viability evidence;
 - Concerns that the supporting CIL viability evidence wasn't in itself subject to Cabinet approval;
 - A developer view that all sites over 500 dwellings should be exempt from having to pay CIL – not just Local Plan allocated sites and that a moderated rate should apply to schemes of 100 or more dwellings;
 - That the Council should commit to a review of CIL rates within 2 years;
 - That the Council should introduce discretionary social housing relief and exceptional circumstances relief;
 - Concerns that the high CIL charge proposed for smaller scale residential schemes of 1 – 10 units will hinder the ability of the smaller local construction sector to deliver new homes;

- That build costs for smaller residential schemes have been under-estimated and should be differentiated from the costs associated with larger ‘estate’ style housing;
- Concerns regarding the approach taken in the viability report in respect of the calculation of benchmark land values;
- Concerns about the lack of evidence underpinning assumed land values; and
- That the proposed CIL charge for food supermarket retail should be reduced in designated Town Centres.

3. PROPOSED GOVERNMENT REFORMS

- 3.1. It is relevant to note that whilst the CIL draft charging schedule consultation was taking place, on 6 August 2020, the Government published its [Planning White Paper – ‘Planning for the Future’](#) which set out proposals to improve infrastructure delivery in all parts of the country and ensure that developers play their part through a reform of developer contributions.
- 3.2. The White Paper stated that CIL and the current system of planning obligations (Section 106 agreements etc.) would be reformed as a nationally set, value-based flat rate charge (the ‘Infrastructure Levy’) with the overall aim being to raise more revenue than under the current system of developer contributions, and deliver at least as much – if not more – on-site affordable housing as at present.
- 3.3. Subsequently in May 2021, the [Queen’s Speech](#) confirmed the Government’s intention to take these proposals forward through a new Planning Bill, with one of the main elements of the Bill being cited as, *‘Replacing the existing systems for funding affordable housing and infrastructure from development with a new more predictable and more transparent levy’*.
- 3.4. The Planning Bill is expected to be published in autumn 2021.

4. RECOMMENDED WAY FORWARD

- 4.1. Since consultation on the Council’s CIL draft charging schedule took place in July – August 2020, Officers have not sought to progress to submission and examination, due to a number of factors including the Government’s stated intention to abolish CIL and S106 and replace them with a new, nationally set tariff as well as Officer resources having been focused primarily on progression of the Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP) to examination. It is also relevant to note that the CIL viability evidence was prepared in late 2019 and pre-dates the Covid pandemic.
- 4.2. In light of the above, it is the opinion of Officers that it would be prudent to hold any further progress towards submission and examination of the Council’s draft CIL charging schedule in abeyance until the Planning Bill has been published.
- 4.3. This will provide much greater clarity regarding the Government’s stated intention to reform the current system of CIL and planning obligations (Section 106 etc.) with a new, nationally set levy. None of the details of this proposal are known at present.
- 4.4. Depending on the details set out in the Planning Bill (including any transitional arrangements towards the introduction of a new, nationally set levy) a decision will then be able to be made on whether or when to progress the draft CIL charging schedule to submission and examination.
- 4.5. If a decision is taken to continue with CIL (for example if very long transitional arrangements justify it being brought into place for a limited period of time), then prior to submission, a ‘refresh’ of the supporting viability evidence is likely to be needed.

4.6. Once the Planning Bill has been published, a further report will therefore be brought before Members to advise on the most appropriate course of action.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is a form of developer contribution and therefore provides a direct potential income stream to fund the provision of supporting infrastructure.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1. The report raises no specific legal implications.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

7.1. There is a risk of the Council's draft CIL Charging Schedule being rejected or revised through the examination process. There is also a risk of wasted resources associated with progressing CIL given the Government's stated intention to replace it with a new, nationally set levy. This depends to a large extent on any transitional arrangements which are, as yet, unknown.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1. The following documents are of relevance to this report:

- West Oxfordshire District Council draft [CIL Charging Schedule](#) (March 2020);
- West Oxfordshire District Council Community Infrastructure Levy [Viability Assessment](#) (January 2020)
- [Planning White Paper – Planning for the Future](#) (August 2020)

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 <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	<p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p>Cabinet: Wednesday 15 September 2021</p>
<p>Report Number</p>	<p>Agenda Item No. 7</p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p>Creating a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc</p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>Councillor Jeff Haine Cabinet Member for Strategic Planning, Email: Jeff.Haine@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager Tel: 01993 861686 Email: chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>To agree the District Council's formal response to the current MHCLG public consultation '<i>Creating a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc</i>' which is running for 12-weeks from 20 July 2021 – 12 October 2021.</p>
<p>Annex</p>	<p>Annex A – Suggested draft response</p>
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>a) That the report be noted; and b) That the suggested draft response attached at Annex A be submitted as the Council's formal response to this consultation.</p>
<p>Corporate priorities</p>	<p>The consultation is the first of three proposed steps in the development of a new Spatial Framework Plan for the Oxford – Cambridge Arc, the area which spans the five counties of Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire.</p> <p>Ultimately, the Arc Spatial Framework Plan will have the same status as the Government's National Planning Policy Framework and will have direct implications for various aspects of the Council Plan (2021 – 2024).</p> <p>The current consultation focuses on four key policy pillars including economy, place-making, connectivity and infrastructure and environment.</p>
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Exempt</p>	<p>No</p>
<p>Consultees/ Consultation</p>	<p>There has been no previous public consultation. This initial consultation on the development of a vision for the Oxford – Cambridge Arc is the first of three core steps to producing the final Arc Spatial Framework.</p>

I. BACKGROUND

- I.1. In 2016, the Government asked the National Infrastructure Commission (NIC) to look at how infrastructure development in the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc can maximise the potential of the area.
- I.2. The Commission's final report ([Partnering for Prosperity: A New Deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes-Oxford Arc](#)) was published on 17 November 2017 and recommended that the arc must be a national priority with its world-class research, innovation and technology able to help the UK prosper in a changing global economy.
- I.3. The report also identified the need for urgent action including the need to address a chronic undersupply of new homes which could jeopardise growth, limit access to labour and put prosperity at risk.
- I.4. One of the key recommendations of the report was the need for a long-term vision for the arc and its sub-regions with a strong, strategic planning framework integrating opportunities for jobs, homes and infrastructure and robust collective decision-making.
- I.5. In its [response to the NIC report](#) in October 2018, the Government confirmed its support for the ambition to build up to one million high-quality homes by 2050 to maximise the economic growth of the Arc, requiring a step change in housing delivery, including engagement on how this can be accommodated through vibrant new and expanded settlements.
- I.6. The government further supported the Commission's finding that in order to deliver the full economic potential of the Arc, there needs to be an integrated approach to the planning and delivery of infrastructure, homes and business growth.
- I.7. To achieve this, the government designated the Oxford-Cambridge Arc as a key economic priority and in March 2019 signed a [joint declaration of ambition](#) with local authorities across the Oxford to Cambridge Arc, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, the Arc's four local enterprise partnerships (LEPs), and England's Economic Heartland.
- I.8. Importantly, the joint declaration recognised the potential development of a spatial vision or strategy for the Arc as a whole and subsequently, in February 2021, the government announced the development of a new Spatial Framework plan to help coordinate the infrastructure, environment and new developments within the Arc.
- I.9. The government stated that the framework would be based on the following 10 core principles:
 - *Collaborative – we will develop the Spatial Framework with local partners, including communities, local councils, businesses and universities.*
 - *Adaptable – we will create a framework that provides certainty for communities, local councils and investors about where growth will happen, and the infrastructure that will support it. But it will also need to be flexible and adaptive to change as it happens.*
 - *Long-term – we will plan to 2050 and beyond so that we create the foundation for long-term sustainable growth.*
 - *Integrated – the Framework will be based on an integrated approach to planning which spans the economy, housing, environment and transport.*
 - *Inclusive – the Framework will aim to bring benefits for existing communities and all places in the Arc – not just the highest growth centres.*
 - *Digital-first – we will make better use of digital tools to support better, more collaborative long-term policy-making.*

- *Evidence-based – the Framework will be based on a robust and comprehensive evidence base, which we will make publicly available.*
 - *Sustainable – the Framework must strengthen our ability to meet the government’s commitment to combat climate change, support sustainable patterns of development, and support lasting improvements to biodiversity and the natural environment.*
 - *Quality – we intend to set high expectations for the quality of new development and infrastructure, so that we can create the heritage areas of the future and enhance quality of life in all parts of the Arc.*
 - *Add value – we will not duplicate local or national policies and plans, but we will take them into consideration in developing the Framework. Instead, the Framework will be genuinely strategic and focus on cross-boundary issues, policies and opportunities.*
- 1.10. The Arc Spatial Framework will have national planning policy status alongside the NPPF, thereby allowing it to have significant weight in the planning system for guiding local plan production and in decision making. It will indicate locations for growth but will not include site allocations, and it will not include detailed policies set elsewhere in national policy or local plans.
- 1.11. The timeline for developing the Arc Spatial Framework covers three core phases:
- Developing a vision for the future of the Oxford-Cambridge Arc – public engagement to shape a vision for the area, through consultation in summer 2021.
 - Towards a *Spatial* Framework – The development of options for turning the vision into policy, based on engagement and initial evidence gathering and analysis. To be published for consultation in spring 2022.
 - Draft Spatial Framework – draft Spatial Framework published for consultation in autumn 2022, with implementation of the final Framework shortly after.

2. CREATING A VISION FOR THE OXFORD-CAMBRIDGE ARC

- 2.1. As the first of the three core phases outlined above, Government is currently consulting on a document entitled '[Creating a Vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc](#)'.
- 2.2. The consultation paper is 58 pages long and is accompanied by a separate [Sustainability Appraisal \(SA\) Scoping Report](#) the intention being to subject the Arc Spatial Framework to a process of sustainability appraisal to help ensure that sustainability is embedded into the development of the Spatial Framework.
- 2.3. Section 1 of the consultation paper provides an introduction to the Arc including the area covered, the reasons for preparing a Spatial Framework Plan, the key issues raised through engagement to date and the proposed next steps for developing the plan.
- 2.4. Figure 1.1 below illustrates the geographical extent of the area covered.

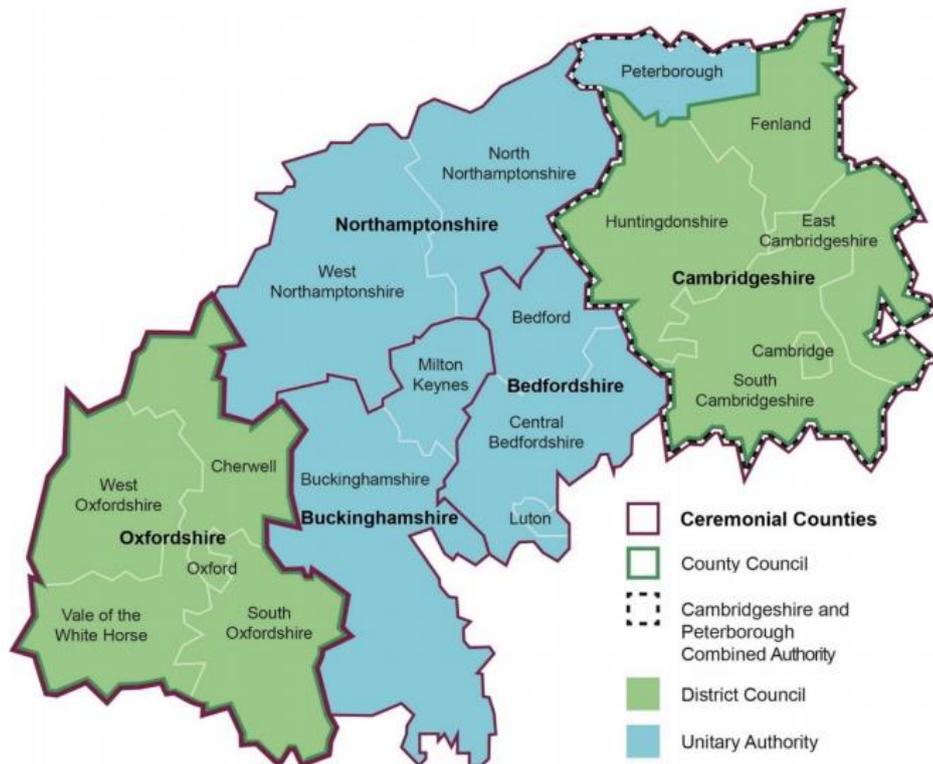


Figure 1.1 – The Oxford-Cambridge Arc

- 2.5. Section I of the consultation paper includes a number of open questions regarding the sort of place the Arc could be, the threats and opportunities that exist and the most important issues that the Spatial Framework plan needs to tackle. The District Council’s suggested response to these questions is attached at [Annex A](#).
- 2.6. The majority of the consultation paper is then focused around four main ‘policy pillars’ including the environment, the economy, connectivity and infrastructure and place-making.
- 2.7. For ease of reference, the overall ‘ambition’ for each theme is reproduced below.

The Environment

‘The government wants to support growth in the Arc in a way that is sustainable – by improving the natural environment and making sure it is protected, and can recover from harm. This will help us to meet our commitment to combat and build resilience to climate change. We think there is an opportunity for the Arc to become a world-leader for environmental sustainability over the coming decades’.

The Economy

‘The government’s priority for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc is sustainable economic growth. We are putting sustainable economic growth first because we think that the Arc can be one of the most productive places in the world by creating new jobs, improving the standard of living and the quality of life for local communities. We want to support economic growth that is sustainable – economically, socially and environmentally. Taking this step will also help national prosperity as we build back better from the impacts of COVID-19’.

Connectivity and Infrastructure

‘We want the Oxford-Cambridge Arc to be a great place to live and work – now and in the future. That means it will need to be better connected – by making it easier for walking, cycling, and public transport to become first choice for everyone in the Arc. It will also mean making places that reduce the need to travel in the first place. And it

means improving communities' access to the services they need – like a good quality, sustainable water supply and broadband, schools, cycle lanes and healthcare, as part of a great approach to place-making'.

Place-Making

'Place-making is the process of designing and creating great places to live, work, play and learn in. We think there is an opportunity for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc to be a world-leader in sustainable place-making and community living. We know that, as the Arc grows, new homes and places will be needed. Our ambition is to help ensure those new homes and places are great places to live by being more sustainable, beautiful and green, and have better access to the services and infrastructure they need. And we want to improve existing places and learn from those that are most valued by local communities as we think about the places of the future'.

- 2.8. Within each theme, the consultation paper provides some relevant contextual information, identifies how the Spatial Framework could potentially help, summarises the key issues raised through engagement to date and then asks a number of 'semi-open' questions regarding the importance of various issues which the Spatial Framework might address, for example in relation to the environment; net zero carbon, nature recovery, flood risk and air quality.
- 2.9. The Council's suggested response to the consultation questions is attached at [Annex A](#).

3. NEXT STEPS

- 3.1. The current consultation will close on 12 October 2021. All comments received will be taken into account in developing the Spatial Framework's vision for the Arc to 2050. In spring 2022, the vision will be published as well as a public consultation on options for the policies in the Spatial Framework. This will subsequently feed into consultation on the draft Spatial Framework itself in autumn 2022.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. The report raises no specific financial implications.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. The report raises no specific legal implications.

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1. The report raises no specific risks.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1. The following documents are of relevance to this report:
 - [Partnering for Prosperity: A New Deal for the Cambridge – Milton Keynes – Oxford Arc](#) (November 2017)
 - [Government response to 'Partnering for Prosperity: a new deal for the Cambridge-Milton Keynes–Oxford Arc'](#) (October 2018)
 - [The Oxford-Cambridge Arc: government ambition and joint declaration between government and local partners](#) (March 2019)
 - [Planning for sustainable growth in the Oxford Cambridge Arc: An introduction to the Oxford-Cambridge Arc Spatial Framework](#) (February 2021)
 - [Creating a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc](#) (July 2021)

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Creating a vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc

West Oxfordshire District Council consultation response – key messages

I. Introduction – creating a vision

In March 2021 the Oxfordshire Growth Board endorsed a Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire <https://www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Strategic-Vision-full-document.pdf>. The focus is on ‘good growth’ and this is guided by a set of principles. The Vision, the definition of ‘good growth’ and the guiding principles form the foundation for an overarching approach to long-term sustainable development for Oxfordshire and for developing plans, strategies and programmes for the county. The Oxfordshire Strategic Vision document is an important consideration in establishing the vision for the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.

The Oxfordshire Growth Board comprises the six councils of Oxfordshire and key strategic partners: Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Oxfordshire Skills Board, Oxford Universities, Homes England, DEFRA, Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group, Network Rail and Highways England. It facilitates collaborative efforts to manage economic, housing and infrastructure development in a way that is inclusive and maximises local social and environmental benefits.

The Vision for Oxfordshire is one that recognises the county’s unique location: *‘what we do here matters, not just for the benefit of our residents and communities, but also for the wellbeing of the UK and communities across the globe.*

We are at the frontier in addressing and solving the most pressing challenges facing humanity. We want Oxfordshire to thrive so that the lives of current and future generations are improved.

To achieve this will require bold, collaborative and inclusive thinking to deliver real and lasting change in ways that build resilience and enhance environmental, social and economic wellbeing. We will draw on our world class economy, our spirit of discovery and Oxfordshire’s global reputation to power this change through the adoption of clean and sustainable technology.’

The aim is to *‘utilise the unique opportunities and assets in Oxfordshire to realise sustainable growth and shape healthy, resilient communities in which it is possible for all residents to thrive and which can be an exemplar for the rest of the UK and other locations internationally.’*

Sustainable economic growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc is emphasised by the government and reflected in the visioning document which also identifies how this will make ‘a major contribution to national economic recovery as we seek to build back better...’ However, there needs to be far more emphasis on ‘Good Growth’, especially on building back better and greener, on the need to address the climate and ecological emergencies (e.g. making a significant contribution towards climate adaptation and mitigation, biodiversity net gain and nature’s recovery), on addressing health, wellbeing and inequalities and on

'embracing social, economic and environmental wellbeing to achieve a happier, healthier and greener future' (One Planet Oxfordshire: Our Shared Vision, Bioregional, 2019).

While accepting that the vision is high-level, there does need to be recognition of the Arc as a place and of the character of the different areas of that place, reflecting both the challenges and opportunities of the local circumstances.

2. The Environment

Green spaces, nature and biodiversity

Section 2 deals with 'the environment'. Although not explicitly stated, the focus is specifically on the natural environment, excluding the historic environment. The questions on the environment are split into topics. While this helps to tease out different issues and priorities, it does miss the opportunity to address the interconnectivity of the issues within the natural environment and the implications of, and measures to tackle, the climate and ecological emergencies.

Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development identifies the importance of adopting a natural capital approach to development, recognising the significant contribution natural capital makes to quality of place, the health and wellbeing of communities, and their value in building resilience to climate change, reducing flood risk, increasing biodiversity and boosting economic productivity.

The OxCAM Arc provides an opportunity for the area to be a leader in achieving exemplar green infrastructure, biodiversity net gain and nature based solutions. These need to be considered holistically, with an emphasis on multi-functional networks, allowing habitat connectivity and wildlife corridors, and on long term management.

The Enabling a Natural Capital Approach (ENCA) toolkit and the Environmental Benefits from Nature (EBN) should be important considerations.

It should be recognised that not all areas of green space are compatible with maximising biodiversity gain and nature's recovery. Green spaces should be considered as slightly separate from nature and biodiversity. While green spaces should certainly be biodiverse and contain natural habitats and natural play areas (which allows people to experience wildlife/nature and interact with birds, bees, hedgehogs, etc.), the vision for nature's recovery should be about habitats and ecosystems and the Lawton principles of more, bigger, better and joined-up.

Having access to every area of the natural environment is not necessarily compatible with protecting and improving it. Some habitats and species just do not do well in urban environments, for example, skylarks, brown hares and adders - these will not use new habitats that are regularly disturbed by dog walkers and children. Off-site habitat creation (via biodiversity net gain mechanism) can have an important role to play, with the potential to deliver real benefits for nature.

Biodiversity net gain is a new way of assessing and measuring the biodiversity impact (e.g. on site), encouraging developers to do MORE on site than before (as well as factoring in the value of all habitats rather than just priority habitats) as well as providing new habitat off-site

where it will be less disturbed (and making real gains in terms of the nature recovery network).

Climate change resilience and net zero

Guiding Principle 1 of the Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development relates to reversing the impacts of climate change by making climate action a top priority in decision-making.

The aim is that Oxfordshire will be carbon neutral by 2040, or earlier, and by 2050 will be moving towards a carbon negative future. Opportunities will be maximised to reverse the impacts of climate change, demonstrate leadership in carbon reduction, develop nature-based solutions to help mitigate the impacts of climate change, champion more sustainable ways to improve connectivity and support transformative technologies and sectors.

In terms of the OxCAM Arc, while overall the consideration of biodiversity and greenspace generally provides a cohesive set of principles which largely aligning with national ambition, there is far less emphasis on net-zero goals, or the existing energy landscape.

There currently appears to be a disconnect between research underway for the Oxford Cambridge Arc's Energy Sector Working Group to help them understand the breadth of the Energy Sector landscape across the region (including current operations and developing projects) and the implications for the spatial framework.

It is essential that the spatial framework seeks to provide clarity of definition for net zero carbon which will adequately meet our obligations under the Climate Change Act.

The emphasis should be on 'ultra-low energy' design, with energy demand reduction as the first and most important step to ensuring climate change impact is mitigated in design for growth. With temperatures increasing, mitigating overheating risk in new development is of an increasing concern and needs to be considered in design terms.

There also needs to be consideration to whole life carbon impact, cradle to grave emissions, which includes not only the operational energy use and associated emissions but also the embodied carbon impact of materials and products required through development of infrastructure and growth.

Links with a circular economy are particularly relevant and should be reflected within a definition a net zero carbon (refer to UKGBC and LETI definitions of net zero carbon development and associated KPIs)

There should be a focus on the need to remove any new carbon emissions first and foremost (both operational emissions and embodied), supplying all predicted and future energy demand through equivalent renewable energy within the region. AECB standards for water efficiency should be endorsed.

The Spatial Framework offers a huge opportunity for climate action, through e.g. actively lowering emissions, mitigating climate change, advocating fossil fuel free development and use of renewables and adapting to future climate change. An ecocentric, integrated approach

is advocated, whereby sustainability features are combined to maximise co-benefits. An ambitious approach is required.

Air quality and waste

Guiding Principle 2 of the Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development relates to creating an economy that is 'clean ... and sustainable' and Guiding Principle 3 relates to placing the overall health and physical and mental wellbeing at the forefront of decision-making, including providing better access to sustainable, inclusive and resilient active and low-carbon transport and improvements in air quality.

There are clear overlaps with issues identified for the Arc.

In terms of pollution, the focus is largely on air pollution and quality. Consideration should also be given to other potential forms of pollution, such as light pollution (and the issue of dark skies), noise pollution and potential contamination, especially of brownfield sites.

In terms of the sustainable use of natural resources and waste management further consideration needs to be given to construction and operational waste management, recycling targets, innovative or advanced waste collection systems, the use of sustainably sourced materials and the circular economy.

Water

Guiding Principle 4 of the Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development which relates to enhancing our natural environment, specifically identifies the value of the water environment: the River Thames and other rivers, canals, reservoirs, lakes, ponds, wetlands and aquifers. The need to improve the quality of waterways and water bodies and reduce levels of water stress are identified.

Adoption of a natural capital approach would help to ensure an integrated approach to water management and flood risk (as well as clean air, sustainable land management, nature recovery, etc.), making sure issues are looked at and addressed in a coherent way and developments are more holistic in their design process. For example, consideration should be given to the interlinkages between SuDs and other sustainable features, such as water recycling, and water source heat pumps, biodiversity and healthy place shaping.

3. The Economy

Education and training

Guiding Principle 2 of the Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development sets out to create conditions to support a world-leading and innovation-rich economy. As part of this approach, inequalities in employment opportunity and access to education, skills and training will be addressed, and life-long learning will be a priority. The aim is to build a skilled population which has a stake in the future prosperity of Oxfordshire, ensuring that growth is inclusive and supports the health and wellbeing of local communities, whether current or future generations.

The recognition of the importance of education and training for the Arc's economy is fully supported. It is essential that educational excellence is embedded throughout the education system, not just at universities and colleges. Skills need to be developed for all ages of children/young adults and from all backgrounds. There are some deprived areas within Oxford and other areas of the Arc where school attendance and educational achievement remain extremely low. There needs to be stronger links between schools and businesses and greater efforts to interest and inspire young people in the key and growing sectors. This is central to ensuring that all communities benefit from the Arc.

Jobs and businesses

Guiding Principle 7 of the Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development relates to embracing technological changes to create better opportunities and outcomes for people, including increasing economic productivity. Guiding Principle 5 again emphasises the importance of embracing innovation but within the context of also reflecting and enhancing the area's valuable assets and recognising the diversity of the city, towns, villages and environment.

Guiding Principle 2 relates to creating the conditions to support a world-leading and innovation-rich economy which is clean, prosperous, diverse, inclusive, successful and sustainable – delivering outcomes for the environment, communities and public services.

These three principles highlight the interlinkages between the different topics and issues affecting Oxfordshire. These interlinkages are equally applicable to the Arc.

There is a tendency for there to be a focus on new jobs/sectors, with an emphasis on innovation, science and technology. That is understandable and clearly these are important growth sectors to be supported and encouraged. However, existing employment and business sectors also need to be considered and so too the need for an understanding and appreciation of the geography of the Arc. For example, much of the region is rural and of high environmental quality, a quality that both contributes to the local economy (e.g. through influencing locational decision-making by entrepreneurs and employees) and is dependent upon it (e.g. through viable and sustainable land management of farms, estates and open space).

The rural and green economy should form part of the vision for jobs and businesses in the Arc. For example, consideration should be given to the role of tourism, the diversity of the rural economy, including landed estates and farming (and their wider environmental and social role), plus the availability of local resources and raw materials (e.g. sand and gravel).

As part of the interconnectivity of issues, an important focus for the vision should be on sustainable and greener growth, including the circular economy and how jobs, businesses and innovation can tackle climate change and support the move to a zero carbon future.

4. Connectivity and Infrastructure

Infrastructure

The importance of infrastructure is a common theme running through the guiding principles of Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development. There is an emphasis on ensuring that the spatial, infrastructure and economic priorities are strategically aligned.

Infrastructure should be addressed in its widest definition, including education, health, movement, green space, communications and water and energy supply.

Keeping resources in use longer and minimising waste links with the use of a circular economy approach, for example, refurbishing buildings rather than demolition. Focusing on the use of local resources is also an important consideration.

New development

It is essential that supporting infrastructure is planned and delivered in conjunction with new development.

Local policies to require and deliver infrastructure as part of development proposals need to be supported by strong national policies.

Guiding Principle 8 of the Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development expects all new development to be of the highest sustainable design and construction, one that improves the overall built environment and embeds healthy place-shaping principles, connecting communities and improving the local environment.

Green and active travel has an important role to play in addressing climate change and achieving net zero emissions and, at the same time, improving connectivity and enhancing the environment. Investment in new and improved infrastructure could provide attractive alternatives to the car, resulting in a shift in how people move around the Arc. The use of electric vehicles should be encouraged.

While focusing growth around areas with better transport links is supported in principle, it must be remembered that there may be localised constraints, such as AONB, SSSIs and limited nearby services and facilities, that makes growth in such a location unsustainable and inappropriate.

The importance of providing digital infrastructure needs to be highlighted, not least to help reduce the need to travel and provide the opportunity for home-working.

Infrastructure associated with energy provision needs particular attention in light of the climate emergency and the move towards zero carbon. A renewable energy strategy for the Arc, based on a detailed understanding of the energy sector, should be an important input into the spatial framework.

Getting around

Guiding Principle 1 of the Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development sets out to reverse the impacts of climate change, including championing more sustainable ways to improve connectivity. Principle 3 on improving health and wellbeing includes providing better access to sustainable, inclusive and resilient active and low-carbon transport. These are important components of achieving high quality development (Guiding Principle 8) through healthy place shaping and should be a fundamental element of the Arc's vision.

In addressing transport, movement and connectivity there are a number of issues that need to be considered, including:

- Assessing a wide range of solutions such as public transport improvements, first and last mile improvements, transport hubs (and connections to these) and technological advances which will develop cleaner and smarter options in the future;
- Measures to access public transport services such as flexible ticketing between the various types of public transport and what facilities should be made available (bike storage etc.);
- Taking into account the transport wider networks, such as the North Cotswolds Line and the planned upgrades;
- Making use of existing public rights of way, enhancing and extending them to increase connectivity within the built up area and into the countryside;
- Encouraging walking and cycling, informed by cycling strategies, to ensure connections are comprehensive and to identify current gaps/ safety issues etc.;
- Promoting electric vehicles and bikes, designing new developments with e.g. charging and safe storage for such vehicles/bikes, and minimising travel through the provision of home or communal office space; and
- Designing movement networks to be multifunctional, with multiple benefits.

5. Place-making

Location of growth

The Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development focuses on achieving 'good growth'. Part of this approach makes a commitment to development being sustainable, focusing on ways that enhance quality of place and at locations which enable people to live and work nearby, improving digital connectivity and avoiding unnecessary travel in the first place, but using opportunities to increase movement by sustainable and active modes of travel when needed.

'Good growth' forms the basis for the set of Guiding Principles, each of which contribute to the overall approach to Oxfordshire's development over the next 30 years, seeking to drive improvements to environmental, social and economic wellbeing in ways which build resilience.

'Making sure new developments are built in the most sustainable locations' is clearly very important and an approach that has underpinned much town and country planning. A focus on brownfield sites is also supported. However, is there a large supply of such sites within the Arc and are they in sustainable locations (or capable of being made sustainable)? On the assumption that most of the development will take place in greenfield locations, careful consideration will need to be given as to the criteria that makes it 'sustainable', particularly taking into consideration the climate and ecological emergencies and the emerging implications of the proposed planning reforms.

Homes in your area

Guiding Principle 6 of Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development sets out to deliver homes that met the needs of current and future generations, tackling the significant challenge of housing affordability by delivering more truly affordable homes both for rent and home ownership. The emphasis of this principle and that of Guiding Principle 3 is on healthy place shaping, including delivering homes that allow people to live healthily, happily and independently in their old age.

An important consideration needs to be on how the right homes* can be provided at speed in the right places, supported by the necessary infrastructure, and built to a high quality, meeting the best sustainable standards. (*including meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers.)

Design of new developments and streets

The Guiding Principles of Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development form an inter-related set of equally important ground rules – the foundation of an overarching approach to long-term sustainable development, with a new emphasis on place-shaping.

Like Oxfordshire's approach, the Arc should be adopting a place shaping approach that embraces a more ambitious, radical, innovative and creative approach to designing new developments, streets, neighbourhood and communities.

6. Our commitment to engaging communities

Oxfordshire's Strategic Vision for Sustainable Development has three guiding principles that are particularly relevant in giving feedback on the issues of community engagement.

Guiding Principle 9 relates to helping people to help each other by supporting communities and individuals to achieve positive change for themselves.

Guiding Principle 10 sets out the importance of maximising the benefits of strong collaboration, creating the conditions where people feel involved and empowered, embedding a culture of meaningful involvement and enabling communities to inform and shape local decisions.

Guiding Principle 11 relates to proactive and positive engagement by fostering links with neighbouring areas to facilitate the delivery of good growth through beneficial relationships. For Oxfordshire this relates to ensuring that the strategic priorities inform regional and sub-regional priorities, including the emerging Oxford-Cambridge Arc. For the Arc itself, this engagement and collaboration should extend to those areas beyond the Arc boundaries. For example, here in West Oxfordshire on the western edge of the Arc, there are interconnections with surrounding districts, counties and regions, including Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Worcestershire, Swindon and the rest of the Cotswolds AONB.

Agenda Item 8

 <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	<p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p>Cabinet: Wednesday 15 September 2021</p>
<p>Report Number</p>	<p>Agenda Item No. 8</p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p>Service Performance Report 2021-22 Quarter One</p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>Cllr Suzi Coul, Cabinet Member for Finance Email: suzi.coul@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Tel: (01993) 861658 Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>This report provides details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2021-22 Quarter One (Q1), and enables Councillors to assess operational performance</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Annex A – Performance Indicator report</p>
<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>That the 2021/22 Q1 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

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

2. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK - PERFORMANCE REPORTING

- 2.1. A review of performance indicators is currently underway, and Portfolio Holders are having discussions with relevant managers about priority areas and finding metrics that would be most representative and provide assurance as to how the Council is performing.
- 2.2. During 2020/21, it was noted in the performance report that the 'average time to process Housing Benefit new claims' had become obsolete due to the significant decrease in new claims since the implementation of Universal Credit which was resulting in the average being skewed by a small number of claims taking significant time to process, often caused by external factors such as clients not returning documents. Two new indicators related to the Council Tax Support scheme, which are closely tied to increases in Universal Credit, and are therefore more relevant, have been introduced.
- 2.3. A selection of publicly available benchmarking data for the most recent period at that time (2019-20) was included in the 2020-21 Q4 Performance Indicator report on a trial basis. Some of the 2021-21 data has started to be released with the majority available by the end of December 2021. It is proposed that the benchmarking data is updated and reported on an annual basis.
- 2.4. A high level Commissioning Framework was approved by Cabinet in October 2020 which sets out the relationship between Publica and the Council and their respective responsibilities. 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.
- 2.5. The Council's Chief Executive has received a report on service performance, and he has assessed it in line with the high level Commissioning Statement. He has noted the capacity issues and high workloads in some services which have contributed to a reduced level of operational performance in those services in Q1, as well as the actions that are being taken to improve performance. He has also noted the continued impact of Covid-19 on our communities, businesses, and customers as well as staff. He has drawn particular attention to the following:
 - i. In February 2021, the Government set out its 4 stage roadmap out of lockdown with the lifting of all restrictions on 21 June, which was delayed until 19 July. As infection rates have been high over the last few weeks, staff are being encouraged to continue to work from home;
 - ii. There were over 126,000 visits to the Council's leisure facilities in Q1 which is encouraging. Although some outdoor fitness classes re-started on 29 March, the Council's leisure centres re-opened on 12 April (Stage 2), with most activities and classes re-starting on 17 May. Some government grant funding has been made available to cover Council losses from waiving management fees, as well as costs incurred by leisure operators during the lockdown, and to support re-opening;

- iii. A number of services have continued to support businesses to access grants, and carrying out 'test and trace'. Between the November 2020 lockdown and the end of Q1, around £20,344,734 has been distributed in both mandatory and discretionary grants to nearly 1300 businesses across the District. These schemes ended on 30 June 2021, with final payments to be made by the end of July 2021. However, the 'test and trace' work carried out by the Benefits team has been extended to the end of September;
- iv. The Council's business rates collection figure (in year) continues to be affected by the impact of Covid-19 on businesses, as is the case with other councils throughout the country. The Government supported certain businesses with 100% business rate relief last year, but there are still businesses which are struggling financially. At the end of June 2021, the relief was reduced to 66% which will run until the end of the financial year;
- v. It is encouraging to see that the that the operations team has been targeting fly tipping at recycling banks and reminding both residents and businesses about their duty of care to dispose of waste responsibly.

3. SERVICE PERFORMANCE

- 3.1. Over the last two quarters, performance has been mixed but is beginning to show a more positive outlook as we move into Q2.
- 3.2. The nation started to emerge from the third lockdown in March 2021 with the lifting of restrictions over four stages; however, in line with government advice the majority of staff have continued to deliver services from home. This has presented challenges to some services most particularly in respect of the planning service.
- 3.3. In response the service has been piloting a hybrid working solution over recent months which should help improve the efficiency of the service (whilst still respecting social distancing to protect staff). However, the time taken to complete statutory consultations has also created delays due to the working arrangements of consultees. The recent ending of the 'work from home' directive has already started to improve this position.
- 3.4. There are backlogs in some services due to a number of reasons including the suspension of site visits due to the pandemic e.g. Food Safety; as well as backlogs that built up while implementing new systems e.g. Benefits team.
- 3.5. Some services such as Planning and Food Safety have found it difficult to recruit to vacant posts; and turnover in the Customer Service team tends to be high due to staff taking opportunities to progress within the organisation.
- 3.6. The relevant services have commenced further recruitment drives; and the Council has agreed additional resource to increase the number and grading structure of planning officers to better balance workloads and resources.
- 3.7. The Benefits team was able to access some external resources from Civica OnDemand, however, it was not able to secure sufficient resources due to a high demand for the same resources from other councils. Further requests for resources have been made, and the service will be employing temporary staff to help reduce the backlog.
- 3.8. Some of the performance indicators that are falling short of their targets are considered below together with rectifying actions:

- The percentage of calls responded to within 20 seconds and the abandoned rate has increased over the last six months but has started to show improvements in July but still remains short of the target. A review of the customer services indicators to ensure that they are appropriate to customers' needs has concluded that these indicators have become outdated and were based on the 'old ways of working', and more emphasis needs to be placed on 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.

The service has started work to improve working practices and reduce call waiting time. The manager is also undertaking process benchmarking with other councils which will help us to understand our performance in a wider context.

Performance has fallen over the last six months as workloads are generally higher in Q4 due to normal annual billing processes, combined with staff on long term sick leave and phased return in Q1. We are aware that staffing resilience is an issue, and it is a challenge to maintain sufficient staffing levels due to high turnover as staff take secondments (often not replaced) or other opportunities to progress in the organisation. This means that the service has to undertake regular recruitment exercises; however, it takes around six months to train each advisor with significant support required from experienced staff.

- The average days to process Council Tax Support new claims have increased over the last six months from 20.6 days to 33.1 days, and Council Tax Support changes have increased over the last quarter from 3.5 days to 43.1 days. This was primarily due to high workloads related to the increase in Universal Credit claims since the start of the pandemic, the implementation of the new Benefits system, Covid-19 work, as well as providing welfare support to the most vulnerable residents in the District. The service is managing its workload with support from Civica OnDemand, and has made a request for additional resources from Civica. It is also useful to note that processing times for new claims and changes is not wholly dependent on the actions of the service, and frequently the service needs to wait for information or evidence from either the DWP or the client, which can create lengthy delays in completing the claim or change. An analysis of the data is planned to provide an accurate picture of the 'down time' and to find solutions for addressing any delays for which the service is responsible;
- Similarly, the average days to process Housing Benefit changes of circumstances has also increased over the last quarter from 3.2 days to 26.5 days. Following the implementation of the new Benefits system, there has been a software failure in the facility to automatically upload changes of circumstances and applying them to system records. Around 80% of changes are applied in this way which makes the process much more efficient than manual handling. A software fix has now been applied and the automation reinstated which should be reflected in an improvement in performance in the second half of Q2. A request to Civica for additional resources has been made, and the service will also be using temporary staff to process the simpler cases which will help to reduce the backlog.

3.9. In spite of the challenges this quarter:

- The council tax collection rate appears to have rebounded. The service collected 33.2% of the council tax due in the year compared to 29.4% a year ago.

- The Planning team achieved its targets for planning applications determined within timescales (all three types of application) through careful management of workloads and the effective use of extensions of time.
- Eighty-eight affordable homes were completed; 53 for affordable rent and 35 for shared ownership. The projection for completions remains high throughout the year, despite indications from developers and registered providers that costs are rising, and the availability of labour and materials may become a challenge.

3.10. We are unable to provide the Q1 waste management data. The data team is undertaking a verification exercise of the waste data including the 2020-21 data to ensure that this complex data is consistent between the different sources and outputs.

3.11. A full report is attached at **Annex A**.

4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN (LGO) ANNUAL REVIEW 2020/21

4.1. The latest Annual Review Letter for West Oxfordshire District Council sets out the complaints that were made against the Council in 2020/21, as well as the outcome of those complaints.

4.2. During the first wave of the Covid-19 outbreak, the LGO temporarily paused its casework for three months to allow authorities to concentrate efforts on vital frontline services. In general, this will have reduced the number of complaints the LGO received and decided in the 2020-21, and should be considered when comparing data from previous years.

4.3. In total, the LGO received 11 complaints/enquiries about this Council, which related mostly to Planning and Development (six); the other complaints/enquiries related to Benefits and Tax (three) and Housing (two). In the previous year, the LGO received nine complaints/enquiries, five of which related to Planning and Development.

4.4. Ten decisions were made by the LGO in 2020/21; one complaint was deemed to be invalid, two complaints were closed after initial enquiries; four complaints were referred back to the Council for a local resolution, and three complaints were investigated in detail. Of the three complaints that were investigated in detail by the LGO, one was upheld.

4.5. The complaint that was upheld related to Planning and Development, and concerned the application of separation distances between the complainant's home and a new housing development. The Ombudsman concluded that the usual separation distances were not capable of being met and 'while there is fault here, I cannot say it is more likely than not that the Council would have made a different decision. It is possible, even if the Council had identified the close distances, that it might still have found them acceptable'.

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

Delivering great services locally

PERFORMANCE REPORT:
April 2021 - June 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	(Snapshot) Number of households in emergency accommodation under 28 days	Number of fly tips collected
Customer satisfaction – web	(Snapshot) Number of households in emergency accommodation 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 within timescales	Percentage of high risk food premises inspected within target timescales
Percentage of telephone calls answered within 20 seconds	Percentage of minor planning applications determined within timescales	Residual household waste per household (kg)
Telephone abandon rate	Percentage of other planning applications determined within timescales	(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 Council Tax Support new 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 Council Tax Support change events	Number of visits to leisure centres	
(Cumulative) Average number of days taken to process housing benefit changes of circumstances	Number of gym memberships	
(Cumulative) Percentage of housing benefit overpayment due to LA error/Admin delay		

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 readily available benchmarking data for the most recent period (2019-20) was included in the 2020-21 Q4 performance report on a trial basis. The 2020-21 benchmarking data has started to be released and will continue over the year until around December 2021. An annual exercise will be undertaken to update the CIPFA benchmarking charts and the Shire Districts' median /top quartile lines.

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, benchmarking data 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.

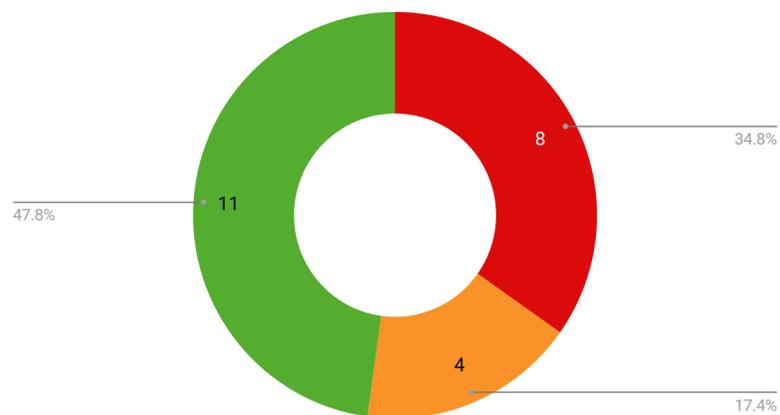
Note

The data benchmarks have been extracted from LG Inform, a benchmarking tool, which contains a range of routinely published data. The median and top (best 25%) quartile lines are based on annual outturns but applied to the quarterly data.

KEY PERFORMANCE METRICS

At a glance...

Summary of Performance



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OVERALL PERFORMANCE

Over the last two quarters, performance has been mixed but is beginning to show a more positive outlook in some services. Although restrictions started to be lifted in March, the majority of staff have continued to deliver services from home which is still presenting challenges for the planning service. The service has been piloting a hybrid working solution over recent months which should help improve the efficiency of the service.

There has been a shortage of resources in some services to deal with increasing workloads due to the economic market e.g. planning applications and land charge searches; and there are backlogs in some services due to a number of reasons including the suspension of site visits due to the pandemic e.g. Food Safety; as well as backlogs that built up while implementing new systems e.g. Benefits team.

These challenges have been exacerbated by the difficulty to recruit in some services such as Planning and Food Safety, and further recruitment drives have commenced. Additional resource to increase the number and grading structure of planning officers has been agreed. The Benefits team was able to access some resources from Civica OnDemand, and further requests have been made. The service will be employing temporary staff to help reduce the backlog.

Indicators with targets	Status
Customer satisfaction - phones	Green
Customer satisfaction - F2F	No data
Customer satisfaction - website	Red
% of calls responded to within 20 seconds	Red
Abandoned call rate	Red
CT collection rate	Green
NNDR collection rate	Green
Average days to process CTS new claims	Red
Average days to process CTS change events	Red
Average days to process HB change events	Red
% 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	Green
% planning appeals allowed	Green
Affordable homes delivered	Green
% land charge searches dispatched within time	Red
Leisure visits	Green
Gym memberships	Green
% high risk notifications assessed within time	Green
% high risk food premises inspected within time	n/a
Residual waste per household (kg)	No data
% overall recycling rate	No data
Missed bins per 100,000	Red
Parking enforcement	Orange

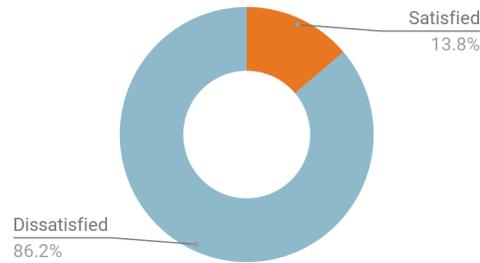
CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer satisfaction

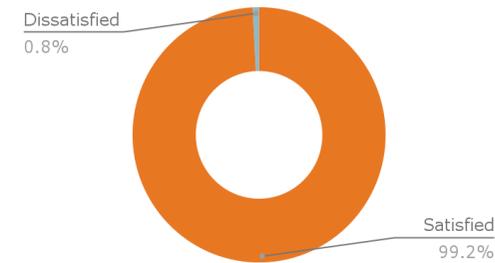
Face to face - no surveys due to Covid19



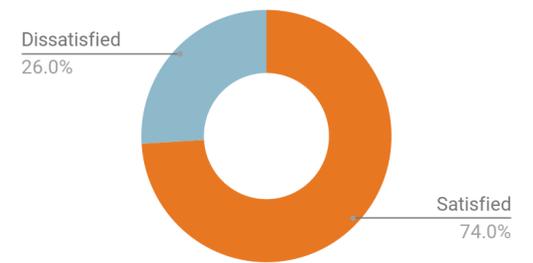
Website - 123 respondents



Phone - 370 respondents

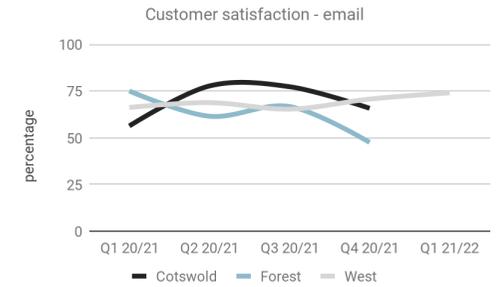
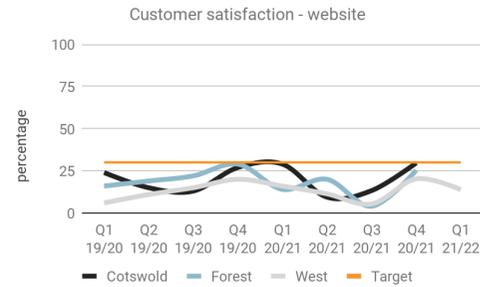
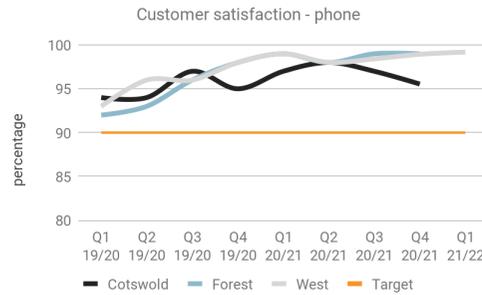


Email - 335 respondents



What's the trend?

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OBSERVATION

Due to Covid-19, the Council closed its reception areas in March 2020 and therefore face to face surveys were temporarily suspended. The nation emerged from the third lockdown on the 29 March 2021 in phased stages; and although Woodgreen and the Town Centre shop re-opened to customers from 12 April 2021, footfall is currently low. As 19 July marked the end of the lockdown restrictions, the service is considering re-commencing face to face surveys.

Overall, satisfaction ratings for services delivered via the phone continue to be high, while satisfaction for services via the website appears to be low. The number of feedback responses continues to be extremely low compared to the large proportion of visitors to the website. The 'Dissatisfied' feedback received this quarter was again analysed to establish the cause (website content issues, data processing issues, failure in service provision, user error etc.). These findings are being collated and will eventually feed into a new digital take up framework in which a range of channel shift data including web service interaction information will form a baseline which can then be continually monitored to give a more accurate picture of digital take up across our online services. This data should then enable us to understand where we can do more targeted feedback around particular online services to ultimately improve the online take up and change behaviours to a digital first approach

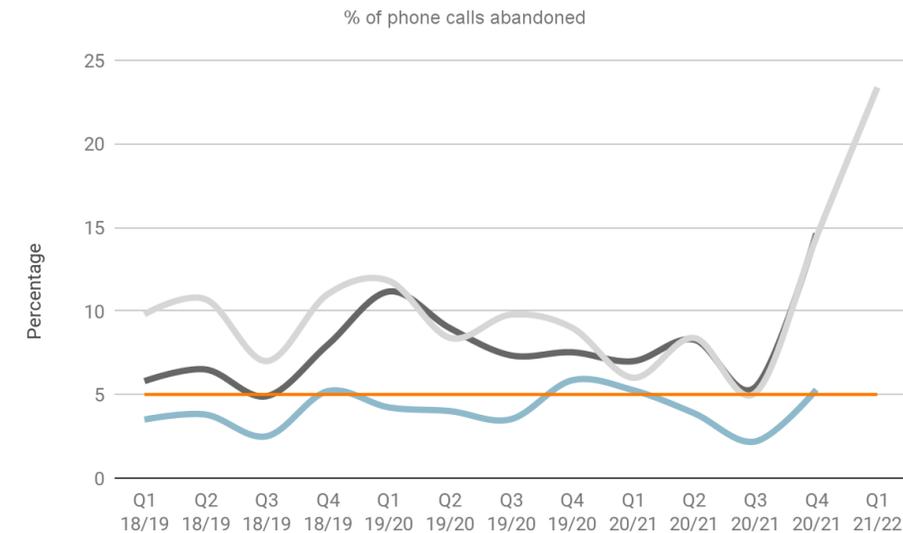
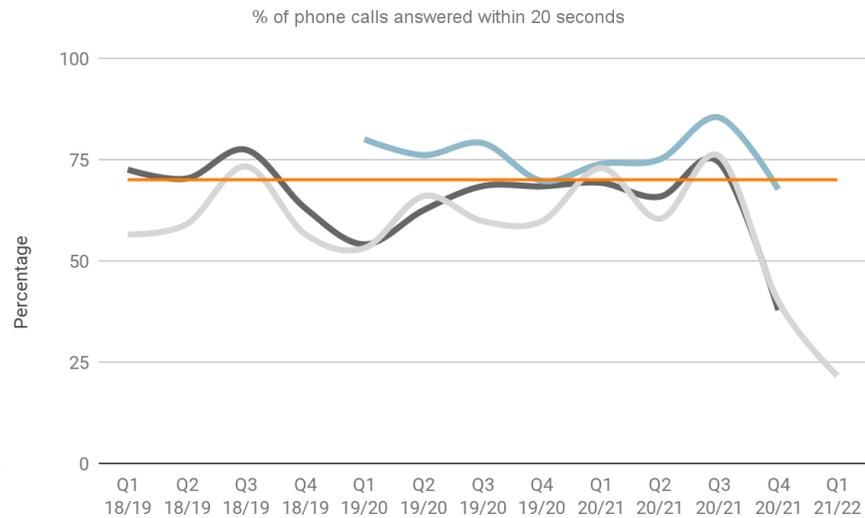
Telephone calls - response and abandonment

Target

Cotswold

Forest of Dean

West Oxfordshire



OBSERVATION

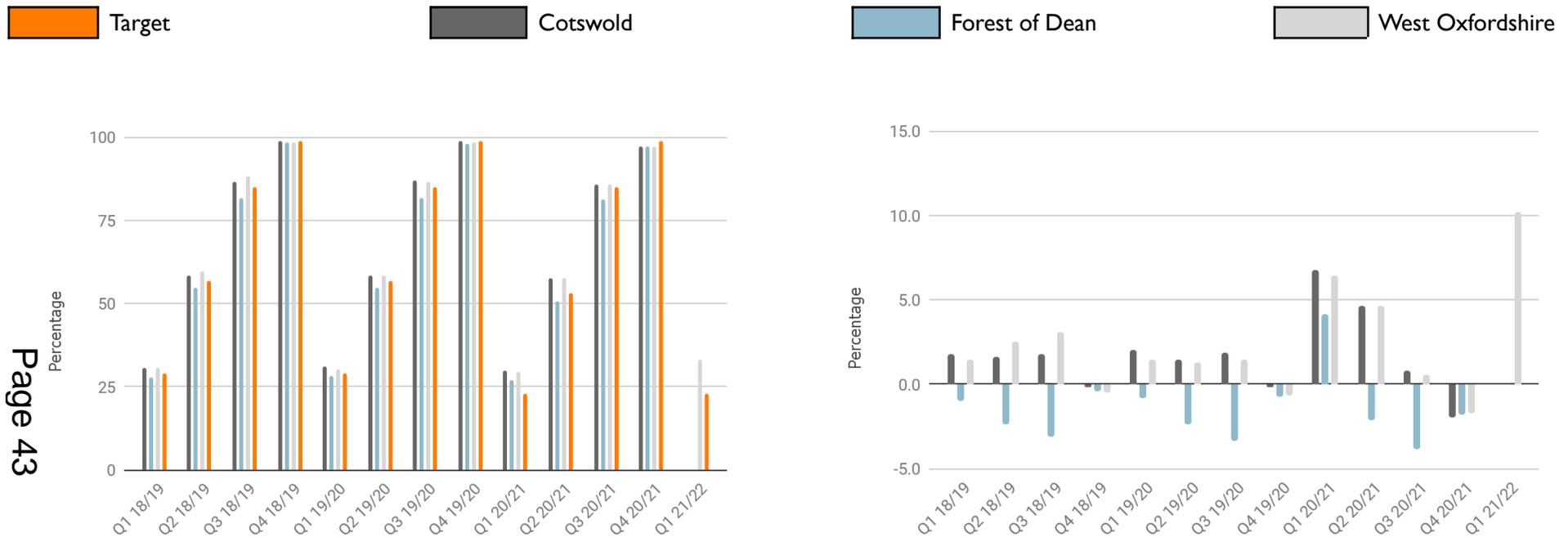
The service has reviewed its indicators to ensure that they are appropriate to customers' needs; the current thinking is that these indicators have become outdated and more emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that satisfaction for our services remains high while also taking into account the benefits of channel shift and providing more options for accessing our services.

Performance for the two indicators has fallen over the last six months but has started to improve. The percentage of calls responded to within 20 seconds improved by over 86% in July, while the abandon rate improved by nearly 50%. The service has started work to improve working practices and reduce call waiting time. The manager is also undertaking process benchmarking with other councils which will help us to understand our performance in a wider context.

Workloads are generally higher in the fourth quarter due to normal annual billing processes which impacted on performance; and performance reduced further in Q1 due to staff on long term sick leave and phased return. We are aware that staffing resilience is an issue, and it is a challenge to maintain sufficient staffing levels due to high turnover as staff take secondments (often not replaced) or other opportunities to progress in the organisation. This means that the service has to undertake regular recruitment exercises; however, it takes around six months to train each advisor with significant support required from experienced staff

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:

The collection rate appears to be returning to more normal levels, and is up on the same period of the previous year, and historically.

The service continues to support residents, 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.

Recovery action re-commenced at the beginning of Q1; and Magistrates Courts have re-opened for liability order hearings

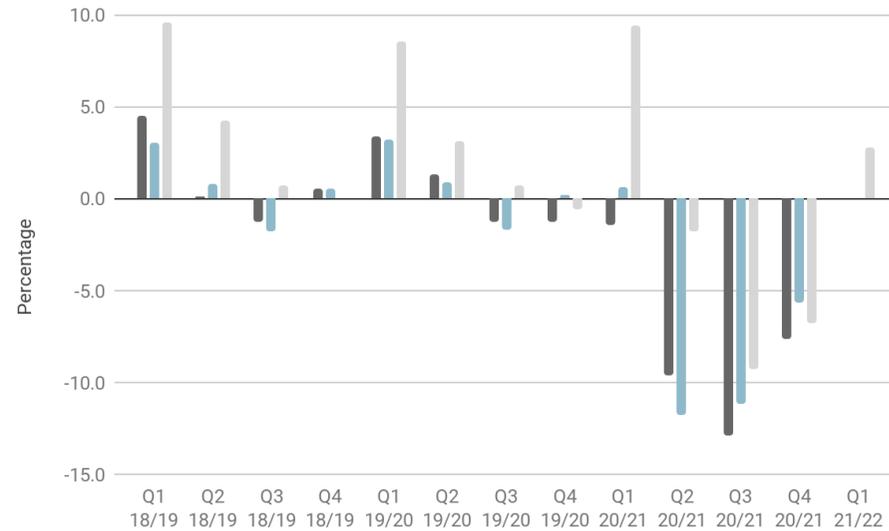
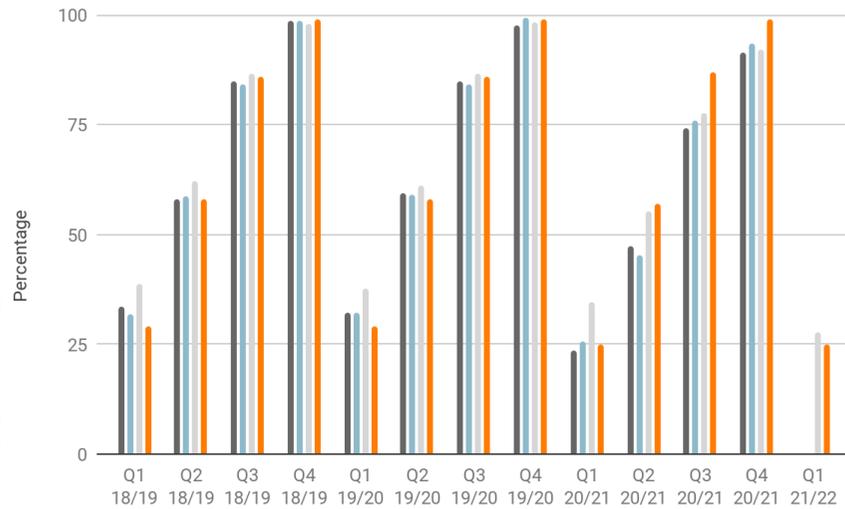
(Cumulative) Percentage of business rates collected & the difference between the percentage of business rates collected and the target

Target

Cotswold

Forest of Dean

West Oxfordshire



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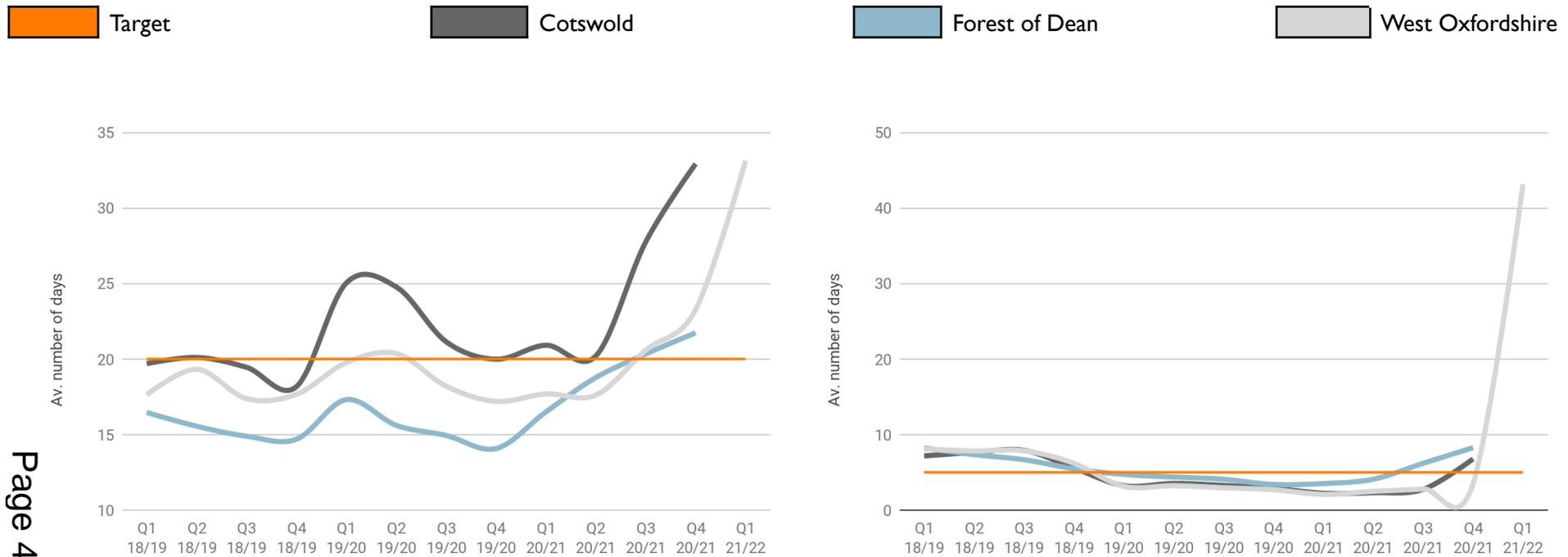
OBSERVATION:

At the end of Q1, the collection of business rates continues to be lower than pre-Covid times. In addition, the Council has had to make some refunds due to changes in rateable value.

The service is continuing to support businesses; sending out reminders, phoning and emailing businesses to encourage them to contact the Council so that we can support them via manageable repayment plans. The Magistrates Courts have re-opened for liability order hearings which will mean the Council can start to formal recovery action and enforce debts that are owed.

The Government has helped certain businesses with 100% business rate relief; the relief was reduced to 66% at the end of June 2021 for the remainder of the financial year. In addition, the window for applying for business grants closed at the end of June with final payments by the end of July 2021

(Cumulative) Average number of days taken to process Council Tax Support new claims and change events



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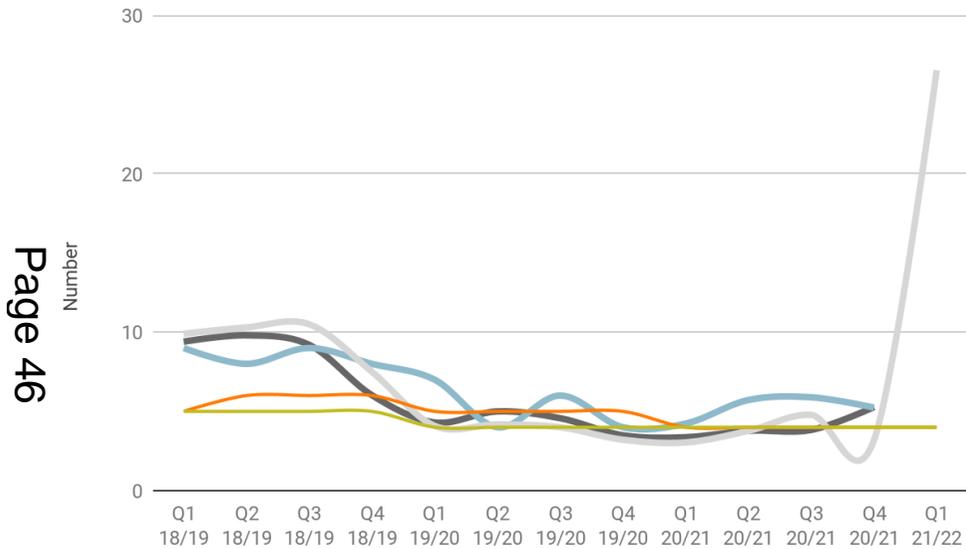
OBSERVATION:

Processing times have increased due to high workloads in the service due to a combination of reasons, as well as a backlog that built up during the implementation of the new revenues and benefits system. Since the start of the pandemic, Universal Credit claims have doubled which has resulted in a significant increase in CTS new claims and changes. In addition, the team has had to prioritise the administration of discretionary housing payments and providing welfare support to the Council's most vulnerable residents.

The backlog is being managed and cleared with the support of Civica OnDemand, and further resources have been requested; however, many councils are trying to access additional resources at this time. Furthermore, team members are still involved in systems work related to the new revenues and benefits system, as well as processing 'Test and Trace' claims which was due to finish at the end of June but has been extended to the end of September.

The aims of the new revenues and benefits system are to improve service delivery and make efficiencies but there are many steps to traverse. The Universal system has been implemented which allows resources to be directed to where it needs to be; and work continues on the open portal which will offer better facilities for clients to self-serve, which is expected to reduce service workloads and improve processing times

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



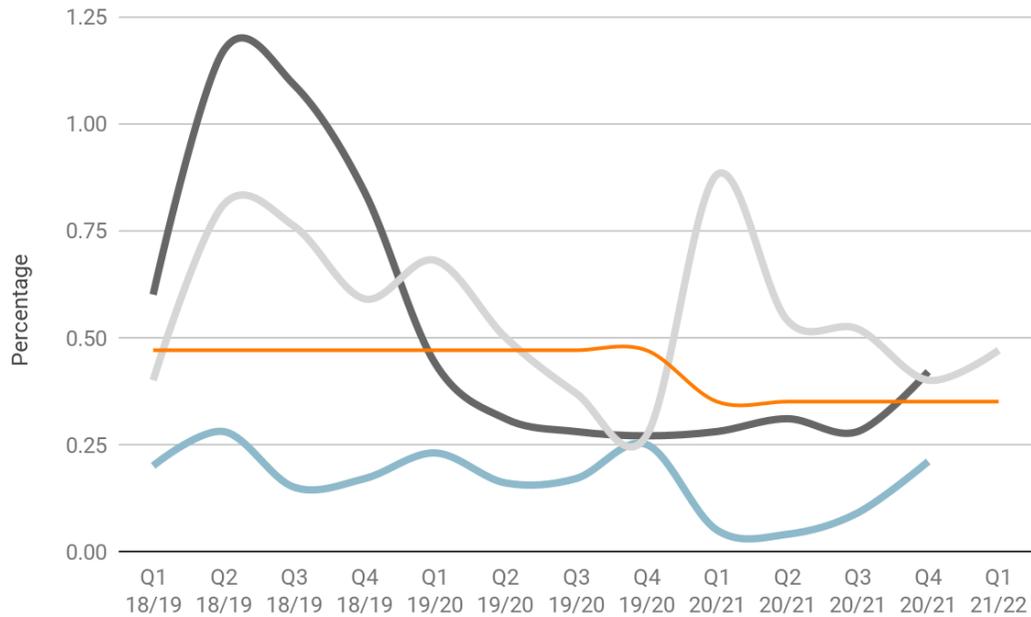
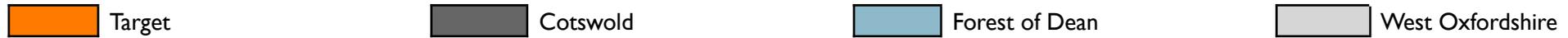
OBSERVATION:

Workloads are higher in Q1 due to end of year changes such as rent increases, pension amendments and earnings amendments; and additional workloads related to the implementation of the new revenues and benefits system, combined with Covid-19 related work, including processing 'Test and Trace' has continued to affect processing times. 'Test and Trace' was due to end on 30 June but has been extended to the end of September.

The Universal system, which allows resources to be directed to where they need to be, was implemented during the quarter, which created a software failure in the facility to automatically upload and apply changes of circumstances to system records. Around 80% of changes are applied in this way which makes the process much more efficient than manual handling. A software fix has now been applied and the automation reinstated which should be reflected in an improvement in performance in the second half of Q2.

The backlog is being managed and cleared with the support of Civica OnDemand, and further resources have been requested. The service will also be using temporary staff to process the simpler cases and help reduce the backlog

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



OBSERVATION:

Due to the high volume of HB change of circumstances, we take a sampling approach and target areas which we know have high error rates such as calculation of earnings.

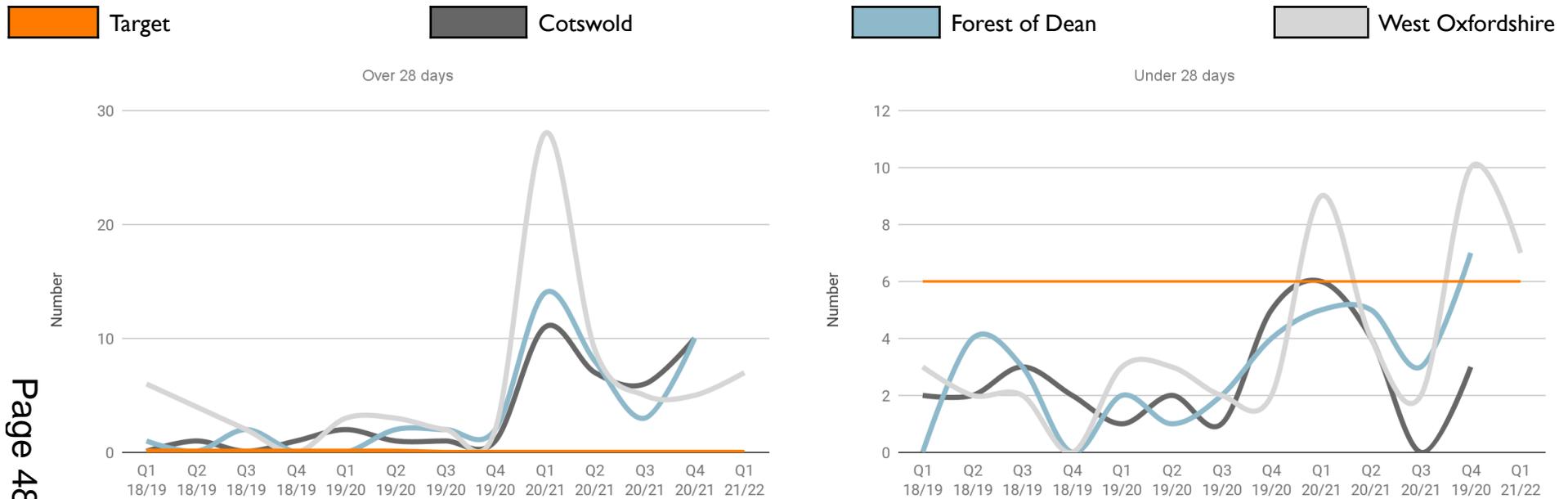
Although the stringent target set by the service was not achieved, the nationally set target of 0.47% was, and therefore, the RAG status has been set to 'Amber'.

Overall, the Council has performed well considering; the backlog of HB change of circumstances that was created during the implementation of the new revenues and benefits system, and the potential for admin delay.

There was a spike in Q1 of the previous year due to a small number of errors relating to high value over payments in the preceding quarter

Housing Support

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



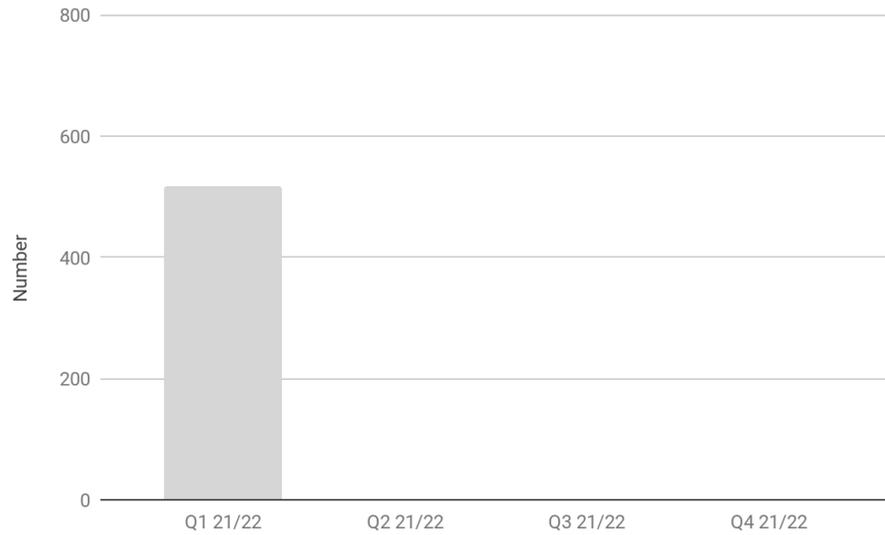
OBSERVATION:

During the national lockdowns, the number of households in emergency accommodation increased as councils were required to place all clients who were rough sleeping or at risk of imminent homelessness into emergency accommodation, regardless of priority need, and who had approached the Council. At the end of each lockdown, the numbers decreased, as exit plans were created to move households into more secure tenancies including housing association, supported accommodation, and private rented accommodation. Local Authorities are still being asked by the Government to ensure that anyone confirmed to be rough sleeping receives a swift offer of accommodation, however these numbers have now very much declined into a more manageable amount.

Currently, the number of households in emergency accommodation reflects the low availability of social housing stock due to low turnover and households not moving as much during the pandemic due to the Eviction Ban; and it also takes time for housing associations to prepare accommodation for new tenants. Void turnaround times are also increasing due to lack of building supplies/ materials as the effects of the pandemic continue on past the easing of restrictions as these often come from abroad. Placing clients in private rented accommodation is even more of a challenge as these properties are usually not affordable and have rents over and above allowable benefits. The majority of the households in emergency accommodation over 28 days tend to be single people who are difficult to move on due to the lack of one bedroom accommodation. Much progress has been made in the latter part of Q1, and into Q2 in finding alternative accommodation with the recruitment of specialist Temporary Accommodation Officers who are able to offer dedicated support and assistance with helping the clients move on successfully. These indicators have been set to 'Amber' in recognition of the challenging conditions.

The Old Court House, a property with 15 self-contained units is expected to become available in September 2021 and will help to reduce the numbers in emergency accommodation further.

(Snapshot) Number of Long Term Empty properties



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OBSERVATION:

The transition of the new Revenues and Benefits system from Northgate to Civica has presented the opportunity to cleanse the data including de-duplication, as well as streamlining the process for the three partner Councils. This work has identified inconsistencies in historical reporting; therefore, reporting will commence from Q1.

The new LTE officer (in post for three months) is contacting landlords/homeowners to ensure that the Council's data is accurate and up to date. Work is also being undertaken to segregate those properties where no further work is required; for example, Cottsway Housing has some older properties awaiting demolition,

Some properties such as retirement properties remain vacant.

Planning and Strategic Housing

(Cumulative) Percentage of major planning applications determined

% of all applications completed within an agreed timeframe



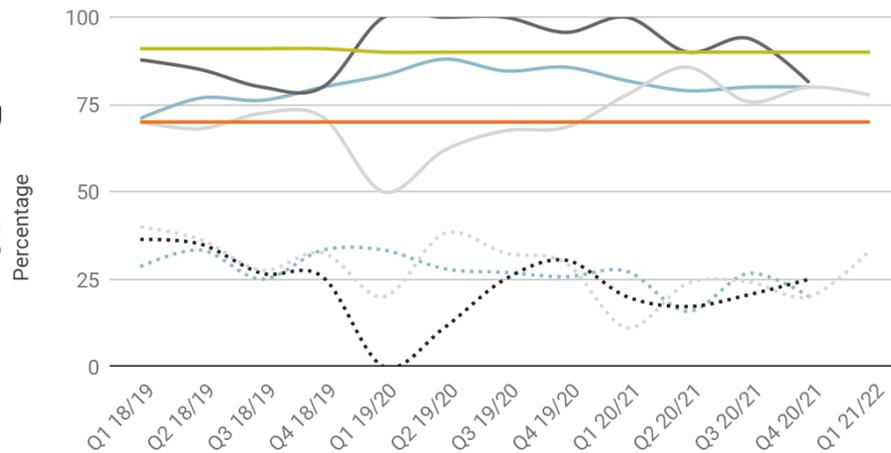
% of all application completed within 13 weeks

----- Cotswold

----- Forest of Dean

----- West Oxfordshire

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OBSERVATION:

The service has reported that the increase in planning applications coming in over the last year is projected to continue due to an overstimulated market.

The increasing numbers coming through combined with reduced capacity caused by increased staff turnover and reduced efficiency in the planning process as a result of Covid-19 has created a backlog.

Given improvements made to processes and a gradual return to the office environment it is anticipated that the outlook should start to improve. Some staff have already returned to the office as not all aspects of the statutory process can be or are best achieved electronically; however, social distancing rules remain in place in the office. Site visits continue to be onerous, and due to high infection rates, staff are being cautious. On the other hand, response turnaround times from consultees such as the County and the Environment Agency have improved.

There are a number of improvement projects scheduled and underway which the Customer Experience Improvement Team (CEIT) will help to deliver alongside the planning service, which has already addressed the build up of applications awaiting validation and improved workflow in general. Furthermore, approval has been given for additional resources and recruitment has commenced.

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.

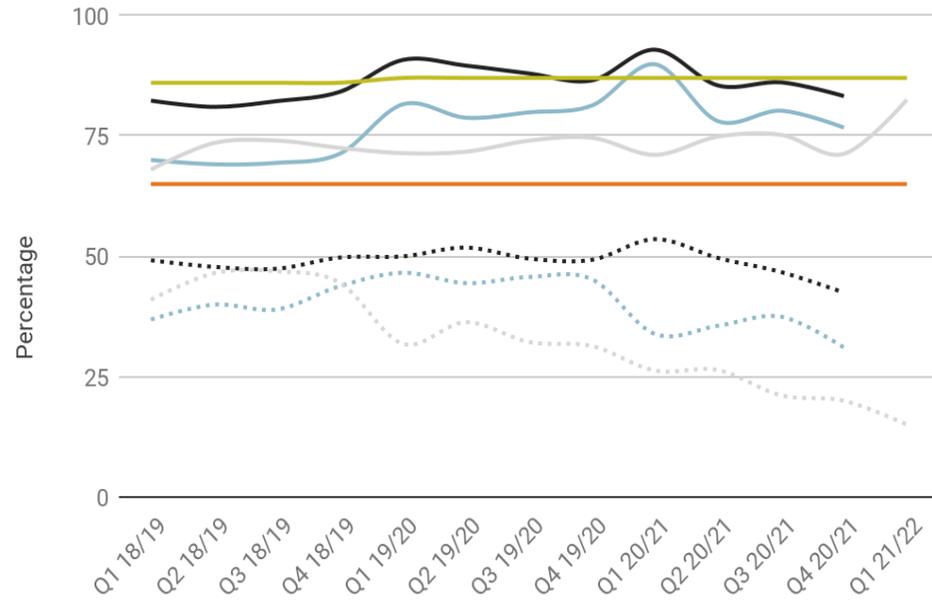
Extensions of times are often a result of consultees requesting changes to the scheme or because the consultee response is essential but has not been received within the timetable. They are also used where officers are working proactively with applicants to improve schemes and make developments acceptable.

(Cumulative) Percentage of minor planning applications determined

% of all applications completed within agreed timescales



% of all applications completed within 8 weeks



OBSERVATION:

86 minor applications were determined in Q1 compared to 76 in Q1 of the previous year.

Performance has improved this quarter. Case officers have high caseloads but are managing them carefully, and using extensions of time effectively.

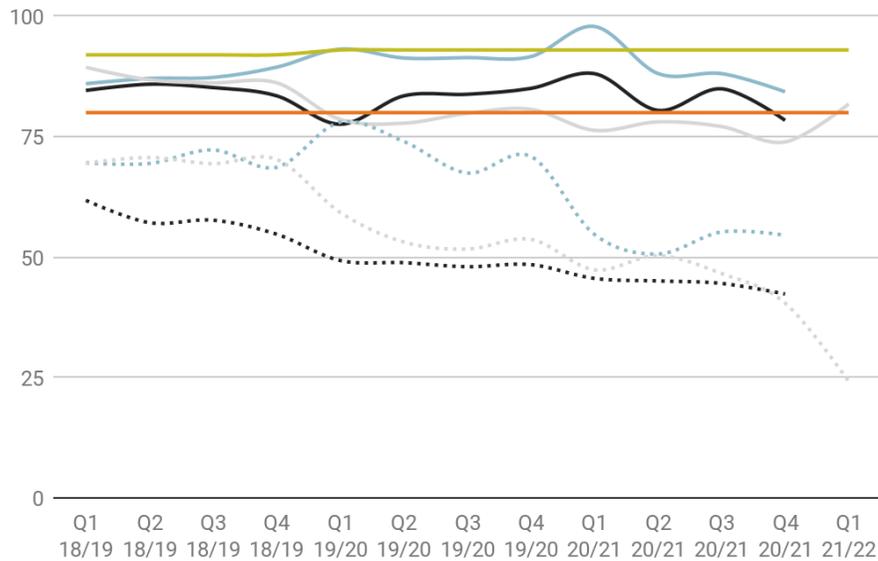
See Observation for Major applications for further explanation

(Cumulative) Percentage of other planning applications determined

% of all applications completed within agreed timescales



% of all applications completed within 8 weeks



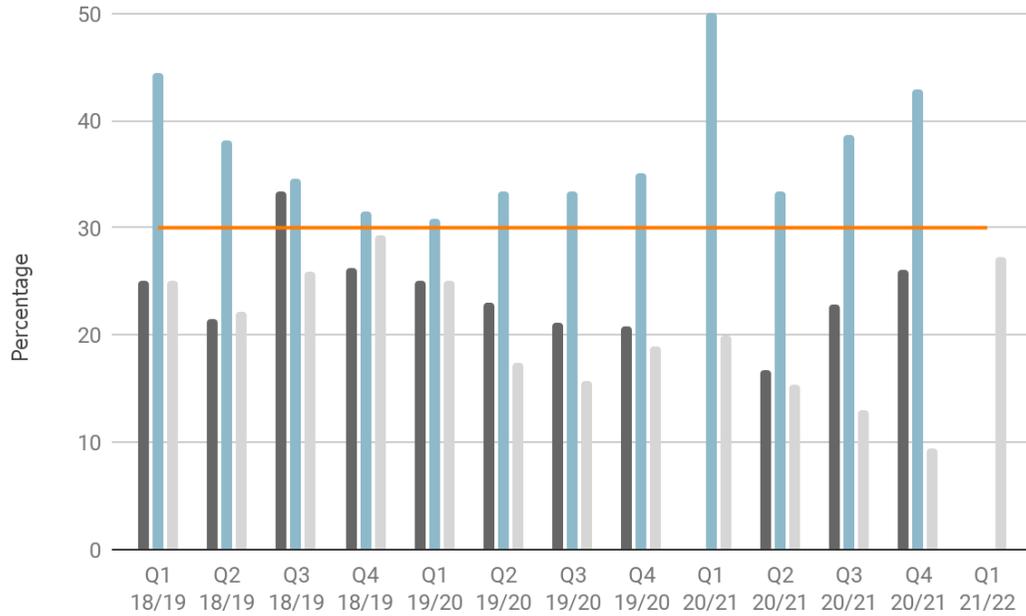
OBSERVATION:

330 other applications were determined in the quarter, around 100 more than in Q1 of the previous year.

Performance has improved this quarter. Case officers have high caseloads but are managing them carefully, and using extensions of time effectively.

See Observation for Major applications for further explanation

(Cumulative) Percentage of planning appeals allowed

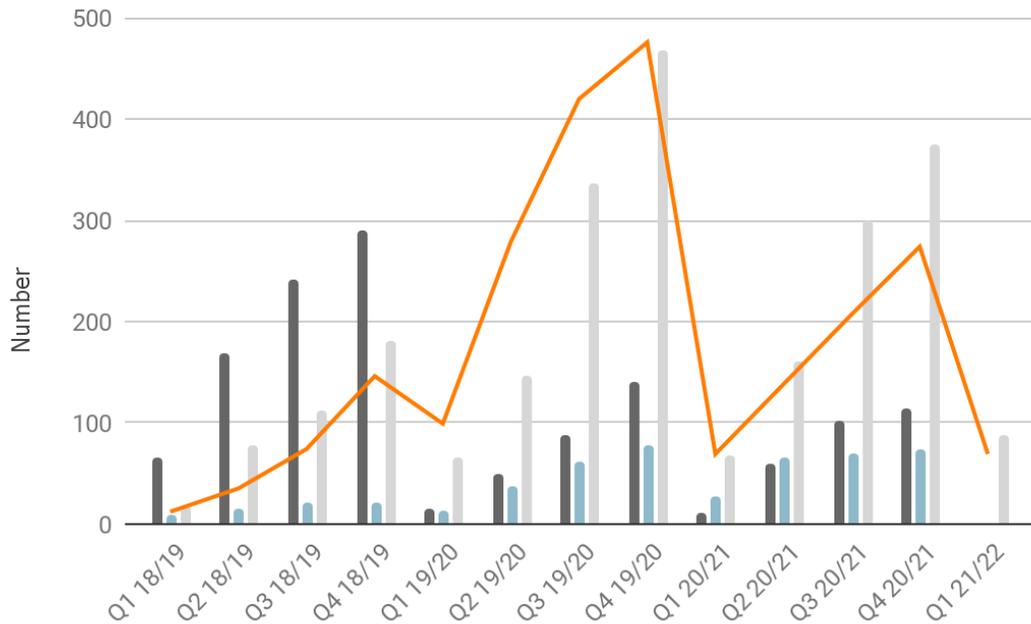


OBSERVATION:
Three out of 11 planning appeals were allowed in Q1

(Cumulative) Number of affordable homes delivered



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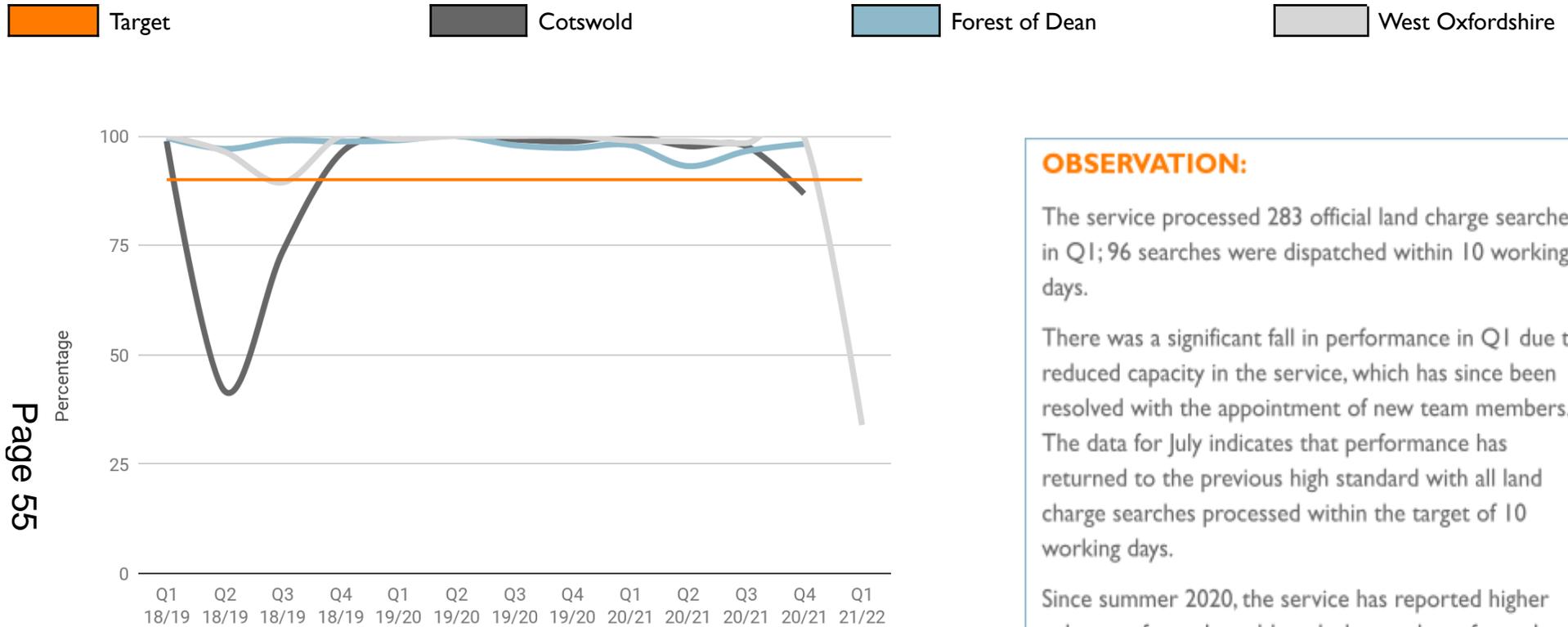


OBSERVATION:

Eighty-eight affordable homes were completed; 53 for affordable rent and 35 shared ownership; which included 22 homes at the Pillars, Chipping Norton; 13 at Shilton Road, Burford; and eight at Burford Road, Minster Lovell; in addition to homes in Witney, Bampton and E. Carterton. Ten of the shared ownership homes at Witney and Minster Lovell are part of the WODC/Heylo scheme supported by Growth Deal funding.

Developers and Registered Providers are reporting challenges related to rising costs and availability of labour and materials, however, the forecasted number of completions through the year remains high

Percentage of land charge searches dispatched within 10 working days



OBSERVATION:

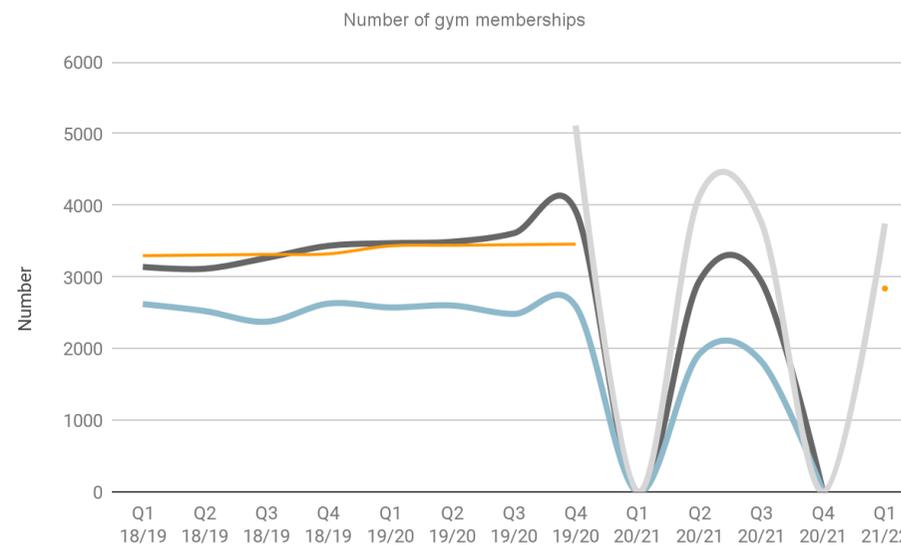
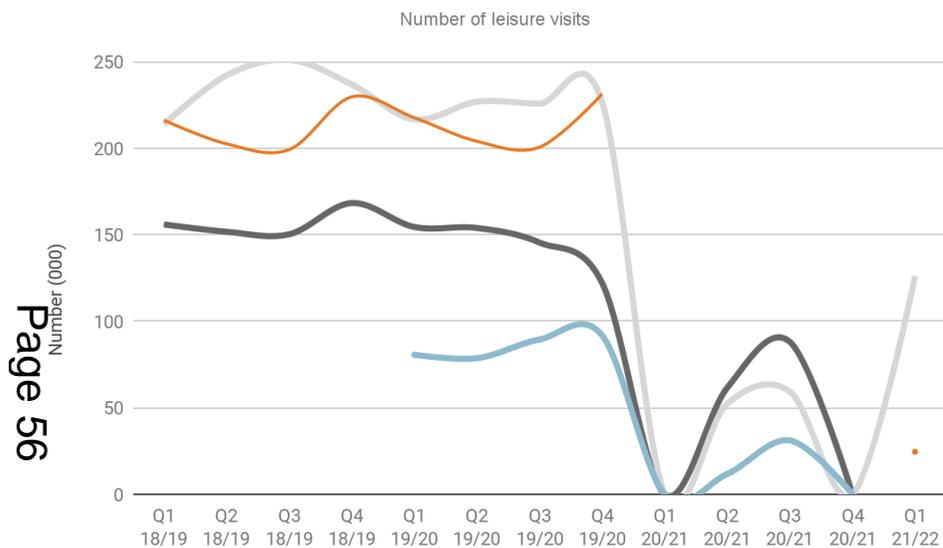
The service processed 283 official land charge searches in Q1; 96 searches were dispatched within 10 working days.

There was a significant fall in performance in Q1 due to reduced capacity in the service, which has since been resolved with the appointment of new team members. The data for July indicates that performance has returned to the previous high standard with all land charge searches processed within the target of 10 working days.

Since summer 2020, the service has reported higher volumes of searches, although the number of searches reported in Q1 appears to indicate that they may be slowing. The 'stamp duty holiday' will be phased out from the end of June 2021

Leisure

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



OBSERVATION:

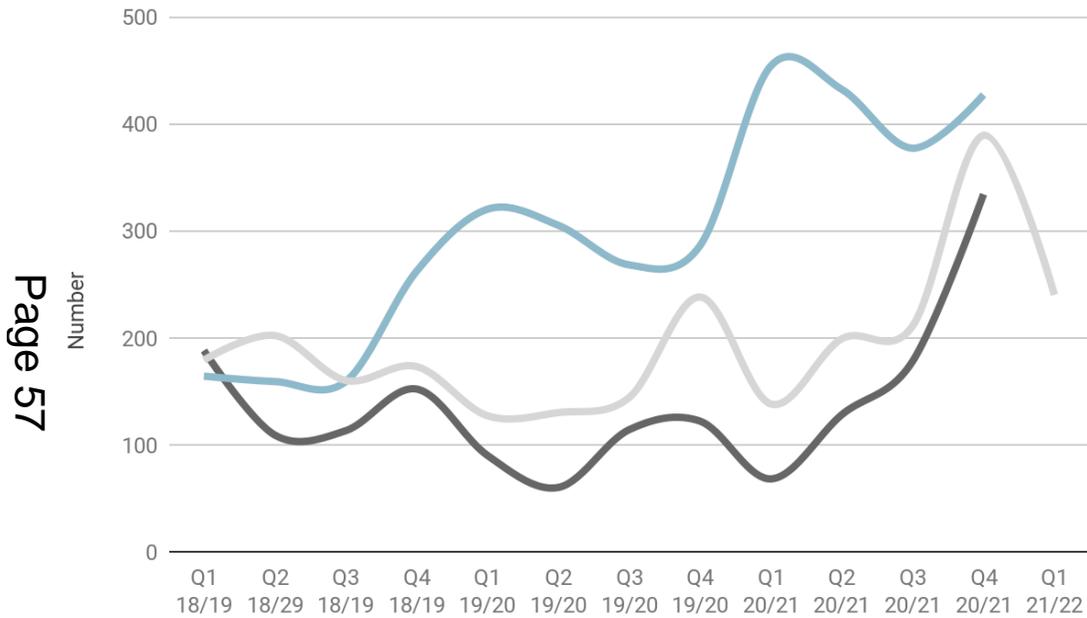
Since April 2021 leisure centres have been following the Government Roadmap and have been able to relax Covid measures, with the final date for relaxation of all measures set for 19 July 2021. The return of customers has been encouraging with many users feeling protected under the new Covid protocols (one-way systems, sanitiser stations, pre-booking etc.) The space available within the facilities has also helped to allow increased numbers without contravening social distancing requirements. As targets were set prior to the end of the last lockdown they were conservative, and we have seen a strong return in usage. The targets are set to increase each quarter during 2021-22, so it may become more challenging should there be further Covid restrictions. Gym memberships are lower than pre-Covid levels but show growth across the District with the exception of the Windrush, which is competing with the new PureGym in Witney that has attracted a number of users due to its budget pricing. Carterton Leisure Centre is looking positive and the re-opening of the trampoline park has also encouraged more users

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



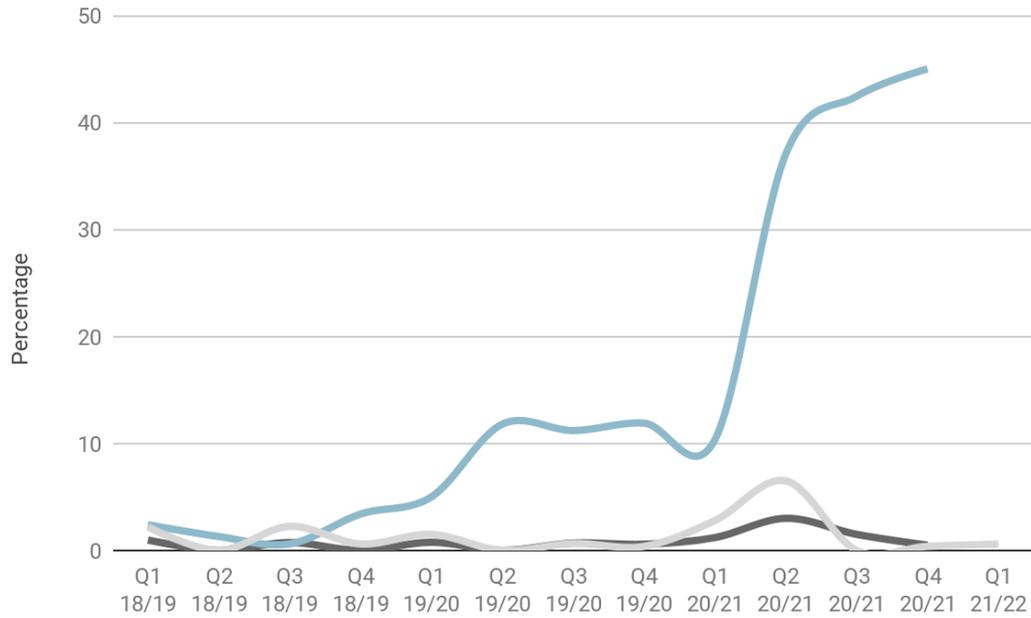
OBSERVATION:

An increase in fly tips has been reported nationally which coincided with the start of Covid-19, and this appeared to be reflected locally. In the most recent quarter, there has been a sharp decrease which again has coincided with the start of the lifting of restrictions in April 2021.

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



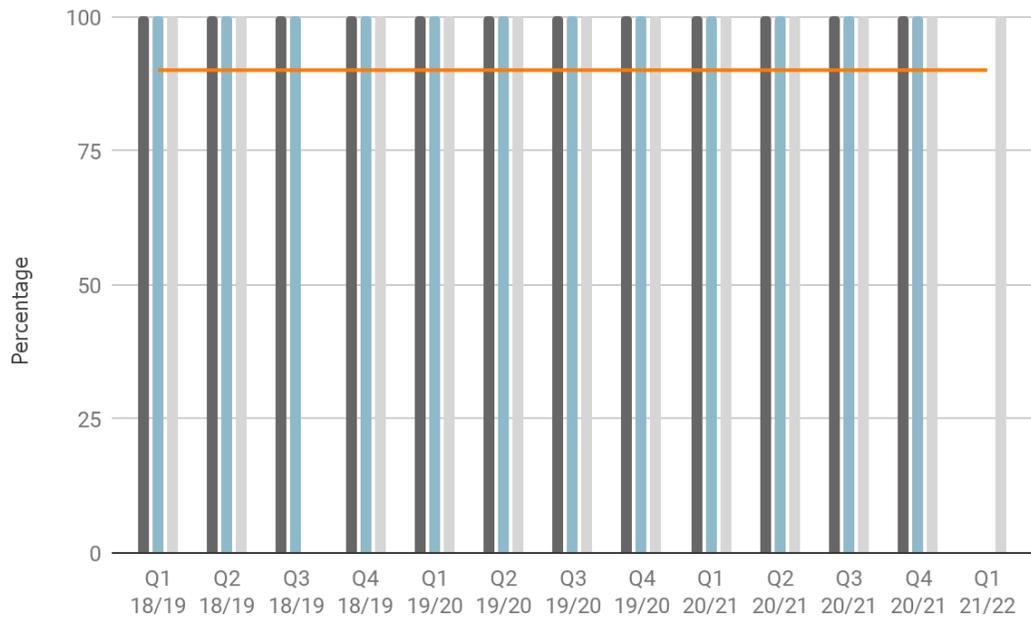
OBSERVATION:

In Q1, there were 342 notifications of fly tips, a significant decrease on the 521 notifications on the previous quarter. Two Fixed Penalty Notices were issued. In addition, officers have been focussing on tackling fly tips at bring banks. Eighty-nine warning letters were issued to residents and businesses who left inappropriate waste, reminding them of their duty of care.

West prioritises the removal of fly tips, and where evidence is available, it is investigated by officers. The Council will always take enforcement action if fly tipping is witnessed.

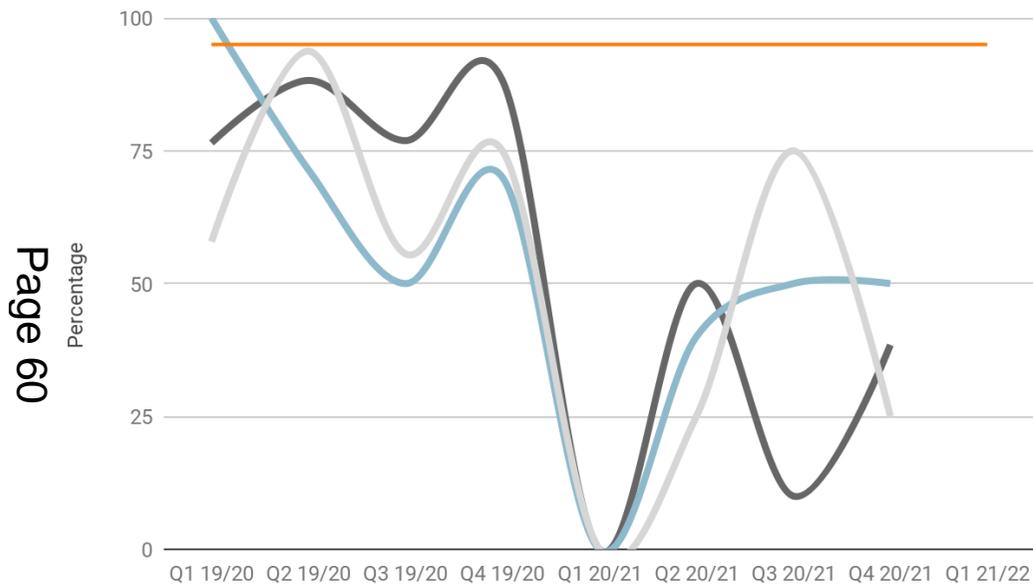
Cotswold and West operate a small multidisciplinary team. In contrast, at Forest of Dean, there is a dedicated Community Warden team

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:
 One notifications of an E. coli outbreak was assessed within one day

Percentage of high risk food premises inspected within target timescales



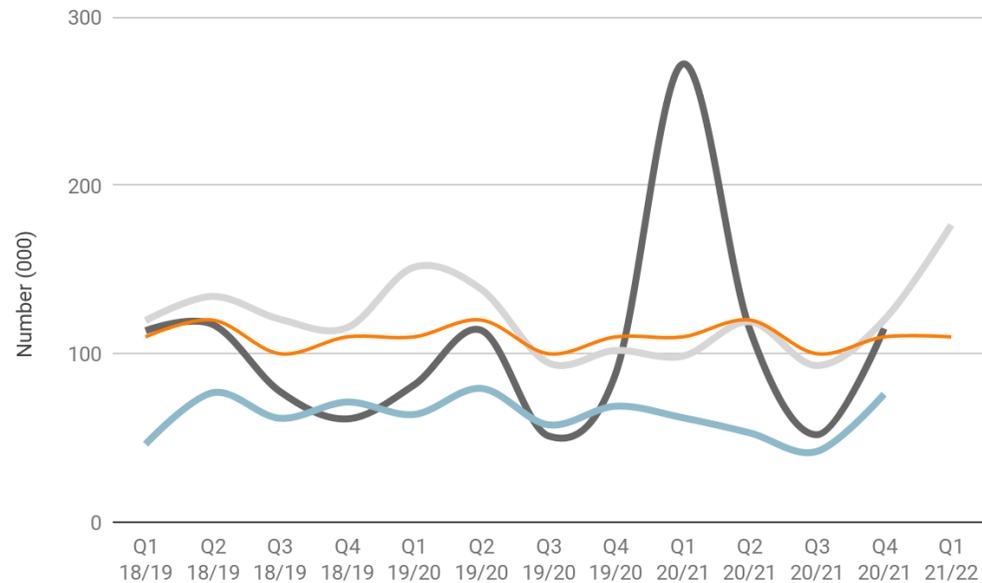
OBSERVATION:

No high risk premises were due a food inspection in Q1. There are two high risk premises (outstanding from previous quarters) which have received a remote inspection but require a site inspection. These inspections have been prioritised.

The FSA has put in place a recovery plan to ensure that both new businesses are prioritised based on risk; and the backlog of the highest risk categories (A's and B's) are cleared by 31 March 2022 and 30 June 2022 respectively. Although officers have cleared the majority of high risk inspections, a backlog of the lower risk categories has started to build up. In addition, reactive work/service requests have to be dealt with.

The service is experiencing some capacity and skills issues, and the recruitment of senior officers is proving difficult. There have been two recruitment campaigns over the last six months, and another one is underway targeted at newly qualified officers who will be trained up

Number of missed bin per 100,000 scheduled collections



OBSERVATION:

The number of missed bins has increased over the last quarter and is largely as a result of a loss of round knowledge from staffing issues related to positive Covid-19 cases, crew members working within the same bubble having to then self-isolate, as well as more recently, the 'pingdemic' which has affected crews more widely.

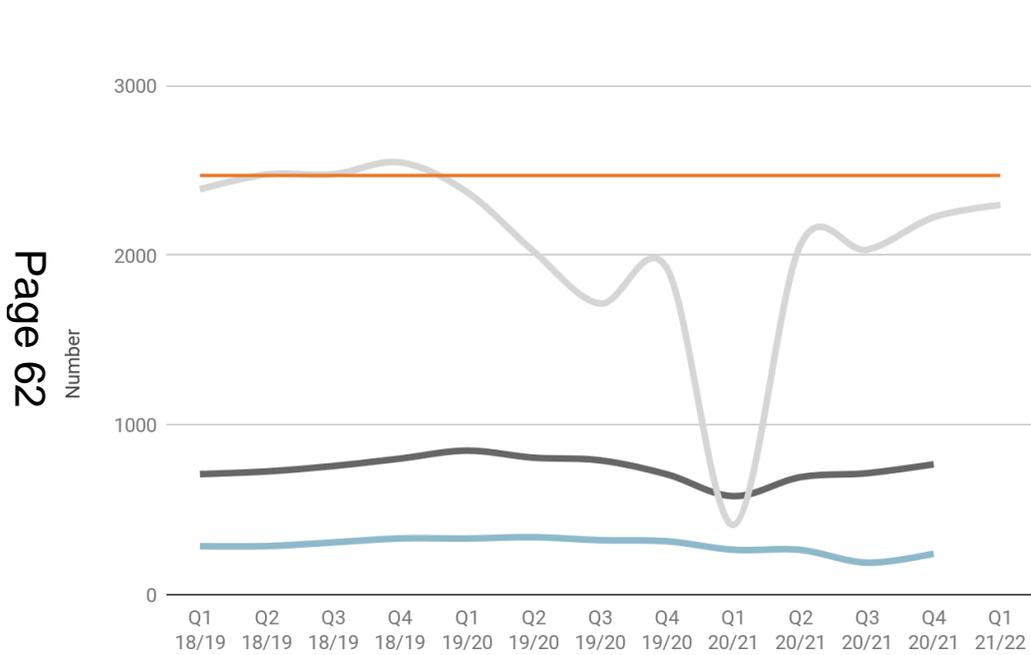
The staffing issues have been further exacerbated by the national shortage of HGV drivers. The use of agency staff and crew members who are unfamiliar with the allocated rounds will always unfortunately result in an increase in the number of misses.

Due to exceptional weather in May, there was insufficient capacity to transfer the large quantities of garden waste presented which resulted in an increase in the number of missed garden waste bins.

Performance is expected to improve from 16 August when crews will not have to self-isolate if double jabbed following contact with a positive Covid case, although they are advised to take a PCR test. In addition, the introduction of In-Cab technology in mid September should help to both provide a more accurate picture of the number of misses as well as reduce the number of misses by providing all crew members with assistance to find all of the properties on their particular round. Evidence has been seen elsewhere of missed collection reducing by 30% when In-Cab is introduced and so this coupled with reduced staff shortages primarily as a result of the pandemic, will benefit service delivery.

Parking

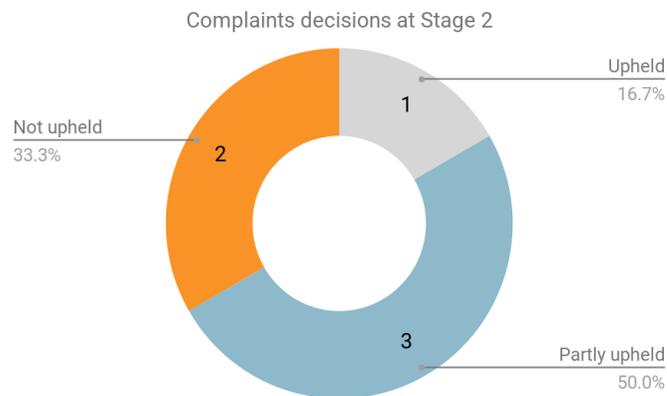
Total hours spent undertaking on and off-street parking enforcement visits



OBSERVATION:

The Team returned to full enforcement activities in April. Enforcement hours were down slightly against the target. The service is still holding a vacant post (funded from PCN activity) while usage levels are relatively low but are beginning to pick up. Officers have also supported 'test and trace' and food deliveries when requested. This indicator has been set to 'Amber' to recognise that car park usage levels are lower than pre-Covid times, and the temporary reduction in staff

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

Agenda Item 9

 <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	<p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p>Cabinet: Wednesday 15 September 2021</p>
<p>Report Number</p>	<p>Agenda Item No. 9</p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p>Finance Performance Report 2021-22 Quarter One</p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>Cllr Suzi Coul, Cabinet Member for Finance Email: suzi.coul@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Elizabeth Griffiths, Section 151 Officer Tel: (01993) 861188 Email: elizabeth.griffiths@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>This report provides details of the Council's financial performance at the end of 2021-22 Quarter One (Q1).</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Annex A – Detailed revenue budget comparison Annex B – Q1 Capital spend against budget</p>
<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>That the 2021/22 Q1 finance performance be noted</p>
<p>Corporate priorities</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. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE – Q1 2021/22

- I.1. Significant variances and those of note are explored in the body of this report. A full list of variances by cost centre is included in Annex A.
- I.2. Q1 results overall are as expected with a few notable outliers. In several budget lines we have received grants which have created surpluses in Q1 but will be spent over the year. Green waste is significantly exceeding budget but this is due to an error where the increase in fees was not reflected in the budget. Car parking penalty charges is the one area which is significantly worse than expected. Income was hugely down in 2020/21 but while the budget expected this to bounce back in 2021/22 this has yet to be seen. Restrictions were still in place in Q1 however so we may yet see some recovery.
- I.3. One of the issues exacerbated by Covid is the Council's level of aged debt but WODC have successfully engaged a credit controller on a fixed term contract and this is being addressed.
- I.4. Overall Q1 is encouragingly on track.
- I.5.

Revenue Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - Quarter 1, 1st April 2021 to 30th June 2021

Original Budget 2021/22 £	Q1 position		
	Profiled Budget £	Actual Exp £	Variance (under) / over spend £

Service Area

Democratic and Committee Services	952,702	296,755	322,080	25,324
Environmental & Regulatory Services	478,583	80,083	97,311	17,228
Environmental Services	7,088,145	778,804	659,039	(119,765)
Finance, Human Resources & Procurement	889,592	257,121	254,277	(2,845)
ICT, Change & Customer Services	1,801,649	671,097	685,412	14,315
Land, Legal & Property	863,453	298,855	270,637	(28,218)
Leisure & Communities	2,057,791	234,937	167,602	(67,335)
Planning & Strategic Housing	712,370	170,703	155,128	(15,574)
Revenues & Housing Support	894,923	323,911	144,477	(179,434)
Investment Property and Retained Services	(1,870,756)	(1,439,929)	(1,353,906)	86,023
Total cost of services	13,868,452	1,672,338	1,402,057	(270,281)

Plus:

Investment income receipts	(787,778)	(95,264)	(43,850)	51,413
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Cost of services before financing:

13,080,674	1,577,074	1,358,206	(218,868)
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- I.6. While the Business Support grant schemes are now closed with only some ARG left to pay before the end of September, the requirement for post assurance work from MHCLG is significant and resource intensive. It has been agreed that the Counter Fraud Unit, based in Cotswold District Council and charged to the Internal Audit cost centre will require

additional resource to undertake this additional work well into Q4. The underspend that is currently showing in the cost centre therefore is expected to diminish over the course of the year and be fully spent by the end of Q4. This cost will however be offset with the use of “New Burdens Funding” which was given by the Govt to help local authorities cover the vastly increased administrative burdens that came with Covid initiatives such as grants.

- 1.7. An agreement has been reached with our Leisure Supplier, GLL, to waive the Contract Management fee for 2021/22 as we did in 2020/21. This was reflected in the budget that was approved in February. GLL will use all surpluses generated to repay their outstanding debt to the Council and the expectation is that this could be cleared in the current financial year. Management fees will be due again in full from April 2022.
- 1.8. Income from car parking penalty charge notices was significantly impacted by Covid with the final 2020/21 result being only 22% of budget for the year. In Q1 this trend has continued with performance to budget sitting at 17.5%, dropping to 15% to the end of July. The hope is that as High Street shopping recovers, so will this income stream but we cannot expect it to achieve the budget as set.
- 1.9. Over the course of 2020/21 we lost a significant proportion of our Trade Waste customers when lockdown closed their businesses meaning waste removal was no longer required. Invoices are raised twice a year and the Q1 income has proved to be £45,000 below target. It must also be remembered that this income represents what has been invoiced, not what has been paid. The current level of overdue debt is £123,000. £95,000 of this relates to 2020/21. A Credit Controller has just started on a fixed term contract to collect outstanding debt for the Council across this and all service areas.
- 1.10. During 2020/21 the Council entered into payment plans with many of our tenants to spread the cost of their rent across the 2020/21 financial year and beyond. These payment plans continue in place and monies relating to last year are being recouped. The Estates team are proactively managing each tenant to ensure that payment plans are effective.
- 1.11. Despite our accounting outturn position on Council Tax in 2020/21 being a surplus, the payment arrears for the year were significantly higher than normal. This was a direct result of the increase in Local Council Tax Support and the closure of the Magistrates Court resulting in no Liability Orders being raised in the year. As at 31st March 2021 the arrears relating to 2020/21 were £2,654,906. The Recovery Team have excelled in Q1 in reducing these arrears by £524,660.
- 1.12. The Extended Retail Discount scheme introduced by the Government for 2020/21 has been modified for this year with a total of £12 million of additional reliefs being awarded to businesses. As with last year, this impacts on the Council’s cashflow as we are unable to collect this income but we are still required to pay out the Government and County shares of Business Rates income based on the NNDR I estimated figure calculated in January of this year. The Government is therefore providing the Council with S31 compensation grant to offset 100% of the loss. In the same way as last year the Council will be required to pay back 60% of this compensation grant in Q4 of the following financial year – representative of the Government (50%) & County (10%) shares. In Q4 of this year we will pay back £9.4 million of S31 grant relating to last year which we are holding in Earmarked Reserves.
- 1.13. Similar to Council Tax, Business Rates arrears relating to 2020/21 were much higher than usual. As at 31st March 2021 the arrears relating to 2020/21 were £1,871,523 with £509,885 being recovered year to date.

- 1.14. The shortfall in Treasury income of £51k is understood to be timing differences but will be closely monitored.
- 1.15. Capital spend against budget is noted in Annex B.
- 1.16. A good level of further progress has been made with the S106 project with a webinar for Town, Parish and District Councillors being planned for the end of September. We have already seen an increased number of projects and claims and expect this welcome distribution of support to the district to continue to escalate.

2. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1. None

3. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 3.1. None

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1. None

5. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 5.1. None

Annex A - Comparison of Q1 budget

Q1 position		
Profiled Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
£	£	£

Democratic Services

DRM001-Democratic Representation and Mgmt	84,090	4,020	(80,070)
DRM002-Support To Elected Bodies	97,238	99,741	2,503
ELE001-Registration of Electors	14,900	11,334	(3,566)
ELE002-District Elections	18,925	85,696	66,771
ELE004-Parliamentary Elections	0	35,953	35,953
ELE005-Parish Elections	0	2,245	2,245
ELE006-County Elections	0	(28,775)	(28,775)
ELE007-European Elections	0	0	0
ELE008-Police & Crime Commissioner Elections	0	25,512	25,512
SUP001-Administration	81,603	86,353	4,750

Total - Democratic Services

296,755	322,080	25,324
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DRM001 - CAB Annual Commissioning £80,000 invoice not yet received

Elections - Timing difference between expenditure on May 2021 election and final settlement by Electoral Claims Unit for Parliamentary & PCC elections

Q1 position		
Profiled Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
£	£	£

Environmental & Regulatory Services

BUC001-Building Control - Fee Earning Work	(35,281)	(32,490)	2,791
BUC002-Building Control - Non Fee Earning Work	17,014	17,451	438
EMPO01-Emergency Planning	3,406	2,132	(1,274)
ESM001-Environment - Service Mgmt & Supp Serv	26,610	23,448	(3,162)
PSH002-Private Sector Housing-Condition of Dwellings	750	0	(750)
REG001-Environmental Health General	0	2,952	2,952
REG002-Licensing	(24,106)	(7,691)	16,415
REG009-Environmental Protection	33,471	30,640	(2,831)
REG011-Authorised Process	(12,000)	(10,185)	1,815
REG013-Pollution Control	30,724	29,548	(1,176)
REG016-Food Safety	31,996	33,163	1,168
REG021-Statutory Burials	1,250	(90)	(1,340)
TAC309-Other Trading Services - Markets	6,250	8,432	2,182

Total - Environmental & Regulatory Services

80,083	97,311	17,228
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REG002 - there is an irregular spread of invoicing for licencing across the year. The £16,000 underachievement of income is a timing difference which is likely to reverse by Q3

Annex A - Comparison of Q1 budget

Q1 position		
Profiled Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
£	£	£

Finance, Human Resources & Procurement

SUP003-Human Resources	41,311	37,554	(3,757)
HLD302-Miscellaneous Cash	0	(169)	(169)
SUP009-Accountancy	77,216	76,755	(461)
SUP010-Internal Audit	74,979	49,846	(25,133)
SUP011-Creditors	10,370	7,495	(2,874)
SUP012-Debtors	13,831	12,097	(1,734)
SUP013-Payroll	14,170	12,303	(1,866)
SUP019-Health & Safety	7,654	7,850	197
SUP020-Training & Development	6,650	6,821	171
SUP033-Central Purchasing	8,708	8,346	(362)
SUP035-Insurances	2,233	2,291	57

Total - Finance, Human Resources & Procurement

257,121	221,190	(35,932)
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SUP010 - Additional expenditure will be incurred throughout the year on grant post assurance work which is likely to continue into Q4

ICT, Change & Customer Services

SUP002-Consultation, Policy & Research	29,069	29,265	196
HLD301-ICT Purchases	0	0	0
SUP005-ICT	412,531	422,400	9,868
SUP006-Telephones	(10,000)	1,329	11,329
SUP008-Reception/Customer Services	114,864	114,250	(614)
SUP014-Cashiers	1,575	0	(1,575)
SUP041-Business Solutions	83,728	85,292	1,564
TMR002-Street Furniture & Equipment	(1,200)	(5,439)	(4,239)
TOU002-Tourist/Visitor Information Centre	40,530	39,016	(1,513)

Total - ICT, Change & Customer Services

671,097	686,113	15,016
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Annex A - Comparison of Q1 budget

	Q1 position		
	Profiled Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
	£	£	£
Land, Legal & Property			
ADB301-3 Welch Way (Town Centre Shop)	15,018	14,086	(931)
ADB302-Guildhall	3,982	5,290	1,307
ADB303-Woodgreen	115,953	111,932	(4,021)
ADB304-Elmfield	68,145	75,209	7,064
ADB305-Corporate Buildings	99,001	85,738	(13,264)
ADB306-Depot	(17,663)	(16,015)	1,648
LLC001-Local Land Charges	(39,492)	(30,340)	9,152
SUP004-Legal	61,220	48,067	(13,152)
TAC303-Swain Court & Newman Court Ind Est Witney	(7,309)	(23,329)	(16,021)
Total - Land, Legal & Property	298,855	270,637	(28,218)

ADB305 - There is a £12,000 timing difference for general & planned maintenance which will reverse in Q2

SUP004 - In Q1 there has not been the need to engage external legal expertise (Barristers), resulting in an underspend of £8,000. The remaining underspend is from books and partnership staff. At year end there is expected to be a small underspend of around £10,000.

TAC303 - A £16,000 credit note relating to a prior financial year has been received producing an underspend in rent payments that will continue to the end of the year

Annex A - Comparison of Q1 budget

Q1 position		
Profiled Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
£	£	£

Leisure & Communities

CCR001-Community Safety (Crime Reduction)	16,869	10,339	(6,530)
CCR002-Building Safer Communities	525	(6,642)	(7,167)
CCT001-CCTV	21,550	25,720	4,170
CSM001-Cultural Strategy	22,091	19,206	(2,885)
CUL001-Arts Development	13,559	13,536	(23)
ECD001-Economic Development	20,933	15,916	(5,018)
OPS003-Countryside	0	0	0
REC001-Sports Development	(6,918)	(15,139)	(8,222)
REC002-Recreational Facilities Development	12,421	12,984	563
REC003-Play	10,126	9,537	(588)
REC301-Village Halls	3,312	3,397	85
REC302-Contract Management	(92,068)	(136,355)	(44,287)
SUP016-Finance - Performance Review	24,992	25,404	412
TOU001-Tourism Strategy and Promotion	41,481	43,636	2,155

Total - Leisure & Communities

88,875	21,540	(67,335)
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REC302 - There is invoiced income of £39,743 for the Solar Fund. An agreement has been reached with GLL to repay the Council £428,544 when they return to profitability which is expected to be before the beginning of the 2022/23 financial year.

Annex A - Comparison of Q1 budget

	Q1 position		
	Profiled Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
	£	£	£
Environmental Services			
CCC001-Climate Change	21,582	24,101	2,519
COR301-Policy Initiatives - Shopmobility	5,239	3,758	(1,481)
CPK001-Car Parks - Off Street	88,864	124,179	35,315
CPK011-On Street Civil Parking Enforcement	3,911	35,904	31,994
ENI002-Grounds Maintenance	120,100	120,630	530
ENI303-Landscape Maintenance	18,460	22,145	3,685
FLD001-Flood Defence and Land Drainage	36,661	28,525	(8,137)
REG004-Dog Warden	13,830	17,754	3,924
REG005-Public Health Sewerage	(6)	0	6
REG018-Pest Control	3,500	(4,262)	(7,762)
REG019-Public Conveniences	43,532	38,176	(5,356)
REG023-Environmental Strategy	20,017	18,546	(1,471)
RYC001-Recycling	653,627	638,484	(15,143)
RYC002-Green Waste	(743,239)	(907,495)	(164,255)
STC004-Environmental Cleansing	257,848	265,153	7,305
TRW001-Trade Waste	(174,660)	(152,748)	21,912
TRW002-Clinical Waste	(275)	0	275
WST001-Household Waste	425,398	414,444	(10,954)
WST004-Bulky Household Waste	3,292	(3,783)	(7,075)
WST301-Env. Services Depot, Downs Rd, Witney	(18,875)	(24,251)	(5,376)
Total - Environmental Services	778,804	659,260	(119,544)

On Street & Offstreet Parking - Q1 has not shown any recovery in PCN income compared to last year's outturn. It is expected that there will be some improvement over time but the year end income position will be significantly underachieved compared to the budget of £250,000

RYC002 - There is an overachievement to budget for Green Bin collections of £179,000 but this is expected income due to the agreed price increase. The variance is due to an error in updating the budget. The budget for 2022/23 will be amended in line with the continued overperformance of the service

TRW001 -Trade Waste collections continue to be in line with last year's outturn. The number of customers has fallen overall with collections £45,000 below budget. This is partially offset by the strong performance of Schedule 2 income in Q1 (chargeable waste collections from public venues such as schools) which is equal to 50% of the total income last financial year

Annex A - Comparison of Q1 budget

Q1 position		
Profiled Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
£	£	£

Planning & Strategic Housing

DEV001-Development Control - Applications	(94,528)	(105,524)	(10,996)
DEV002-Development Control - Appeals	18,946	19,433	487
DEV003-Development Control - Enforcement	38,720	39,716	996
ECD301-WOSP - West Oxon Strategic Partnership	2,250	450	(1,800)
ENA001-Housing Enabling	28,870	25,022	(3,847)
ENI301-Landscape Initiatives	12,622	17,947	5,325
HLD315-Growth Board Project (Planning)	20,946	(7,453)	(28,399)
PLP001-Planning Policy	85,252	107,321	22,069
PLP003-Implementation	(229)	0	229
PLP004-Conservation	21,129	21,672	544
PSM001-Planning Service Mgmt & Support Serv	36,727	36,544	(183)
Total - Planning & Strategic Housing	170,703	155,128	(15,574)

DEV001 - Planning Application income is volatile but is on budget due to two large applications received in April. Pre Application Advice is performing well and is overachieving the budget by £4,000

HLD315 - There is an £20,000 additional recharge to Oxford City Council relating to 2020/21

PLP001 - £18,000 legal fees (QC) relating to the West Oxfordshire Area Action Plan. Further significant spend on QC fees has been incurred in Q2.

Annex A - Comparison of Q1 budget

Q1 position		
Profiled Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
£	£	£

Retained Services

COR002-Chief Executive	59,616	65,228	5,612
COR003-Corporate Policy Making	16,386	16,808	422
COR004-Public Relations	3,015	4,059	1,044
COR005-Corporate Finance	93,172	79,623	(13,549)
COR006-Treasury Management	6,675	81	(6,594)
COR007-External Audit Fees	14,250	8,882	(5,368)
COR008-Bank Charges	17,300	58,989	41,689
COR302-Publica Group	(127,978)	(109,923)	18,055
FIE341-Town Centre Properties	(230,547)	(211,318)	19,229
FIE342-Miscellaneous Properties	(397,123)	(383,939)	13,184
FIE343-Talisman	(574,300)	(543,196)	31,104
FIE344-Des Roches Square	(255,925)	(286,393)	(30,468)
FIE345-Gables at Elmfield	(20,433)	(15,243)	5,190
NDC001-Non Distributed Costs	159,775	162,624	2,849
TAC304-Witney Industrial Estate	(84,300)	(81,667)	2,633
TAC305-Carterton Industrial Estate	(110,975)	(106,924)	4,051
TAC306-Greystones Industrial Estate	(7,287)	(11,597)	(4,310)
TAC308-Other Trading Services - Fairs	(1,250)	0	1,250

Total - Retained Services

	(1,439,929)	(1,353,906)	86,023
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Bank Charges - There has been a significant increase in bank charges for credit & debit card transactions. Discussions are underway with the card bureau to discuss the situation with a view to reducing the cost or an alternative bureau may be sought through the Council's tendering process

Investment Property - During 2020/21 the Council entered into payment plans with many of our tenants to spread the cost of their rent across more than the 2020/21 financial year. These payment plans continue in place and monies relating to last year are being recouped. The Estates team are proactively managing each tenant to ensure that payment plans are effective.

Annex A - Comparison of Q1 budget

	Q1 position		
	Profiled Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
	£	£	£
Revenues & Housing Support			
HBP001-Rent Allowances	50,030	(59,586)	(109,616)
HBP003-Local Housing Allowance	(1,750)	33	1,783
HBP005-Benefit Fraud Investigation	29,761	30,562	801
HOM001-Homelessness	89,101	65,590	(23,512)
HOM002-Homelessness Grants	2,500	0	(2,500)
HOM003-Rent In Advance Scheme	0	(295)	(295)
HOM004-Refugees	0	953	953
HOM005-Homelessness Hostel Accomodation	0	8,100	8,100
LTC001-Council Tax Collection	90,344	38,724	(51,619)
LTC002-Council Tax Support Administration	36,609	37,110	501
LTC011-NNDR Collection	31,793	26,463	(5,331)
PSH001-Private Sector Housing Grants	11,342	11,608	266
PSH004-Home Improvement Service	(15,820)	(14,784)	1,035
Total - Revenues & Housing Support	323,911	144,477	(179,434)

HBP001 - The Council has received £82,000 in one off government grants which will be spent throughout the year on software upgrades due to statutory changes and additional temporary resource to process Benefit claims. There is also a timing difference between Housing Benefit payments and Subsidy received which will resolve by the end of the year

HOM001 - The Council received £100,000 in additional grant funding towards the costs of accommodating Rough Sleepers in 2021/22. The Housing Manager will be putting forward plans to utilise this funding not only on direct accommodation costs but also the extension of the Our House Programme for an additional year which in partnership with Cottsway Housing & Aspire provides accommodation, access to training and a specialist Support Worker

LTC001 - The Council has received additional one off grant funding for a Council Tax Support Scheme which will be utilised throughout the year

Annex B - Capital spend at Q1

Scheme	2021/22 Original budget	2021/22 Total budget	Actual Expenditure Q1	Comments
CAP027	Developer Capital Contributions	0		
CAP200	Parish Council Loans Scheme	0		
CAP301	IT Provision - Systems & Strategy	112,244		
CAP302	In-cab technology	140,000		£127,169 spend in Q2
CAP306	Deployment of High Speed Broadband	1,230,366		
CAP325	Council Buildings Maintenance Programme	325,000		
CAP333	IT Equipment - PCs, Copiers etc	40,000		
CAP361	CCTV - Upgrading	200,000		
CAP505	Improvement Grants	606,800	606,800	110,195
CAP509	Shop Mobility - Replacement stock	10,000		
CAP510	Loan to Cottsway Housing Association	0		
CAP511	Replacement dog and litter bins	52,701		
CAP512	Weighbridge at Bulking Station	0		
CAP513	Replacement Street Sweepers	200,000		
CAP514	Ubico Fleet - Replace Vehicle Hire Costs	1,004,374	1,004,374	18,928
CAP515	Vehicle & Plant Renewal	70,157		
CAP535	Flood Prevention Works 2009/10	0		
CAP543	Cottsway - Blenheim Court Growth Deal	170,500		
CAP544	Unicorn CPO purchase provision	700,000		
CAP545	Town Centre Shop building renovation project	75,000		
CAP546	Southhill Solar Loan	0		
CAP547	Cottsway - Lavender Place Growth Deal	99,000		
CAP548	Talisman re-roofing project	0		
CAP549	Affordable Housing in Witney (Heylo)	1,761,875		
CAP600	Community Grants Fund	325,115	325,115	11,559
CAP609	Carterton Leisure Centre Phase 2	0		0
CAP629	Madley Park playing Fields Project	6,165		
CAP630	Chipping Norton Sports Hall Floor	0		
CAP649	Abbeycare - Public Art	0		1,000
CAP671	Purchase of Vehicles			54,929
CAP677	House Property Purchase	0		
CAP678	Chipping Norton Creative	30,063		375
CAP679	Carteron Connects Creative (Swinbrook s106)	47,280		
CAP768	Electric vehicle recharging points	400,000		
CAP769	Raleigh Crescent Play Area (s. 106)	75,000		
CAP550	Old Court House, Witney	1,452,750	1,452,750	1,274,471
CAP551	Property Purchase in Carterton			2,373,115
	Investment Strategy for Recovery	15,000,000		
		24,134,389	24,134,389	3,844,572

Remainder for repairs/improvements

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 <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	<p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p>Cabinet: Wednesday 15 September 2021</p>
<p>Report Number</p>	<p>Agenda Item No. 10</p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p>Council Tax Section 13A Policy</p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>ALL</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>Councillor Suzi Coul –Cabinet Member for Finance; Email: suzi.coul@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Accountable officer</p> <p>Author</p>	<p>Jon Dearing – Group Manager for Resident Services Tel: 01993 861221 Email: jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk</p> <p>Mandy Fathers – Business Manager for Operational Support and Enabling Tel: 01993 861232 Email: mandy.fathers@pubicagroup.uk</p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>This report outlines proposals to introduce a Council Tax Section 13A Policy to support the Council in making decisions when considering such applications from Council Tax payers in the district.</p>
<p>Annex</p>	<p>Annex A – Section 13A Policy</p>
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>a) That the Council Tax Section 13A Policy included at Annex A be adopted; and b) That the decision making process detailed within paragraphs 4.2 and 4.3 of this report be approved.</p>
<p>Corporate priorities</p>	<p>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>
<p>Consultees/ Consultation</p>	<p>The Chief Executive Officer, The Chief Finance Officer, The Monitoring Officer, Legal Services Manager, Cabinet Member for Finance</p>

I. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. Section 76 of the Local Government Act 2003 introduced Section 13A (Billing Authority's Power to Reduce Amount of Tax Payable) into the local Government Finance Act 1992. This provides the council with discretionary powers to reduce the amount of council tax payable to such an extent as it thinks fit; including reducing the amount to zero, where other national discounts and exemptions cannot be applied.
- 1.2. The Local Government Finance Act 2012 (LGA 2012) inserted a new Section 13A(1)(a), (b) and (c); in the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA 1992), creating two discounts:-
 - Local Council Tax Support schemes under Section 13A(1) (a) and (b); and
 - Section 13A(1)(c) effectively the original Section 13A discount, now including the provision to further reduce the amount of any reduction provided by S13A (1)(a) and (b).
- 1.3. In accordance with Section 13(A)(1)(a) of the LGFA 1992 as amended, the Council has a Council Tax Support scheme which provides assistance to those deemed to be within financial need. The scheme has been designed to take into account the financial and specific circumstances of individuals with maximum relief of 100% of Council Tax liability, available to working age applicants.
- 1.4. Council Tax legislation also provides for a wide range of discounts, exemptions and reductions that have the effect of reducing the level of council tax due. The Policy under Section 13A (1) (c) as shown within [Annex A](#) will require the applicant to have exhausted all other options before making an application under the policy.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1. When applying this policy officers will similarly consider whether alternative actions could be undertaken before applying this policy. As such, this policy will only consider exceptional circumstances, due to financial need or crisis, where it is appropriate and fair to provide a discretionary discount.
- 2.2. Any relief awarded under Section 13A (1) (c) would be intended only as short term assistance and not a means to reduce Council Tax liability indefinitely. Having a Policy in place ensures that the Council has a fair approach to dealing with applications for discretionary discount in Council Tax, and the criteria to which there will be regard. The Council will treat all applications on their individual merits and the criteria which should be met are listed at [2.1](#) in Annex A.
- 2.3. The full cost resulting from the granting of a local discretionary discount is met by the billing authority and there is no statutory right to pass on the cost to other major precepting authorities.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. The full cost resulting from the granting of a local discount is met by the billing authority and there is no statutory right to passed on costs to other major precepting authorities.
- 3.2. Based on the average band D property for 2021/2022 the full cost associated with a discount would be £2004.99 for the full financial year. Discounts are rarely awarded for the full financial year so it is envisaged that any award given would be less than the example given.
- 3.3. All costs associated with Council Tax discounts and reliefs are examined as part of the annual budget activity. Any costs in the current financial year, which cannot be funded within the Council's revenue budget, will be funded from the Council Priorities Fund.

Ongoing revenue provision for costs associated with this Policy will be considered as part of the budget setting process for the 2022/23 budget.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. Section 76 of the Local Government Act 2003 introduced Section 13A (Billing Authority's Power to Reduce Amount of Tax Payable) into the local Government Finance Act 1992. This provides the council with discretionary powers to reduce the amount of council tax payable to such an extent as it thinks fit; including reducing the amount to zero, where other national discounts and exemptions cannot be applied.
- 4.2. The authority to determine individual applications under Section 13A may be delegated to an officer of the authority under section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972; however, for this purpose it is proposed that individual applications are determined by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance on consideration of a report from the Chief Finance Officer.
- 4.3. Applications which relate, or could potentially relate to a class or classes of case (for example, a group of properties affected by flooding) will be determined by Cabinet following consideration of a report from the Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer and the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. Decisions on discretionary discounts are subject to a statutory appeals process and therefore can add an additional element of financial risk for the Council. However, this risk is minimised with the implementation of this policy as it give guidance on what the Council will/will not consider within its scheme.
- 5.2. Following recommendations from the Local Government Ombudsman to adopt publish and promote a Section 13A Policy the Council will be at a reduced risk of future challenges against the administrative processes of such a discount.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 6.1. This policy is accessible to all Council taxpayers in the event of financial crisis or event causing exceptional hardship and where other statutory reductions cannot be claimed.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 7.1. None

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1. None



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Section 13A Policy For the determination of applications for a reduction in Council Tax liability

Contents:	Para:
Background	1
Eligibility Criteria	2
How to Apply	3
Decision Making Process	4
Period of Award	5
Notification of Decisions	6
Review of Decisions	7
Equalities	8
Fraud	9

1. Background

- 1.1 This policy outlines the Council's approach to granting discretionary reductions in liability for Council Tax under Section 13A (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA), as amended. The Council has the ability to reduce the liability for Council Tax in relation to individual cases or classes that it may determine where national and other local discounts and/or exemptions cannot be applied.
- 1.2 In January 2019 the Council approved to award care leavers up to the age of 25 council tax discounts under Section 13A (1) (c) of the LGFA. This scheme is in partnership with the 4 Oxfordshire District and City Councils and supported financially by Oxfordshire County Council.
- 1.3 There are financial implications to awarding any discounts other than those currently available under the statutory legislation and the financial burden of Section 13A (1) (c) discounts has to be met through an increase in the general level of council tax for other payers.

2. Eligibility Criteria

2.1 When determining an application consideration will be made to:

- The applicants personal circumstances
- The applications not having access to assets or savings that could be realised to pay the council tax
- The taxpayer must satisfy the council that all reasonable steps have been taken to resolve their situation prior to the application
- Any other eligible discounts, relief or exemptions that could be awarded
- The council tax account and if it is in arrears the Council must be satisfied that non-payment is not due to wilful refusal or culpable neglect
- The Council's finances allow for a discount to be made
- It is reasonable for the Council to award a discount having regard to the interests of other local Council Tax payers who have to meet the cost of any discount awarded
- An award can only be made for the Council Tax element of any charge, any court or enforcement agency costs applied to the account cannot be considered.

2.2 Discount under this policy will not be awarded in the following circumstances:

- Where the full council tax liability is being met in full by council tax support
- For any other reason, other than to reduce the council tax liability
- Where the council considers that there are unnecessary expenses and debts and that the application has not taken reasonable steps to reduce these
- To cover any increase in the council tax payable due to the failure by the application to notify changes in their circumstances in a timely manner or where the application has failed to act correctly or honestly.
- Where a council tax or council tax support penalty has been imposed at any time during the financial year where discount is being requested.
- The council will only consider discretionary discounts in respect of the main home occupied by the council taxpayer (annexes or second homes will not be eligible for relief)

3. How to apply

- 3.1 The person(s) liable for council tax, their appointee or representative, will be required to complete and submit an application for discretionary discount to the Council using

the form provided. The application form is available on the Council's website and paper copies will also be made available on request.

3.2 The application form must be fully completed and submitted with any supporting information or evidence.

3.3 The applicant must provide details of any special circumstances being experienced and provide evidence to support their application. Evidence required may include, but is not limited to:

- Full details of income and expenditure
- Full details of any capital and other assets
- Confirmation of outgoings, including debt repayments, outstanding loans and credit card debt
- Details of personal illness confirmed by a GP.

3.4 Failure to provide any supporting evidence and information that is requested will lead to the discretionary application being refused, unless there are mitigating circumstances which led to that failure. There may be some occasions where discounts can be considered based on information already available to officers in the Revenues and Benefits team.

4. Decision making process

4.1 Individual applications will be determined by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer.

4.2 Applications which relate, or could potentially relate, to a class or classes of case (for example, Care Leavers) will be determined by Cabinet following consideration of a report from the Chief Executive, Chief Finance Officer and the Cabinet Member responsible for Finance.

5. Period of Award

5.1 A section 13A discount award will not normally be used to provide long term support for individuals. They will be used to provide short term support to allow people the time to resolve their current financial difficulties and to move to a position which is financially sustainable for them in the longer term.

5.2 The length of time over which an award is made is at the discretion of the Council but will not normally exceed a six-month period.

5.3 The applicant will be notified of the amount and period of the award and any specific end date.

6. Notification of decisions

6.1 The Council will aim to consider the application and notify the customer of the outcome within one calendar month from receipt of the claim and all supporting documentation.

6.2 If the application for a discount is successful, the award will be made directly by way of a discount applied to the Council Tax account. This will be confirmed in writing and the Council's decision letter will include the following:

- The reason for the award
- The amount of the award
- The period of the award
- The applicant's duty to report any changes in circumstances
- Any conditions associated with the award
- Details of the right of review

6.3 If the application is unsuccessful, this will be confirmed in writing and the Council's decision letter will include an explanation of how the decision has been reached and details of the right to request a review.

7. Review of Decision

7.1 Section 13A discretionary discounts are administered in accordance with the LGFA 1992, as amended, and are subject to a statutory appeals process. If the applicant disagrees with a decision they must put this in writing giving their reasons. This should normally be received by the Council within one calendar month of the decision, although more time can be given in exceptional circumstances.

7.2 Where possible the Council will try to resolve the matter by explaining the reasons for the decision to the applicant or their representative, either verbally or in writing. If a decision is formally challenged a reconsideration will be made Cabinet. The applicant will then be notified of the reconsideration which will clearly state the reasons for the decision made.

7.3 If the applicant remains dissatisfied with the decision, an appeal may be made to the independent Valuation Tribunal. Further details on this process will be notified to the applicant with the outcome of any previous review of the decision.

8. Equalities

8.1 The Council is committed to equality and the fair application of the policy, ensuring that people receive fair outcomes in the standard of service they received from the Council and equality of access to Council services. This policy is fully inclusive and could support all members of the community, regardless of their race, gender, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status and/or disability in line with the principles set out in the Equalities Act 2010.

9. Fraud

9.1 The Council takes fraud seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance approach. All allegations of fraud will be investigated; should a person make a false statement or provide incorrect evidence in support of their application they may commit a criminal offence. All such instances will be dealt with in accordance with the law, and any overpaid monies will be recovered together with any outstanding Council Tax.

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