

Tuesday, 21 June 2022

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FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

You are summoned to a meeting of the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee which will be held in the Council Chamber, Woodgreen, Witney OX28 1NB on **Wednesday, 29 June 2022 at 2.00 pm.**



Giles Hughes
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillors: Alaa Al-Yousuf (Chair), Alaric Smith (Vice-Chair), Hugo Ashton, Michael Brooker, Andrew Coles, Julian Cooper, Suzi Coul, Gill Hill, Mark Johnson, Richard Langridge, Charlie Maynard, Michele Mead, Ruth Smith and Alex Wilson.

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. **Minutes of Previous Meeting (Pages 5 - 10)**
To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 13 April 2022.
2. **Apologies for Absence**
To receive any apologies for absence.
3. **Committee appointments and start time for civic year 2022/23**
Purpose:
 1. Confirmation of appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair for the Committee, civic year 2022/23.
 2. Members to agree start time of the Committee for civic year 2022/23.
Recommendations:
 1. The committee confirms appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair for the Committee, civic year 2022/23.
 2. Members to confirm start time of the Committee for civic year 2022/23
4. **Chairs announcements**
Purpose:
To provide the Committee with Chair's announcements,

Recommendation:
That the Committee notes Chair's announcements.
5. **Declarations of Interest**
To receive any declarations from Members of the Committee on any items to be considered at the meeting.
6. **Participation of the Public**
To receive any submissions from members of the public, in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure.
7. **Committee Work Programme (Pages 11 - 12)**
Purpose:
To provide the Committee with an updated Work Programme for 2020/2021.

Recommendation:
That the Committee notes the work programme and provides comment where needed.
8. **Cabinet Work Programme (Pages 13 - 20)**
Purpose:
To give the Committee the opportunity to comment on the Cabinet Work Programme June to September 2022.

Recommendation:
That the Committee decides whether to express a view to the Cabinet on relevant issues in its Work Programme.

9. **Council Priorities and Service Performance Report 2021-22 Quarter Four** (Pages 21 - 44)

Purpose:

The report provides details of the Council's progress towards delivering the priorities in the Council Plan during 2021/22 and operational performance at the end of 2021-22 Quarter Four (Q4).

Recommendation:

That the Annual Statement of the Council Plan and 2021/22 Q4 service performance be noted.

10. **Investment Property Review and Outturn 21/22** (Pages 45 - 52)

Purpose:

To inform Committee of the performance of the Councils investment property portfolio.

Recommendation:

That treasury management and the performance of in-house and external fund managers' activity for 2021/22 are noted

11. **Members Questions**

To receive any questions from Members of the Committee.

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WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the
Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Held in the Council Chamber at 2.00 pm on **Wednesday, 13 April 2022**

PRESENT

Councillors: Derek Cotterill (Chair), Geoff Saul (Vice-Chair), Joy Aitman, Julian Cooper, Rupert Dent, Harry Eaglestone, Gill Hill, Richard Langridge, Dan Levy and Alex Postan.

Officers: Jan Britton (Managing Director Publica), Elizabeth Griffiths (Chief Finance Officer), Bill Oddy (Group Manager - Commercial Development), Frank Wilson (Group Finance Director - Publica), Beth Boughton (Managing Director – Ubico), Michelle Ouzman (Strategic Support Officer), Anne Learmonth (Strategic Support Officer) and Maria Harper (Democratic Services Assistant).

Also present: Chris Urwin (Finance Director – Ubico)

40 Members Questions

Councillor Cotterill stated that this was his last meeting as Chairman of the Finance Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as he was retiring from the Council.

Councillors Cooper and Postan both thanked Councillor Cotterill for his years of public service, and this was concurred by all Councillors present.

41 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 February 2022 were approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

42 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Alaa Al Yousuf, Mark Prosser, Mathew Parkinson and Steve Good.

43 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

44 Participation of the Public

There were no participation of the public.

45 Draft Publica Business Plan 2022 - 2025.

The Chair welcomed officers to the meeting, and asked for introductions,

Bill Oddy the Group Manager - Commercial Development, introduced the following officers who were in attendance:

Jan Britton the Managing Director of Publica

Beth Boughton the Managing Director of Ubico

Chris Urwin the Finance Director of Ubico

Jan Britton attended the meeting to receive questions from the Councillors regarding the Draft Publica Business Plan 2022 – 2025.

Councillor Poston asked if he could carry forward the recommendation from the Audit and General Purposes Committee, for improving the rate of response of temporary shortages for Publica staff, particularly in the planning service. He advised that he had looked at the plan but

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could not see any positive way to address the issue. Mr Britton directed the Committee to the 'People' section of the plan which summarised improvements in retaining and attracting staff, including the introduction of career grade posts in development management.

Councillor Langridge thought it was an excellent document, but was concerned that engaging with residents seemed to be reflected by online engagement, and wondered about those residents who were unable to engage digitally. Mr Britton confirmed that online was a good move forwards, however, they would not be turning off the telephones or written communications. Councillor Langridge advised that he had residents complaining that they could not talk to officers directly, and that everything was being directed via Customer Services. Mr Britton advised that the plan was to enhance officers' knowledge within Customer Services to enable them to answer first tier questions, for example how much a planning application would cost to submit. This would allow officers within the wider teams to concentrate on specialist issues and most residents queries should be resolved by Customer Services. Councillor Langridge also commented on staff pride at working for Publica and asked if there were plans to engage with staff to make them feel proud. Mr Britton referred to the 'People' section of the plan, which provided information about the work being undertaken with staff within Publica.

Councillor Saul asked about Publica's Social Value Policy. Mr Britton confirmed that embedding Climate and Social Values was important and Publica would take the lead from the Council's policies, rather than develop separate policies.

Councillor Cooper followed up on Councillor Langridge and Councillor Postan's comments. He too was concerned about the older generation and people who were unable to communicate on-line for Council Services, he was also concerned about the staff vacancies and the time it took to fill these vacancies. Following a query about the average time to fill a vacancy, Mr Britton explained that Publica factored in a 5% vacancy rate, within the staffing budget. As they did not have a separate budget for recruitment, they often ran with a number of vacancies together when recruiting, which took time.

The Chairman asked Elizabeth Griffiths, the Councils Chief Finance Officer, to come back on the vacancy statement. She advised that officers had not been asked to build in a budget for recruitment and that the Council had never been asked to increase the budget to cover recruitment costs. Following a query from the Chairman relating to interim staff, Mr Britton confirmed that there was a small budget for this.

Councillor Dent referred to the plan on page 7, and asked what the financial objectives were for 2023 onwards. He also referred to Section 3 of the plan, Financial Implications. He queried the dates for the business case as there appeared to be a misalignment and asked what the financial objectives up to 2025 were.

Mr Britton explained that each year a financial business plan was supplied, and within that reference would be made to past years business cases from when Publica was first set up. He advised that there should be further savings for future years and he was working with Frank Wilson, the Group Finance Director to project future savings.

Councillor Levy noted that WODC were losing staff to other neighbouring Councils and queried if this issue had been resolved. Mr Britton confirmed that the situation had improved as they had introduced a two tier career grade. Previously, staff had been reaching the ceiling of their grade and were then leaving to join other Councils at a higher grade, enabling them to progress in their career. Now they would be able to progress via the career grading schemes, which would assist with staff retention and continuity. In addition, by using apprenticeship levy funding, Publica had introduced a development management scheme, and staff would be training on the scheme from one to three years.

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The Chairman noted that the plan referred to Councillors being informed, including Town and Parish Councils and asked how this would happen. Councillor Cotterill thought communications had been poorly managed and asked how this would be effectively managed in the future.

Mr Britton confirmed that recently they had opened dialog with presentations and question and answer sessions. He added that he would look into how the relationships could be reflected more within the plan. He was able to inform the Committee that they were working with the Communications Team on creating some short films to be available to Councillors and staff on what was happening within Publica.

The Chairman noted that the business plan was dated to 2025, but felt the milestone objectives were missing along. Mr Britton confirmed this was a three year plan that would be refreshed annually. Stakeholders were more receptive to a refreshed plan annually, this is referenced on page 4 of the plan.

Mr Oddy referenced the on line engagement point raised and advised that whilst rolling out the green waste bins, 6,000 letters were sent to residents, with 2,500 people telephoning the council and 22,000 renewing online. Mr Oddy also referred to the carbon literacy training commitment in the plan which, following feedback from other Publica Shareholder Councils, would be amended from silver to gold level.

Councillor Postan referred to the large area that the Shared Lead Flood Risk Management Officer covered. He did not feel that minutes of scrutiny meetings always captured the mood and felt that if Publica management attended more of these meetings they would be able to reflect on the mood, in relation to the service provided.

Mr Britton acknowledged the point and believed that many of his managers attended Scrutiny Committees, which he received feedback from. He advised that he would look at attending more meetings in the future but could not commit to attend all meetings.

Mr Britton acknowledged that Mr King covered a larger area than he did before but highlighted that he now had three assistants working with him, which he didn't have before. However he did understand that all Councils were having budget cuts and gone were the days where Councils had rows and rows of desks with staff to answer every query, but the partnership did offer the benefit of substantial expertise across the partnership which would not be there if operating alone.

The Chairman thanked the Publica Management Team for attending and answering the Councillors questions.

Resolved that the Committee noted the Draft Publica Business Plan 2022 – 2025.

46 Ubico Business Plan 2022 - 2023

The Committee received a report from the Group Manager – Commercial Development, which asked members to consider the Ubico Business Plan 2022-23 and make any comments that can be considered by the Cabinet and the Leader as Ubico Limited Shareholder Representative.

Beth Boughton the Managing Director and Chris Urwin the Finance Director of Ubico attended along with Bill Oddy the Group Manager - Commercial Development, at Publica. Councillor Langridge welcomed the detailed report but queried the resilience of the refuse fleet, asked if this was sufficient and whether it was working under the partnership.

Beth Boughton confirmed that the partnership definitely worked on skills and knowledge, but recognised this was not always the case in practice, citing an example of vehicles braking down.

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Procurement of equipment, parts and fuel across Councils had delivered efficiencies, resulting in the more buying power the partnership has.

Councillor Postan queried the cost of refuse trucks, asked if the Council could design a specification, based on need and put it out to manufacture.,

Beth Boughton agreed that refuse trucks were expensive and confirmed they had looked at specification when replacing the fleet, within the specialist market available. She advised that a new electric design fleet was due to come onto the market soon, but advised it would be at least ten years before they would be available. Mr Urwin added that there were only a handful of manufacturers, and that Ubico buying power was not enough to have a bespoke design.

Elizabeth Griffiths advised on economies of scale, end of life of the fleet and the cost to convert to electric vehicles and the infrastructure required, which she felt could exceed £9 million. Mr Urwin added that a future option could be to move the existing fleet onto the second-hand market. Following a question from Councillor Cooper relating to the recruitment of staff. Beth Boughton summarised the processes in place at Ubico. She explained that Ubico budgeted to backfill vacancies to avoid gaps in service. Councillor Levy complimented Ubico on their service delivery over the last couple of years, and thanked them for working with residents on the timings of fleet rounds. He enquired if there was any coordination between the different authorities, Cotswold and WODC for example, with regards to routes and equipment sharing.

Mr Urwin explained that they were looking at cross boundary collaboration and were keen to come up with pilot initiatives. "In Cab" technology that the Council has led on, would be rolled out across the partnerships.

Councillor Hill commented that prompt action by Bill Oddy, when issues arose, was most appreciated. She went onto explain that some Minster Lovell residents had told her that recycling and glass that was collected separately, was then put in the same container on the truck. Mr Oddy explained that within the truck it was separated although it did look like it was being put into the same bin. Ubico were working with the Councils Communications Team on creating videos to show what happens to waste collection processes. The Chairman asked where the recycling depot was located. Mr Oddy confirmed it went to Witney before being transported to Birmingham.

Following on from Councillor Hill's comments, Councillor Langridge stated he had seen operatives collect glass by tipping it into a wheelie bin. Mr Oddy responded that he believed that some operatives collected glass recycling into one bin, before depositing it into the refuse lorry. Beth Boughton also confirmed that the Birmingham depot would reject any mixed recycling, and Ubico would know if this practice was occurring regularly.

Councillor Dent raised the issue of fly tipping, asked how many instances there had been, how the council would prosecute and how this issue was going to be managed moving forwards. Mr Oddy confirmed that collection and cost was clearly in Ubico's domain, however, Environmental Regularity Services (ERS) had an interest with the management of the issue. He reminded members of the mapping tool that recorded instances and looked at hotspots, identifying repeat locations. In addition there was an online form that residents could use to report fly tipping, and once reported, this would be reviewed by ERS before being passed to Ubico.

Councillor MacRae was able to clarify that ERS had recruited a specialist officer whose job was to investigate fly tipping occurrences and Ubico's involvement was only to collect the rubbish. Once in post, ERS would be able to evidence and prosecute after investigations. Councillor MacRae was also keen to publicise prosecutions once they had occurred to warn off potential future fly tippers.

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Councillor Dent queried the procurement and finance issues relating to Publica and Ubico. Elizabeth Griffiths clarified that the Council would be purchasing the fleet of vehicles.

The Chairman concluded that he thought the report was set out well and it was easy to see the objectives. He thanked the Ubico Management Team for their attendance.

Recommended that the Ubico Business Plan 2022-23 be approved by the Leader, as the Council's Shareholder Representative of Ubico Limited, subject to any minor amendments that might arise from the final stages of consultation with the other Shareholder Councils and/or general editing.

47 2021-22 Q3 Performance Monitoring v2

The Committee received the 2021 -22 Performance Monitoring Report, which provided details of service performance during Q3.

Councillor Cooper queried paragraph point 3.3, and asked about the target times. Elizabeth Griffiths explained that the report showed current trends, not target times, the next report Q4, which was due soon would show the annual detail of times.

Councillor Langridge congratulated the officers on the level of detail contained in the report. He asked if the Council could buy another narrow refuse truck as a spare, as it kept on breaking down.

Elizabeth Griffiths confirmed that the narrow vehicle had broken down and they had leased another which also broke down. It was just one of those events that sometimes happens.

The Chairman noted that on page 59, there was no data relating to Customer Services, and no explanation. He also noted that there was no record of the Officers responses once the issue was passed over to specialist teams.

Elizabeth Griffiths confirmed that Customer Services also got frustrated at the lack of figures, and she was happy to take back all the comments that had been made. She added that the extra training being given to staff on Customer Services Teams, should reduce the need to pass enquiries onto Officers.

Councillor Levy noted that there were no statistics on leisure services in the report and asked if there was any data on non-renewal of the green bin licence.

Elizabeth Griffiths clarified that some feedback had been received from residents asking if they could pay by instalments, rather than in one lump sum. She confirmed that this was being looked at.

Councillor Hill noted that the Customer Services 151 number after 1700, was directed to a contact centre in Liverpool and was not local.

Resolved That the Cabinet report of 16 March 2022 detailing the 2021/22 Q3 finance and service performance be noted.

48 Committee Work Programme

The Chairman asked the Committee if there were any particular questions or updates on the Committee Work Programme.

Councillor Saul updated members on Item 3 - Task & Finish Group - Council's Investment Policy. The task and finish group were working alongside officers, and Elizabeth Griffiths agreed that the plan was in initial first draft state.

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Councillor Langridge asked when the next Financial Strategy was due, Elizabeth Griffiths advised that one was completed in February, they were awaiting questions on the budget, and nothing of value had changed so far.

Resolved that the Committee Work Programme is noted.

49 Cabinet Work Programme

The Chairman asked Councillors if there were any questions on the Cabinet Work Programme.

Councillor Saul asked about the status of item 16, the disposal and development of land at Walterbush Road, Chipping Norton.

Elizabeth Griffiths explained that the land, bought in 1968 was previously a playground that had fallen into disuse. The Council was now looking to work with a developer for custom self-build homes, which would be carbon net zero. The Council had received a grant from the Secretary of State to move some power cables, and were now looking at how many houses could be built on the land.

Councillor Saul asked if there was a Council Parking Strategy, item 21.

Elizabeth Griffiths confirmed that Chris Hargreaves had almost completed a parking options specification in Chipping Norton. The Chairman commented that Woodstock and Burford would be interested in how the parking options developed for Chipping Norton, as they had similar parking issues.

Councillor Cooper enquired on item 15 Review of Options, Hensington Road, Woodstock, which had slipped from November, now July. Elizabeth Griffiths confirmed that initial works had been completed and updated members on the current situation.

Councillor Dent asked about item 17 Community Facility grants and how many there were. Elizabeth Griffiths confirmed that some grants had already been awarded, and a report circulated, she advised that these fell under the remit of Councillor Doughty as Cabinet member for Customer Delivery.

Councillor Langridge noted that item 19 Agile Working project should be on the FMOS work programme. The Chairman confirmed that the Agile Working project would be considered by FMOS prior to a decision being taken by Cabinet.

Resolved that the Cabinet Work Programme be noted.

The Meeting closed at 3.34 pm

CHAIRMAN

Work Programme – Finance & Management O&S

29 JUNE 2022

| | Title | Format | Lead Officer / Cabinet Member | Next report / Anticipated Completion Date | Comments |
|---|--|---------------|--|---|--|
| 1 | Q4 Performance Monitoring report | Report | | | |
| 2 | PSDS3 Carterton Leisure Centre decarbonisation | Report | Ness Scott / Councillor Andrew Prosser | To be considered by Cabinet | Dependent on Cabinet date, this may need to be considered at a special meeting |
| 3 | Task & Finish Group - Council's Investment Policy - Update Councillor Saul – Chair of T&F Group | Verbal update | Councillor Saul – Chair of T&F Group | | To be considered at the next meeting |

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| | Title | Format | Lead Officer / Cabinet Member | Next report / Anticipated Completion Date | Comments |
|---|--|--------|-------------------------------------|---|----------|
| 1 | New Procurement and Contract Management Strategy | Report | Ciaran Okane/Councillor Levy | September 2022 | |
| 2 | Treasury management update | Report | Elizabeth Griffiths/Councillor Levy | September 2022 | |

Agenda Item 7

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CABINET (EXECUTIVE) WORK PROGRAMME
INCORPORATING NOTICE OF DECISIONS PROPOSED TO BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE SESSION AND NOTICE OF INTENTION TO MAKE A KEY DECISION

June – September 2022

Published June 2022

By virtue of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, local authorities are required to publish a notice setting out the key executive decisions that will be taken at least 28 days before such decisions are to be taken. The Regulations also require notice to be given of any matter where it is proposed that the public will be excluded during consideration of the matter.

This Forward Plan incorporates both of these requirements. In the interests of transparency, it also aims to include details of those items to be debated by the Cabinet that relate to either policy/budget formulation, matters which will be subject to a recommendation to the Council, and other matters due to be considered by the Cabinet. This programme covers a period of four months, and will be updated on a monthly basis. The timings of items may be subject to change.

It should be noted that although a date not less than 28 clear days after the date of this notice is given in each case, it is possible that matters may be rescheduled to a date which is different from that given provided, in the cases of key decisions and matters to be considered in private, that the 28 day notice has been given. In this regard, please note that agendas and reports for meetings of the Cabinet are made available on the Council's website at www.westoxon.gov.uk/meetings five working days in advance of the meeting in question. Please also note that the agendas for meetings of the Cabinet will also incorporate a necessary further notice which is required to be given in relation to matters likely to be considered with the public excluded.

There are circumstances where a key decision can be taken, or a matter may be considered in private, even though the 28 clear days notice has not been given. If that happens, notice of the matter and the reasons will be published on the council's website, and available from the Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxon, OX28 1NB.

Key Decisions

The Regulations define a key decision as an executive decision which is likely –

(a) to result in the relevant local authority incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the relevant local authority's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates; or

(b) to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the area of the authority'.

The Council has decided that a cost or saving of an amount greater than £50,000 is necessary to constitute expenditure or savings which are significant for the purposes of this definition.

Please note that if a matter is approved by the Council following a recommendation from the Cabinet, that decision will not be a key decision.

Matters To Be Considered in Private

The great majority of matters considered by the Council's Cabinet are considered in 'open session' when the public have the right to attend.

However, some matters are considered with the public excluded. The public may only be excluded if a resolution is passed to exclude them. The grounds for exclusion are limited to situations where confidential or exempt information may be disclosed to the public if present and, in most cases involving exempt information, where in all the circumstances of the case the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. The definitions of these are set out in the Council's Constitution.

Documents and Queries

Copies of, or extracts from, documents listed in the programme and any which subsequently become available are (subject to any prohibition or restriction on their disclosure), obtainable from the following, and this contact information may also be used for any queries.

Democratic Services - Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk Tel: 01993 861111

West Oxfordshire District Council: Executive Members 2022/23

| Name of Councillor | Title and Areas of Responsibility |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Andy Graham (Leader) | <i>Leader of the Council: Policy Framework; Corporate Plan; Executive functions; Representation on Regional and National Bodies; Oxfordshire Partnership Board; Oxfordshire Growth Board; Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership; Oxfordshire Leaders; Publica & Ubico; Democratic Services; Communications; Legal Services; and Counter Fraud.</i> |
| Duncan Enright (Deputy Leader) | <i>Economic Development: Inward investment; Business Development; Visitor Economy; and Town and Village regeneration.</i> |
| Dan Levy | <i>Finance: Finance & Management; Council Tax and Benefits; Efficiency Agenda; Performance management of the Council; Asset management; Investment Strategy; and South West Audit Partnership.</i> |
| Carl Rylett | <i>Planning and Sustainable Development: Oxfordshire Plan 2050; Local Plan; Government planning policies and guidance; Conservation and Design; Design and Historic Environment; Landscape and Biodiversity; Strategic Housing; Development Management; and Ensuring planning policies meet 2030 requirement.</i> |
| Mathew Parkinson | <i>Customer Delivery: Parish and Town Empowerment; Equality and Diversity; Customer Services; ICT and services; Councillor Development; and Broadband.</i> |
| Joy Aitman | <i>Stronger Healthy Communities: Community; Community Revenue Grants; Voluntary sector engagement; Sports and Leisure facilities; Health and Safety; Public art; Facilities Grants; Community and Public Health; Healthy Communities; Accountable Member for Refugee Resettlement Programme; and Young People.</i> |

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| Geoff Saul | Housing and Social Welfare: <i>Housing Allocations; Homelessness; Provision of affordable homes; Sheltered Housing Accommodation; Safeguarding – Community Safety Partnership; Crime and Disorder; Neighbourhood Policing; Scrutiny of Police and Crime Commissioner; and Assets of Community Value.</i> |
| Lidia Arciszewska | Environment: <i>Energy Advice; Flood alleviation and sewage; Environmental and Regulatory; Environmental Partnership; Waste collection and recycling; Street Scene (cleansing, litter and grounds maintenance); Car parking; Air Quality; and Land, food, farming.</i> |
| Andrew Prosser | Climate Change: <i>Renewable energy and retrofit investment; Biodiversity across the District; Carbon neutral by 2030; Fossil fuel dependence reduction; Local, national and county wide liaison on climate; Internal liaison on Climate Change; and EV Charging Rollout.</i> |

For further information about the above and all members of the Council please see www.westoxon.gov.uk/councillors

| Item for Decision | Key Decision (Yes / No) | Likely to be Considered in Private (Yes / No) | Decision – Maker | Date of Decision | Cabinet Member | Lead Officer | Consultation | Background Documents |
|--|-------------------------|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|--|----------------------|
| Community Facilities Grants – 1 st Round 2022/23 | Yes | No | Cabinet | June 2022 | Cllr Aitman | Scott Williams | | |
| Performance Monitoring Report Q4 – 2021/22 | No | No | Cabinet | June 2022 | Cllr Graham | | | |
| Cleaning & Maintenance of Public Conveniences | No | No | Cabinet | June 2022 | Cllr Arciszewska | Mandy Fathers | | |
| Acquisition of Amenity Land Langel Common | No | No – confidential annex | Cabinet | June 2022 | Cllr Rylett | Frank Wilson | Local Community Group | |
| Sustainable Warmth – Local Authority Delivery (LAD) Phase 3 and Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) | Yes | No | Cabinet | June 2022 | Cllr Prosser | Ness Scott | | |
| PSDS 3 Carterton Leisure Centre decarbonisation | Yes | No | Cabinet | July 2022 | Cllr Prosser | Vanessa Scott | | |
| Approval of revised draft Developer Contributions SPD for public consultation | No | No | Cabinet | July 2022 | Cllr Rylett | Chris Hargraves | Initial public consultation held Nov – Dec 2020. | |

| Item for Decision | Key Decision (Yes / No) | Likely to be Considered in Private (Yes / No) | Decision – Maker | Date of Decision | Cabinet Member | Lead Officer | Consultation | Background Documents |
|--|-------------------------|---|--------------------|------------------|----------------|---|--------------|----------------------|
| Consideration of options for the future provision of legal services to the Council | Yes | No | Cabinet | July 2022 | Cllr Graham | Giles Hughes | | |
| Approval of funding for West End Link Study | No | No | Cabinet | July 2022 | Cllr Rylett | Chris Hargraves | | |
| Oxfordshire Food Strategy | No | No | Cabinet | July 2022 | Cllr Aitman | Phil Martin/Andy Barge (GM) Philippa Lowe (BM) Heather McCulloch (Lead officer) | | |
| Review of Options- Hensington Road, Woodstock | No | No | Cabinet Council | July 2022 | Cllr Graham | Claire Locke | | |
| Agile Working project | Yes | No | Cabinet Council | July 2022 | Cllr Graham | Phil Martin / Carl Jones | | |
| Budget Monitoring Report Year End Outturn | Yes | No | Cabinet | July 2022 | Cllr Levy | Elizabeth Griffiths | | |

| Item for Decision | Key Decision (Yes / No) | Likely to be Considered in Private (Yes / No) | Decision – Maker | Date of Decision | Cabinet Member | Lead Officer | Consultation | Background Documents |
|---|-------------------------|---|------------------|------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------------|
| West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 – Initial Issues and Scoping Consultation | Yes | No | Cabinet | July 2022 | Cllr Rylett | Chris Hargraves | | |
| Local Development Scheme (LDS) Update | Yes | No | Cabinet | July 2022 | Cllr Rylett | Chris Hargraves | | |
| Performance Monitoring Report Q1– 2021/22 | No | No | Cabinet | Sept 2022 | Cllr Graham | | | |
| Approval of upgrade to West Oxfordshire's public space CCTV provision and monitoring arrangements | Yes | No | Cabinet | Sept 2022 | All relevant Cabinet Members | Andy Barge | | |
| New Lease at Unit 1 Talisman Business Centre, Bicester | Yes | Yes | Cabinet | Sept 22 | Cllr Enright | Jasmine McWilliams | | |

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Agenda Item 9

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|  <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p> | <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p> |
| <p>Name and date of Committee</p> | <p>Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny committee: Wednesday 29 June 2022</p> |
| <p>Report Number</p> | <p>Agenda Item No. 9</p> |
| <p>Subject</p> | <p>Council Priorities and Service Performance Report 2021-22 Quarter Four</p> |
| <p>Wards affected</p> | <p>All</p> |
| <p>Accountable member</p> | <p>All relevant Cabinet Members</p> |
| <p>Accountable officers</p> | <p>Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Tel: (01993) 861658 Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk</p> <p>Elizabeth Griffiths, Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Finance Officer Tel: (01993) 861188 Email: elizabeth.griffiths@westoxon.gov.uk</p> |
| <p>Summary/Purpose</p> | <p>This report provides details of the Council’s progress towards delivering the priorities in the Council Plan during 2021/22 and operational performance at the end of 2021-22 Quarter Four (Q4)</p> |
| <p>Annexes</p> | <p>Annex A – Annual Statement of the Council Plan 2020-24 Annex B – Service Dashboards</p> |
| <p>Recommendation</p> | <p>That the Annual Statement of the Council Plan and 2021/22 Q4 service performance be noted</p> |
| <p>Corporate priorities</p> | <p>Climate Action: Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity</p> <p>Healthy Towns and Villages: Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone</p> <p>A Vibrant District Economy: Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Local Industrial Strategy</p> <p>Strong Local Communities: Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities</p> <p>Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population: Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for a wide range of householders making their home in West Oxfordshire</p> <p>Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance: Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council</p> |
| <p>Key Decision</p> | <p>No</p> |
| <p>Exempt</p> | <p>No</p> |

I. BACKGROUND

- I.1. The Council monitors service performance each quarter and a report on progress towards achieving the aim and priorities set out in the Corporate Plan is produced at the end of Q2 and Q4.
- I.2. 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, including a range of performance indicators, 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.
- I.3. The Council's Chief Executive has received a report on service performance and has assessed it in line with the high level Commissioning Statement. Particular attention has been drawn to the following:
 - i. Following the surge in the Omicron variant in November 2021, the government announced the move back to Plan A on the 19 January 2022; and staff were no longer being asked to work from home and face masks were no longer mandatory. On 24 February 2022, the government confirmed the ending of domestic legal restrictions for Covid-19 including the legal requirement to self-isolate. Staff were reminded to be cautious and retain the good habits learned over the last 20-24 months, especially as infection rates were high.
 - ii. The rising energy prices and higher cost of living is affecting householders, in particular those on low incomes. The Council has started to administer the £150 council tax rebate for homeowners in bands A-D, and those more vulnerable residents in Council Tax bands E to H.
 - iii. The Council's business rates collection figure (in year) continues to be affected by the cumulative impact of Covid-19 on businesses. The Government supported certain businesses with extended retail relief during the year, and the Council recently received £2.27m of Covid Additional Relief Fund (CARF) to be distributed to those businesses that are not eligible for the extended retail relief but have been affected by Covid-19. In addition, the Council administered 1252 Omicron mandatory grants to businesses (mainly leisure and hospitality) totalling £1,325,051 during Q4;
 - iv. In addition to supporting the Syrian and Afghan Resettlement programmes, the Council is standing with Ukraine. A special email address has been set up as dedicated point of contact to help deal with the volume of enquiries. The Council is supporting the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme in which people in the UK will be able to sponsor/host a Ukrainian individual or family. The Council is working with the County Council to ensure that sponsoring households' properties are inspected and the necessary safeguarding checks are completed; and together with Asylum Welcome, they are providing support for sponsors and guests. Currently, 87 sponsors have been registered in the District.
 - v. One hundred and fifty-six affordable homes reached practical completion in Q4, totalling 378 for the year, well ahead of the target of 274. The success of the Oxfordshire Growth Deal schemes is becoming apparent with 80 homes completed in

Q4 on the Housing 21 affordable extra care scheme at Chipping Norton, and two Cottsway schemes in Carterton and Bampton that have been funded by Growth Deal are expected in the next quarter providing homes at social rent. An additional 17 homes were completed at Cottsway's site at Upavon Way, Carterton, which is part of a larger all-affordable site that is due in Q1 2022/23.

- vi. The Planning team returned to full capacity in Q4 including the two additional posts that the Council approved in August 2021, and is having a positive impact on planning determination times and caseloads.

2. COUNCIL PRIORITIES

2.1. A comprehensive update of progress towards delivery of the Council Plan 2020-24 and Covid-19 Recovery Plan during 2021-22 can be found at **Annex A**. Some of the highlights are presented below:

- The Council's [broadband rollout project with Gigaclear](#) was formally completed in December 2021. WODC and HM Government each invested £1.6m in the project, contracting Gigaclear to connect 4,788 of the most rural premises in West Oxfordshire with Fibre to the Premises broadband. The Council's investment levered a further £6.7m funding from Gigaclear to extend the network resulting in access of a total of over 12,000 properties in the District to ultra-fast broadband as a result of the project.
- The Council successfully bid to Homes England for a 3 year Housing Development and Community Facilitator to enable housing delivery of Salt Cross Garden Village. The post holder is focussing on projects developing community led housing and self-build housing at the Garden Village.
- The Council successfully bid to the government's PropTech fund for £125k to develop a new digital engagement platform that makes readily available information on community infrastructure and developer contributions that exist (or can be created) into a single, accessible and visually engaging repository.
- Four thousand responses have been received from young people across the District to a survey that will inform the West Oxfordshire Youth Needs Assessment. This will inform a comprehensive understanding of the priorities of young people in order to ensure that future services and infrastructure provision meets their needs and that the significant impact on young people in terms of their education, employment options, development opportunities and social skills can be mitigated against.
- Five-year Biodiversity Land Management Plans for twelve Council-owned natural green spaces have been developed, consulted on and subsequently embedded within Ubico's contract renewal 2022 as cost-neutral changes.
- Working in partnership with Cottsway Housing and benefitting from Growth Deal Funding, the Council has worked to enable redevelopment of 49 units for affordable social rent which were no longer fit for purpose at two sites: 18 units at Lavender Place, Bampton and 31 units at Blenheim Court, Carterton.
- An award of £78k from the government's 'Brownfield Land Release Fund' has been made to the Council which will unlock a Council owned site in Chipping Norton for eight affordable net-zero carbon custom built homes. A planning application is forthcoming for the homes and associated sustainable amenities including e-vehicle club with car charging points.

3. SERVICE PERFORMANCE

3.1. The service dashboards that are relevant to the work of this Committee are attached at **Annex B**.

3.2. Some of the performance indicators that have fallen short of their targets are considered below together with rectifying actions:

- Processing times for all three Benefit indicators showed significant improvements at the end of Q4. The average days to process Council Tax Support (CTS) new claims improved by six days, while the average days to process changes for CTS and Housing Benefit, improved by 10 days and 8.5 days respectively. The increase in processing times was primarily due to high workloads related to the increase in Universal Credit claims since the start of the pandemic (with much of the New Claims time delays beyond our control), the implementation of the new benefits system, Covid-19 related work, and supporting the administration of discretionary housing grants to the most vulnerable residents in the District. The backlog of work that was created following the implementation of the new benefits system was exacerbated by a software failure that prevented the automatic upload of changes of circumstances. A partial fix was applied nationally, but still required some cases to be processed manually; and was finally resolved in January 2022.

Resolution: Additional resources were brought in during Q3 to deal with the backlog and support the service; and a recovery plan is being developed to improve performance. The OpenPortal was officially launched in January 2022 and clients are now able to start self-serving. Other benefits of the new system are increased automation and better monitoring of workflows and individual workloads which will help the service to actively manage resources and identify any training requirements.

Although it will take time for the system to be fully exploited, the initial signs are promising with performance starting to return to previous levels.

- Both the in-year Council Tax collection rate and Business Rates collection rate continue to be lower than the pre-Covid years. The Council collected 96.3% of council tax due in the year, one percentage point lower than the previous year; while the in-year business rates collection rate was over one percentage point up on the previous year at 93.4%.

The pausing of recovery action during 2020-21 and waiting for Magistrates courts to re-open for liability order hearings resulted in recovery action only recommencing in August 2021 which will have affected the collection rates. Overall, there are relatively few options available for the recovery of business rates and the process is lengthy, as shown by the extended time taken to recover last year's non payment.

Resolution: Many businesses have been supported by extended retail relief and a range of mandatory and discretionary grants including the Omicron mandatory grant in Q4. Extended retail relief will continue through 2022-23 at a relief of 50%, and for those businesses that are not eligible for extended retail relief and have been impacted by Covid-19, there is £2.27m in Covid-19 additional relief fund (CARF) to support them. A large proportion of these businesses have already been identified although the window for applying will remain open until September 2022. These businesses will have their business rates accounts credited which will help to reduce the debt owed in 2021-22.

Some homeowners will receive a council tax rebate to help with the rising cost of living. This process started in April 2022, and the rebate will be administered via their bank accounts or other means, rather than as a credit on the council tax account.

The service is continuing to support homeowners and businesses; sending out reminders, phoning and emailing to encourage them to contact the Council so that they can be supported via manageable repayment plans, or refer them on to other services both internally and externally. The debt, however, can only be secured through recovery action and issuing of a liability order. There is a dedicated team in place for the recovery of rates who are up to date on cases so all possible steps have been taken.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1. None

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

5.1. None

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

6.1. None

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1. None



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL PLAN ANNUAL STATEMENT
April 2021 - March 2022

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



1. Climate Action

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



2. Healthy Towns and Villages

Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone.



3. A Vibrant District Economy

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



4. Strong Local Communities

Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities.



5. Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population

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



6. Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance

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

Introduction

Two years have passed since the launch of the [West Oxfordshire Council Plan 2020 – 24](#) in January 2020 when the Council embarked on delivering the projects defined as a means of achieving the **Council Plan vision** to support West Oxfordshire to be fit for the future through delivery of the following priorities:

1. **Climate Action:** Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity
2. **Healthy Towns and Villages :** Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better well being for everyone
3. **A Vibrant District Economy :** Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Local Industrial Strategy
4. **Strong Local Communities:** Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities
5. **Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population:** Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for a wide range of households making their home in West Oxfordshire
6. **Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance:** Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council

During this period and in tandem with delivering the Council Plan, efforts initially pivoted towards responding to the sudden challenges posed by the pandemic, principally supporting West Oxfordshire residents, its business and economy, and community and voluntary sector and latterly to developing the West Oxfordshire Covid-19 Recovery Plan through cross-party engagement and delivering the Themes of this plan: Economy, Community, Climate and Council, Service Delivery & Finance.

This agility and ability to adapt to the unprecedented pandemic, reflects well on the Council and its staff and demonstrates that they have remained true to the vision in the Council Plan to be ‘fit for the future’. The Covid-19 Recovery Fund invested by the Council to deliver the Covid-19 Recovery Plan has had the dual benefit of making a meaningful contribution to Council Plan delivery due to the close alignment of these Themes with the six Council Plan Priorities. The Covid-19 Recovery Plan has provided the Council with a helpful framework for ensuring that the wide ranging impacts of the pandemic have been mitigated against.

The Council undertook a wide range of activities, providing support to individuals, charities and communities throughout 2021-22 which included:

- Working closely with NHS colleagues to:
 - Host and resource 3 x ‘walk in’ vaccination centres based in the Welch Way Office, where boosters as well as 1st / 2nd Jabs were given to 12-15s & 16 plus. Just under 8,500 vaccinations were given
 - Set up and manage a community symptom free testing site in Carterton – just under 1800 test carried out and 800 kits handed
 - Facilitate the establishment and running of the Covid test site that was based in Woodford Way Car Park
 - Support the running of a vaccination centre in Elmfield for vulnerable children
 - Operate a Community Collect Scheme for test kits from the Welch Way Office– over 1,000 handed out

- Supporting the local Test and Trace scheme in Oxfordshire – Over 640 visits carried out as well as undertaking over 230 requests for desktop checks
- Co-ordinating the operation of the Mobile Testing Unit (MTU) in Carterton
- Provided a dedicated support Hub with Resident Support Workers in place to respond to calls from residents in need and provide complex support, help with food, signposting and referrals, conducting 844 Test and Trace support calls and 324 contact tracing visits
- Funding support:
 - Distribution of funding (£44,850) to all food groups in the District
 - Distributing food support through the Household support fund (£100,000) to residents in need through Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire.
 - Administration of the extended Winter Support Grant, working closely with Citizens Advice West Oxfordshire
 - Additional food support for those in temporary accommodation
 - Provision of additional food support to those receiving the Test and Trace payment
 - Securing £40,000 for a grants programme for West Oxfordshire community food projects administered by Good Food Oxfordshire
 - Securing and allocating Contain Outbreak Management funding (£103,450) towards:
 - APCAM and the Help Hub for Mental health services for young people and families
 - Volunteer Link Up for vaccination transport support
 - Citizens Advice for an additional debt and welfare adviser
 - Reducing the risk to provide domestic abuse training for community groups and professionals
- Offering free training to VCS including food groups, which covered topics such as governance, GDPR, vision writing, working with volunteers etc
- Provision of emergency food parcels to vulnerable families
- Actively supporting local community groups and helping to develop food groups.

This Annual Statement details progress against each of the 6 Council Plan priorities and achievements against the aims of the Covid-19 Recovery Plan. It should be read in conjunction with the [WODC Annual Monitoring Report for the period 1st April 2020 – 31st March 2021](#). The AMR is structured around the 6 Council Plan priorities, setting out progress against the Local Plan as the strategic development framework for the District. By priority, an outline of the current district context in terms of background/contextual information and what has happened during the AMR period is provided. Facts and figures are used to illustrate the Council's progress/patterns of change against a number of indicators – such as carbon emission reductions, numbers of affordable homes delivered, visitor numbers to leisure centres, and local workforce structure.

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

Covid-19 Recovery Theme: Climate

The Council has been working on its commitment to proactively respond to the climate and ecological emergency as set out in its Carbon Action Plan (the Pathway to Achieving Carbon Neutral by 2030) and Climate Change Strategy through a wide ranging work programme. The work has been further supported by 3 fixed-term posts resourced through the Councils Covid-19 Recovery Fund: Carbon Action Plan Officer, Biodiversity and Countryside Land Management Officer and a Development Management Sustainability Officer. These posts have added capacity and expertise to complement existing capacity to take action towards addressing the climate and ecological emergency identified as a priority in the Council Plan and Recovery Plan. An overview of deliverables over the 2021-22 year are provided below.

- The [WODC Sustainability Standards Checklist](#) was launched in May 2021, providing a framework of standards for assessing planning applications against in terms of their sustainability on a range of criteria relating to water use and flood risk; biodiversity; green and active travel; aligning with net-zero carbon; sustainable construction; and materials and waste. From launch until 31 March 2022 66 major and 26 minor planning applications have been assessed against the criteria and a focus has been given to raising the sustainability of development proposed. To further embed the benefits of assessing planning applications against sustainability criteria, the Validation Checklist against which all planning applications are checked prior to registration and determination has been updated to require submission of a Sustainability Statement demonstrating how the sustainability measures are met.
- Landscape and biodiversity assessments of 12 key WODC owned sites has been undertaken, informing the production of five year [Land Management Plans](#) for each with a view to restoring and improving the existing natural habitats and biodiversity of the sites and/or creating new wildlife habitats to increase their ecological value. The LMP's are designed to achieve multiple benefits as a result of changes to the way the land is maintained, improving natural capital assets across the Council's estate including carbon storage, flood management and pollination.
- Delivery of two externally funded projects to improve energy efficiency in private rented properties, providing energy efficiency assessments and guidance to landlords to implement improvements to energy efficiency. In a further contribution towards improving energy efficiency of homes and those at risk of fuel poverty in the District, the Council continues to fund the Better Housing, Better Health service, providing low income households access to grants for energy efficiency improvements, and a further range of Fuel Poverty Grants for those on means tested benefits to make essential energy efficiency improvements. In the latter half of 2021 – 22 34 assessments were undertaken and 5 energy-efficiency installations were completed.
- In November 2021 the Royal Assent of the Environment Act mandated a Biodiversity Net Gain of 10%, with the aim of ensuring development, and/or land management leaves the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. [The Interim Biodiversity Net Gain Guidance for Developers and Ecological Consultants](#) was updated in July 2021 providing guidance to developers to ensure that sufficient information is submitted to demonstrate Biodiversity Net Gain. Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre continues to support WODC to screen biodiversity metric calculations submitted to ensure that they achieve a Net Gain for Biodiversity. In the 2021 – 22 period 13 applications were submitted with Biodiversity Net Gain calculations. Of these, 2 secured a Biodiversity Net Gain on site and 1 offsite, with 9 pending a decision and one application being refused.

- WODC continued to play an active role on the [Oxfordshire Nature Partnership](#) which has the purpose 'to radically enhance nature, its positive impact on our climate and the priority it is given, helping to make Oxfordshire an exemplar county for people and nature to thrive'. This strategic forum exists to guide nature recovery in an integrated way to produce multiple benefits for local people, the economy and the environment. At a County level WODC also sits on the [Environment Advisory Group of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership](#) which exists to embed critical environmental thinking across the Future Oxfordshire Partnerships and to link closely with the Oxfordshire Nature Partnership. At a cross county level WODC sits on the [Cotswolds National Landscape Board](#) and [the Oxford to Cambridge Arc](#) to represent West Oxfordshire's environment in this wider strategic context.
- The Council commissioned the [Witney Flood Investigation Report \(January 2022\)](#) into the floods at Christmas 2020 to inform understanding of the event. WODC works collaboratively through an informal agency agreement with Oxfordshire County Council (as the Lead Local Flood Authority), undertaking flood investigations, enforcement and consent functions on behalf of the LLFA for West Oxfordshire. It has been confirmed that an updated flood risk model for the River Windrush and its tributaries through the town is to be carried out by the Environment Agency which will be informed, in part, by the findings of the Witney Flood Investigation Report.
- WODC continues to partner others through the Windrush and Evenlode Catchment Partnerships. This approach aims to build better functioning river catchments by:
 - Recognising catchments as interconnected systems
 - Working in partnership to tackle multiple challenges together
 - Harnessing natural processes wherever possible
 - Capitalising on opportunities for solutions on a catchment scale

Under the Thames Water Smarter Catchment Initiative, a £3million fund has been made for the [Evenlode Catchment Partnership](#) for delivery of projects between 2020-25 focussing on: water quality and advocacy; landscape, habitat and biodiversity; natural flood management; and education, access and recreation.

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

Recovery Theme: Communities

The value of adopting a 'Healthy Place Shaping' approach in new and existing developments is highlighted in the Council Plan. In February 2022 the Council further expressed their commitment to this by passing the motion that *'Each Member commits to being a champion for Healthy Place Shaping (HPS) utilising the core principles (and the tools available to them) to influence and underpin all aspects of their work. To recognise that within their role as Members, their commitment is crucial to the organisation of HPS. Actively encouraging/challenging one another, officers, Parish and Town Councils to use HPS approaches, to influence future decisions for council services, ensuring that they have the best possible outcomes for the health and wellbeing of all residents of West Oxfordshire.'*

Healthy Place Shaping activity falls under three branches:

- Community Activation – connecting local people and community groups, schools and businesses to enable them to enjoy healthier lifestyles and create activities, facilities and services which make their communities healthy, resilient and sustainable
- Built Environment – ensuring homes, streets and other buildings are healthier, people can easily access green spaces, and are enabled to cycle, walk and socially interact in order to improve health and wellbeing
- New Models of Care – re-shaping and developing local health, wellbeing and care services, and the infrastructure which supports people to achieve physical and/or mental health benefits.

Examples of the Healthy Place Shaping approach being put into action by the Council are:

- The Built Indoor Leisure Facilities Strategy reached its final draft stage in March 2022, informed by an audit of current indoor leisure facilities stock across the District and Sport England modelling leisure facility need against projected population growth. Stakeholder consultation was also undertaken, including a Focus Group looking at the scope for a relocated Windrush Leisure Centre ('Windrush 2') and a residents' online survey to inform the required facility mix for any new Windrush 2. This activity has sought to address the current, latent and unmet need for built leisure facilities across West Oxfordshire. Following adoption of the Built Indoor Leisure Facilities Strategy, an associated Action Plan will establish a programme of delivery for the Strategy.
- Consultants have produced a Playing Pitch Strategy and Action Plan for the District that provides robust justification for the provision of outdoor playing pitches and sport facilities that meet the needs of existing and future residents and visitors to West Oxfordshire. It also provides the evidence required to help protect playing fields to ensure sufficient land is available to meet existing and projected future pitch requirements. This important document will form part of the evidence base for the forthcoming Local Plan Review by ensuring that existing facilities are the most appropriate in terms of quantity, quality and location and gives consideration to how to best meet the additional needs generated by planned housing and economic growth. Furthermore, the Strategy identifies a number of sites for development to meet the District's need for Playing Pitches.

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

Recovery Theme: Economy

The economy of the district has been greatly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and a reframing of efforts to address recovery and renewal of the economy has been the focus over the last year, as set out in the Covid-19 Recovery Plan. This is in addition to making progress on the actions identified in the Council Plan, for example the roll out of the Electric Vehicle Charging Point programme and early consideration toward a Masterplan and Station Travel Plan for Hanborough Station. This dual approach to proactively addressing the short and long term challenges facing the local economy is described below.

The Council's Covid-19 Recovery Fund resourced 2 full time posts to increase capacity for supporting local businesses impacted negatively by the pandemic and associated restrictions, recognising the acute impact of these on town centres and employers. Specific initiatives to counter this impact include:-

- A Welcome Back Fund allocation of £195k has been invested across the District to support the safe return to the high streets and help build back better from the pandemic. A range of public realm improvements (e.g. better signage, amenity landscape and seating) and promotional activity and events benefitted Witney, Burford, Carterton, Charlbury, Chipping Norton, Eynsham and Long Hanborough. These were delivered in partnership with local Town and Parish Councils, Wake up to Woodstock, Marriots and Woolgate Shopping Centres and local businesses.
- The Council used Welcome Back funding to procure the LoyalFree 'place promotion app' to support local businesses. The app is connected to a platform that any town centre retailer in the district can use to promote offers, discounts and loyalty schemes. The scheme has been promoted through the 'Love West Oxfordshire' campaign and helps footfall across town centres by encouraging repeat purchases, discounts and other offers as well as listing events and interactive trails to entice new visitors to West Oxfordshire. To date there are 3015 users of LoyalFree and the app has promoted 290 businesses.
- The Council has been working with other districts and Makespace Oxford on the Oxfordshire-wide [Meanwhile in Oxfordshire Project](#). The purpose of the project was to try and fill selected vacant units in our high streets with a variety of offerings to mitigate the negative impact of empty units. A number of premises were considered as part of this, but, positively and in a sign that the local economy was recovering, did not proceed because long term tenants were found. The Guildhall in Chipping Norton has been successfully taken on by the project and is filled partly by the [Chippy Larder](#), thus making a meaningful contribution to addressing the issue of food security in the town, with the remaining space available as a co-working space and small offices.
- In the fourth quarter of the 2021-22 year the Council distributed 1,252 one-off grants of up to £6,000 on behalf of government to businesses in the hospitality and leisure sectors to counter impacts of the Omicron variant of Covid-19. The total distributed was £1,325,051. The Council also used

part of its Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) allocation to run a 'Business Growth Support' scheme (BGS) which provided one to one advice sessions and cash grants to 86 businesses. The advice sessions were delivered by OxLEP.

The value of the provision of Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP) was specified in the Council Plan as a means of improving public realm in our town centres and an action to be taken towards achieving a vibrant district economy. Under the roll out of the [Park and Charge Oxfordshire](#) project into West Oxfordshire, a total of 32 electric vehicle charging points serving 64 parking bays have been installed in five of the Council owned car parks at: Woodford Way in Witney; New Street in Chipping Norton; Black Bourton Road in Carterton; Hensington Road in Woodstock and Back Lane in Eynsham. This contributes to delivering Electric Vehicle Infrastructure at sites in Council ownership and also to meeting the ambitions of the Oxfordshire EV Infrastructure Strategy to reach a target of 7.5% of local authority managed car parks providing Electric Vehicle charged spaces by 2025. A 7.5% target is equivalent to 263 charged parking bays in Council owned car parks across the District. The 64 bays delivered under Park and Charge Oxfordshire represent 24% of this target. This, alongside public realm improvements, will enable town centres to evolve to meet the changing expectations of resident shoppers, businesses and visitors alike.

Hanborough Station was identified in the Council Plan as a focus for partnership effort to secure new and upgraded infrastructure to increase use of sustainable transport and improve connectivity. WODC and Oxfordshire County Council are now jointly commissioning the preparation of a Station Masterplan and Station Travel Plan (STP) in order to identify and deliver improvements to Hanborough Station, including consideration of accessibility improvements to the station. The bespoke STP will bring about a range of outputs including consideration of 'stewardship' issues, acting as a vehicle for change and planning a 'legacy'. The exercise will take a 'community led' approach to tap into local knowledge, enthusiasm and making use of local skills to help develop a robust rationale for investment. It is anticipated evidence will be gathered to understand:

- The profile of new developments and existing populations
- Stated preferences of travel
- Key routes and data of the locality/visitor patterns
- Scope for alternative travel such as cross promotion of the Liftshare scheme

Improved infrastructure at Hanborough Station will also benefit the 40 hectare Salt Cross Science and Technology Park allocated in the Local Plan which is in close proximity to the station. The delivery of the Salt Cross Science Park is a key ambition of the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy and will make an unprecedented contribution to the economic development of West Oxfordshire.

Turning to broadband infrastructure, the Council's [broadband rollout project with Gigaclear](#) was formally completed in December 2021. WODC and HM Government each invested £1.6m in the project, contracting Gigaclear to connect 4,788 of the most rural premises in West Oxfordshire with Fibre to the Premises broadband. The Council's investment levered a further £6.7m funding from Gigaclear to extend the network resulting in access of a total of over 12,000 properties in the district to ultra-fast broadband as a result of the project.

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

Recovery Theme: Communities

Two years into the pandemic and the importance of the Council Plan 'Strong Local Communities' priority has not diminished. The dynamic and inspiring community sector response across West Oxfordshire to the challenges introduced by the pandemic has provided a strong foundation from which to further develop a range of approaches to support the district's communities. The Council committed in the West Oxfordshire Covid-19 Recovery Plan to taking an active role in improving the health and wellbeing of its communities, investing resources in two particular strands of activity:-

Wellbeing Hubs: research with 48 community organisations and statutory service providers has been undertaken to explore the scope of and potential model for hubs as a means of providing a mix of services in partnership with other service providers, including advice, housing and welfare support for the community either through networking or co-locating or embedding staff in a local area. This research has been complemented by an asset mapping exercise to understand fixed buildings and greenspaces available in primary settlements alongside people/community groups.

Three models have been identified: Model 1: A Building, Model 2: A Person or People and Model 3: A Connected Way of Working. A 12 month 'test and learn pilot' of Model 2 has been funded with the appointment of a 'Carterton Hub Worker', in partnership with Carterton Connects, who is based in the Carterton Family Centre to connect people with services and providing advice. Similarly, a 'Community Builder' has been put in post for Witney Central focussing on supporting the community on the Smiths Estate. Finally, the Council has implemented Model 3 by facilitating the Witney Forum, bringing together local organisations and statutory services in Witney to share information and network. 50 organisations are in contact through the forum. This meets the Council Plan aim to 'help build resilience in communities with more effective joint working and intelligence sharing.'

Active Lives: the Council identified the need for a focus on helping people, especially those who are alone or with long term health conditions, to improve levels of physical activity in light of severe restrictions on movement by the pandemic. This reduced mobility was identified as a risk factor leading to physical decline, the consequences of which could lead to additional burdens on the NHS and which the Council seeks to mitigate against. A dedicated person centred activity programme called 'Move Together' has been offered to all residents who have shielded during the pandemic. A targeted 'Go Active Get Healthy' project has also been offered to help people with diabetes manage their condition through greater levels of activity.

Beyond these two strands of activity, the Council's Response Hub, established at the outset of the pandemic in March 2020 has been able to extend its reach with the appointment of staff funded through the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) to provide direct support and signposting to those residents requiring assistance and a specialist outreach function to further develop relationships between the Council and neighbourhood response groups and other voluntary and community sector partners.

A Youth Needs Assessment is underway to develop a comprehensive understanding of the priorities of young people in order to ensure that future services and infrastructure provision meets their needs and that the significant impact on young people in terms of their education, employment options, development

opportunities and social skills can be mitigated against. 4,000 survey responses have been received by young people which are being categorised into themes. Focus Groups will be held to explore these themes further to provide a robust evidence base for the Youth Needs Assessment.

Moving to activity not emanating from the Covid-19 Recovery Plan, attention has been given to longer term planning for the District's communities and their infrastructure needs in the years ahead as the Strategic Development Areas identified in the Local Plan, and smaller sites, are delivered to ensure that existing and incoming residents benefit and that the approach promotes social integration and cohesion. The Council successfully bid to the government's PropTech fund for £125k to develop a new digital engagement platform that makes readily available information on community infrastructure and developer contributions that exist (or can be created) into a single, accessible and visually engaging repository.

The benefit of this platform is that it will enable communities to better understand and interrogate local community infrastructure priorities. It will present:

- What development is proposed for their local area
- What infrastructure improvements have already been provided or are proposed to be provided as a result of new development in their local area
- The overall process of developer contributions including how they are negotiated, the differences between Section 106 legal agreements and the Community Infrastructure Levy
- How to put forward suggestions for infrastructure improvements needed locally (eg by being able to drop a pin on a map or plot out a new pedestrian or cycle route which would benefit the community)

A further commitment to working with partners to promote West Oxfordshire as a visitor attraction (whilst protecting its essential character) is made in the Council Plan. Given the significant contribution the visitor economy makes to West Oxfordshire communities, it is evident that there is a particularly acute need for support to recover and renew in the wake of the pandemic and the Cotswolds Tourism team have been working directly with tourism businesses to enable adaptation by improving their online capabilities. Partnership work with Wake up to Woodstock, the Witney Chamber of Trade and local businesses has focussed on enhancing destination marketing of Witney and Woodstock through www.cotswolds.com/witney and www.cotswolds.com/woodstock

Options for encouragement of sustainable tourism practices within the visitor economy have been investigated. The Sustainable Tourism Survey elicited 60 responses from local businesses and demonstrates a strong interest in improving the sustainability of their businesses.

The Council is also committed to supporting, through the distribution of grants, voluntary and community activity and partnership actions which help to progress delivery of the Council Plan and thereby benefiting West Oxfordshire communities. In the 2021 – 22 year £187,851 was granted to 15 organisations and/or projects and detail of these can be viewed on pages 279 – 298 of the [Cabinet Paper - March 2022](#).

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

Recovery Theme: Communities

In October 2021 the Council formally adopted the [West Oxfordshire Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document](#) (AH SPD) which will steer the successful delivery of West Oxfordshire Local Plan Policy H3 'Affordable Housing' by providing detailed guidance on the delivery of affordable housing in West Oxfordshire for the Council, developers, housing providers and local communities. The AH SPD is now a material planning consideration.

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

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

In 2021-22, 378 new affordable homes have completed in the District, far greater than the Local Plan identified average annual need of 274. Of this total, 241 are affordable rent and 137 are shared ownership. These are located in Freeland, Minster Lovell, Chipping Norton, Carterton, Burford, Long Hanborough, Woodstock, Witney, North Leigh and Bampton. It is anticipated that this target will again be exceeded in 2022-23 with a non-binding forecast of 336 completions.

Schemes of particular note which meet the housing needs of our changing population, as required by this Council Plan priority include:

- Delivery in partnership with Oxfordshire County Council, and with the use of Growth Deal Funding, of 80 extra care affordable homes in Chipping Norton.
- An award of £78k from the government's 'Brownfield Land Release Fund' has been made to the Council which will unlock a Council owned site in Chipping Norton for eight affordable net-zero carbon custom built homes. A planning application is forthcoming for the homes and associated sustainable amenities including e-vehicle club with car charging points.
- In partnership with Cottsway Housing and benefitting from Growth Deal Funding, the redevelopment of 49 units for affordable social rent which were no longer fit for purpose at two sites: 18 units at Lavender Place, Bampton and 31 units at Blenheim Court, Carterton.

- In partnership with Registered Provider Heylo Housing and the Oxfordshire Growth Deal, the Council has benefited from Heylo Housings ability to negotiate bulk purchase of new homes from developers for use as shared ownership housing. 43 properties have been secured with 32 of these sold and 11 in the process of completion.

The rollout of the 'Blenheim Approach' in partnership with Blenheim Estate continues apace. This innovative 'affordable rent' housing model seeks to deliver affordable housing available at between 60 – 80% of market rental costs. It is the intention of Blenheim Estate to retain ownership of the rental properties so they can be held in perpetuity for local people, especially those within the key worker categories. At the Park View development in Woodstock, 11 affordable homes have been delivered out of a total of 150, with completions set to increase substantially in 2022-23.

In addition to this the Council is exploring a range of housing products for existing and upcoming developments to broaden the range of Low Cost Home Ownership products on these. These include Rent to Buy, Build to Rent and Discount Market Sale and First Homes which are defined in the AH SPD on pages 14, 15 and 16 respectively. A number of Rent to Buy properties are scheduled to come forward at the Milestone Road site in Carterton and 4 properties as First Homes at Discount Market Sale are being developed in Long Hanborough. The [Pre-submission Area Action Plan for Salt Cross Garden Village](#) includes a Policy 24 'Build to Rent' (at page 174) in support of Build to Rent proposals coming forward at Salt Cross Garden Village.

Within the West Oxfordshire Local Plan there is a requirement for sites of over 100 homes to provide suitable self-build/custom finish plots. Self-build is also promoted through a Council maintained [self-build register](#) which can be accessed on the Council website and additional guidance is provided in the aforementioned Affordable Housing SPD. Policy 25 'Custom and Self-Build Housing' contained within the Pre-submission Area Action Plan for Salt Cross Garden Village supports delivery of this specialist type of housing within the site and demonstrates the Council's commitment to support this alternative type of housing as a means of meeting the housing needs of our changing population. A successful bid was made to Homes England for a 3 year Housing Development and Community Facilitator to enable housing delivery of Salt Cross Garden Village. The post-holder will focus on projects developing community led housing and self-build housing at the Garden Village.

The Council continues to pursue opportunities for working in partnership with legacy landowners to accelerate delivery of affordable housing in the district. The AH SPD invites those landowners (particularly in smaller rural settlements) who are considering development as part of their long term legacy planning to engage with the Council to explore the scope for delivering affordable housing through rural exception sites. Furthermore the Council is collaborating with Parish Councils, Registered Providers and developers to bring forward smaller schemes to help meet local need for affordable housing.

The Council is also working proactively to address the issue of rough sleeping and in mid-2021 purchased the Old Court House in Witney to provide safe, flexible accommodation for adults who are rough sleeping or at risk of it. The property contains 15 units of high quality, self-contained bedsits. By being able to offer homeless clients direct access to accommodation at the Old Court House it mitigates the need to fund more costly B&B accommodation which is often out of area. This approach is much more cost effective to the council and beneficial to the client as they are placed close to existing support networks. A partnership with employment charity and social enterprise [Aspire](#) provides bespoke onsite support to assist residents to move on successfully at the right

time into long term accommodation and provides one to one support to ensure access to services including health, mental health and addiction agencies as well as employment, training/education opportunities

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

Recovery Theme: Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance

Achievement of the aforementioned 5 Council Plan priorities are dependent on the Council having a sound financial footing. Previous budgetary constraints have been amplified by the pandemic (greater draw on Council services, extraordinary service costs and lost revenue streams) and so the challenge of matching delivery ambitions to the Council's revenue stream makes this final Council Plan priority of delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council a key priority.

The WODC Recovery [Investment Strategy](#) 2020 – 24 starts from a premise that there is a significant funding gap that needs to be closed and capital investment is a major tool available to the Council to achieve this so long as it covers the revenue implications of that investment and makes an appropriate return. Capital Investment provides a route to delivering the ambitious programme of the Council set out in the Council Plan, with 6 delivery themes in the Investment Strategy defined as: · The provision of adequate and affordable housing · Green Energy & Carbon Reduction; · Delivering Infrastructure for Jobs & Economic Growth; · Reinvigorating Commercial Centres to ensure our economic vibrancy; · Maximising existing and new income streams from service delivery; · Developing a commercial culture to our decision making whilst retaining a public service ethos.

A £2.4million acquisition has been completed in the 2021 – 22 year of a commercial building in Carterton currently occupied by The Garden Trading Centre and was an opportunity to consolidate the land and buildings into single ownership. Further investment will be made to substantially improve the asset with repairs to the roof. The return is in line with the requirement that any investment generates a return in the order of 3.5% above the borrowing cost and thus makes a contribution towards closing the revenue funding gap set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Further detail of activity under the Investment Strategy can be found in the [Investment Strategy Report 2022-23](#).

Two areas of particular focus are the Agile Working Project (Office Rationalisation) and the Environmental Services Innovation Programme. The Council has embarked on an office rationalisation exercise to look at ways of generating revenue from Council owned offices. New office layouts have been proposed which reduce the office footprints by 40%, enabling vacated areas to be tenanted. This has been made possible by the adoption of an 'Agile Working Strategy' which requires staff to become 'hybrid workers', mixing the remote working that was the 'norm' during the pandemic with in office working. Additional benefits to this approach are an estimated 40 – 50% reduction in carbon emissions from reduced staff mileage and opportunities for enhanced 'work/life balance' for staff.

The Environmental Services Innovation Programme was launched in June 2021 with a focus on delivering efficiency measures relating to three criteria: service cost, performance and climate (including carbon savings/biodiversity impact mitigation). In the early phase of the ESIP, 39 lower level projects have been delivered eg in-cab digital waste management system (Yotta), rationalisation of dog waste/litter bins, change to grounds maintenance practices to mitigate wildlife habitat loss. The next phase of the ESIP for West Oxfordshire is the Council's waste service review which will consider environmental and CO2 impacts. An options appraisal will explore opportunities which may be brought about by cross boundary working and/or the sharing of a depot with a

neighbouring waste collection authority. The options appraisal will in turn feed into waste vehicle replacement plans in readiness for the Council's current Waste and Recycling Collection Contract with Ubico ending in 2024, and which coincides with the majority of the current collection vehicles being 7 years old and at end of life. Ahead of this, an electric waste vehicle was added to the Council's Waste Vehicle Fleet in 2021.

Turning to modernisation of Council service delivery, provision of digital options for businesses and residents as a means of offering more choice for accessing services has continued to progress in this second year of the Council Plan. Customers can access Council services more conveniently via a range of online self-serve tools, whilst still having access to an advisor on the phone or face to face if preferred. In Witney, this can be at the relaunched Customer Service Centre on Welch Way where Customer Services, Housing and Benefits Officers are based. The launch of [OpenPortal](#) in 2022 enables 24/7 online self-service of Council Tax and Business Rates accounts and the claiming of Benefits.

Central to the digitalisation of Council services is the Salesforce platform which has further evolved to meet a variety of service needs:-

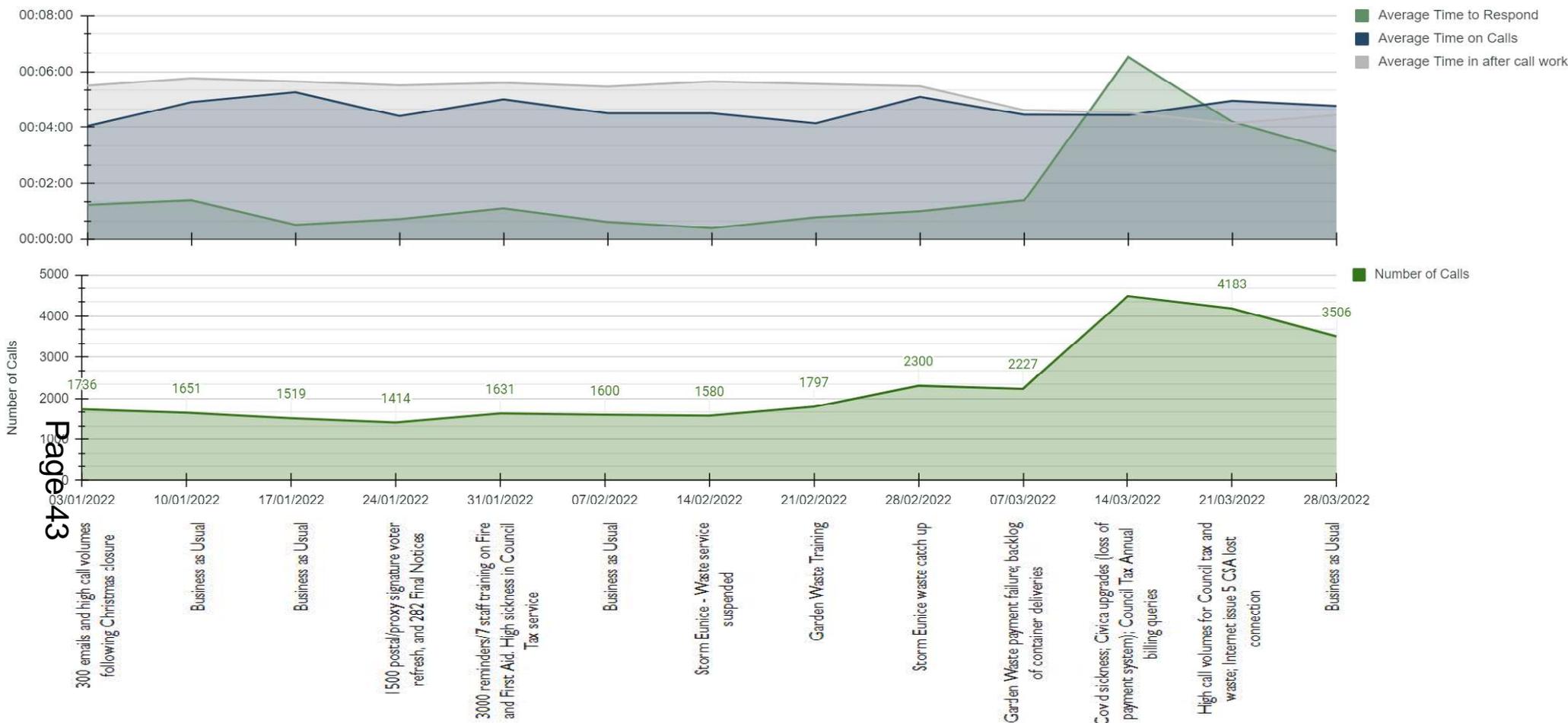
- Integration of Salesforce with a new digital Waste Management System (Yotta) to enable monitoring of bulky household, clinical and commercial waste as well as missed bin collections and replacement container requests. Ubico is able to access information updates via use of tablets in their service trucks on route.
- Platform enhancements to increase efficiencies through better transparency and case management, including the addition of high priority queues to expedite response rate to urgent queries
- Distribution of a variety of Covid-19 related business grants including: Additional (Covid-19) Restrictions Grant to previous applicants paid under the Restart:Strand 2 (Hospitality and Leisure) scheme, the WODC Business Growth Support Scheme and the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grants.

The aforementioned successful application for £125k of PropTech funding to establish a new digital engagement platform will enable the Council to greatly improve its digital engagement capacity through the establishment of a new digital engagement platform using software '[CommonPlace](#)'. This centralised, transparent and accessible web-based resource can also be downloaded as an app, enabling communities to better understand and interrogate local community infrastructure priorities and funding opportunities, as well as providing the means of submitting infrastructure priorities to the Council for their local area. The Council will benefit through improved engagement and knowledge sharing but via reduced resource burden as local communities will be enabled to 'self-serve' and establish information requirements themselves.



Satisfied

Customer Services Quarter 4



Service delivery can be affected by a range of factors both within the service such as staff absence and in other services such as the implementation of new software which requires advisors to be trained up; as well as mass comms sent to residents /clients such as council tax reminders, garden renewals and election registration.

There was a spike in the volume of phone calls during the last three weeks of March, which related primarily to queries about garden waste renewals and council tax annual billing. An issue with the 3D secure authentication of the Civica Payment solution resulted in a number of failed customer payments. This issue affected all Councils who are using the Civica webpay solution. The ICT team immediately flagged up the issue with the company and an interim 'fix' was rolled out shortly afterwards. Due to the

disruption caused to residents a meeting was held with senior managers from Civica and a claim for compensation has been submitted. A permanent solution will be rolled out after the summer when a new 3D secure gateway is implemented.

Council tax annual bills generated from the new system resulted in additional calls. Although the wording was identical to last year's bill, the format was slightly different. Next year's annual bills will be revised to improve clarity.

During this busy period, 12 staff in the service contracted Covid-19 including nine advisors, some advisors temporarily lost IT connectivity during one lunchtime, and Civica scheduled a software upgrade during annual billing (outside of the Council's control)

which reduced capacity in the service while increasing additional/repeat calls.

It has been acknowledged that garden waste renewals coinciding with the annual CT billing creates a spike in call volumes which can be difficult to manage; the service will be reviewing the scheduling of garden waste renewals later this year, as well as collaborating with key service areas on the comms going out to residents/businesses and building a timeline of events to better manage the demand for Customer Services.

Note: The response time, on call time, and after call time data include data for West Oxfordshire specific staff and shared staff, based on a 60% - 40% split respectively. This arrangement helps to improve resilience in the service.



WODC FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

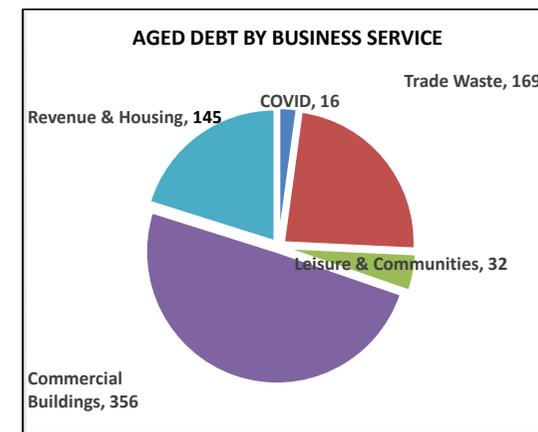
| Service Area | £k | | | Variance (under) / over |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------------------------|
| | Original Budget | Profiled Budget | Actual Exp. | |
| Democratic and Committee Services | 953 | 927 | 961 | 33 |
| Environmental & Regulatory Services | 479 | 746 | 432 | (44) |
| Environmental Services | 7,088 | 6,925 | 6,893 | (32) |
| Finance, Human Resources & Procurement | 890 | 899 | 895 | (3) |
| ICT, Change & Customer Services | 1,802 | 1,819 | 1,772 | (48) |
| Land, Legal & Property | 863 | 807 | 776 | (31) |
| Leisure & Communities | 2,058 | 2,055 | 1,980 | (76) |
| Planning & Strategic Housing | 712 | 778 | 720 | (58) |
| Revenues & Housing Support | 895 | 749 | 790 | 41 |
| Investment Property and Retained Services | (1,871) | (1,800) | (425) | (245) |
| Total cost of services | 13,868 | 13,905 | 14,794 | (463) |
| Plus: | | | | |
| Investment income receipts | (788) | (788) | (794) | (6) |
| Cost of services before financing: | 13,081 | 13,117 | 14,000 | (469) |

AGED DEBT SUMMARY

| | Mar-22 | Dec-21 | Sep-21 | Movement vs. prior period | | |
|----------|--------|--------|--------|---------------------------|-----|---|
| Invoices | 1,241 | 1,244 | 1,356 | 3 | 0% | ↓ |
| £k | 718 | 1,093 | 1,426 | 375 | 52% | ↓ |

Aged Debt Summary:

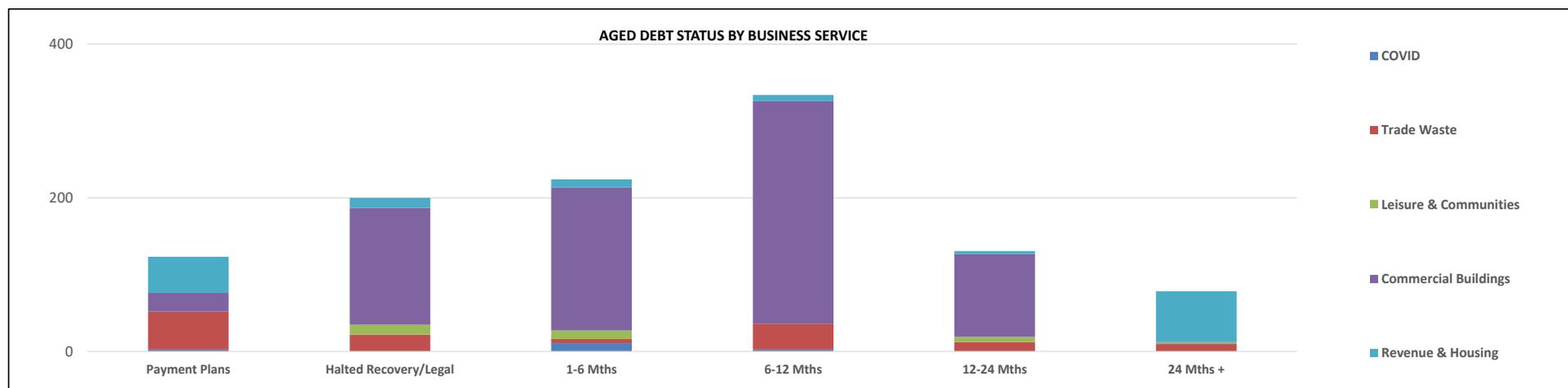
- Q4 position has improved versus Q3 with a significant reduction in total aged debt of £375,000.
- Our aim is to bring every case to a conclusion.
- A lot of effort has been successfully put into making sure that invoices do not become overdue by proactively liaising with customers. The success of this strategy is evidenced by an increase of 25% of invoices in Payment Plans vs Q3.



Overall Summary:

The Council faced continued pressure on income budgets in 2021/22 with in year reporting highlighting Car Parking and Land Charges. A prudent approach was taken in the 2021/22 budget with the inclusion of £1.8m of income contingencies against our Leisure Contract and Investment Properties. Investment Property rents performed above target by £249,563 aided by the purchase of additional units at Carterton Industrial Estate in Q2 and a material fall in bad debt necessitated a £212,000 reduction in Bad Debt provision.

Both of our major contractors - Publica & Ubico returned a contract refund to the Council at the end of the year, a great achievement against the backdrop of high inflation & fuel prices and the lack of agency workers, providing the Council with a benefit of £67,819 (Publica) and £137,278 (Ubico). Combined with Council Service areas controlling costs and additional grant income from the Government, the Q4 outturn position is very positive, giving the Council the opportunity to place surplus funds into earmarked reserves to offset unavoidable inflationary increases in 22/23.



| | |
|---|--|
|  WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL | WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL |
| Name and date of Committee | Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee Wednesday 29 June 2022 |
| Report Number | |
| Subject | INVESTMENT PROPERTY REVIEW AND OUTTURN 21/22 |
| Wards affected | ALL |
| Accountable member | Cllr Levy Cabinet Member for Resources Email: dan.levy@westoxon.gov.uk |
| Accountable officer | Andrew Turner, Business Manager for Assets and Council Priorities Email: andrew.turner@publicagroup.uk Elizabeth Griffiths, Chief Finance Officer Tel: 01993 861188 Email Elizabeth.griffiths@westoxon.gov.uk |
| Summary/Purpose | To inform Committee of the performance of the Council's investment property portfolio |
| Annexes | Exempt Annex A – Outturn report 2021/2022 |
| Recommendation/s | That the report be noted |
| Corporate priorities | Provide efficient and value for money services, whilst delivering quality front line services |
| Key Decision | No |
| Exempt | Exempt Annex A only |
| Consultees/ Consultation | |

I. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. As a consequence of a strategic decision taken a number of years ago the Council holds a portfolio of property assets to help support the revenue budget via investment income. This decision was made as the Council had identified an over reliance on cash based investments in its reserves and, as a consequence, suffered a major risk at times of falling interest rates.
- 1.2. In addition it was identified that the approach of maintaining cash based investments risked the value of the capital deposited being diminished over time due to the effects of inflation.
- 1.3. As a consequence, a strategy was adopted and annually reviewed to allow the Council to take advantage of strategic and opportunistic investments in property that met the broad principles of improving the balance of the investment portfolio. This report seeks to update the Committee on performance of the portfolio.

2. MAIN POINTS

General Property Update

- 2.1. In September 2011 the Committee took a strategic view that the investment strategy, with continuing record low levels of interest rates, should adopt a target ratio of commercial property to finance assets of 65% property and 35% cash.
- 2.2. The total investment property portfolio (excluding strategic sites Woolgate etc) now stands at £45.8m (£44.8m I April 21). The long term cash portfolio at 31/3/22 stood at £25.6m (excluding short term cashflow funds of £13.8m)and therefore the ratio of long term property assets to overall long term assets stood at 64.1%. The details are shown below:-

| Asset Class | Amount (£m) |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|
| Property | 45.8 |
| Pooled Funds | 12.0 |
| Bonds | 2.5 |
| REIT (Housing) | 1.0 |
| Third Party Loans (Housing and Solar) | 10.1 |
| Total | 71.4 |

- 2.3. In addition to setting out the running yield on the properties (rent v total cost of acquisition), the report also tries to give a view on the overall return on property by taking account of any appreciation or diminution in asset values. This also has the effect of accounting for losses incurred as acquisition costs are deleted from valuations.
- 2.4. The table at Annex A shows that the property values are, in some cases, lower than the purchase price. The principal reasons for this are the acquisition costs associated with such investments and the natural diminishing length of lease term that has an impact on asset values for investment purposes. Typical acquisition costs are 5% to cover stamp duty, fees and survey costs. On the portfolio overall this has now been offset by capital appreciation.
- 2.5. It must be stressed that these gains (and losses) remain unrealised and are based on RICS Red Book valuations calculated to comply with CIPFA requirements for asset valuation. Annex A identifies the overall return on property assets taking account of the issues set out in 2.4 above.
- 2.6. As mentioned above, the principal reason for the move into commercial property was to protect the Councils income stream from the volatility of interest rates rather than capital appreciation, although appreciation remains a longer term possibility. The financial implications section gives a commentary on the success in respect of the income stream relative to cash
- 2.7. The investment properties are subject to differing lengths of lease terms and these are set out in Annex A. The industrial estates at Newman Court and Swain Court have been excluded as these are not capital assets of the Council (they are held under head leases). Also excluded is Greystones Industrial Estate which is currently being reviewed and other buildings which are in part leased by Ubico for operational purposes, and garages which are viewed as de-minimus.
- 2.8. Given the high proportion of long term ground rents within the portfolio (Carterton, Woolgate, Marriotts and Mill Walk) the average unexpired lease term is longer when compared to many portfolios, at around 20 years, and this provides further assurance to the Council of a relatively stable long term return. Of course this can mask a range of leases expiring in a short time period and the table below shows the rental income attributable to leases by reference to expiry dates and consequent risk to revenue streams.

| Lease Expiry @ 31/03/2022 | Rental Income @ 31/03/2022 |
|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| Within a year /vacant | £471,326 |
| 1 year – 2 years | £641,270 |
| 2 year – 5 years | £1,664,642 |
| 5 years – 10 years | £492,603 |
| 10+ years | £652,834 |

- 2.9. A major focus over the coming year is to continue to make progress on leases in the within 1 year category and 2-5 year category. Given the potential risk of voids in this scenario the council has made provision within its reserves for such risk. Attached at Annex A is the outturn report including all of the council's investment properties
- 2.10 To support the Council's commercial tenants during the Covid 19 pandemic the Council agreed deferral schemes, on qualifying criteria, in March 2020 and December 2020 to cover the national lockdowns. On 16th June 2021 Cabinet approved a set of tools to be used in respect of those tenants who have been unable to trade being further rent deferrals, lease re-gear and finally in exception circumstances a rent free period. These tools can be used by the Cabinet member for Finance on a case by case basis.
- 2.11 In early 2022 the Government enacted the Commercial Rent (Coronavirus) Act 2022. This act ringfences the rent arrears for the lockdown periods and establishes a code of practice for landlords and tenants to follow in agreeing any further assistance. Officers are currently in discussion with two tenants that wish to make an application for further assistance under this act and the Council's set of tools referred to in 2.10

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. This report is seeking to give the committee additional information by detailing yield not just compared to purchase price (running yield), but also, to consider the overall return on property by taking into account unrealised capital gains and losses (overall yield).
- 3.2. The running yield on the commercial property portfolio (excluding Marriotts, Woolgate and Mill Walk which were not purchased as part of the property strategy and are ground rents only) is currently around 6.78%. (7.5% on original cost).
- 3.3. The uplift in running yield being achieved on the commercial property compared to cash is around 3.72% being the difference in the running yield (6.78%) and the return in long dated cash in pooled funds, housing associations and third parties (3.06%). UK 10 year gilts currently attract a return of 2.6% and are a useful benchmark when comparing to long term cash.
- 3.4. In financial terms this 3.72% uplift in performance from property is worth around £1.7m per annum (£45.8m @ 3.72%). To date the change in strategy has saved the Council in the order of £18m on a cumulative basis compared to cash.
- 3.5. Calculation of the overall return is quite a complex exercise which is summarised at Annex A. From this summary it can be noted that the annual overall return on property since acquisition taking account of losses due to transaction (acquisition) fees and notional unrealised valuation losses and gains is around 9.13% - some 2.35% over the running yield.

3.6. Some individual properties remain underperforming on an overall return basis - this is in the main part because the acquisition costs have been amortised (written down) over a shorter period of time than the older properties.

3.7. The overall return on property can be summarised as:-

| | |
|---|---------|
| (A)Overall Acquisition Price (incl costs) | £40.2m |
| (B)Latest Valuation | £45.8m |
| (C)Unrealised valuation gain (B-A) | £ 5.6m |
| (D)Overall Rental Stream (multi-year) | £ 35.5m |
| (E) Total Return (D+C) | £ 41.1m |
| (F) Rental Yield (D/A) | 88.3% |
| (G)Unrealised Capital Gain (C/A) | 13.9% |
| (H)Overall Yield (E/A) | 98% |
| (I)Annualised Time Weighted Yield* | 11.18% |

* This takes account of both the relative size of the property and the length of time held in addition to the yield on the property.

3.8. The above analysis shows that despite acquisition costs the portfolio has now achieved an unrealised valuation gain and this together with the rental performance of the portfolio has led to, in overall terms, an extremely positive performance.

3.9. In response to continued funding pressures facing the Council a Recovery and Investment Strategy was approved in October 2020 which sets out parameters for future acquisitions that deliver both council priorities and offer investment return to cover cost of capital and risk.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1. Holding any asset has an element of risk associated with that holding. Whilst property has the security of 'bricks and mortar' compared to financial assets it does come with risks if that asset is not occupied or if the occupation market suffers due to difficult market conditions.

4.2. The purpose of the annual report is to enable a regular review of the asset holding to enable a view to be taken on the current risks associated with the holding.

4.3. The council has mitigated the risk of its property holding by having a broad portfolio of assets covering a range of sectors including Industrial, Office, Retail and Leisure. It also has a mix of ground rents and full occupational leases which underpin the returns by providing longer term stability.

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