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## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

You are summoned to a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which will be held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB on **Wednesday 4 September 2024 at 5.30pm.**



Giles Hughes  
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chairman), Joy Aitman (Vice-Chair), Thomas Ashby, Adam Clements, Julian Cooper, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Genny Early, Natalie King, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Paul Marsh, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, Elizabeth Poskitt, Carl Rylett, Sandra Simpson, Ruth Smith, Alistair Wray, Liam Walker, Mark Walker and Alex Wilson.

Recording of Proceedings – The law allows the public proceedings of Council, Executive, 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. **Apologies for Absence**

To receive any apologies for absence and temporary appointments.  
The quorum for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is 6 members.

2. **Declarations of Interest**

To receive any declarations from Members of the Committee on any items to be considered at the meeting.

3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting (Pages 5 - 12)**

To approve the minutes of the previous meeting, held Wednesday 17 July 2024.

4. **Announcements from the Chair**

To receive any announcements from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5. **Participation of the Public**

To receive any submissions from members of the public, in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure, anyone who lives in the district or who pays council tax or business rates to the Council is eligible to read a statement or express an opinion at this meeting. You can register to speak by sending your written submission of no more than 750 words to [democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk) by no later than 10.00am on the working day before the meeting.

6. **Development Management Improvement Programme – Progress Update (Pages 13 - 24)**

Purpose:

To report progress with the implementation of the Development Management Improvement Plan (DMIP) and outline areas of current/future improvement.

Recommendation:

That the Committee Resolves to:

1. Note the existing/proposed improvements to the Development Management process, alongside the direction of travel for future improvements post repatriation of the Planning Service to WODC.

Invited:

Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning  
Phil Shaw, Business Manager Development & Sustainability

7. **Responding to External Consultations (Pages 25 - 28)**

Purpose:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has requested detail on how West Oxfordshire District Council assesses which external consultations it responds to.

Recommendations:

That the Committee resolves to:

1. Note the content of the report;
2. Agree any recommendations it wishes to submit to the Executive.

Invited:

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council  
Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Officer  
Astrid Harvey, Strategic Policy and Partnerships Officer

8. **Financial Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter One (Pages 29 - 46)**

Purpose:

To detail the Council's financial performance for Quarter One 2024-2025.

Recommendations:

That the Committee notes the report, and agrees any recommendations it wishes to make to the Executive on 11 September 2024.

The Executive is recommended to resolve to:

1. Note the Council's Financial Performance for Quarter One 2024-2025;
2. Recommend to Council that an additional £750,000 should be included in the revised Capital Budget for 2024/25 as set out in 2.25 in the report.

Invited:

Councillor Alaric Smith, Executive Member for Finance  
Madhu Richards, Director of Finance  
Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant

9. **Service Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter One (Pages 47 - 106)**

Purpose:

To provide details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2024-25 Quarter One (Q1).

Recommendations:

The Committee notes the report and agrees any recommendations it wishes to make to the Executive on 11 September 2024.

The Executive is recommended to resolve to:

1. Note the 2024/25 Q1 service performance report.

Invited:

Councillor Andy Graham, Leader of the Council  
Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Officer  
Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst

10. **Proposed Reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the Planning System (Pages 107 - 144)**

Purpose:

To consider a number of proposed changes to National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and to agree West Oxfordshire District Council's response to those proposed changes.

Recommendation:

The Committee notes the report and agrees any recommendations it wishes to make to the Executive on 11 September 2024.

The Executive is recommended to resolve to:

1. Note the content of the report including the summary overview of the proposed changes to national planning policy;
2. Delegate responsibility to the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, to agree, finalise and submit the suggested draft consultation response attached at Annex A.

Invited:

Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager  
Councillor Hugo Aston, Executive Member for Planning

**11. Report Back on Recommendations**

For the Committee to note the Executive's response to any recommendations arising from the previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.

There were no recommendations to the Executive arising from the previous Committee meeting.

**12. Executive Work Programme (Pages 145 - 154)**

Purpose:

To give the Committee the opportunity to comment on the Executive Work Programme.

Recommendation:

That the Committee agrees which items on the Executive Work Programme should be subject to pre-decision scrutiny and the priority order of those items.

**13. Committee Work Programme (Pages 155 - 158)**

Purpose:

To provide the Committee with an updated Work Programme for 2024/25.

Recommendation:

That the Committee notes and comments on the work programme.

(END)

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### Minutes of the meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB  
at 5.30 pm on **Wednesday, 17 July 2024**

#### PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chairman), Joy Aitman (Vice-Chair), Thomas Ashby, Adam Clements, Julian Cooper, Steve Cosier, Rachel Crouch, Genny Early, David Jackson, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Paul Marsh, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, Elizabeth Poskitt, Carl Rylett, Sandra Simpson, Ruth Smith, Alistair Wray, Liam Walker, Mark Walker and Alex Wilson

Officers: Giles Hughes, Chief Executive, Andrew Pollard, Interim Programme Director, Simon Anthony, Business Manager for Environmental Services, Kim Hudson, Principal Planning Officer, Madhu Richards, Director of Finance, Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant, Maria Wheatley, Parking Manager, Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business Manager and Christine Elsasser, Democratic Services Officer

Other Councillors in attendance: Alaric Smith and Andy Graham

#### **17 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Natalie King. Councillor David Jackson substituted for Councillor Natalie King.

Councillor Nick Leverton left the meeting at 18:24.

Councillor Liam Walker left the meeting at 18:30

Councillors Adam Clements and Liz Leffman left the meeting at 19:09

Councillor Thomas Ashby left the meeting at 19:15

Councillor Michele Mead left the meeting at 19:45

#### **18 Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received from Members of the Committee.

#### **19 Minutes of Previous Meeting**

Councillor Michele Mead proposed that the minutes of the previous meeting, held on Wednesday 5 June 2024, be approved by the Committee as a true and accurate record. This was seconded by Councillor Steve Cosier, was put to a vote and it was unanimously agreed by the Committee.

It was noted that Councillor Liz Leffman had given apologies and was therefore not absent. The attendance record for 5 June 2024 would be amended accordingly.

#### **20 Announcements from the Chair**

The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and drew attention to the updated version of the Publica Transition document which had been provided to Members

#### **21 Participation of the Public**

There was no participation of the public.

## 22 Publica Transition Plan

The Chief Executive introduced the report that set out the services proposed to transfer from Publica to the Council, the process including phasing, consideration of risks and opportunities, cost implications, practicalities and timelines.

It was explained that important work had been done collectively and alongside the Interim Programme Director to ensure the best outcomes were achieved. Taking into consideration logically, the great detail of services to ensure any changes were done in a phased manner with a strong locality focus to ensure the organisation would deliver.

Special care was taken in the financial modelling to recognise that service areas varied and that there would be differences in how Publica and the Council would be structured.

The financial implications of the Publica Review had been the subject of extensive due diligence since programme inception in February 2024. The resulting financial modelling output reflected robust programme assumptions and a detailed audit trail of movements between baseline costing, of delivery via the current Publica model, to the new Council structure post transition, as proposed in the Detailed Transition Plan.

The key financial implications of the Detailed Transition Plan were an indicative enduring annual increase to West Oxfordshire District Council revenue budget of £185k per annum (pro rata for 2024/25 would be £77k) with one-off costs of restructuring in the region of £207k to £301k, being the “most likely” and “maximum” scenario respectively.

The report also referenced business change and a focus on the Council’s needs and priorities. The changes would bring better clarity in roles and responsibilities, responsiveness and agility.

There was a plan to implement minimum redundancies and the intention was to ensure that roles would be available for as many staff as possible. TUPE would be used to facilitate this process and for the majority of staff the transition from Publica to West Oxfordshire District Council would straightforward with very little disruption.

The Interim Programme Director explained that he deliberately set up a programme office and asked Members to note the ‘Waterfall’ chart on page 31 that highlighted the core movements in cost from the Publica baseline costing to the Council’s new structure post transition. The key assumptions which underpinned the Phase I cost movements were:

- The Council model assumed that all Phase I roles were opted-in to Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) at the point of transfer (November 2024) with no subsequent opt out.
- Newly created roles were in accordance with service delivery requirements under the Council model post Phase I. Proposed organisational structures had been developed, to facilitate this cost modelling, and these would be refined and finalised after consultation with staff involved in Phase I.
- “Direct savings” resulted from roles not transferring to an equivalent role within the Council operating structure.

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- “Indirect savings” resulted from a Senior Management restructure within Publica. These savings were offered in entirety underneath the scope of Phase 1, therefore no further executive management savings were anticipated for future phases.
- For modelling purposes, both the one-off costs of transition and the savings (direct & indirect) had been split equally across the councils (one third each).
- The paper did not consider any impact of the Council restructure on Retained Officers’ remuneration.
- As mentioned, Local Partnerships envisaged a phased approach to the transition and Phase 2 would be the subject of a future report.

The Chief Executive and the Interim Programme Director answered questions from Members and the following points were to be noted:

- The intention was to make sure as many people as possible would have roles in the new structures and where TUPE does apply, the employment of any employees would transfer automatically to the Council unless they objected to the transfer. They would be employed on the same terms and conditions and gain an entitlement to join the Local Government Pension Scheme. Where a role was fragmented (shared) and would no longer remain shared post transfer, TUPE would not apply in all cases. In these instances, formal consultation would be undertaken with the impacted employees in line with the Publica Redundancy Policy and Procedure following ACAS best practice. Consideration would be given to alternative measures to minimise or avoid redundancies including, and limited to, suitable alternative suitable employment within Publica, or through employment opportunities with the Shareholder Councils.
- The cost savings were explained in the covering report section 5.1. Impacts on 2024/25 were explained in section 5.3 of the covering report.
- Human Engine identified some benefits, for example a suitable pension that may attract future employees to the Council.
- Organisational culture was important and this would be considered in the consultation period; understanding of what values staff felt were important would be continued to be monitored through staff surveys.
- Processes for redundancy costs would be highlighted as part of the quarterly budget monitoring report to ensure Members could be made aware.
- Publica would still exist and deliver important services to the Council.
- The Budget for 2024/25 was built on assumptions that were known at the time. The cost of the transition could be found in section 5.2 of the report.
- Councils were creating various roles within planning to ensure experience was retained within each Council.

RESOLVED that the Committee AGREED:

I. To Note the Publica Transition report.

23

### **One-Year Publica Business Plan**

The Chief Executive introduced the report that considered the Draft Publica Business Plan 2024-25, produced by the Publica Board in consultation with Directors and Shareholders, and that recommended the Leader (as Shareholder Representative) approved the plan.

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It was explained that the purpose of the plan had been updated from the previous version first introduced and now:

- Acknowledged that Publica (and the Shareholder Councils) were currently in a 'transitional period' to staff and interested parties such as Councillors and Ubico, Publica's sister Teckal company;
- Provided clear messages to employees and interested parties on the priorities over the next year as part of a change management strategy;
- Ensured there was a clear focus on supporting Publica employees through transition and managing service changes effectively;
- Focused on the planning for the 'New Publica' and co-creating a new operating model in partnership with the Shareholder Councils;
- Stated that work with the Shareholder Councils was being undertaken to enable and ensure a smooth transition of services back under Council control.

The Chief Executive and the Interim Programme Director answered questions from Members and the following points were noted:

- The future of Publica was an appropriate question and updates and further questions would be answered to that as and when. It was believed that staff would find it reassuring that it was business as usual.
- There were priorities within the plan and those priorities would not be delayed.

**Action Point: Comments would be fed back to Officers that it was felt this document was not a business plan due to the lack of financial figures.**

RESOLVED that the Committee AGREED:

I. To Note the One-Year Publica Business Plan.

## 24 Waste Service Update

The Business Manager for Environmental Services presented a report that provided Members with an update of current waste services and also provided a timeline and options for future service design and delivery.

It was explained that West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) had contracted with Ubico for waste collection, street cleansing, grounds and other ancillary services since 1 April 2015. Ubico was a Teckal company wholly owned by its Shareholder Councils including West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC). Ubico's contract with WODC was due to end on 1 April 2026. Ubico's performance, particularly in terms of key waste areas of missed bins and container deliveries had improved significantly over the last 12 months since the introduction of a shared improvement plan between Ubico and Publica. The contract required WODC to notify Ubico of its intentions regarding a future contract before 1 April 2025. This report provided a suite of options for a future contract.

WODC was a key partner of the Oxfordshire Waste and Resources Partnership. The partnership was a very active collection of like-minded local authorities who were aiming to find collaborative ways of working to generate savings, efficiencies, environmental improvements, and other corporate objectives. WODC had led a review of strategic container purchasing across the partnership and identified quick wins for neighbouring authorities to



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make significant savings on their container purchasing. WODC have been named on a partnership contract for sale of recycling material, this joint contract was projected to provide significant savings for WODC, a paper was being prepared seeking approval for this contract.

The Business Manager for Environmental Services answered questions from Members and the following points were to be noted:

- There were active ongoing discussions to push new opportunities for a new recycling contract.
- The example in the report of collections every 3-4 weeks was only an example and did not represent the current thinking around the new government would do. It was requested that this be removed as to not to confuse residents.
- Missed material of any kind during a waste collection was classified as missed bins.
- Consideration needed to be given to how the Council could promote refill and reuse.

**Action Point:** The Business Manager for Environmental Services to consider including data on scattered bins in reporting. Online systems were being developed so that information could be used to retrain crews.

**Action point:** The Business Manager for Environmental Services would investigate Councillor Mead's address to find out what has happened with missed bins previously.

**Action point:** The Business Manager for Environmental Services would ask DEFRA to speak back to the Committee regarding broken equipment.

RESOLVED that the Committee AGREED:

I. To Note the Waste Service Update.

## 25 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Schedule

The Principal Planning Officer introduced the report that considered a draft CIL charging schedule which had been prepared in response to updated viability evidence. The report summarised the main outcomes of the viability work and the updated draft CIL charging schedule.

It was explained that the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was a charge that may be levied on most forms of development to help fund infrastructure. Despite several previous public consultations, CIL had not been adopted in West Oxfordshire and therefore last year, Members agreed that fresh viability evidence should be commissioned with a view to public consultation taking place on a new CIL draft charging schedule. That viability evidence had now been completed and a new draft charging schedule had been prepared. Details of the various charges were set out in the report.

The Principal Planning Officer answered questions from Members and the following points were noted:

- As part of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy which is a county-wide study, there would be collaboration with other councils in Oxfordshire on larger strategic projects.
- CIL is a fixed tax on development and once adopted is not negotiable on an application-by-application basis whereas Section 106 payments are negotiable.
- Rates are based a large part on viability, and it was advised a pragmatic and simple approach be taken.

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- The proposed CIL rates are similar to other local planning authorities, in particular South & Vale.
- Payment of CIL receipts to Town and Parish Councils was capped at 15% if no Local Plan Neighbourhood Plan in place; 25% if a Local Plan Neighbourhood Plan was in place. However, the broad understanding was that it was capped annually based on the number of existing residential properties in the parish (£100 per dwelling) properties which was 110 per existing on that dwelling.
- An Infrastructure Development Plan (IDP) was due to update the funding gap analysis and would help close the infrastructure funding gap. The Council's infrastructure funding gap analysis would be updated prior to submission for examination
- The funding gap analysis would provide up-to-information on the predicted costs of all necessary infrastructure and the money expected from CIL and legal agreements to establish the likely funding gap.
- Regarding point 3.4 on page 89 of the pack, the non-residential developments listed as nil rated were due to it being based on relative lack of viability.
- Neighbourhood plans allow for Towns and Parish Councils to decide what infrastructure they would like to see and identify a level of need in the community.
- Suggested CIL rates are based on viability evidence, recommended by viability consultants. Their evidence found that charging CIL on the strategic development sites would not be viable due to their high Section 106 costs associated with supporting infrastructure.

RESOLVED that the Committee AGREED:

I. To Note the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Schedule.

## **26 Financial Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter Four**

The Director of Finance reported the financial performance of the Council in 2023/24.

The Chief Accountant explained that at year end the overspend on the cost of services was £972,473. This was driven by pressure on fee earning activities such as Building Control, Land Charges and Development Management. In addition, there was a significant overspend on the Ubico contract, due to the impact of the NJC pay award and additional costs for vehicle hire. There were also voids and rent-free periods in the Council's Investment Property portfolio which exacerbated this year end position. There was a table that outlined all the expenditures and savings per service on page 119 of the agenda pack.

The Chief Accountant answered questions from Members and the following point was noted:

- It was only the Capital Expenditure Budget that was slipping and therefore it was unlikely to affect residents directly. The reasons for slippage varied but projects included in the capital programme were all subject to a business case.

Members commended and thanked Officers for the report.

RESOLVED that the Committee AGREED:

I. To Note the Financial Performance Report 2023-24 Quarter Four.

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**27 Public Convenience Contract**

The Parking Manager introduced a report that would ask Executive to consider to agree a contract award for the cleaning and maintenance of public conveniences.

It was explained that the procurement process was carried out with an open tender method. The new contract would benefit from economies of scale being a shared contract across Cotswold District Council and West Oxfordshire District Council.

The Council-owned public conveniences were currently cleaned and maintained by Danfo (UK) Ltd under contract. The contract was due to expire on 30 September 2024, and a procurement exercise had been completed to secure a new contract from 1st October 2024 for a period of 4 years.

Quality criteria included an assessment of the bidders' ability to meet the required standards, their arrangements for management and supervision, their approach to managing customer complaints, their fleet management arrangements, their resilience and their approach to health and safety and sustainability.

Officers evaluated the bids, the outcome being that the preferred contractor for recommendation was Danfo (UK) Ltd, the current supplier. (Annex B)

The Parking Manager answered questions from Members and the following points were to be noted:

- It was only the contract that was being looked at not services in general.
- Outsourcing to Parish and Town Councils was not considered as part of this report; however, it would be looked at as part of a separate review of the service.
- The review would start once the contract was decided and within that contract there was a clause that enabled negotiation of more or less services to be provided.

RESOLVED that the Committee AGREED:

I. To Note the Public Convenience Contract.

**28 Report back on recommendations**

There was one Executive response to a recommendation, which related to the Approval of upgrading CCTV provisions on page 144 of the agenda pack and it was for noting.

**29 Committee Work Programme**

**Action Point:** There was a suggestion from a Member to examine access to dentistry in the District. Officers would be consulted on the best way of dealing with this suggestion and the Chair would report back to the Committee.

The Committee Work Programme was noted.

**30 Executive Work Programme**

The Executive Work Programme was noted.

**31 Matters Exempt from Publication and Exclusion of Press and Public**

There was no requirement for an exempt session.

**32 Public Convenience Contract - Exempt Appendix**

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This item was not discussed.

The Meeting closed at 8.25 pm

CHAIRMAN

 <p><b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b></p>	<p><b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b></p>
<p>Name and Date of Committee</p>	<p><b>OVERVIEW &amp; SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 4 SEPTEMBER 2024</b></p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p><b>DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT IMPROVEMENT PLAN – PROGRESS UPDATE</b></p>
<p>Wards Affected</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Accountable Member</p>	<p>Councillor Hugo Ashton – Executive Member for Planning Email: <a href="mailto:hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk">hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Accountable Officer</p>	<p>Jon Dearing – Interim Executive Director Email: <a href="mailto:jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk">jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk</a></p>
<p>Report Author</p>	<p>Phil Shaw – Business Manager, Development Management Email: <a href="mailto:phil.shaw@publicagroup.uk">phil.shaw@publicagroup.uk</a></p>
<p>Purpose</p>	<p>To report progress with the implementation of the Development Management Improvement Plan (DMIP) and outline areas of current/future improvement.</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Annex A – Recent Performance Statistics</p>
<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>That the Committee Resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I. Note the existing/proposed improvements to the Development Management process, alongside the direction of travel for future improvements post repatriation of the Planning Service to WODC.</li> </ol>
<p>Corporate Priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li> </ul>
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p><b>NO</b></p>
<p>Exempt</p>	<p><b>NO</b></p>
<p>Consultees/ Consultation</p>	<p>Consultation on the original report setting out the DM improvements and upon this report outlining the progress was undertaken following the PAS report.</p>

## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 It will be recalled that a series of improvements that had been made or were proposed to be undertaken were contained in a Development Management Improvement Plan (DMIP).
- 1.2 This report identifies the progress that has been made and then also sets out further potential changes and improvements that can be made alongside the repatriation of the Planning function to WODC.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 The Development Management (DM) Service has had a challenging time over the last few years. The Pandemic brought about an unanticipated surge in demand which resulted in substantially higher workloads and a much more competitive recruitment market. The Pandemic also restricted working processes, with (at times) 100% home-working and restrictions around meetings and site visits.
- 2.2 Locally, these Pandemic related challenges were exacerbated by issues around retention, recruitment, validation backlogs and a lack of accurate data around which performance management mechanisms could operate. This in turn led to customer contact /feedback issues as staff prioritised throughput/backlog reduction over customer focus.
- 2.3 Accordingly, an Improvement Programme was initiated in January 2021, with the aim of addressing the fundamental issues. Some elements relating to staff recruitment and retention were implemented immediately eg Career Grades, improved recruitment processes, golden hello's etc whilst implementation of some elements was delayed whilst member approval across the partnership was secured.
- 2.4 Over the last eighteen months the DM Management Team has been closely monitoring the impact of the first phase of improvements and prioritising the next best steps in terms of improving the service and implementing a number of the recommendations arising from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) review that was undertaken to sense check the proposed improvements. The first part of this report sets out the state of progress against each of the areas identified for improvement.
- 2.5 It should be noted that Phase III of the Programme (which was to have been the focus of 2024) was to look at the digitalisation of the service and implementation of further shared working models where appropriate (e.g. ecology). The decision of the three Publica shareholder Councils to repatriate services such as DM has meant that this work can no longer be implemented as intended. The opportunity is however still being taken to explore digitalisation commensurate with the likelihood that a shared ICT base may no longer be delivered. It also opens up the prospect of the ability to deliver a more WODC focused service such that WODC specific improvements can, following agreement with the Executive member, be rolled into the programme for the coming years.
- 2.6 The aim of all the improvement work is to be providing a high quality, customer focussed and high performing service, that is sustainable and efficient.

## **3. UPDATE AS TO PROGRESS**

- 3.1 This section of the report sets out under the sub-headings the area of activity that was agreed in the improvement plan and what progress has been made in delivering against that task.

## Improvements to Enforcement Function

- 3.2 The focus for Enforcement was to reduce the backlog of cases. To help with this a “Harm Checklist” was created to streamline the triage process and identify cases that needed prioritising. This has been successful and aided the backlog of cases which has now reduced from over 600 to around 250.
- 3.3 The front end of the process focused on getting enforcement complaints to the team in the most efficient way possible. This has involved the creation and testing of an interactive digital form specifying all the key information that is required to be able to progress the complaint alongside additional functionality - such as the ability to upload photographs, plot the location on a map, set out the key harms being caused etc. These forms have been tested and are now live on a refreshed website setting out a more useable format explaining what the process of an investigation involves, the likely timeframes etc. and where in the process a particular complaint has got to.
- 3.4 The improvements will mean that in future customers will have their expectations managed proactively and they can self-serve far better than at present, thus releasing staff time to investigate complaints rather than spend disproportionate amounts of time liaising with complainants.
- 3.5 The next phase of the project will also review the case management process. This includes case triage, investigation and sign off (the back-office elements) to ensure that best practice is being used, allowing colleagues to focus attention on key cases rather than try to deal with all of them equally irrespective of the level of planning harm or profile that is caused.
- 3.6 Alongside the process of making the enforcement more efficient we are looking at making it more responsive. We are investigating the ability (generated by project work in another Service) to adapt their processes so as to enable a complainant to “track” a complaint (in a similar way that they can track an application progress). This is being picked up as part of the work in the next phase of improvements
- 3.7 Status - on track

### Validation

- 3.8 This work is complete. A shared team has been formed which has performed excellently in maintaining delays at levels far less than was historically the case, where there were very small teams and as such leave or sickness had disproportionate adverse impacts on throughput. The processes at all three Publica sites have been aligned such that (coupled with the greater staffing numbers of a shared team) there is now far greater resilience with work flexed across the sites according to demand. This element of the Planning Service is being retained within Publica.
- 3.9 A new validation checklist has been introduced and is delivering far better information at initial submission thus reducing the need for the team to revisit approximately 40% of applications which were deficient in supporting information before the changes were introduced. As new changes arise in national legislation (e.g. the recent introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain) the checklist will need to be refined and adapted but this is now a “business as usual” task as opposed to a major new piece of work.
- 3.10 Status - complete

### Pre-application advice

- 3.11 Through the pandemic upsurge officers needed to concentrate on applications as a priority in their day to day work. The initial premise of this ‘pre- app’ piece of work was that some pre-application advice could be handed down to admin/caseworkers but with supervision from Planners, and in so doing pre- apps would get greater priority and allow officers to concentrate on application processing.
- 3.12 This process had been designed but initially it was not implemented as the volumes of planning

applications rose to such an extent that there was no capacity. In addition, this piece of work and change in process relies on a pool of “admin/casework” staff who are shared across the three Publica councils. The recent announcements to repatriate services meant it is unlikely that there will be sufficient team members who are not already fully employed on other tasks.

3.13 Officers thus looked at whether the scheme could be tweaked so that the role undertaking the pre-application advice was at career grade planner or planning assistant etc. level. The process of training them would involve exposing them to pre app casework under the supervision of a planner. This would then hopefully support quicker upskilling and the ability to ‘grow our own’ in what is still a tricky employment market. This is an evolution of existing training and as such has been implemented immediately.

3.14 Status - complete

#### Invalid applications

3.15 As set out above, historically there was a significant volume (approx. 40%) of applications that required very extensive work to get them to a position where they could be processed. This hidden work was done for free in the sense that the Council was essentially subsidising agents and applicants for tabling substandard applications.

3.16 The data we have collected shows that the number of invalid applications has decreased notwithstanding that we had two significant pulses of non- registerable applications associated with our new biodiversity requirements and the introduction of new fees for applications. Other key reasons that applications are invalid are missing plans, wrong fees tabled and using the wrong forms. Work is in hand to seek to improve the advice regarding these elements to drive down the numbers even further.

3.17 The process encourages applicants to submit applications via the Planning Portal, and in conjunction with clearer guidance and structure in the revised Validation Checklist, has assisted in reducing poor-quality submissions.

3.18 We will also be introducing a fee whereby we retain an admin charge for applications that we return.

3.19 Consideration was given to the introduction of an “Accredited Agent” list where we publicised the best and worst agents in terms of getting it right first time - to try to encourage agents to get it right first time. However, it was considered that “endorsing” an agent for validation purposes may give a false impression that we would support their proposals on their planning merits and similarly that by criticising agents who tabled the highest number of invalid applications may open up legal challenges. It would also take considerable resources to both administer accreditation and monitoring as to whether agents were performing against the required standards. This aspect has thus not been pursued.

Status - complete

#### Agreed Extensions of Time (EOT)

3.20 This was the area where the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) was most critical of pre- existing processes. Officers had resisted the use of agreed EOT as potentially masking poor performance. However, use of EOT were encouraged by Government and very actively used by the vast majority of other Local Planning Authorities (LPA) such that when benchmarked against other LPA (some of whom were asking for EOT at registration stage!) it was impossible for West Oxfordshire to compete on an even playing field.

3.21 PAS also correctly pointed out that it was an agreement to extend the time (rather than an obligation) and was thus open to applicants to refuse to accede to the request. In light of the strong



- steer from PAS it was decided to ask for an agreed EOT if the cause of delay sat outside the role of the planning officer (e.g. awaiting response from Oxfordshire County Council, or Natural England, need for a further ecology surveys, amended plans required, need to consult neighbours again etc.) but to not ask where the delay sat with the planning team (e.g. admin error, officer workload etc.).
- 3.22** We have also been collating the causes of delay. The cases where the delay sits with the team is less than a handful with 'awaiting consultees' as the overwhelming reason why agreed EOTs have to be requested.
- 3.23** We have also taken a more risk based approach, as suggested by PAS , that we will proceed to determination even where a response has not been received provided a judgement has been made as to whether the response was likely to be critical in the acceptability or otherwise of the application (i.e. need to have rather than nice to have).
- 3.24** The performance of the team has improved significantly as a result of these changes in terms of determining applications within Government targets. At the time the PAS investigation was running the Council was at risk of designation(target 70%) . The most recent performance is set out at appendix A.
- 3.25** Notwithstanding the Government introduced (and have hitherto been promoting) the use of EOTs, members will be aware of the announcements just before Christmas by the former Government that they intended to conduct a 3 month review into the performance of statutory consultees, as they are aware that much of the delay blamed on the planning system actually sits with these consultees. Their aspiration was that response times will be speeded up and the use of agreed EOTs could be reduced. We need to await the outcome of the review and any associated announcement from the new Government - and particularly an improvement in consultee response times before the use of EOT could be reduced.
- 3.26** Status - complete pending Government update.  
Customer contact/planning officer availability
- 3.27** As workloads increased by approx. 40% coupled with recruitment and retention issues, the officers remaining in post focussed on application throughput. Customer care and engagement suffered, and complaints arose regarding communication from officers. A series of 4 customer contact points were introduced and measured starting with the receipt, validation and registration of the application through to it being handed to a named officer. This is all in hand.
- 3.28** The next 2 intended contact stages were to require i) that the officer contacted the customer within 2 weeks to introduce themselves, and then ii) at the 5 week period to report on progress/agree an EOT if required. However, it has proven very difficult to establish a workable system to monitor these latter two elements. The reason for this is that some officers were using the site visit to make contact, some phoning, some using e- mail etc such that the management data collected could not accurately reflect the fact that contact had been made without undue double handling to retrospectively input the contact dates etc. Perhaps more importantly, as the volumes of work have returned back to historic levels, officers have been able to be more proactive in updating agents and are more available generally and with more of a customer focus attitude. This has meant there have very few complaints over the last year about lack of contact. It would appear that the workloads and culture have resolved the issue that the later contact points were seeking to resolve. It has therefore been decided that this work, to formally monitor officer contact with the customer, ceases as it is no longer commensurate with the very limited additional benefits that would be realised.
- 3.29** Status – complete.

### Application Sign off

3.30 This concern from PAS was primarily directed at another of the partner councils. It identified a shortage of officers enabled to sign off applications which caused delays. The suggested solution was to allow peer sign off. This has been looked into but it is considered that the risks associated with more junior staff signing off their colleagues work outweigh the benefits. However, the Development Manager has been allowing some Senior Planners to sign off some of the simpler cases as their experience grows, and to assist them in transitioning to the skill sets required to be a Principal Planner (who sign off decisions alongside the Development Manager). The ability to sub delegate is already embodied in the scheme of delegation and so this power is used as and when the relevant staff attain the competency and experience to exercise the function.

3.31 Status – complete.

### Planning fees

3.32 Concern was expressed that the discretionary fees did not cover costs and that we were not charging for all the work that we were doing. Separately Government increased planning fees for applications by between 25% and 35% in recognition that planning services were under-resourced and to try to aid cost recovery. As a result, Officers have undertaken a thorough review of the extent and amount of fees and a revised fee charging schedule has been approved as part of the budget for the forthcoming year. There is a separate consultation running at present alongside the proposed changes to the NPPF that may enable increased fee recovery.

3.33 Status – largely complete pending current Government consultation

### Consultation and negotiation protocols

3.34 The review by PAS determined that applicants were given too many opportunities to amend applications which confused neighbours and cost the Council money it was not recovering. PAS suggested these new protocols were put in place to negotiate less and prevent “over consulting”. This would speed up application processing, encourage potential applicants towards the paid pre app service and therefore recover costs incurred.

3.35 The protocols were agreed by the Executive and have been operated by Officers thereafter with very little ongoing negative feedback following some initial resistance from some agents who had effectively been using the first application, plus free go, as free pre application advice.

3.36 Subsequent government changes to the fee regime have now removed the free go and this has additionally aided in pushing applicants towards the pre app process.

3.37 Status - complete

## **4. FUTURE POTENTIAL IMPROVEMENTS**

4.1 There were some other areas where actions were agreed and where work is in hand but is less advanced and some further areas where repatriation of the service offers opportunities to deliver a more bespoke WODC service

### Agent Forum

4.2 PAS suggested that the agent forum be reinvigorated as a means to sell the new ways of working and open up dialogue with our key customers. This is an agreed action and a date for a forum meeting was set at a partner site for the 6<sup>th</sup> March 2024. However there was poor take up for that date and so the Forum has been postponed to allow further publicity before it is held- likely alongside the formal repatriation of the Service

4.3 Status- In hand

### Web improvements

- 4.4 These were intended as a “big bang” to be introduced in association with the new IT technology that had been authorised but which, following the announcement of the Councils to repatriate services, will no longer be implemented at this time. However, the website is being modified alongside improvements and changes mentioned above as and when they are implemented, and we are seeking to design processes and procedures so they can more easily be adapted into any future IT solution individual councils pursue in due course.
- 4.5 Status - Ongoing and to be reviewed post repatriation of DM services.

### Template reports

There was a concern at partner sites that junior officers were too reliant upon senior staff to proof-read and sense check their reports or that reports were too long and bespoke for minor cases. The suggested solution was that template reports would address this issue.

The Development Manager at Forest of Dean therefore created a series of template reports for householder approvals, discharge of conditions and non-material amendments which are being trialled by all Officers there. It will need a more extended trial before we can confirm whether or not the templates are successful and whether they can be rolled out further i.e. to WODC where there was less of an issue.

- 4.6 Status- initial signs are positive but a longer trial is needed

### Revised Neighbour Notification scheme

- 4.7 This was perhaps the most significant change that was agreed for the other Councils in that it commended the approach adopted by WODC since 2014 i.e. the ceasing of postal neighbour notification and instead staff use a combination of electronic alerts, site notice and officers posting site notices as required.
- 4.8 Status – No change at WODC

### Paperless consultation with TC/PC

- 4.9 Officers consider that following the initial engagement we had with Town and Parish Councils regarding neighbour notification where we sought to promote electronic as opposed to paper based consultation, we could again seek to promote the use of electronic rather than paper consultations with them. The savings in postage, officer time, printer ink etc. would be considerable, alongside the consequential CO2 emissions, and so it is considered that it would be preferable if we could move to a more electronic as opposed to paper based system when consulting local Councils. It is recognised that some Town and Parish Councils may not wish to alter /may be resistant to moving away from paper consultations
- 4.10 Status – Can be promoted quickly following suitable advance publicity. Payment for providing paper copies can be sought for those TC/PC who wish to remain with paper based consultation.

### Ecology resourcing

- 4.11 Members will recall that the initial report following the PAS report identified that there were particular pressures in the Ecology service and that further resources were required. Work was underway looking at a shared ecology and heritage team across all three Publica sites to seek to deliver the benefits that a shared validation team had secured, but with the repatriation this has had to be put on hold.
- 4.12 The pressures on the team however continue (associated with DM work) and have increased in association with the recent introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and the work required to

support the new local plan. Officers were successful in securing £100k of Government funding to assist in building capacity in the heritage and ecology functions but this was put on hold pending the general election results. If resurrected it may assist in providing agency support whilst longer term solutions are put in place as the post Publica arrangements become clearer. A growth bid for additional resource in terms of an ecological assistant has been approved and recruitment was successful.

4.13 Status – Some temporary funding for further staff had been secured and an additional ecologist post has been secured.

#### 4.14 Next Steps post repatriation

4.15 In addition to the improvements outlined above, the Development Management team are working to add in further ideas to maintain the cycle of continuous improvement. As a result of the substantial improvements in performance the opportunity now exists to push into more qualitative areas without the fear that any additional resource directed there could reduce output to a level that endangered the authority being “designated” by the Secretary of State. These ideas include reviewing and improving performance reporting to aid closer operational management and the running of the service; optimising the automation of current IT systems to free up officer time; looking at the creation of easy to use online customer interfaces to allow customers to self-serve in different ways; reviewing the Land Charges process, and improving the case management capabilities of Enforcement cases.

4.16 All of these ideas are currently being explored and will be formed along with the remaining recommendations by PAS into the next phase of the Development Management Improvement Plan which is likely to encompass 4 main headings- delivery on strategic sites, delivering excellent customer care, improving the quality of new developments and delivering further improvements to enforcement outcomes

4.17 All ideas will need prioritising according to impact, and dependencies and resourcing will need to be mapped and balanced, as this work will require significant input from Planning Officers, IT and other teams across the Council.

4.18 The aim is for this next phase of improvements to be conducted from 2024 to 2026.

#### 4.19 **PERFORMANCE**

4.20 The improvements already delivered have transformed the landscape and have assisted in moving us from a lower quartile performer to an upper quartile/ improving performer. In summary, complaints have reduced, application performance has increased, appeals performance has (with one or two notable overturns) improved, enforcement backlogs have reduced and staff feedback that they are more satisfied. The Council’s planning team are however currently operating with a number of vacancies so this improvement may be difficult to sustain.

4.21 The key benefit of the improvements secured are that as baseline performance has improved this now gives us the opportunity to look into customer experience and adding value to the planning service, without the fear that this could impair performance.

### 5. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

5.1 Members could decide to reverse the improvements made. However they have clearly led to a better service with less complaints and this is not recommended.

5.2 Members could decide not to undertake further improvements. The uncertainties around the future operating model post Publica had curtailed/stopped a number of work streams. However the planning system is constantly evolving with a new act (Planning and regeneration act) further biodiversity

net gain requirements and the very significant changes following the general election . Thus ongoing change is likely to be a feature of local government planning and as the future of the Planning Service has become clearer it is the case that the service needs to continue to adapt to new circumstances and ways of working, and we welcome that culture of continuous improvement.

## **6. CONCLUSIONS**

6.1 This report sets out those tasks completed, those where progress is no longer possible, those where work has started but not yet completed and a limited number where work is just starting or where the opportunities presented by repatriation are just being explored.

## **7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 An increase of income is expected as a result of the increase in planning fees implemented by central government. Further income is also expected to be generated as a result of changes to the pre-application advice service mentioned in this report.

7.2 No impact or requirement for funding sought.

## **8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 None

## **9. RISK ASSESSMENT**

9.1 Minimised risk to performance outlined in this report.

## **10. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

10.1 Under equality legislation, the council has a legal duty to pay 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination and promote equality in relation to:

- Race
- Disability
- Gender, including gender reassignment
- Age
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Religion or belief

It is not considered that any of these characteristics will be adversely impacted

## **11. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

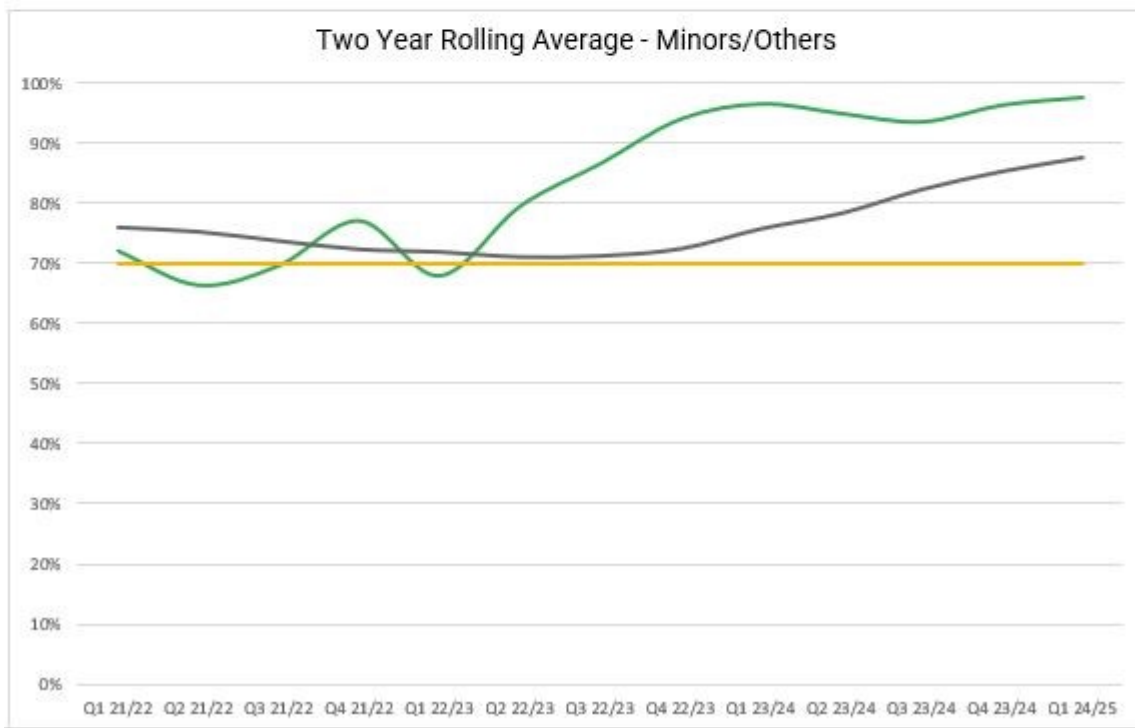
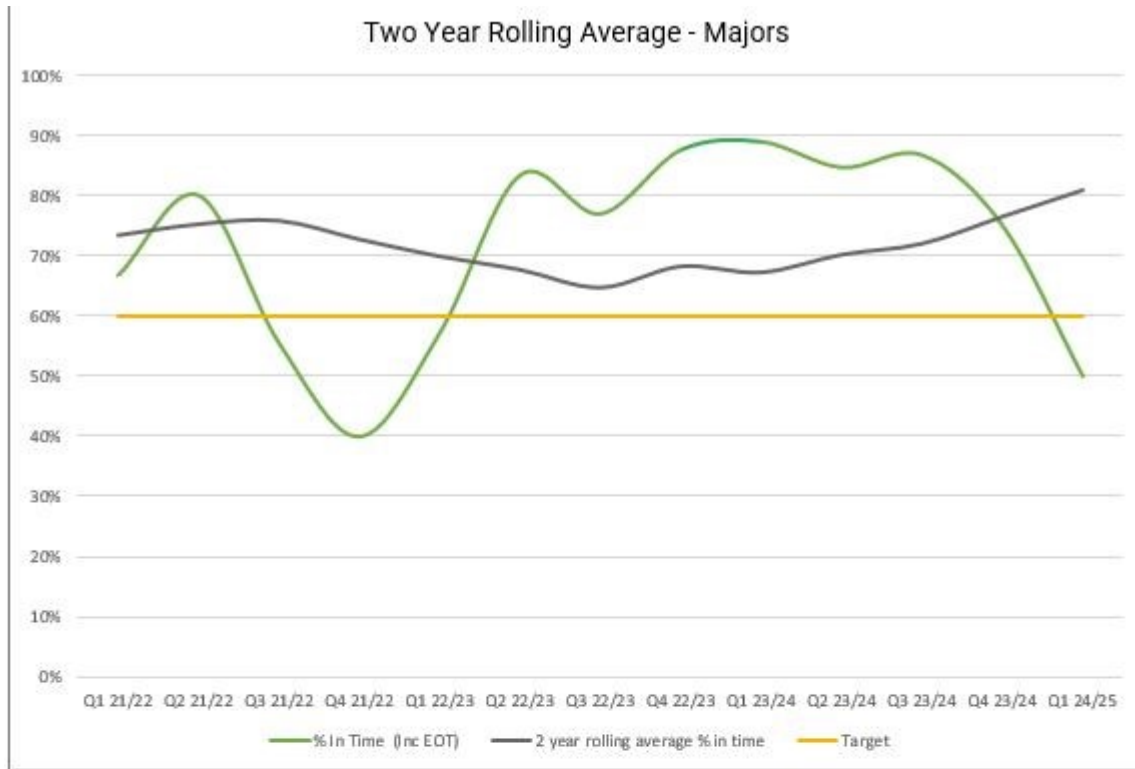
11.1 There will be reductions in CO2 emissions if we move increasingly to paperless consultation

## **12. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

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 <p><b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b></p>	<p><b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b></p>
<p>Name and Date of Committee</p>	<p><b>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 4 SEPTEMBER 2024</b></p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p><b>RESPONDING TO EXTERNAL CONSULTATIONS</b></p>
<p>Wards Affected</p>	<p>ALL</p>
<p>Accountable Member</p>	<p>Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council Email: <a href="mailto:andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk">andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Accountable Officer</p>	<p>Giles Hughes – Chief Executive Email: <a href="mailto:giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk">giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Report Author</p>	<p>Astrid Harvey, Strategic Policy and Partnerships Officer Email: <a href="mailto:astrid.harvey@westoxon.gov.uk">astrid.harvey@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Purpose</p>	<p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has requested detail on how West Oxfordshire District Council assesses which external consultations it responds to.</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Nil</p>
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>That the Committee resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Note the content of the report;</li> <li>2. Agree any recommendations it wishes to submit to the Executive.</li> </ol>
<p>Corporate Priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Putting Residents First</li> <li>• Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All</li> <li>• Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife</li> <li>• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency</li> <li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li> </ul>
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Exempt</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Consultees Consultation</p>	<p>Cross service officer engagement to seek examples of recent responses to external consultations.</p>

## **I. EXTERNAL CONSULTATIONS**

- I.1** West Oxfordshire District Council receives a wide range of consultations from a variety of bodies that deem it to be a relevant consultee. These include, but are not limited to, Central Government bodies, other Local Authorities within and beyond Oxfordshire, the Cotswold National Landscape, Thames Valley Police, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and West Berkshire Integrated Care Board, and organisations from within the Community and Voluntary Sector.
- I.2** External bodies may send consultations directly to Senior Officers within the service that is most relevant to the matter or topic under consultation or they may be sent to the Council Leader, relevant Executive Member or Chief Executive Officer who will delegate the consultation request to the relevant Service.
- I.3** On receipt of a consultation, Senior Officers will assess the consultation against criteria in order to determine if a response is required and to undertake the consultation response. The assessment criteria include:
- The impact on and/or significance of the proposal to the District;
  - Whether the Council is statutorily required to submit a consultation response;
  - The value to be added by the Council submitting a consultation response;
  - Whether the consultation relates to a matter the Council wishes to influence;
  - How relevant the consultation is to the services the Council is responsible for; and
  - How relevant the consultation is to progressing the strategic priorities of the Council.
- I.4** In undertaking the assessment against the criteria above, Senior Officers may engage with lead Members to inform their judgement of the significance of the proposal or matter. Usually this would be the Executive Member with portfolio responsibility for the matter being consulted on.
- I.5** Consultations received by the Council fall in to three categories.
1. Operational matters
  2. Those directly relevant to an Executive Portfolio
  3. Those that require a report to the Executive for decision because the matter is so significant to the Council.
- I.6** Examples of external consultations responded to by the Council include:
- Cotswold National Landscape Management Plan, (September 2023).
  - 2024 – 25 Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, (January 2024).
  - Proposed legislative changes to the Accounts and Audit Regulations (2015), (March 2024).

- Neighbouring authorities Local Plan consultations: Cherwell Local Plan, (November 2023), and Oxford Local Plan, (January 2024).
- Changes to the National Planning Policy Framework, (February 2023).
- Botley West Statutory Consultation, (February 2024).
- Serious Case Reviews (ad hoc) in relation to Safeguarding statutory requirements, (most recently April 2024).
- International Migration Resettlement Schemes, (January 2024).

## **2. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 2.1** No specific budget is allocated to support the resourcing of the Council's capacity to respond to external consultations. Careful assessment of the consultation against the criteria above allows for a judgement over the resource implications of responding to external consultations to be made.

## **3. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 3.1** Where the Council is statutorily required to respond to an external consultation it will always fulfil this legal obligation.

## **4. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 4.1** Not applicable

## **5. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 5.1** Not applicable

## **6. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1** Not applicable

## **7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**


- 7.1** Not applicable

## **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 8.1** None.

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 <p><b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b></p>	<p><b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b></p>
<p>Name and Date of Committee</p>	<p><b>EXECUTIVE – 11 SEPTEMBER 2024</b></p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p><b>FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024/25 QUARTER ONE</b></p>
<p>Wards Affected</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Accountable Member</p>	<p>Councillor Alaric Smith – Executive Member for Finance Email: <a href="mailto:alaric.smith@westoxon.gov.uk">alaric.smith@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Madhu Richards – Director of Finance Email: <a href="mailto:madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk">madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Report Author</p>	<p>Georgina Dyer – Chief Accountant Email: <a href="mailto:georgina.dyer@westoxon.gov.uk">georgina.dyer@westoxon.gov.uk</a></p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Annex A – Detailed Revenue Budget Comparison Annex B – Capital Spend Against Budget</p>
<p>Purpose</p>	<p>To detail the Council’s financial performance for Quarter One 2024-2025.</p>
<p>Recommendation</p>	<p>That the Executive resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Note the Council’s Financial Performance for Quarter One 2024-2025;</li> <li>2. Recommend to Council that an additional £750,000 should be included in the revised Capital Budget for 2024/25 as set out in 2.25 in the report.</li> </ol>
<p>Corporate Priority</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li> </ul>
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p>YES</p>
<p>Exempt</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Consultees</p>	<p>Nil</p>

## 1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the financial performance of the council's activities for the first quarter of the 2024/25 financial year from 1 April 2024 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.
- 1.2. The report considers the significant variances in revenue income and expenditure against the approved revenue budget set by Full Council on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2024 which anticipated a contribution of £5,107 to General Fund reserves.
- 1.3. The report also includes progress in delivering the approved Capital Programme and a request for the Executive and Council to approve additional funding for urgent works.
- 1.4. At this stage of the year a year-end forecast is not included. It will be part of subsequent quarterly budget monitoring reports as data becomes easier to extrapolate.

## 2. MAIN POINTS

### Financial Performance Revenue Budget Monitoring - Summary

- 2.1. At quarter 1 (Q1) there is an overall overspend **£257,013** against the profiled budget for the period. The key factors driving this revenue position are income shortfalls in garden waste and development management, the delayed Elmfield office letting and increased expenditure in respect of the materials recycling contract.
- 2.2. Garden waste income may struggle to recover but development management income may do so if we receive a major application. The recycling contract with Suez expires at the end of September 2024 with the new contract, if approved at the Executive meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2024, delivering a budget saving of £300,000 from 2025/26 (£62,000 in 2024/25).
- 2.3. The Elmfield offices have been empty since August 2023 and require capital investment before the new tenant occupies the building. Work is ongoing to finalise the schedule of capital works and set a realistic timeframe for occupation.
- 2.4. The table below sets out the summary revenue monitoring position for the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 against profiled budget by service area.

## WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL - Budget Monitoring

### Revenue Budget Monitoring 2024/25 - Quarter 1, 1st April to 30th June 2024

Service Area	Quarter 1			
	Original Budget 2024/25	Current Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
	£	£	£	£
Democratic and Committee Services	1,233,712	382,978	403,531	20,554
Environmental & Regulatory Services	941,117	177,757	172,009	(5,748)
Environmental Services	8,545,309	542,942	808,623	265,680
Finance, Human Resources & Procurement	1,089,330	1,022,924	1,017,910	(5,014)
ICT, Change & Customer Services	2,309,350	1,609,978	1,580,294	(29,684)
Land, Legal & Property	396,355	67,431	164,212	96,781
Leisure & Communities	227,208	(1,158,033)	(1,189,865)	(31,832)
Planning & Strategic Housing	1,061,472	313,220	345,806	32,587
Revenues & Housing Support	1,345,917	465,328	443,505	(21,823)
Investment Property and Retained Services	(318,880)	(65,661)	(80,162)	(14,500)
<b>Total cost of services</b>	<b>16,830,890</b>	<b>3,358,864</b>	<b>3,665,865</b>	<b>307,000</b>
Plus:				
Investment income receipts	(1,156,230)	(289,058)	(339,045)	(49,987)
<b>Cost of services before financing:</b>	<b>15,674,660</b>	<b>3,069,807</b>	<b>3,326,820</b>	<b>257,013</b>

### Significant Variances

- 2.5. A full list of variances by cost centre is included in Annex A. The most significant variances, listed by Service Area (as set out in the table above), are as follows:

#### Environmental Services

##### Recycling

- 2.6. At the end of Q1 the Suez contract is £30,000 overspent, likely to rise to £50,000 by the end of the contract at the end of September 2024. Savings anticipated to be achieved through the new recycling contract, once approved, should offset the year to date overspends.

##### Green Waste

- 2.7. Income is £95,000 below budget. The Waste team have launched a targeted marketing campaign on 2,000 new properties in developments in Witney and Carterton and we should have a clearer picture of the final income at the end of Q2 when green licences normally finish.

##### Trade Waste

- 2.8. Trade Waste is invoiced in April & September, income is £25,000 behind target for the first half of the year and there has been £29,000 of unbudgeted expenditure on bins & boxes.

## Land, Legal & Property

### Elmfield

- 2.9. When the 2024/25 budget was set, it was anticipated that Elmfield would be tenanted from Q2 2024. Unfortunately, this timeframe has slipped due to ongoing discussions around the capital works required to bring the building up to a letting standard. As an empty building, the Council bears the liability for Business Rates and therefore has incurred the full annual charge in April 2024. Once this liability has transferred to the tenants, once they are in occupation, the Council will receive a refund of any overpayment. As mentioned above, officers are working diligently to finalise the schedule of capital works and set a realistic timeframe for occupation.

### Downs Road Depot

- 2.10. Reactive maintenance costs of £26,000 have been incurred for a number of small projects which, because the cost of each is less than £10,000, is not categorised as capital expenditure and therefore sits as a revenue cost. Projects include HGV charging points, a new electric shutter and external repairs to the building.

## Planning & Strategic Housing

### Development Management

- 2.11. Income from Planning applications is difficult to forecast as it is not consistent throughout the year and there is no discernible pattern over the longer term. At Q1 income is £76,000 below target, a 23% drop from the same period last year. The government increased Planning Application fees by 25% in December 2023, but we are yet to see any positive impact from this increase.
- 2.12. It could be that some projects may have been put on hold pending the outcome of the General Election and again we will have a clearer picture of this in future reports.
- 2.13. Major applications have a significant impact on our overall fee income but have an extended timeline and it is difficult to predict when exactly applications will be submitted. General economic conditions like interest rates, which have slowly started to fall, may increase planning application volumes as both individuals and developers are able to estimate their costs more confidently.

### Development Management Appeals

- 2.14. External legal spend for Planning appeals has been a source of concern over the last year with an overspend in 2023/24 of £184,000. In response an additional £90,000 was included in the budget for the current financial year and at Q1 there is an underspend of £33,000. There are two appeals waiting to be heard, the costs for which will be reported in future budget monitoring reports.



- 2.15. A single Planning Inquiry can cost the Council up to £55,000 for significant sites and an average of £20,000-£30,000 for more standard sites as well as the requirement to pay the opponent's court costs for certain matters.

### **Investment Property**

- 2.16. In response to challenging and volatile market conditions for our Investment Property portfolio in 2023/24 the 2024/25 budget setting process revised the base budget to reflect the current rate of voids and based on a detailed cashflow and taking account of service charges and business rates liability.
- 2.17. In Q1 Investment Property is £10,000 ahead of budget and a number of existing and new leases are under negotiation. Net income from Investment Property is budgeted to be £2.45m in 2024/25 with Marriotts, which is not an Investment Property, estimated to return a further £0.8m to the Council. The focus for Marriotts is on upgrading the landscaping and seating to encourage increased footfall and a local community feel. Marriotts is key to the economic development of the whole town, but it will take time to achieve full occupancy and for the total benefits to be seen.

### **Publica Review**

- 2.18. Phase I of the transition of staff from Publica back to the Council was approved by full Council on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2024. A detailed transition cost model has forecast the additional employee costs to West Oxfordshire at £185,000 a year, with one off costs of between £207,000 and £301,000. This is in line with the estimates included in the 2024/25 budget and reserves set aside to meet one off costs.

### **Capital Programme Budget Monitoring**

- 2.19. At the end of Q1 capital expenditure is £1.77m against an approved Capital Programme for the year of £11.28m, which includes slippage from 2023/24 of £4m for the decarbonisation of Carterton Leisure Centre, Agile Working, Electric Vehicle charging points and Waste Vehicle replacement.
- 2.20. The Agile Working programme is complete at Woodgreen and is now focussed on Elmfield. It is likely that the Programme as a whole will be underspent by the time it concludes, confirmation of which will be provided in future budget monitoring reports. Discussions are ongoing with tenants who wish to take over Elmfield in relation to the level of refit works necessary before the building can be handed over.
- 2.21. A lot of work has been undertaken by Officers to establish the viability of installing Solar PV on Council owned buildings, this includes establishing the financial viability of potential schemes and discussions with our tenants. Due to the pausing of the Carterton PSDS project, Officers are investigating the installation of additional solar PV and battery storage at Carterton Leisure Centre. A report will be taken to Executive later in the year with findings and recommendations.
- 2.22. The decarbonisation of Witney Leisure Centre is still at an exploratory stage, a business case will go forward to Executive once the viability of the scheme has been established.

- 2.23. Involved discussions have taken place between the Waste team, Finance and the Portfolio holders for the Environment, Climate and Finance regarding the best option for the Waste Vehicle replacement programme. A report will be going to the Executive in the Autumn with a proposal for the phase one replacement of the fleet taking into account the Council's climate aspirations and the financial viability of the proposal.
- 2.24. The Council were successful in their bid for funding from the Local Authority Housing Fund. Collaborating with Cottsway Housing Association and Miller Homes, the Council has facilitated the construction of 23 affordable home within the District.
- 2.25. Work is underway to develop an Asset Management Strategy for the Council's buildings, a portfolio valued at £69.8m at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024. Integral to this strategy are building condition surveys which are currently work in progress. In advance of the condition surveys being completed, it has become apparent that there are urgent works which will need to be carried out in this financial year which are not included in the current approved Capital Programme. For example, Carterton Industrial Estate, empty due to the tenant going into liquidation, needs a replacement roof to prevent degradation to the fabric of the building and put it into a marketable condition to attract new tenants. Similarly, there are works required at Windrush Leisure Centre, Chawley Park and The Old Court. This work is estimated to cost circa £750,000 and a recommendation is included to seek Council approval for this addition to the capital programme.
- 2.26. An Asset Management Strategy will provide a rolling programme of planned maintenance which will be included in the ongoing Capital Programme through the annual budget setting process. This maintenance will keep our assets in a good state of repair and tenatable condition. Failure to maintain our buildings in a timely manner could result in a significant financial impact. If buildings are allowed to degrade pending repair, they will become less commercially viable. The Asset Management Strategy and Building Condition Survey will be brought to the 9<sup>th</sup> October 2024 Executive meeting.

### **3. CONCLUSIONS**

- 3.1. Whilst it is early in the financial year there are some key areas of concern at the end of Q1 and these have been highlighted in the body of this report. That said, there are also some grounds for cautious optimism given the actions that have already been taken to mitigate some of these overspends.
- 3.2. All areas will be closely monitored and reported on in future quarterly Financial Performance Reports.

### **4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

These are set out within section 2 of the paper.

### **5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no legal implications arising from this paper.

**6. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 6.1. Officers will continue to monitor budgets closely throughout the year to identify mitigating actions which will enable the overall budgetary position to be brought back in line with budget where possible.

**7. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

No direct equalities impact with regards to the content of this report.

**8. CLIMATE CHANGE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

None arising from this report.

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## Annex A - Comparison of Q1 Budget Monitoring

	Q1 position		
	Current Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
	£	£	£
<b>Democratic Services</b>			
DRM001-Democratic Representation	84,898	83,232	(1,666)
DRM002-Support To Elected Bodies	120,504	108,787	(11,717)
ELE001-Registration of Electors	18,300	8,480	(9,820)
ELE002-District Elections	37,525	68,039	30,514
SUP001-Administration	121,751	121,934	183
<b>Total - Democratic Services</b>	<b>382,978</b>	<b>403,531</b>	<b>20,554</b>

ELE002 - the overspend is due to an overspend in the production and posting out of poll cards and postal voting packs, the cost of which all falls in Q1.

	Q1 position		
	Current Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
	£	£	£
<b>Environmental &amp; Regulatory Services</b>			
BUC001-Building Control - Fee Earning Work	6,441	(583)	(7,024)
BUC002-Building Control - Non Fee Earning Work	886	882	(3)
EMP001-Emergency Planning	3,591	4,004	413
ESM001-Environment - Service Mgmt & Supp Serv	27,050	26,952	(98)
PSH002-Private Sector Housing-Condition of Dwellings	750	0	(750)
REG001-Environmental Health General	0	(4,649)	(4,649)
REG002-Licensing	9,080	12,028	2,948
REG009-Environmental Protection	58,286	57,956	(330)
REG011-Authorised Process	(3,000)	(9,057)	(6,057)
REG013-Pollution Control	31,599	40,320	8,721
REG016-Food Safety	37,861	37,531	(330)
REG021-Statutory Burials	1,250	(50)	(1,300)
STC011 - Abandoned Vehicles	0	(537)	(537)
TAC309-Other Trading Services - Markets	3,963	7,212	3,249
<b>Total - Environmental &amp; Regulatory Services</b>	<b>177,757</b>	<b>172,009</b>	<b>(5,748)</b>

	Q1 position		
	Current Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
	£	£	£
<b>Finance, Human Resources &amp; Procurement</b>			
SUP003-Human Resources	50,418	49,147	(1,271)
HLD319 - New Initiatives	0	0	0
SUP009-Accountancy	97,637	96,268	(1,370)
SUP010-Internal Audit	32,069	32,844	775
SUP011-Creditors	11,040	10,088	(952)
SUP012-Debtors	15,483	13,905	(1,578)
SUP013-Payroll	14,858	14,141	(717)
SUP019-Health & Safety	9,056	9,229	173
SUP020-Training & Development	7,868	7,840	(29)
SUP033-Central Purchasing	10,303	10,266	(37)
SUP035-Insurances	2,642	2,633	(10)
<b>Total - Finance, Human Resources &amp; Procurement</b>	<b>1,022,924</b>	<b>1,017,910</b>	<b>(5,014)</b>

	Q1 position		
	Current Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
	£	£	£
<b>ICT, Change &amp; Customer Services</b>			
SUP002-Consultation, Policy & Research	43,619	42,526	(1,092)
SUP005-ICT	491,341	461,510	(29,831)
SUP006-Telephones	0	(1,001)	(1,001)
SUP008-Reception/Customer Services	159,210	159,572	362
TMR002-Street Furniture & Equipment	(4,316)	(4,337)	(21)
TOU002-Tourist/Visitor Information Centre	0	1,900	1,900
<b>Total - ICT, Change &amp; Customer Services</b>	<b>1,609,978</b>	<b>1,580,294</b>	<b>(29,684)</b>

SUP005 -expenditure on software licences and maintenance is below budget in Q1, but is spread across the financial year, so the expectation is that this budget will be fully exhausted in 2024/25.

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

#### Land, Legal & Property

ADB301-3 Welch Way (Town Centre Shop)	15,977	9,517	(6,460)
ADB302-Guildhall	2,544	(2,385)	(4,929)
ADB303-Woodgreen	124,195	129,377	5,181
ADB304-Elmfield	22,591	106,954	84,363
ADB305-Corporate Buildings	161,932	168,952	7,020
ADB306-Depot	(78,583)	(52,816)	25,767
FIE346-Marriotts	(194,120)	(198,117)	(3,997)
LLC001-Local Land Charges	(16,580)	(12,523)	4,057
SUP004-Legal	36,784	30,449	(6,335)
TAC303-Swain Court & Newman Court Ind Est Witney	(7,309)	(15,196)	(7,887)

#### Total - Land, Legal & Property

<b>67,431</b>	<b>164,212</b>	<b>96,781</b>
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ADB304 - the overspend is due to the Business Rates liability for the year being charged in April. The budget is based on a tenant occupying the building in Q2 and therefore the business rates liability would pass to them. The timing of the tenancy has slipped due to ongoing discussions about the level of work required to bring the building up to a letting standard.

ADB306 - there is a £26k overspend on reactive maintenance which does not meet the criteria to be classed as capital expenditure.

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

#### Leisure & Communities

CCR001-Community Safety (Crime Reduction)	(5,786)	(4,018)	1,768
CCR002-Building Safer Communities	(1,686)	3,688	5,374
CCR301 - Communities Revenue Grant	51,826	32,500	(19,326)
CCT001-CCTV	23,880	20,569	(3,311)
CSM001-Cultural Strategy	23,197	22,036	(1,160)
CUL001-Arts Development	12,088	4,401	(7,687)
ECD001-Economic Development	41,511	39,661	(1,850)
ECD010 – SPF Community and Place	(1,032,895)	(1,032,895)	0
REC001-Sports Development	17,081	14,405	(2,677)
REC002-Recreational Facilities Development	14,639	14,641	3
REC003-Play	53,504	57,952	4,448
REC301-Village Halls	3,919	3,905	(14)
REC302-Contract Management	(469,502)	(474,984)	(5,482)
SUP016-Finance - Performance Review	29,306	29,200	(106)
TOU001-Tourism Strategy and Promotion	44,949	43,138	(1,811)

#### Total - Leisure & Communities

<b>(1,193,969)</b>	<b>(1,225,801)</b>	<b>(31,832)</b>
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CCR301 - the allocation of grants falls predominantly in Q2 & Q3

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

#### Environmental Services

CCC001-Climate Change	71,521	68,734	(2,787)
COR301-Policy Initiatives - Shopmobility	4,335	4,320	(16)
CPK001-Car Parks - Off Street	132,626	126,742	(4,974)
ENI002-Grounds Maintenance	162,628	167,266	4,638
ENI303-Landscape Maintenance	19,987	21,112	1,125
FLD001-Flood Defence and Land Drainage	51,540	65,465	13,925
REG004-Dog Warden	12,593	21,001	8,408
REG018-Pest Control	0	0	0
REG019-Public Conveniences	27,031	25,695	(1,336)
REG023-Environmental Strategy	21,546	21,148	(398)
RYC001-Recycling	655,766	716,350	60,584
RYC002-Green Waste	(1,342,026)	(1,240,359)	101,667
RYC003-Food Waste	259,870	264,020	4,150
STC001-Street Cleansing	0	0	0
STC004-Environmental Cleansing	264,806	273,154	8,348
TRW001-Trade Waste	(295,391)	(242,735)	52,656
TRW002-Clinical Waste	(125)	0	125
WST001-Household Waste	488,884	497,856	8,973
WST004-Bulky Household Waste	3,476	4,479	1,002
WST301-Env. Services Depot, Downs Rd, Witney	3,875	13,464	9,589

#### Total - Environmental Services

542,942	807,712	265,680
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FLD001 - Unbudgeted for ditch clearance works amounts to £13k in Q1.

RYC001 - the Suez contract is £30k overspent and recycling credits are £11k behind budget. The Suez contract expires at the end of Q2, savings from the new contract will offset current year overspends.

RYC002 - income is £95k behind target and is unlikely to improve significantly in the rest of the year, due to the seasonal nature of demand.

TRW001 - £29k of expenditure on bins is not budgeted for in 2024/25 and there is a £25k shortfall of income.



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

### Planning & Strategic Housing

DEV001-Development Control - Applications	(119,429)	(50,574)	68,855
DEV002-Development Control - Appeals	67,493	33,848	(33,645)
DEV003-Development Control - Enforcement	45,816	45,649	(166)
ENA001-Housing Enabling	28,865	30,761	1,895
ENI301-Landscape Initiatives	15,815	21,101	5,285
HLD315-Growth Board Project (Planning)	62,452	64,846	2,394
PLP001-Planning Policy	152,060	148,552	(3,508)
PLP003-Implementation	0	0	0
PLP004-Conservation	28,524	28,240	(284)
PSM001-Planning Service Mgmt & Support Serv	31,623	23,383	(8,240)

### Total - Planning & Strategic Housing

<b>313,220</b>	<b>345,806</b>	<b>32,587</b>
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DEV001 - fee income is £76k behind target, continuing the trend seen in 2023/24. It was hoped that the increase in Planning Fees introduced in December 2023 would improve the income position but this has not been the case year to date.

DEV002 - additional budget was provided in 2024/25 for the legal costs associated with Planning Appeals. It is not possible to predict the timing of Planning appeals but it is forecast that this budget will be fully utilised during the course of the year.

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

**Retained Services**

COR002-Chief Executive	89,900	82,262	(7,638)
COR003-Corporate Policy Making	19,582	19,319	(263)
COR004-Public Relations	5,869	(1,396)	(7,265)
COR005-Corporate Finance	136,235	134,276	(1,959)
COR006-Treasury Management	6,675	0	(6,675)
COR007-External Audit Fees	27,926	27,926	(0)
COR008-Bank Charges	19,625	33,252	13,627
COR012 - Publica Review	15,296	15,296	(0)
COR302-Publica Group	74,893	69,060	(5,832)
FIE341-Town Centre Properties	(102,013)	(109,565)	(7,552)
FIE342-Miscellaneous Properties	(91,732)	(87,394)	4,338
FIE343-Talisman	(322,059)	(331,605)	(9,546)
FIE344-Des Roches Square	(107,873)	(101,830)	6,042
FIE345-Gables at Elmfield	(12,534)	(14,475)	(1,941)
NDC001-Non Distributed Costs	191,500	202,749	11,249
TAC304-Witney Industrial Estate	(42,855)	(45,206)	(2,351)
TAC305-Carterton Industrial Estate	27,587	35,944	8,357
TAC306-Greystones Industrial Estate	(964)	(8,773)	(7,809)
TAC308-Other Trading Services - Fairs	(719)	0	719
<b>Total - Retained Services</b>	<b>(65,661)</b>	<b>(80,162)</b>	<b>(14,500)</b>

COR008 - the new contract charging mechanism came into force in May 2024 after protracted discussions with the supplier. Charges for the remainder of the year are forecast to be within budget.

	Q1 position		
	Current Budget	Actual Exp	Variance (under) / over spend
	£	£	£
<b>Revenues &amp; Housing Support</b>			
HBP001-Rent Allowances	99,208	88,897	(10,312)
HBP003-Local Housing Allowance	0	1	1
HBP005-Benefit Fraud Investigation	1,549	1,554	5
HOM001-Homelessness	111,016	106,336	(4,680)
HOM004-Refugees	0	0	0
HOM005-Homelessness Hostel Accomodation	(1,622)	(5,742)	(4,119)
HOM006 - The Old Court	20,762	18,224	(2,539)
HOM007-Afghan Resettlement Programme	56,331	56,331	(0)
HOM008-Homes for Ukraine	9,969	9,969	(0)
LTC001-Council Tax Collection	100,577	101,429	852
LTC002-Council Tax Support Administration	1,877	2,611	735
LTC011-NNDR Collection	29,693	31,111	1,419
PSH001-Private Sector Housing Grants	13,416	13,343	(74)
PSH004-Home Improvement Service	22,552	19,441	(3,110)
<b>Total - Revenues &amp; Housing Support</b>	<b>465,328</b>	<b>443,505</b>	<b>(21,823)</b>

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## Annex B

### Capital Programme 2024/25

Scheme	Funded By	2024/25 Total Budget	Q1 Actual
Agile Working	Borrowing	1,447,068	64,002
Solar PV on Council Buildings	Borrowing	276,345	
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	Grant		7,758
Chipping Norton LC Repairs	Borrowing	150,000	
Ubico Fleet - Replace Vehicle Hire Costs	Borrowing	3,500,000	606,926
Update to Planning System (Idox)	Borrowing	150,000	
Update to Finance System (ABW)	Borrowing	25,000	
Electric vehicle charging points	Borrowing	200,000	
In Cab Technology	Borrowing	100,000	
CCTV - Upgrading	Capital Receipts	255,635	
Shop Mobility - Replacement stock	Capital Receipts	10,000	
Affordable Housing - Cottsway	Grant	212,125	635,880
Improvement Grants (DFG)	Grant	880,000	108,667
Carterton Leisure Centre PSDS Project	Grant	1,300,000	
UKSPF	Grant		
Witney Leisure Centre PSDS	Borrowing	1,874,000	
IT Provision - Systems & Strategy	Revenue Contribution	100,000	
Weighbridge at Bulking Station	Capital Receipts	25,000	
Council Buildings Maintenance Programme	Revenue Contribution	200,000	
IT Equipment - PCs, Copiers etc	Revenue Contribution	40,000	7,830
Community Grants Fund	Revenue Contribution	200,000	2,936
Play Parks	S106	50,000	
EVCP Woolgate	S106	167,000	
UK Rural Prosperity Fund	Grant		233,777
Carterton Connects Creative (Swinbrook s106)	S106	44,500	
Raleigh Crescent Play Area (s. 106)	S106	75,000	
Developer Capital Contributions	S106		98,957
		<b>11,281,673</b>	<b>1,766,732</b>

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 <b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>	<b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and Date of Committee	<b>EXECUTIVE – 11 SEPTEMBER 2024</b>
Subject	<b>SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2024-25 QUARTER ONE</b>
Wards Affected	ALL
Accountable Member	Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council Email: <a href="mailto:andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk">andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable Officer	Giles Hughes – Chief Executive Officer Email: <a href="mailto:giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk">giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Report Author	Alison Borrett – Senior Performance Analyst Email: <a href="mailto:democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk">democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Purpose	To provide details of the Council’s operational performance at the end of 2024-25 Quarter One (Q1).
Annex	Annex A – Council Priorities Report Annex B – Corporate Plan Action Tracker Annex C – Performance Indicator Report
Recommendation.	That the Executive resolves to:  I. Note the 2024/25 Q1 service performance report.
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Putting Residents First</li> <li>• Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All</li> <li>• Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife</li> <li>• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency</li> <li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li> </ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Publica Directors, Assistant Directors, Business Managers, Service Managers and Service Leads.

## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1** The new Council Plan was adopted in January 2023 and the Action Plan, setting out how the priorities within the Council Plan will be delivered, then followed. Additionally, following on from the external audit report in August 2023 which included a recommendation to review performance management to match the Council Plan and measure performance, a new performance framework has been developed to include a Corporate Action Plan Tracker and a Priority Report alongside the service output metrics.
- 1.2** A high-level Commissioning Framework was approved by the Executive in October 2020, which sets out the relationship between Publica and the Council and their respective responsibilities. Publica 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.
- 1.3** The Council's Chief Executive is responsible for reviewing and approving the information provided in this report prior to its publication.

## **2. COUNCIL PRIORITY REPORT**

### **2.1** Progress on actions in the Corporate Plan for Q1 include:

- In September 2023, the Council reduced its customer services call centre hours to 9am-2pm, for a trial period of 6 months, focussing on peak times and boosting online services, as call volume dropped by 37% and online form usage rose by 350% over three years. Following the successful trial, the Executive resolved to make the reduced phone lines permanent in June.
- The Executive approved the draft CIL charging schedule in July, with an 8-week public consultation on the draft running from 2 August to 27 September 2024.
- An updated Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and Phase 1 Water Cycle Study have been commissioned to support the Local Plan evidence base, with the preferred option paper currently in preparation.
- The eHGV trial for refuse collection was undertaken in May and produced positive results, with climate change officers exploring funding options with Local Authorities and the Greater South East Net Zero Hub.
- Provisional sites for EV microhubs have been agreed upon at Ducklington, Brize Norton and Burwell Hall.
- As part of the Deer Park South Access Project, interpretation panels have been installed to enhance visitors' understanding of the area's natural features and heritage. Additionally, surfacing improvements have been made to the bridleway along the southern boundary of Deer Park South, improving accessibility and enjoyment for all users.
- The draft District Charter Markets Strategy is currently under development. A draft brief for an Expression of Interest is also being prepared, focussing on the management and operation of the Charter Markets in Chipping Norton and Witney, with the possibility of including additional markets at Marriotts.

- 2.2** The Council Priority highlight report is attached at Annex A with an overview of progress against all actions in the Corporate Plan is attached at Annex B.



### 3. SERVICE PERFORMANCE

- 3.1 Overall, the Council's performance for the quarter has been largely positive, with notable progress in Collection Rates, Planning Determination Times, and Missed Bin Collections. Visits to the Leisure Centre, Gym Memberships, and Land Charges Response Times remain high. Additionally, Customer Satisfaction continues to be strong, with the Council topping the Gov Metric league table in June. However, the percentage of Planning Appeals Allowed is increasing, and the Number of Affordable Homes delivered is showing a negative trend.
- 3.2 A review of the targets for Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates Collection was conducted, as the previous 99% in-year collection target was recognised as unrealistic to achieve within year and more realistic over the debt's lifespan (indeed the taxbase calculation assumes 98.5%). Benchmarking was undertaken for all English Councils' previous years' collection rates, as well as the Council's specific similar Local Authorities, using the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Nearest Neighbours model. This benchmarking exercise demonstrated that a Council Tax Collection Rate of 98% and a Non-Domestic Rates Collection Rate of 98.5% would place the Council within the top quartile for both the Nearest Neighbours and all English Councils. Following agreement from the Portfolio Holder and the Section 151 Officer, the in-year collection targets have been amended. Additionally, regression analysis was conducted on previous years' collection rates for specific quarters to ensure the targets more accurately reflect whether the Council is on track.
- 3.3 Service performance above target:
- Percentage of Council Tax Collected (33.69% against a target of 33%)
  - Percentage of Non-Domestic Rates Collected (37.15% against a target of 33%)
  - Processing times for Council Tax Support new claims (18.85 days against a target of 20 days)
  - Processing times for Council Tax Support Change Events (2.51 days against a target of 5 days)
  - Percentage of Housing Benefit overpayment due to LA error/admin delay (0.14% against a target of 0.35%)
  - Customer Satisfaction (98.71% against a target of 90%)
  - Building Control Satisfaction (100% against a target of 90%)
  - Percentage of major planning applications determined within agreed timescales (100% against a target of 70%)
  - Percentage of minor planning applications determined within agreed timescales (94.92% against a target of 65%)
  - Percentage of other planning applications determined within agreed timescales (96.41% against a target of 80%)
  - Percentage of official land charge searches completed within 10 days (98.19% against a target of 90%)
  - Percentage of high risk food premises inspected within target timescales (100% against a target of 90%)
  - Percentage of high risk notifications risk assessed within 1 working day (100% against a target of 90%)
  - Missed bins per 100,000 (85.59 against a target of 110)
  - Number of visits to the leisure centres & (Snapshot) Number of gym memberships (4,949 memberships against a target of 4,800 memberships and 206,370 visits against a target of 197,500)

### 3.4 Service Performance below target:

#### **Processing times for Housing Benefit Change of Circumstances (5.39 days against a target of 4 days)**

Q1 commenced with the usual small backlog of work for changes in circumstances at the end of Q4 due to end-of-year processing, which the team has worked hard to reduce. Although the Council is currently above target for processing times, there has been an improvement compared to the same period last year, with processing times decreasing by approximately 2.5 days.

However, the reduction in HB Change applications means that any delay in assessing an application due to outstanding evidence has a more noticeable impact on the average processing days. Additionally, the managed migration of HB to Universal Credit commenced in April, with some minor glitches reported in the system. While the migration was planned in stages, some stages have been brought forward, which will further decrease the number of changes received and may potentially increase processing times.

#### **Percentage of FOI requests answered within 20 days (86.5% against a target of 90%)**

In Q1, the Council answered 86.5% of FOI requests within 20 days, up from 79.78% in Q4, falling below the national target of 90%. Most FOI requests continue to be received by Development Management and Environmental, Welfare, and Revenue Services. To reduce the number of information requests, the Council is reviewing the information currently available on its website and aims to publish additional guidance and Frequently Asked Questions.

#### **Percentage of Planning Appeals Allowed (cumulative) (42.31% against a target of 30%)**

Between 1 April 2024 and 30 June 2024, thirteen appeals were decided, with eight supported, including a split decision, resulting in an allowance rate of 42.31%. Of these, six were Upland applications, with four supported, resulting in a 33.33% allowance rate. The remaining seven were Lowlands applications, with four supported, including a split decision, equating to a 50% allowance rate. As this metric is cumulative, it may decrease throughout the year depending on the number of appeal decisions received.

#### **Number of Affordable Homes Delivered (48 against a target of 69)**

During Q1, a total of forty-eight properties were delivered in West across Woodstock and Carterton comprising 36 for affordable rent and 12 for shared ownership. Properties delivered in Carterton include 10 homes acquired using Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) funding.

It's worth noting that completion rates vary throughout the year due to the nature of housing developments, which often span multiple months or even years. Some projects may be phased over several years, contributing to fluctuations in completion numbers. Delays in handovers, attributed to works required from statutory service providers and highway work scheduling, have impacted expected completions in Carterton and Enstone. Consequently, the delivery of these properties has been pushed back to later in the year.

The 2014 Oxfordshire Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) outlined a yearly requirement of 660 homes in West Oxfordshire until 2031, including 274 affordable units. Since 2013–14, the Council have delivered 2,443 homes, falling short of the SHMA's target of 3,014 homes by 592 units. However, there has been an increase in the delivery of affordable homes following the adoption of the Local Plan in September 2018. Typically, these numbers have surpassed annual targets, gradually narrowing the shortfall observed in previous years.

- 3.5 A full report is attached at Annex C and should be looked at in conjunction with this report.
- 3.6 As previously agreed, where possible, broader benchmarking has been included in the full performance report to gain a more robust and insightful evaluation of performance. Where benchmarking data is not currently available or outdated, this is noted, and further investigations will be undertaken to look at options.

**4. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

- 4.1 This report will be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 4 September 2024. The draft minutes of that meeting will be circulated to all Members and any recommendations from the Committee will be reported to the 11 September 2024 Executive meeting.

**5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 There are no direct financial implications from this report.

**6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 None specifically because of this report. However, a failure to meet statutory deadlines or standards in some services may expose the Council to legal challenge and/or financial liability.

**7. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 Contained in this report.

**8. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 8.1 None

**9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Contained in this report.

**10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 10.1 None

(END)

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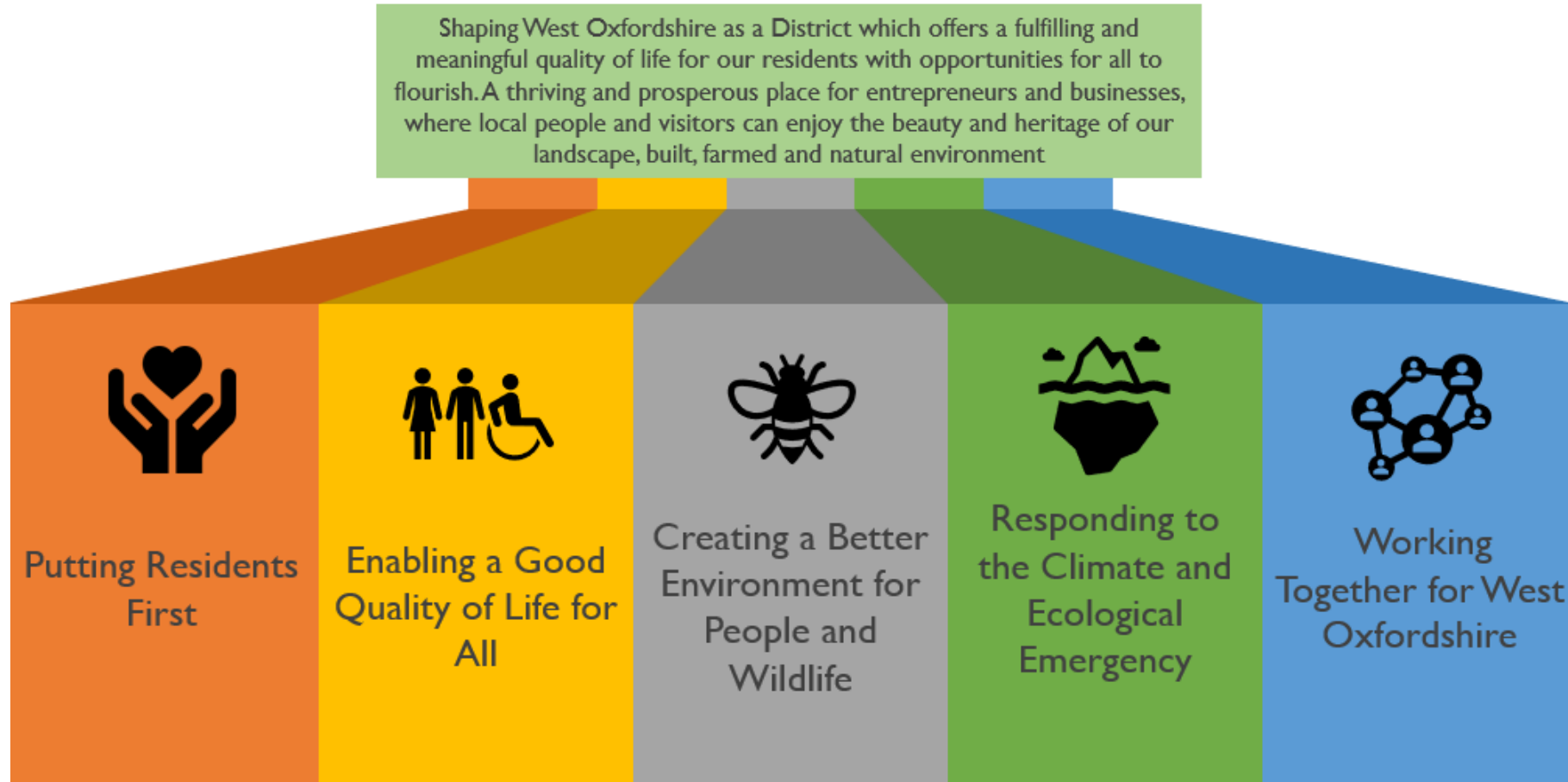
WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT  
**April 2024 – June 2024**

## Background

The Executive Action Plan was created to outline the steps needed to carry out the vision of the Executive after the new Council Plan was adopted in February 2023. In the Council Plan, the Executive looks to the district's future and establishes a vision for West Oxfordshire. In addition to updating the public on the status of each priority at regular meetings across the plan's four-year duration, a new performance framework has been created to offer timely updates for actions taken in relation to the priorities.



## Putting Residents First



### Actions we are taking

The Council is partnering with Oxfordshire County Council, the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils, district and city councils, as well as town and parish councils and parish meetings, to develop a shared charter. This charter will commit to principles that support successful partnership working across all councils in Oxfordshire. Through a multi-organisational working group, we have collaboratively developed the Oxfordshire Councils Charter, which outlines our principles and commitments to achieving two main goals: stronger partnership working and enhanced local democracy. The Charter was crafted through an extensive three-stage engagement process, detailed in the Oxfordshire Councils Charter Engagement Report, with participation from 32 local councils in West Oxfordshire. Clear themes from this engagement have been incorporated into the Charter's aims. Endorsed by the Executive in June, the Charter is set to be launched at the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils Annual General Meeting on July 1, 2024.

Our House launched in 2018 and is run by Cottsway Housing in partnership with WODC and specialist support provider Aspire. Funded by the Government's Community Housing Fund, the project offers accommodation and support to up to 12 individuals, known as 'trainees', and offers assistance to get them back into employment, education, or occupational training. The Council continues to work together with partners and the community to combat homelessness and ensure safe and secure housing options for everyone. The current funding arrangements were set to expire in October 2023, but the Council's commitment to the safety and well-being of its residents has led to the decision to continue supporting this vital initiative for a further year, until November 2024.

Residents and visitors who frequent Guildenford car park in Burford and Hensington Road car park in Woodstock were encouraged to share their feedback as part of the Council's Car Parking Strategy Consultation, which took place from January 15 to February 12. The consultation sought to gather insights from regular users, prioritising an understanding of their experiences and ensuring that the facilities meet both present and future needs. Additionally, comprehensive studies, including the use of counters at Guildenford car park, are planned to gather detailed usage data. The Council's overarching strategy for car parking in Woodstock and Burford aims to align provisions with the evolving needs of users, with the eventual goal of outlining improvements to enhance the usability of these facilities for all stakeholders. A review of the consultation responses is underway by Officers with a Mid-Point Review of the Car Parking Strategy anticipated to go to the Executive in September.

## Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All



### Actions we are taking

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), introduced by the Government in 2008, aims to ensure fair and transparent contributions from developments towards essential infrastructure, such as schools and roads. In March 2023, the Council's Executive commissioned new viability evidence for a revised CIL charging schedule. Progress is underway as the Council moves towards adopting and implementing the CIL. Additional information has been provided to Dixon Searle Partnership, the appointed consultants, and discussions are ongoing regarding the development typologies to assess and the best approach for consulting with key stakeholders, including landowners and developers. An 8-week public consultation survey is scheduled to run from August 2 to September 27, 2024, to gather community input for a well-informed and collaborative CIL implementation. The draft CIL charging schedule was prepared and approved by the Executive in July. After the public consultation concludes, Officers will review the responses. Unless major concerns arise, the charging schedule will be submitted for independent examination later in the year.

The Strategic Housing Project at the Council is undergoing significant developments with a Housing Delivery Programme Manager appointed in April. This new role will lead project work focused on identifying and advancing innovative ideas and models for increased affordable housing. The project includes assessing the scope for investment and modelling, exploring the best route for more interventionist housing delivery, developing business cases for existing Council-owned sites, and further exploration of modular building options. This comprehensive strategy underscores the council's commitment to addressing housing challenges through proactive planning and innovative solutions.

The Weavers Fold development in Chipping Norton features eight 2- and 3-bedroom zero-carbon homes available through a discounted market sale, offering buyers the unique opportunity to custom-build their homes and influence design and specifications. Despite some delays in the project, the Executive approved a new delivery model proposal in November, which was jointly developed by Green Axis and Homes England. The legal agreements have been drafted and agreed upon by Legal Services, the housing team, and the developers.

The Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) is an innovative capital fund that supports local authorities in England to obtain housing for those who are unable to find settled accommodation on resettlement schemes. The Council were successful in their bid for funding to relieve pressures on short term accommodation with a longer term objective of seeing the housing used for more general affordable purposes. Collaborating with Cottsway and Miller Homes, the Council facilitated the construction of 23 additional affordable units within the district. All properties have been exchanged, and an allocation program is now in progress. With LAHF Round 3 currently open, the Council is optimistic about securing a successful bid that would enable the acquisition of an additional 4 properties in partnership with Soha HA.

Salt Cross Garden Village is a proposed new standalone settlement, self-contained with its own village facilities, such as schools, community resources and employment opportunities. The initial garden village proposals set out in the Local Plan include 2,200 new homes and a new science business park which will give local people an alternative to driving to work in Oxford. Nearby Hanborough railway station together with a new Park and Ride facility to the north of Eynsham will give people an alternative to using their cars. The Area Action Plan (AAP) has undergone a thorough revision, encompassing modifications identified during the examination process in preparation for its adoption. After the Inspector's report was received, a legal challenge was submitted focusing on the conclusions reached by the Inspector in relation to the soundness of AAP Policy 2 – Net Zero Carbon Development. The High Court ruled in favor of the community group in a hearing held on 14-15 November 2023. Subsequently, additional clarity on Net Zero was provided through a Ministerial Statement on 23 December 2023. Following the High Court ruling, the Planning Inspectorate has set a timeline for hearings based on the Council's submission of the revised Policy 2 (Net Zero) and related evidence. The Council has appointed consultants to assist with a revised viability assessment and sustainability appraisal, expected to be delivered by mid-September 2024. As a result, the Council plans to submit the documents to the Planning Inspectorate in October 2024, with hearings scheduled for February 2025.

A Market Towns Study was commissioned as part of the government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund Levelling Up scheme to help identify issues to be addressed through the fund. The study recommended establishing town partnerships in order to identify detailed projects in each of the towns, for which £158,000 has been allocated to Witney Town Partnership has been established as the first of the Town Partnerships with the priorities for the Witney Town Partnership agreed as:

- Develop a long term strategic plan for the Town
- Promote the town to increase footfall
- Improve wayfinding and signage

The latter is being informed by a detailed audit of signage and wayfinding issues with officers from both planning and parking teams involved to ensure that any proposals will be acceptable in planning terms and are aligned with existing Council work to update carparking signage in Witney.



# Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife



## Actions we are taking

The Council has committed to the preparation of a new Local Plan covering the period up to 2041. The emerging plan is currently at the 'Regulation 18' stage of plan preparation, where views are sought on the content of the plan and different options and alternatives are considered and tested. An initial public consultation, 'Your Voice Counts' took place from August – October 2022 seeking general views on what sort of issues the new plan should focus on. More recently, a further public consultation took place from 30 August – 25 October 2023, and sought specific views on potential draft objectives for the new plan, along with different scenarios for the potential future pattern for growth and ideas/opportunities for how land might be used across the District, as well as a call for sites which Officers are assessing their potential suitability. The consultation was held predominantly online via the Council's digital engagement platform, citizenlab, but also included a number of 'in-person' events. 225 individuals and stakeholder organisations responded through citizenlab and a further 180 representations were received via email or letter. Further public consultation will take place in the new year as the Local Plan moves forward through further Regulation 18 consultation. It is anticipated that this will comprise a series of preferred policy approaches, building on the consultation feedback to date and emerging technical evidence on issues such as housing need. Additionally, the Environment Agency's 'Spheres of Influence' Project, which the Council is participating in as one of three national pilot areas, will influence local plan policies related to the water environment. Updated Level 1 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) and Phase 1 Water Cycle Study are being commissioned as part of the Local Plan evidence base. The Council is also working closely with the Environment Agency on a more integrated approach to water management, which will be reflected in the emerging draft Local Plan.

The Council is collaborating with the Wychwood Forest Trust on a funding bid for the Windrush in Witney project. This initiative aims to implement landscape-scale enhancements across the Witney Floodplains area. Partnering with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC), Witney Town Council (WTC), and the Wychwood Forest Trust, the project will focus on introducing grazing, enhancing floral diversity, pollarding willow trees, establishing a new volunteer group, and organizing a series of community engagement and rural skills training events.

The Coronation Community Orchard Scheme aims to plant trees in non-woodland areas near residential communities as a lasting tribute to King Charles III's coronation. The Council has secured £50,000 from the DEFRA Coronation Living Heritage Fund to support this initiative. Following the closure of the first round of applications in January 2024, six community groups received grants to start planting fruit trees, with grant claim submissions currently underway. The second round of funding opened in June 2024, with applications closing at the end of July. Evaluations will occur in August, and funding will be awarded to recipients, with the goal of completing all planting activities by March 2025.

The Deer Park South Access Project is progressing with infrastructure enhancements aimed at improving public access to the adjacent woodland. Key developments include the installation of two new bridges over Colwell Brook and completed footpath upgrades, including a new bench offering a scenic view of the site's balancing ponds. Local artist-collaborated nature trail brass rubbing posts, crafted with Windrush CofE Primary School students, have been installed by Ubico, adding to the trail's immersive experience. Interpretation panels, now installed, are designed to enhance visitors' understanding of the area's natural features and heritage. Schoolchildren from Windrush CofE Primary School have already visited and enjoyed the nature trail. Additionally, surfacing improvements have been made to the bridleway along the southern boundary of Deer Park South, and nature recovery officers will review land management and site access with Witney Woodland volunteers.



# Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency

## Actions we are taking

In June 2019, the Council declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency and pledged to become a carbon-neutral council by 2030. In January 2020, the Council published a report on Climate Action for West Oxfordshire, which set out a proposed framework for developing a Carbon Action Plan to deliver the Council's carbon-neutral commitment and develop a Climate Change Strategy for West Oxfordshire.

The decarbonisation of Council-owned buildings is progressing with various initiatives. Funding from the Local Carbon Skills Fund has been secured for heat decarbonisation plans at Elmfield Council Offices and Welch Way. The Windrush Leisure Centre has received £1.6 million from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Phase 3c (PSDS 3c), with Council approval granted on March 11, 2024, and work commencing on April 1, 2024. Additionally, a successful bid to the Swimming Pool Support Fund will finance the installation of solar PV panels and shower flow restrictors at Windrush Leisure Centre. Solar PV panels and heat recovery systems will also be added to the air handling units at Chipping Norton Lido to boost energy efficiency. Heat decarbonisation plans for Elmfield, Welch Way, and Old Court House were finalised in March 2024, advancing the Council's sustainability efforts. The PSDS 3c design and build contract for Windrush Leisure Centre will be procured through the Pagabo framework, with a mini competition launched on June 28, 2024. A bid has been submitted under the Public Sector Low Carbon Skills Fund Phase 5 (LCSF 5) for initial design work for the decarbonisation of Chipping Norton Leisure Centre and additional Council-owned buildings in Chipping Norton, Witney, and Oxford.

The Executive approved the updated Carbon Action Plan for 2030 in March 2024, signalling a commitment to addressing climate change. The document is undergoing a redesign to enhance accessibility and readability before its publication on the website. A tender process has been initiated for establishing the carbon baseline, which will serve as the foundation for the new Climate Change Strategy. The scope of work for the carbon baseline has been revised, and consultants have been asked to submit revised costs. Meanwhile, work on the delivery of the Carbon Action Plan continues, and the drafting of the new Climate Change Strategy has begun.

The Council's New Nature Recovery Plan aims to tackle the climate and ecological emergencies across the district up to 2030. Currently, the plan is undergoing revisions to ensure it is engaging and accessible to the public before its publication on the Council website. Given the Council's custodianship of approximately 106 hectares of greenspace, including parks, fields, greens, and public spaces within housing estates, there is a recognition of the ongoing need to enhance these areas for both wildlife and public enjoyment. While progress has been made on Council-owned sites in recent years, there remains much work to be done to safeguard and restore habitats and species. The new plan will focus on identifying areas for improvement within Council-owned spaces and exploring natural methods to enhance resilience and biodiversity. By adopting these strategies, the Council aims to make these areas more vibrant and resilient ecosystems for the benefit of both wildlife and the community.

The Greenlight initiative, launched on July 17, 2023, is a nature and online hub fostering community action for a greener future. It features a greenspace competition, Q&A sessions, local group events, and a recently added library to encourage communities to share resources on nature recovery and climate action, with regular updates to keep information current. A new competition on retrofit measures is set to launch soon. The initiative also includes ongoing liaison with Oxfordshire County Council on climate engagement.

The Home Upgrade Grant (HUG) is a countywide initiative aimed at enhancing energy efficiency and promoting low carbon heating solutions, particularly targeting low-income households residing in the least energy-efficient off-gas grid homes. The council, in collaboration with Oxfordshire County Council, are highlighting the Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG2) to those residents that may be eligible, with communications to residents outlining the Welcome the Warmth Oxfordshire Scheme. At the conclusion of Year 1 of the HUG2 scheme, 15 homes within the district received grant funding to implement energy-saving measures.

Ubico, the District Council's waste partner, tested a zero-emission Dennis Eagle eCollect in West Oxfordshire, collecting over 94 tonnes of rubbish in two weeks to evaluate its performance in a large rural district. Transport emissions from the Council's waste services contribute around 40% of the authority's greenhouse gases. Reducing this figure is crucial for the Council's goal of becoming carbon-neutral by 2030. The test vehicle, on loan from Dennis Eagle, features five lithium-ion battery packs to maximize payload. The District Council's fleet already includes three electric supervisor vans, three electric sweepers, and an electric car. The Council's updated Carbon Action Plan focuses on making its buildings, vehicles, and waste services more energy-efficient to achieve net zero by 2030, aligned with the Climate Change Strategy 2021-25.



# Working Together for West Oxfordshire

## Actions we are taking

The Community Infrastructure Fund, hosted on the Westhive platform (<https://www.spacehive.com/movement/westhive/>), aims to revitalise and grow local infrastructure as part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Levelling Up scheme. It offers capital grants of up to £20,000 or 50% of the project's crowdfunding target. With a generous budget of £40,000 for this financial year and a total of £226,000 over two years, the fund supports projects fostering community restoration, local pride, belonging, and positive contributions to health and wellbeing. The Council encourages submissions emphasising environmental sustainability, aiding vulnerable communities, and addressing exclusion due to mental health, physical or mental disability, or financial hardship. There's a particular focus on projects for or by young people, aligning with the Council's commitment to empower young voices.

The Spacehive team hosted a well-attended project creators workshop to guide potential applicants in developing and securing funds for project delivery. The Council pledges up to £10,000 for eligible projects, in addition to public contributions via the platform. The initiative has had eight projects crowdfunding, with four fully funded: Food Surplus Redistribution in Witney, Cotswolds Arts Through Schools, Get Set Gagingwell - The MAP Garden, and Cycles of Good. Round 3 of Westhive is underway, with a further creator workshop to be held on July 22.

Funded through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Wild Oxfordshire, a charity dedicated to fostering a more natural, resilient, and biodiverse Oxfordshire, is collaborating with Officers to update a Biodiversity Toolkit. This toolkit aims to guide Town and Parish Councils in managing their land in nature-friendly ways. Three pilot projects in Asthall, Eynsham, and Filkins & Broughton Poggs will serve as demonstrations of the toolkit's efficacy, producing case studies to assist other parishes in their nature recovery endeavours. The recently updated Community Town and Parish Guide to Nature Recovery provides valuable insights and resources for local communities to enhance biodiversity and promote nature conservation. An in-person launch event held at Woodgreen Offices on March 21, 2024, featured demonstrators showcasing practical examples to representatives from various town and parish councils, fostering knowledge sharing and collaboration. The guidance was also launched online on April 16, 2024, providing a broader audience with access to the resources virtually. The grand opening of Water Close in Asthall Leigh on May 23, 2024, marked another milestone in the initiative. Additionally, £2,000 was transferred to parish councils for long-term maintenance, using the underspend to further support sustained nature recovery efforts across the region.

Several community-focused initiatives are underway to enhance local well-being and support. The Food Action Plan benefits from £23.5k in funding, with an additional £40k+ from Household Support Fund 4 (HSF4) to strengthen the community food network. The Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) is being utilised for a cultural programme for young people in collaboration with Oxford Cultural Education Partners (OXCEP). A new local area coordination pilot in Chipping Norton, funded by Oxford County Council (OCC), will introduce a permanent coordinator to assist residents. Starting in March 2024, a Local Ward Profile in Witney, funded by Public Health, will develop a health profile to guide service delivery and identify local needs, with grants available for community groups. Additionally, £120k from COMF is allocated to address poor mental health, split between Service Level Agreement (SLA) grants and two Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations in West Oxfordshire. The Community Insight project will provide £25k for VCS groups in Witney. A bid for OCC Public Health funding aims to support 2-4 community-based health and nature recovery projects, and £10k from COMF will aid local groups offering mental health support to parents based on Youth Needs Assessment findings. Decisions on the allocation of Household Support Fund 5 (HSF5) funds are anticipated soon. These efforts collectively aim to boost community support, promote environmental sustainability, and improve overall health and well-being.

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## Corporate Strategy Action Tracker

<b>Green</b>	On target
<b>Amber</b>	Off target but action being taken to ensure delivery (where this results in a reviewed target date, this is made clear in the table)
<b>Red</b>	Off target and no action has yet been agreed to resolve the situation
<b>Complete</b>	Action completed
<b>Not Scheduled to Start</b>	The action/project has either a future start date or is still in its early stages, with no start date established yet.

Our Focus	Actions	Quarter 1 Update	Start Date	Date Due	Status	Executive Member	Link Officer	Updates Provided by	
<b>Putting Residents First</b>	<p>The Council will listen and act in the best interests of residents by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Being an outward facing, accessible, inclusive and open Council, improving our use of technology to increase understanding and access to what we do, how we work and the decisions we take</li> <li>-Providing easy to use platforms for public consultations that are effective, accessible and timely so that the voice of residents can be heard in planning and other Council decisions</li> <li>-Positively engaging with and listening to locally elected representatives on Town and Parish Councils</li> <li>-Actively seeking the voice of the seldom heard, including those of young people, to understand their particular needs and ensure that the</li> </ul>	<p>Explore how the Council leads Youth Engagement, ensuring youth are engaged across the wide range of activity it undertakes.</p>	<p>After 2 rounds of advertising the Youth Dev Role a successful candidate has been identified - expected start 16th Sept. This role will engage with internal and external colleagues to secure greater engagement by young people and develop more opportunities.</p> <p>External funding for 2 years for a second Community Builder role has been secured to cover Carterton - this will strengthen our ability to hear from those seldom heard in our communities</p>			On Target	Rizvana Poole	Emmy-Lou Bossard / Heather McCulloch	Heather McCulloch
	<p>Customer Experience Improvement Programme</p>	<p>The arrangement for telephones to remain open 9 - 2 was agreed by Executive in June. Online services available for customers continues to increase with the uptake for our customers exceeding expectation. Open portal applications continue to rise so that our customers can self serve.</p>	01/07/2020	01/01/2024	On Target	All	Giles Hughes	Michelle Clifford	

<p>1.2</p>	<p>The Council will act with outstanding levels of transparency and accountability, with high standards of governance and trustworthiness.</p>	<p>Proposal to implement a robust system and process for:          &gt; the allocation of matters to the councils' forward plans          &gt; report preparation, consultation and approval          &gt; transparency and publication of decision making; and          &gt; decision tracking.</p>	<p>The Modern.gov Xpress integration was successfully deployed at the local elections. The Audit and Governance work plan has been drafted, and the declarations at meetings functionality has been implemented.</p>	<p>01/05/2021</p>	<p>31/12/2023</p>	<p>On Target</p>	<p>Andy Graham</p>	<p>Giles Hughes</p>	<p>Andrew Brown</p>
<p>1.3</p>	<p>The Council will actively manage Council budgets, delivering good levels of service through the wise and efficient use of funds available as well as enabling those budgets to grow so that the Council can take action towards the priorities of this Council Plan.</p>	<p>Procurement: Publica-wide project to embed climate, ecological and social value considerations in procurement processes to maximise the use of sustainable suppliers and support local businesses.</p>				<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Alaric Smith</p>	<p>Ciaran O'Kane / Phil Martin</p>	<p>Ciaran O'Kane</p>
<p>1.4</p>	<p>The Council will seek to attract inward investment in our towns, villages and rural areas so that they can flourish and be sustained with new jobs and housing and infrastructure that are designed to meet the needs and aspirations of our current and future residents.</p>								
<p>2.1</p>	<p>Ensure the timely provision of built and green infrastructure which meets the needs of existing and incoming residents and that supports health and care to enable physical and mental well-being, community cohesion and delivers a high quality of life.</p>	<p>Adopt and implement CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy).</p>	<p>Viability report finalised. Draft charging schedule prepared. To be considered at O&amp;S committee on 17 July and Executive on 22 July with a view to 6-week public consultation thereafter.</p>	<p>01/11/2019</p>	<p>31/08/2024</p>	<p>On Target</p>	<p>Hugo Ashton</p>	<p>Giles Hughes / Charlie Jackson / Chris Hargraves</p>	<p>Chris Hargraves</p>
		<p>Commission (Sport England) Strategic Outcomes Planning Model (SOPM) through Max Associates to inform a West Oxfordshire Leisure, Health and Wellbeing Strategy which will define a more holistic leisure provision offer (inc. arts, culture, entertainment and sport). The SOPM will also inform the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (and Local Plan Review) and Town Centre regeneration plans.</p>	<p>Stage 3 of planning model recieved and reviewed by officers. Final report moved on Executive Forward Plan to September 2024 due to elections.</p>	<p>01/09/2023</p>	<p>05/06/2024</p>	<p>On Target</p>	<p>Tim Sumner</p>	<p>Rachel Biles</p>	<p>Rachel Biles</p>
		<p>Explore opportunities for green investment for strategic development areas eg through the Carterton Masterplan and also through the Pan-Regional Partnership.</p>	<p>Final draft of 'Carterton Strategic Study' submitted. Opportunities to extend green active travel loop, greater investment in green public realm and green infrastructure. To be discussed further at Executive Away Day in particular how the recommendations can be realised in practical terms.</p>	<p>01/01/2023</p>	<p>31/08/2025</p>	<p>On Target</p>	<p>Tim Sumner, Andrew Prosser</p>	<p>Philippa Lowe</p>	<p>Philippa Lowe</p>

**Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All**

<p>Explore how the Local Plan can address the issue of securing long term maintenance of green infrastructure on large SDA's.</p>	<p>Local Plan preferred option paper in preparation. To be shared with Officers and Local Plan Member working group in August ahead of refinement and formal consideration in October. Long-term maintenance of community infrastructure including Green Infrastructure to be included as a preferred policy option.</p>	31/08/2022	31/08/2025	On Target	Andrew Prosser	Chris Hargraves	Chris Hargraves
<p>Consideration of community stewardship and maintenance of Strategic Development Areas – how do we enable this?</p>	<p>The Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP) provides a potential approach to this issue by requiring the submission of a Community Management and Maintenance Plan (CMMP) to explore suitable options for the future management and maintenance of community assets. Potential to roll this approach out more widely through the new Local Plan 2041.</p>	31/08/2022	31/08/2025	On Target	Andrew Prosser	Chris Hargraves	Chris Hargraves
<p>Work with Oxfordshire County Council and others to increase the opportunity for residents to travel around and beyond the District on foot or by bike, or on public transport, to reduce car dependence and benefit from the health and economic benefits of doing so.</p>	<p>Working with Bioregional and Space Syntax to complete a carbon assessment of Local Plan spatial options, including the accessibility of places by active travel. Districtwide carbon baseline and net zero pathways will consider green and active travel in consultation with OCC, which will feed into the Climate Change Strategy update.</p>			On Target	Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon
<p>Strategic Housing Project: Internal management and modelling – proposals to be presented to Executive in paper compiled by Publica Assistant Director Planning and Sustainability to November Executive.</p>	<p>Completed</p>	01/04/2023	15/11/2023	Complete	Geoff Saul	Giles Hughes	Charlie Jackson
<p>Strategic Housing Project: Assessing scope for investment and modelling.</p>	<p>Housing Delivery Programme Manager, Michael David, appointed in April. Workplan being drafted with opportunities for additionality being identified.</p>	01/04/2023		On Target	Alaric Smith, Geoff Saul	Giles Hughes	Michael David
<p>Strategic Housing Project: Overview of modelling options and delivery. Proposed approach to the November Executive.</p>	<p>Completed</p>	01/04/2023	15/11/2023	Complete	Tim Sumner, Geoff Saul	Giles Hughes	Charlie Jackson
<p>Further exploration of the best route to be more interventionist in housing delivery via direct provision – clarity needed over the desired objectives of establishing the council owned housing company or pursue an alternative route eg via a Joint Venture (OxPlace/Oxfordshire wide).</p>	<p>Housing Delivery Programme Manager, Michael David, appointed in April. Workplan being drafted with opportunities for additionality being identified.</p>	01/04/2023		On Target	Geoff Saul	Giles Hughes	Michael David

Explore the scope for alternative means of delivering the range of homes in the District that meet the diverse needs of our communities, such as investment in tenures and sizes of homes that the market does not currently deliver enough of.

Development of business cases for existing Council owned sites – initial focus should be on Woodford Way – a housing scheme which integrates carparking (what is needed/tie in with EVPC). Key landowners/development partners.	Housing Delivery Programme Manager, Michael David, appointed in April. Workplan being drafted with opportunities for additionality being identified.	01/04/2023		On Target	Geoff Saul	Andrew Turner	Michael David
Further exploration of modular building – how, where and with whom including visits manufacturers. To understand options for delivery.	Housing Delivery Programme Manager, Michael David, appointed in April. Workplan being drafted with opportunities for additionality being identified.	01/04/2023		On Target	Geoff Saul	Giles Hughes	Michael David
Emergency accommodation – Acquisition of - consider the balance – single/couple and family accommodation).	Oxford City have come back with some design options - Michael David now on boarded and working up scheme for business case assessment with Oxford City.			On Target	Geoff Saul	Frank Wilson / Jon Dearing	
Completion of housing development at Walterbush Road, Chipping Norton.	Legal documents and S106 have been drafted and agreed with Legal Services, the Housing team and the Developer.	01/10/2021	31/07/2023	Off Target but Mitigation in Place	Geoff Saul	Andrew Turner	Andrew Turner
Deliver the Local Authority Housing Fund as a means to relieve pressures on short term accommodation and bridging hotels with a longer term of objective to see the housing being used for more general affordable purposes.		01/04/2023	31/09/2024	On Target	Geoff Saul	Jon Dearing	Jon Dearing
Work with Carterton Town Council and other relevant stakeholders to identify economic regeneration priorities for the town and immediate area following completion of the UKSPF funded Carterton Strategic/Master Plan.	The Carterton Strategic Study has now been completed by the consultant team. Discussions are now needed on how to take forward the potential actions and recommendations that have been identified. This will be the subject of discussion at the forthcoming Executive away day.			Not Scheduled to Start	Duncan Enright	Chris Hargraves	
Strategy and plan for reinvigorating the District's Charter Markets	Draft strategy currently developed and the draft brief for the Expression of interest being designed for the management and operation of the Charter Markets in Chipping Norton and Witney and potentially another for additional markets at Marriotts.			On Target	Duncan Enright	Emma Phillips	
Take an active role as member of Cotswolds Plus Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) and engagement with neighbouring LVEP's.	Climate team are advising on the green leaf scheme and webpages.			On Target	Duncan Enright	Chris Jackson	Chris Jackson
Set future project priorities for Council and Stakeholders to secure the long term viability of our Market Towns via enhancements inc wayfinding & signage, public realm and support for independent retailers and appropriate market promotions/attractions.	Engagement work started with key stakeholders to identify and prioritise enhancements working with established networks and steering groups. We have seen increased food events bring greater footfall to the main towns and are working on additional promotions that will bolster the independant traders also.	01/12/2022	31/05/2025	On Target	Duncan Enright	Sam Stronach	Sam Stronach

The Council will be a hive of activity to help build and support thriving towns and villages that provide residents with a high quality of life by supporting a vibrant local economy, homes and infrastructure that meet people's needs, excellent health and wellbeing and ensuring equal access to opportunity for all.

Work with partners to support a vibrant local economy which gives residents the opportunity to prosper and fulfil their ambitions through secure jobs and exciting careers, entrepreneurship and developing new skills to participate in and contribute to the local economy.



Support the retention of existing and development of new services and facilities that contribute to the local economy, community wellbeing and cohesion.

Oxfordshire County Council improvements to Witney Town Centre linked to Marriots Walk redevelopment where appropriate.	Proposed enhancements currently in pre-consultation phase. Will be pulling together an opportunity for Cllr Enright to feedback directly with OCC on the proposed Witney enhancements.			On Target	Duncan Enright	Sam Stronach	Sam Stronach
The commissioning of the Strategic Outcomes Planning Model (through Max Associates) to inform the development of a West Oxfordshire Leisure, Health and Wellbeing Strategy.				Not Scheduled to Start			
Guide the future delivery of Salt Cross new garden village and associated infrastructure to enable delivery of Salt Cross Science Park.	<p><b>Area Action Plan (AAP):</b> The Planning Inspector has set a timeline for hearings based on WODC's submission of modified Policy 2 (Net Zero) and related evidence. The Council has appointed consultants to modify Policy 2, revise the viability assessment, and submit the sustainability appraisal from, As a result, the Council anticipates submitting to PINs in Oct 24, leading to hearings in Feb 25.</p> <p><b>Self Build/Community Led Housing Toolkit:</b> The CoHo Hub's input on delivery advice is concluded and the housing team aims to expand the toolkit District-wide rather than just for Salt Cross.</p> <p><b>A40 Improvements Scheme:</b> OCC presented a revised scheme to Homes England (HE), which goes to the board for approval in July. OCC held a developers forum with WODC and Eynsham developers. The grade-separated crossing/underpass is not part of the revised scheme.</p>	01/01/2018	31/12/2034	Off Target but Mitigation in Place	Duncan Enright	Andrea Clenton	Andrea Clenton
Marriotts Walk – implementation of CBRE recommendations inc. securing new tenants, public realm improvements & making enhanced use of the square.	Progress in securing new tenants has been challenging with significant interest not yet translating to new tenancies. Approval given for Capex associated with fitting out the uncompleted unit adjacent to M & S food hall with tenant lined up.			On Target	Duncan Enright	Jasmine McWilliams	Andrew Turner
Development of the Carterton Strategic/Master Plan to regeneration the town and in doing so redressing balance between housing development with investment in the town centre, leisure and culture facilities, community space and business opportunities. Will seek to determine the best way to maximise the economic benefit of the RAF's largest airbase for the town and immediate area.	The final draft of the Carterton Strategic Study is now an opportunity to now consider the plan and allow for further discussion on the recommendations. Next steps will be to engage with key stakeholders who input into the study. Further discussion through the Executive Away day to determine next steps.	01/02/2022	31/05/2025	On Target	Alaric Smith, Hugo Ashton, Geoff Saul, Tim Sumner	Philippa Lowe	Mikki Liddiat
Ubico Grounds Maintenance Contract – review contract with aim of securing both biodiversity enhancements and budgetary savings.		01/03/2025	01/03/2026	Not Scheduled to Start	Lidia Arciszewska	Bill Oddy	

Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife

3.1

<p>Work with others, and fulfil our statutory obligations, to ensure that land, air and water support biodiverse habitats, reduce pollution and bring about nature recovery to the District, putting it at the forefront of local decision making.</p>	<p>Biodiversity Land Management Plans - Working with Ubico to change land management processes across key WODC sites, for example reduced mowing frequency, creation of urban meadows, changes to floodplain meadow management, invasive species action, subsidence works, to improve them for both wildlife and people.</p>	<p>Land management plans are under review. Chanida Fung has been appointed as Lead Nature Recovery Officer. Climate change and nature recovery officers are working on the grounds maintenance review with Bob Lightfoot.</p>	01/02/2022	01/03/2026	On Target	Lidia Arciszewska	Bill Oddy	Hannah Kenyon
	<p>Support DEFRA funded Landscape Recovery Project (contiguous with the Evenlode and Windrush Catchments) in partnership with the North East Cotswolds Farmer Cluster and the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership.</p>				Not Scheduled to Start	Lidia Arciszewska	Chris Hargraves	
	<p>Windrush in Witney funding bid, in partnership with Wychwood Forest Trust - Landscape-scale enhancements across the Witney Floodplains, working with OCC, WTC and Wychwood Forest Trust to introduce grazing, improve floral diversity, pollard willow trees, establishment of a new volunteer group and delivery of a series of community engagement/rural skills training events. Linked to 3.5.</p>	<p>Preparation of the Windrush in Witney funding bid included in the Wychwood Forest Trust SLA. Neil Clennell to provide an update on the project.</p>	01/05/2022	01/03/2025	Off Target but Mitigation in Place	Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon
	<p>Coronation Community Orchard Scheme</p>	<p>Second round of funding has been launched and application closes at the end of July. Submissions to be evaluated in August and funding to be awarded to recipients,</p>	01/11/2023	21/03/2025	On Target	Andrew Prosser/Lidia Arciszewska	Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon
<p>Recognise and support the vital role of farming in natural ecosystem conservation, local food production and economic resilience, and the role that environmentally sustainable farming can play in achieving this.</p>	<p>Engaging with farmers as part of a wider consideration of the District's rural economy. How can WODC work to support (within its powers) a strong local rural economy, including diversification and the visitor economy.</p>	<p>Climate change and nature recovery officers engaging with the North East Cotswold Farmer Cluster on projects. Meeting held with a number of representatives of the farming and agricultural sector in April. Valuable feedback received which is being taken into account in drafting the Local Plan preferred options consultation paper.</p>			Not Scheduled to Start	Lidia Arciszewska, Andrew Prosser	Chris Jackson / Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon
<p>Help people to connect with nature by improving understanding of and public access to green spaces and the countryside.</p>	<p>Deer Park South Access Project – Infrastructure improvements to enhance public access to woodland adjacent to strategic development area.</p>	<p>Both interpretation panels have been installed. Schoolchildren from Windrush CofE Primary School visited the site and enjoyed the nature trail. Surfacing improved on the bridleway along the southern boundary of Deer Park South. Nature recovery officers to review land management and access to the site with the Witney Woodland volunteers.</p>	01/12/2022	31/05/2025	On Target	Duncan Enright	Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon
<p>The Council will be a progressive custodian of our environmental resources, supporting a</p>	<p>Be an active participant in the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership and contribute to the production of the Local Nature Recovery</p>	<p>Officer group to convene with Local Nature Partnership - maintain relationship with LNP and work with partners to develop workstreams.</p>	01/07/2022	01/07/2025	On Target	Lidia Arciszewska, Duncan Enright	Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon

3.4  
3.5

healthy natural landscape and functioning ecosystem which is rich in wildlife and habitats that are enjoyed by and benefit all.

Strategy to establish priorities and map proposals for action to drive nature's recovery, achieve Biodiversity Net Gain and provide wider environmental benefits specific to West Oxfordshire.

Work with others to facilitate environmentally sensitive flood management of our river catchments.

Explore the potential for the Council to acquire land for Biodiversity Net Gain and nature-based carbon sequestration.

Support of the Catchment Partnerships including the promotion (where appropriate) of other water quality campaigning groups. Sewerage and Water Agency Group continue to facilitate (Links with the Pan Regional Partnership – Scoping and Modelling Work).

Delivery of the Local Plan – overview including how can the site allocations process through the Local Plan review play a positive role in water management? Coordination of policy. Linked to 4.2.

Nature based carbon sequestration project started with an initial review of the carbon offsetting market e.g. UK Woodland Carbon Code etc. Tatiana Bell appointed as the Nature Recovery Officer. Consider acquisition of land for BNG and carbon sequestration as part of this project.

Updated Level 1 SFRA and Phase 1 Water Cycle Study being commissioned as part of the Local Plan evidence base. Officers also continue to engage with the Environment Agency in respect of their 'spheres of influence' project which is considering a more integrated and holistic approach to water management. This will be reflected in the emerging draft Local Plan accordingly.

8/12/2024 31/03/2026 On Target Andrew Prosser Frank Wilson / Hannah Kenyon Hannah Kenyon

Not Scheduled to Start Lidia Arciszewska, Andy Graham

01/06/2022 31/12/2024 On Target Hugo Ashton Chris Hargraves Sam Stronach / Chris Hargraves

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4.1

Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency

Decarbonisation of council owned buildings, including leisure centres and sports pavilions – secure external PSDS funding and extend the MEES project to include the full decarbonisation of tenanted buildings.

PSDS 3b funded Carterton Leisure Centre decarbonisation - Carbon reduction through the replacement of the heating and hot water system of the building with a low-carbon alternative and increasing the amount of solar PV on site.

Waste Vehicle Strategy - Supporting the Waste team on the development of the strategy to reduce emissions from the Council's waste vehicle fleet.

Carbon Action Plan to 2030 and Climate Change Strategy to 2050 - Update of the Carbon Action Plan and Climate Change strategy to include scope 3 emissions, district carbon budgets, route maps to net zero, and actions.

Drive down carbon emissions from Council operations including leisure, waste and street cleansing and running of the Council's estate, and in so doing lead by example to inspire others to take action to collectively reduce the overall carbon emissions of the District.

PSDS 3c design and build contract for the decarbonisation of Windrush Leisure Centre will be procured through the Pagabo framework. A mini competition was launched on 28/06/24. LCSF 5 bid submitted for some initial design work for the decarbonisation of Chipping Norton Leisure Centre, Horsefair, Old Print House, 21 Between Towns Road, Unit 1 Des Roches Square (still awaiting result).

PSDS 3b Carterton Leisure Centre decarbonisation scheme on hold. Evaluating scheme cost and available funding for PSDS 4a application. Report being prepared for September Executive to review cost, funding opportunities and next steps.

eHGV trail completed and results positive. Climate change officers researching funding options in consultation with other local authorities and the Greater South East Net Zero Hub. Meeting arranged for 15 July to discuss next round of EV vehicle procurement.

Carbon Action Plan completed and continuing to work on its delivery. Scope of work revised for the carbon baseline and consultants have been asked to submit revised costs. Started to draft the new Climate Change Strategy.

Ongoing

Off Target

On Target

On Target

Andrew Prosser, Dan Levy, Alaric Smith Hannah Kenyon Hannah Kenyon

Andrew Prosser, Tim Sumner Claire Locke Claire Locke / Andrew Turner

Lidia Arciszewska Simon Anthony / Hannah Kenyon Hannah Kenyon

Andrew Prosser Hannah Kenyon Hannah Kenyon

4.2

4.3

The Council will be a community leader in responding to the challenges of climate change, including rapidly reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing the District and its communities for the impacts of climate change to ensure a fair transition for all to a future that will be defined by climate change.

	<p>Climate Impact Assessment Tool (CIAT) – Develop the tool as a mandatory requirement on projects so as to embed climate and nature considerations in council decision making.</p>	<p>Management team have approved the use of the Sustainability Impact Assessment Tool (SIAT), formerly known as the Climate Impact Assessment Tool. Members to be briefed on the SIAT in Informal Executive.</p>	01/02/2023	01/04/2024	On Target	Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon
	<p>Solar PV project for tenanted buildings - A Publica-wide long-term project to install rooftop solar panels on council owned buildings, increasing the amount of renewable energy generated in the District.</p>	<p>New PPAs are being agreed with the tenants at Unit 5 Talisman Business Park and Unit 2 Des Roches Square. Unit 6 did not generate sufficient ROI to proceed. Climate Change officers have submitted additional documents to Planning in support of the Woodgreen planning application. No prior approval is required for Elmfield. Climate Change officers are in discussion with the solar installer, GSM, and the Property and Estates team about implementation and coordinating installs with the wider refit.</p>	01/08/2022	01/12/2023	On Target	Andrew Prosser	Andrew Turner/Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon
<p>Encourage the use of nature based solutions to sequester carbon and combat the risks arising from climate change at a river catchment scale, such as restoration of meadows and trees to reduce flooding and improve water quality.</p>	<p>Biodiversity Action Plan – Develop and deliver workstreams to restore nature and enhanced biodiversity in the District.</p>	<p>Nature Recovery Plan has been uploaded on the Council website. Nature recovery officers are prioritising the delivery of particular workstreams.</p>	01/03/2023	01/03/2024	On Target	Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon
	<p>Consider how proactive should WODC be in facilitating retrofit for the 'able to pay' market.</p>	<p>Local Area Retrofit Accelerator (LARA) bid was submitted with OCC and was unsuccessful. Hoping to shadow the winners to assist in developing districtwide retrofit strategy. Working on the CAPZero project team, as part of the SLA, to encourage retrofit at a local level. Explored solar bulk-buy with other Oxfordshire local authorities.</p>			Ongoing	Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon
<p>Work with partner organisations and residents to facilitate the retrofit of carbon reduction measures in homes and businesses and pursue a drive to net zero carbon buildings in new developments through planning policy</p>	<p>Greenlight – nature and online hub to facilitate community action for a greener future.</p>	<p>Greenlight content has been reviewed and updated. New competition to launch on retrofit measures. Liaising with OCC on climate engagement.</p>			Ongoing	Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon
	<p>Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) project for tenanted buildings - A Publica-wide review of tenanted buildings to determine what measures are needed to bring the EPC rating up to a B or above by 2030.</p>		01/07/2023		On Target	Andrew Prosser	Jasmine McWilliams	Jasmine McWilliams
	<p>Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2 (HUG2) - A countywide scheme to upgrade energy efficiency and low carbon heating for low-income householders in the worst performing off-gas grid homes.</p>		01/06/2023	01/03/2025	On Target	Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon

4.4		Encourage renewable energy generation at appropriate sites in the District, improving local energy and economic resilience and supporting the community benefits that this resilience will bring.	Explore opportunities with partners to encourage renewable energy within the District.	Worked on the Outline Business Case for additional Local Area Energy Planning (LAEP) funding with OCC. FOP to approve funding on 30th July 2024. Drafting the consultant brief with OCC.			Ongoing	Andrew Prosser	Giles Hughes / Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon
4.5		Work with Oxfordshire County Council to deliver on our joint commitment to active travel and public transport, including through improved walking, cycling and public transport infrastructure and better public transport services.	Install EV charging points across the District.	Agreed provisional sites for a community microhub in West Oxon: Ducklington, Brize Norton and Burwell Hall.	26/05/2023	01/01/2025	Off Target but Mitigation in Place	Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon
5.1		Target available Council grant budgets to proposals by other organisations that will deliver on Council priorities.	Enable delivery of agreed project interventions on Government approved Investment Plan under UKSPF and REPF.	Progressing well with coordinating activities and projects linked to the government interventions. Changes in government have led us to change some of our branding for promotion of some of our projects going forward.			On Target	Duncan Enright	Sam Stronach	Sam Stronach
			Successful implementation of new Grant Scheme: a) Crowdfunding, b) Community and Voluntary Sector Service Level Agreements and c) Youth initiatives.	a) Round 3 of Westhive underway with Creator workshop on 22nd July. Round 2 projects successfully pledging to WODC and UKSPF have been confirmed. b) Legal agreements for most SLA grant recipients are signed. Work has begun. Kick off meeting with all organisations was held on 11th July. c) Work with youth people is included in some SLA proposals. No specific projects led by Young people have come forward through Westhive. We anticipate this will change with arrival of Youth Dev lead.	01/12/2022	31/05/2025	On Target	Alaric Smith with Rizvana Poole, Andrew Prosser and Lidia Arciszewsk	Heather McCulloch	Heather McCulloch
5.2		Work with existing businesses and new start-ups to access support available to enable their success.								
5.3		Support Town and Parish Councils to represent their communities energetically and take action on issues important to their locality.	Towns and Parish Biodiversity project– UKSPF funded project to provide case studies for communities on how to enhance biodiversity in different habitats.	Guidance launched online on 16th April 2024. Grand opening of Water Close in Asthall Leigh on 23rd May 2024. £2k was transferred to parish councils for long term maintenance, using the underspend.	01/12/2022	31/05/2025	On Target	Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon	Hannah Kenyon

5.4

The Council recognises that to deliver on our aspirations and the priorities in this Council Plan for West Oxfordshire, working collaboratively with others will be essential

<p>Support the Voluntary and Community Sector to continue to undertake activity which serves the needs of residents including established organisations and more informal groups working to address particular needs such as access to food, youth support and cultural provision.</p>	<p>Community Grants</p>	<p>No expenditure on VCS as part of Food Action Plan to date. Community Insight (ward profile) will provide £25k of funding for VCS groups in the Witney area. Of the £120 of COMF funding towards MH support, £60k has been allocated to the SLA grant recipients and £60 has been awarded to 2 VCS organisations to work in West Oxfordshire over the next 2 years. A bid has been submitted to OCC Public Health to provide funds to 2-4 community based Health and Nature Recovery recovery projects in communities. £10k of COMF funding is to be allocated to 2-3 local groups to deliver mental health support to parents based on findings of the Youth Needs Assessment. Decisions on how HSF5 funds will be distributed are imminent.</p>	<p>01/12/2022</p>	<p>31/05/2025</p>	<p>On Target</p>	<p>Rizvana Poole</p>	<p>Heather McCulloch</p>	<p>Heather McCulloch</p>
<p>Make a dedicated effort to further understand and meet the needs of our young people and support their mental health, including children, teenagers and young adults leaving school, entering the world of work and/or seeking to set up home in the District.</p>	<p>Focussed programme of engagement with young people, and other groups, on mental and physical health, local facilities and spaces for young people, to ensure future leisure, sport, culture and arts provision in the District best provides for these.</p>	<p>We await the arrival of the Youth Development Role in order to support and upskill colleagues internally in conducting more effective engagement with young people so that it becomes second nature. YDR will also consider how the YNA might be updated in the future.</p>			<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Rizvana Poole, Tim Sumner</p>	<p>Heather McCulloch</p>	<p>Heather McCulloch</p>
	<p>Have Your Say Events – focussed topic event for young people.</p>	<p>Engagement with young people will be an element of the new Youth development role and this engagement will take a number of forms. Have your say is too prescriptive at this stage.</p>			<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Rizvana Poole</p>	<p>Heather McCulloch</p>	<p>Heather McCulloch</p>
<p>Look to invest in the building of homes that meet the diverse housing needs of our residents at all stages of their lives, including for those seeking to downsize or affordable social housing.</p>								

5.5

5.6



WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Delivering great services locally

**PERFORMANCE REPORT:**  
**April 2024 - June 2024**

# Summary Index

Area	KPI Name	RAG	Page
Revenues, Benefits and Housing	<a href="#">Percentage of Council Tax Collected</a>	Green	6
	<a href="#">Percentage of Non Domestic Rates collected</a>	Green	7
	<a href="#">Processing times for Council Tax Support new claims</a>	Green	8
	<a href="#">Processing times for Council Tax Support Change Events</a>	Green	9
	<a href="#">Processing times for Housing Benefit Change of Circumstances</a>	Orange	10
	<a href="#">Percentage of Housing Benefit overpayment due to LA error/admin delay</a>	Green	11
	<a href="#">(Snapshot) Long Term Empty Properties</a>	Grey	12
	<a href="#">(Snapshot) Number of households in B&amp;B/hotel-type accommodation &amp; Hostels (LA owned or managed); and Number of successful 'Move On' into suitable independent/long-term accommodation from B&amp;Bs/hotels/hostels</a>	Grey	13
Customer Experience	<a href="#">Customer Satisfaction - Telephone</a>	Green	14
	<a href="#">Customer Satisfaction - Email</a>	Grey	15
	<a href="#">Customer Satisfaction - Face to Face</a>	Green	16



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Customer Experience	<a href="#">Customer Call Handling - Average Waiting Time</a>		17
	<a href="#">Complaints</a>		18
	<a href="#">Percentage of FOI requests answered within 20 days</a>		20
Development Management and Land Charges	<a href="#">Building Control Satisfaction</a>		21
	<a href="#">Percentage of major planning applications determined within agreed timescales (including AEOT)</a>		22
	<a href="#">Percentage of minor planning applications determined within agreed timescales (including AEOT)</a>		23
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	<a href="#">Total Income achieved in Planning &amp; Income from Pre-application advice</a>		25
	<a href="#">Percentage of Planning Appeals Allowed</a>		26
	<a href="#">Percentage of official land charge searches completed within 10 days</a>		27
	<a href="#">Number of affordable homes delivered</a>		28

# Summary Index

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Area	KPI Name	RAG	Page
Waste and Environment	<a href="#">Number of fly tips collected and percentage that result in an enforcement action</a>		29
	<a href="#">Percentage of high risk food premises inspected within target timescales</a>		30
	<a href="#">Percentage of high risk notifications risk assessed within 1 working day</a>		31
	<a href="#">Percentage of household waste recycled</a>	Awaiting Data	32
	<a href="#">Residual Household Waste per Household (kg)</a>	Awaiting Data	33
	<a href="#">Missed bins per 100,000</a>		34
Leisure	<a href="#">Number of visits to the leisure centres &amp; (Snapshot) Number of gym memberships</a>		35

## A note on performance benchmarking

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

When we embark on performance benchmarking, it is important to understand that we are often looking at one aspect of performance i.e. the level of performance achieved. It does not take into account how services are resourced or compare in terms of quality or level of service delivered, for example, how satisfied are residents and customers? Furthermore, each council is unique with its own vision, aim and priorities, and services operate within this context.

Benchmarking has been included wherever possible ranking against Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Nearest Neighbours model which uses a range of demographic and socio-economic indicators to identify the local authorities most similar to your own. The Councils identified Nearest Neighbours are Bromsgrove, East Cambridgeshire, East Hampshire, Harborough, Hinckley and Bosworth, Horsham, Lichfield, Mid Sussex, Rushcliffe, South Oxfordshire, Stafford, Stratford-upon-Avon, Stroud, Test Valley, Tewkesbury. Additional investigations are underway to provide it for those metrics that are missing comparisons.

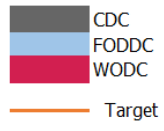
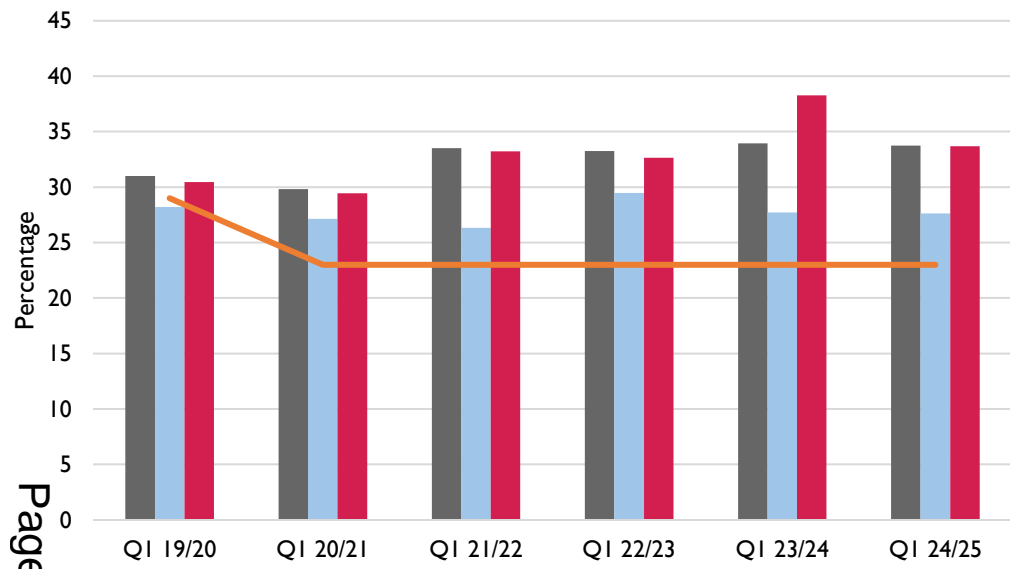
A RAG (red, amber, green) status has been applied to each KPI to provide a quick visual summary of the status of that KPI for the quarter. Additionally, RAG status has been added to the direction of travel for each metric to show how the performance against last quarter and the same quarter compared to last year is progressing.

# Overall Performance


Overall, the Council's performance for the quarter has been largely positive, with notable progress in Collection Rates, Planning Determination Times, and Missed Bin Collections. Visits to the Leisure Centre, Gym Memberships, and Land Charges Response Times remain high. Additionally, Customer Satisfaction continues to be strong, with the Council topping the Gov Metric league table in June. However, the percentage of Planning Appeals Allowed is increasing, and the Number of Affordable Homes delivered is showing a negative trend.

The Council remains committed to further improving its performance and service delivery and actively investing in the development and implementation of automation and self-serve options for customers. By providing accessible and efficient self-help tools, customers can address their queries and concerns independently, leading to a decrease in the need for repeated interactions with services. It will continue to monitor and assess the impact of improvement programs in reducing customer contact and enhancing operational efficiency.

# Percentage of Council Tax Collected



## Direction of Travel

Against last Year   
Declined since last year.

## 2024-25 Q1 – Higher is Good

Target	33%
Actual	33.69%

## 2023-24 Collection Rate

Target	99%
Actual	98.05%

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## How do we compare?

Benchmarking via Gov.uk Tables and Individual Council Websites using CIPFA Nearest Neighbours - Current Dataset is up to March '24 (Q4 23-24)

Q4 23-24 Benchmark	%	CIPFA Rank	Quartile
<b>West Oxfordshire</b>	<b>97.81</b>	<b>12/16</b>	<b>Third</b>
Rushcliffe	99.02	1/16	Top
Horsham	98.36	3/16	Top
South Oxfordshire	97.94	6/16	Second
Stroud	97.66	14/16	Bottom
Hinckley and Bosworth	97.52	16/16	Bottom

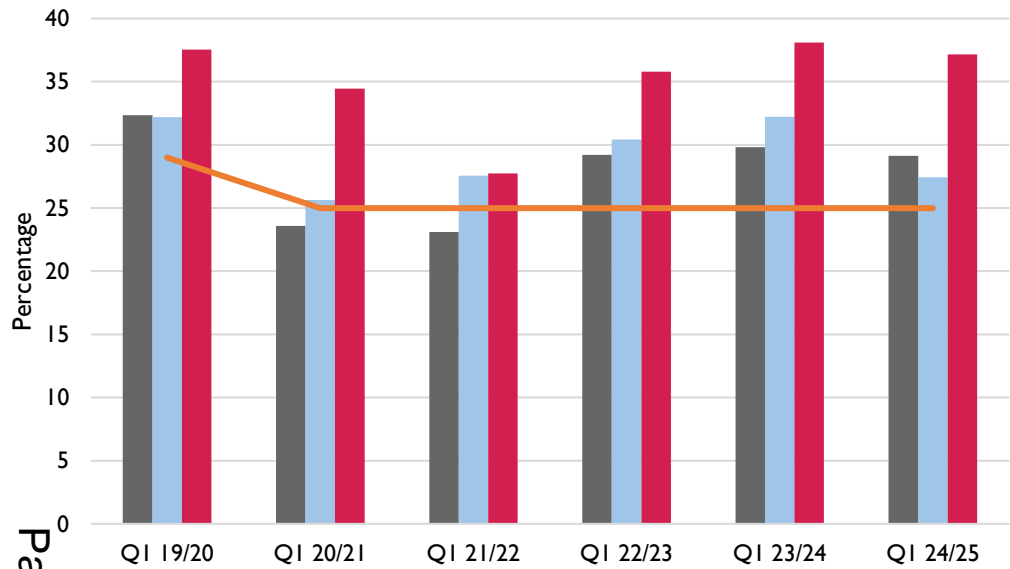
An audit of the Council Tax Services indicated that a significant sum of arrears had accumulated during challenging circumstances associated with the pandemic. Whilst the recovery of arrears had been suspended for a time, it has since been reinstated, and the current recovery cycle is up to date with the service reporting progress in collecting the previous year's debt. The below table shows the percentage of aged debt that has been collected and the total outstanding:

2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	Total Outstanding
5.73%	8.98%	8.91%	19.33%	£5,946,845

By March 2024, authorities in England had collected £38.5 billion in council tax for 2023-24, along with an additional £907 million in aged debt. They achieved an average in-year collection rate of 95.9%, marking a 0.1 percentage point decrease from 2022-23 (source: [gov.uk](http://gov.uk)).

By the end of Q1, the Council observed a decrease in the amount collected compared to the same period last year. In previous years, the Q1 collection rates included Direct Debits due on 1st July, resulting in higher percentages. This year, those payments were not included, leading to a decrease in the collection percentage by approximately 4.5%. Despite this, the collection rates have surpassed pre-pandemic levels for the same period by around 3.3%.

# Percentage of Non-domestic rates collected



CDC  
FODDC  
WODC  
Target

## Direction of Travel

Against last Year  
↓  
Slightly declined since last year.

## 2024-25 Q1 – Higher is Good

Target	33%
Actual	37.15%

## 2023-24 Collection Rate

Target	99%
Actual	97.62%

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## How do we compare?

Benchmarking via Gov.uk Tables and Individual Council Websites using CIPFA Nearest Neighbours - Current Dataset is up to March '24 (Q4 23-24)

Q4 23-24 Benchmark	%	CIPFA Rank	Quartile
<b>West Oxfordshire</b>	<b>97.89</b>	<b>6/16</b>	<b>Second</b>
Lichfield	99.53	1/16	Top
Rushcliffe	98.74	3/16	Top
East Hampshire	97.32	9/16	Third
Stratford-on-Avon	96.44	14/16	Bottom
South Oxfordshire	93.92	16/16	Bottom

The current recovery cycle is up to date with the service reporting progress in collecting previous year's debt. The below table shows the percentage of aged debt that has been collected and the total outstanding:

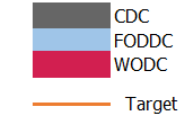
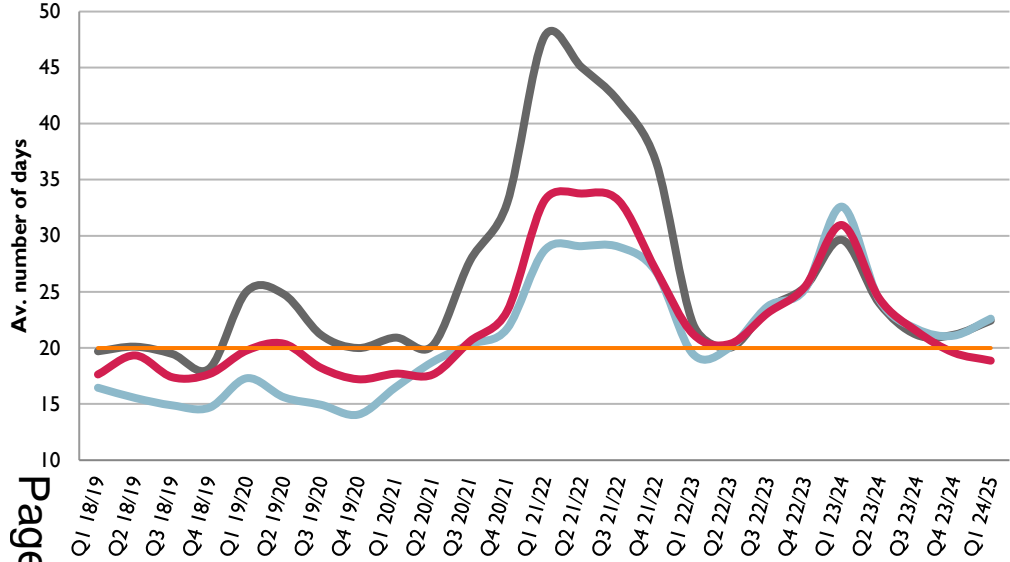
2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	Total Outstanding
12.90%	22.95%	8.17%	15.35%	£1,751,724

The arrears outstanding for previous year's debts for Business Rates include some data where the amount outstanding now is greater than that brought forward at the beginning of the financial year. There are some processes that can increase the amount that needs to be collected, such as Rateable Value changes and amendments to liability. As Business Rates deal with large amounts of money, the outcome can outweigh the amount that has been collected.

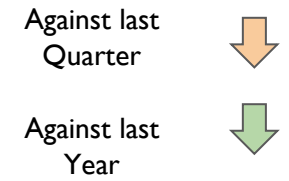
During Q1, the Council observed a slight decrease in the amount collected compared to the same period last year. In previous years, the Q1 collection rates included Direct Debits due on 1st July, resulting in higher percentages. This year, those payments were not included, leading to a decrease in the collection percentage by around 0.9%.

The service remains committed to supporting businesses, actively reaching out through reminders, phone calls, and emails to encourage dialogue with the Councils so that we can support them via manageable repayment plans. All in year recovery processes are up to date.

# Processing times for Council Tax Support new claims



### Direction of Travel



Improved since last quarter and last year

### Q1 – Lower is Good

Target	20
Actual	18.85

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## How do we compare?

Gov.uk produces tables to show a snapshot of the number of CTS claimants at the end of each financial year. The below table shows number of claimants at the end of March 2024 and the percentage change from March 2023 for each authority, plus the data for all authorities in England

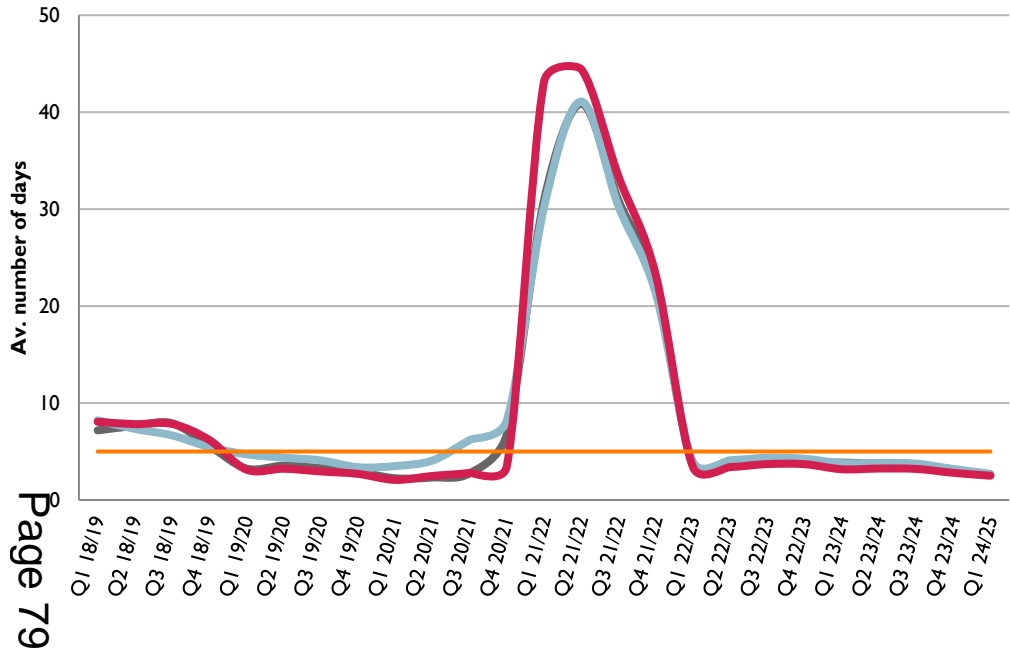
	Number of Claimants at end of March 2024	Percentage Change since March 2023	CIPFA Nearest Neighbours Rank (Higher = less claimants)
<b>West Oxfordshire</b>	<b>4,363</b>	<b>0.88</b>	<b>4/16</b>
Harborough	2,955	1.65	1/16
South Oxfordshire	4,966	0.32	10/16
Stafford	6,783	5.11	16/16

During Q1, the average processing time for new Council Tax Support (CTS) claims was 18.85 days, remaining well within the 20-day target. This achievement is notable despite the typical small backlog of cases carried over from Q4 due to end-of-year processing, which is expected to be cleared in the coming weeks.


Compared to the same period last year, processing times have improved significantly, decreasing by approximately 12 days.


The automation of tasks received directly from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and customers has released capacity for officers to process manual claims, with options for further automation currently under discussion.

# Processing times for Council Tax Support Change Events



### Direction of Travel

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

Improved since last quarter and last year

### QI – Lower is Good

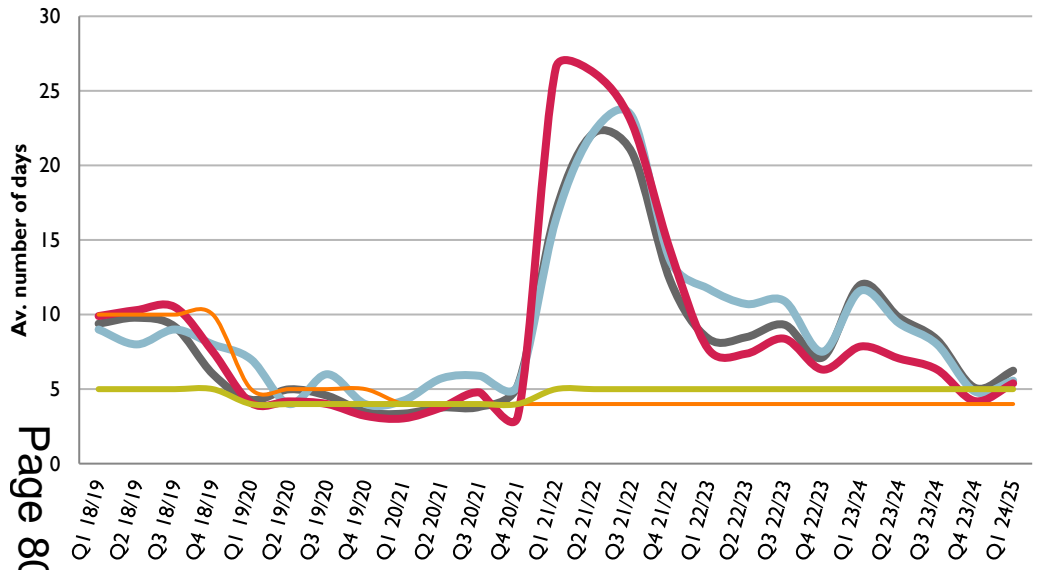
Target	5
Actual	2.51

### How do we compare?

Benchmarking currently not available. The Data & Performance Team will investigate options.

The processing times for Council Tax Support Change Events continue to comfortably meet the target of 5 days, with processing times decreasing compared to both the last quarter and the previous year.

# Processing times for Housing Benefit Change of Circumstances



CDC  
 FODDC  
 WODC  
 Target  
 Shire Districts Mean

### Direction of Travel

Against last Quarter ↑  
 Against last Year ↓

Increased since last quarter but improved since last year

### QI – Lower is Good

Target	4
Actual	5.39

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## How do we compare?

SPARSE provide benchmarking data on the speed of processing for HB CoCs. The latest data set is 2022-23

Q3 23-24 Benchmark	Days	CIPFA Rank	Quartile
<b>West Oxfordshire</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>5/16</b>	<b>Top</b>
Test Valley	3	1/16	Top
Harborough	7	7/16	Second
East Cambridgeshire	8	10/16	Third
Stroud	9	14/16	Third
South Oxfordshire	15	16/16	Bottom

Please see [Processing times for Council Tax Support new claims.](#)

Q1 commenced with the usual small backlog of work for changes in circumstances at the end of Q4 due to end-of-year processing, which the team has worked hard to reduce. Although the Council is currently above target for processing times, there has been an improvement compared to the same period last year, with processing times decreasing by approximately 2.5 days.

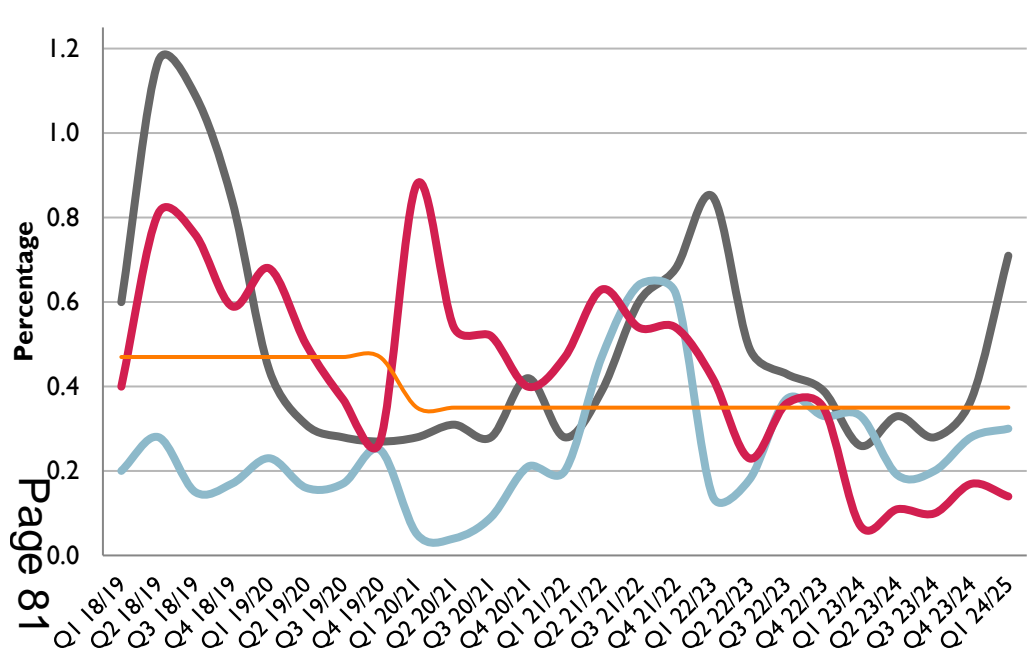
It should be noted that the number of expected changes affecting Housing Benefit (HB) is reducing significantly, as can be seen by comparing the number of HB changes assessed to the number of Council Tax Support (CTS) changes assessed. The decrease in HB changes received amplifies the impact of delays in assessing an application due to outstanding evidence required for average processing days.

HB Changes – 1,198  
 CTS Changes – 5,665


The managed migration of HB to Universal Credit commenced in April, with some minor glitches reported in the system. While the migration was planned in stages, some stages have been brought forward, which will further decrease the number of changes received and may potentially increase processing times.




# Percentage of Housing Benefit overpayment due to LA error/admin delay



### Direction of Travel

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

Slightly improved since last quarter but increased since last year

### QI – Lower is Good

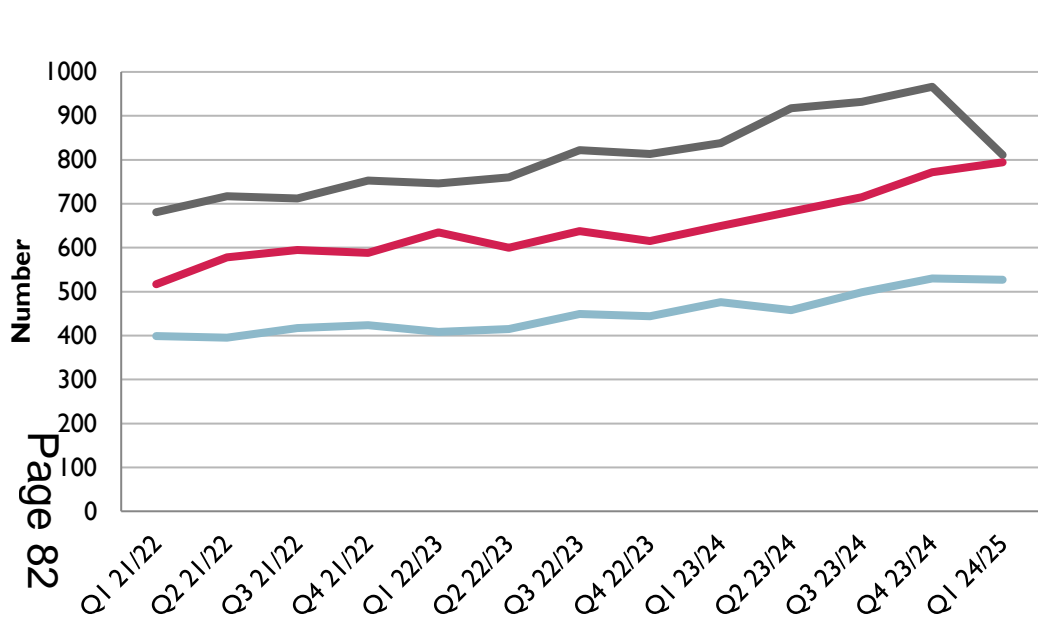
Target	0.35%
Actual	0.14%

## How do we compare?


Benchmarking currently not available. The Data & Performance Team will investigate options.


Measures are in place to ensure that HB overpayments due to local authority errors are reduced as much as possible. Around 20% of the HB caseload is checked by Quality Assurance officers, who target areas with high error rates, such as calculation of earnings. In addition to this work, the service is signed up to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Housing Benefit Award Accuracy (HBAA) initiative to tackle fraud and error.

# (Snapshot) Long Term Empty Properties



### Direction of Travel

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

Increased since last quarter and last year

**QI – Lower is Good**

No Target

772

## How do we compare?

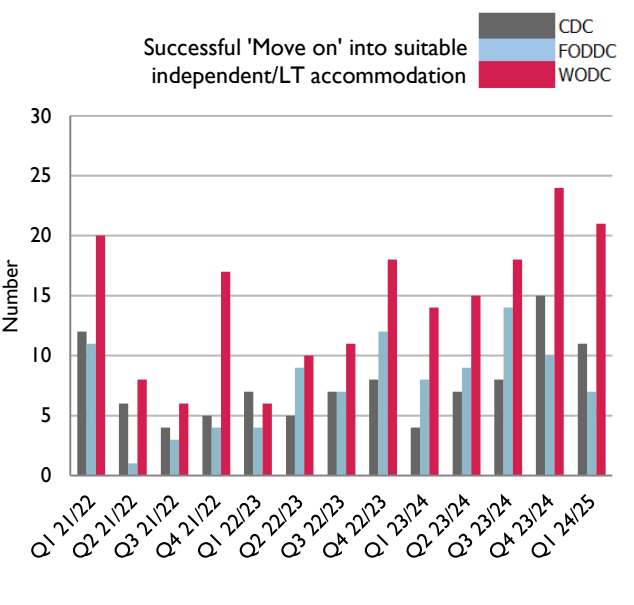
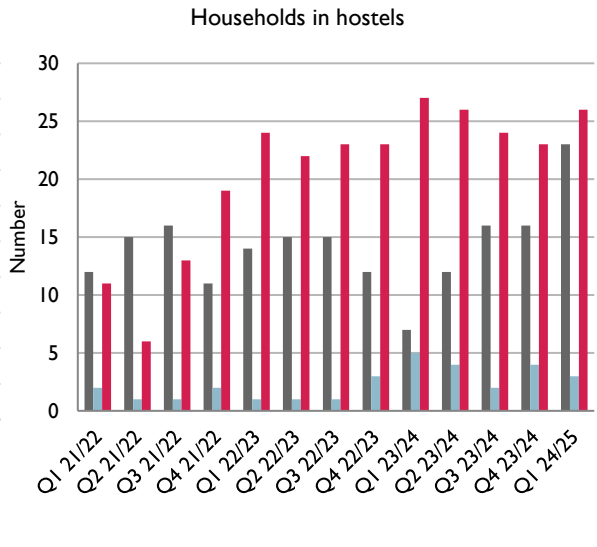
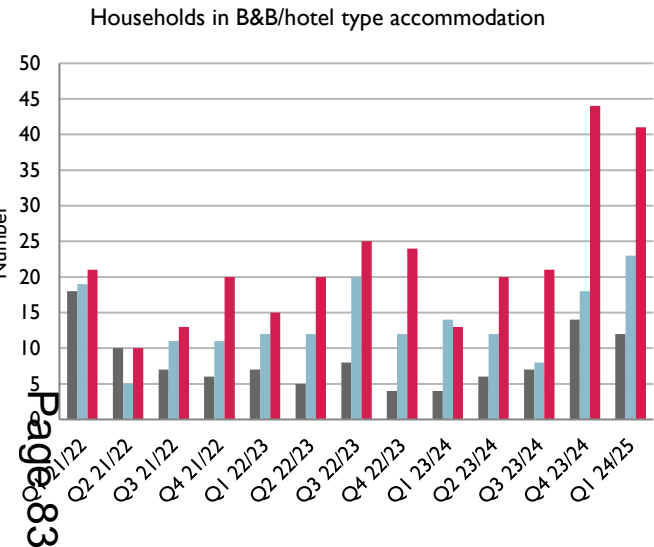
Benchmarking currently not available. The Data & Performance Team will investigate options.

The graph indicates a clear upward trend in property additions, although properties continue to be added and removed from the list. To address this trend, the Council's Long-Term Empty Homes Strategy is undergoing a refresh. This strategy aims to identify the reasons behind properties remaining empty and seeks to alleviate housing needs within the district. By understanding the causes of empty properties, the Council can develop targeted interventions to address the issue and ensure that these properties are utilised effectively to meet housing demands.

The service reports that properties are staying on the LTE list longer with most properties individually owned which have to be followed up individually which is resource intensive, and will not result in the removal of large numbers from the LTE list. A range of work is being undertaken to both understand the reasons why properties are coming onto the list so that they can be managed and reduced as well as ensuring that the data is up to date so that these properties are having the correct levy applied and charged for.

Maintaining registers of long-term empty properties can help monitor the situation, target interventions, and communicate with property owners more effectively.

# (Snapshot) Number of households in B&B/hotel-type accommodation & Hostels (LA owned or managed); and Number of successful 'Move On' into suitable independent/long-term accommodation from B&Bs/hotels/hostels



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Direction of Travel		
Against last Quarter	B&B/Hotels	↑
Against last Year	B&B/Hotels	↑
Against last Quarter	Hostels	↓
Against last Year	Hostels	→
Against last Quarter	Move Ons	↑
Against last Year	Move Ons	↑

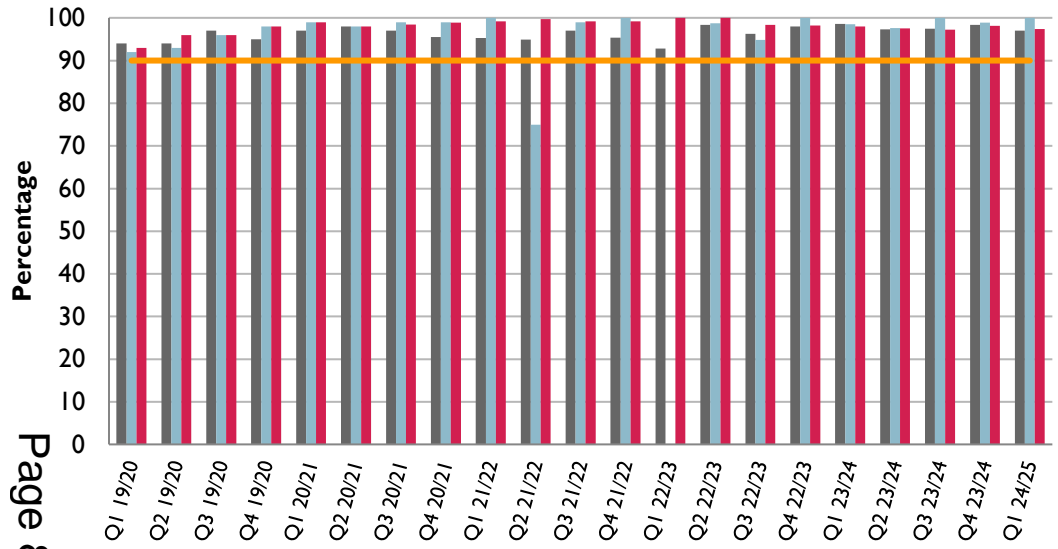
Homelessness continues to be a significant challenge for all three Councils, adding considerable pressure to Housing services, systems, and pathways. During Q1, there was a noticeable rise in homelessness applications. This increase is due to various factors, including heightened demands on the countywide support system. The situation is further complicated by several issues: an influx of individuals leaving refugee hotels, reduced capacity in adult homelessness pathways, and a shortage of affordable housing options outside the social rented sector. Additionally, uncertainties surrounding the general election, including potential policy changes like the abolishment of no-fault evictions, have further exacerbated the growing homelessness issue. This has led to increased competition for available social rented accommodations, resulting in longer stays for individuals transitioning from hostels and B&Bs.

The team persistently works towards preventing homelessness, successfully averting homelessness for 48 households during Q1—31 within the statutory 56-day period and 17 before statutory duties were triggered. It's important to note that these figures are approximations and have not yet been officially confirmed through the reporting system.


## How do we compare?


No benchmarking currently available. The Data & Performance Team will investigate options.

# Customer Satisfaction - Telephone



### Direction of Travel

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

Slightly decreased since last quarter and last year

### QI – Higher is Good

Target	90%
Actual	97.42%

Page 84

## How do we compare?

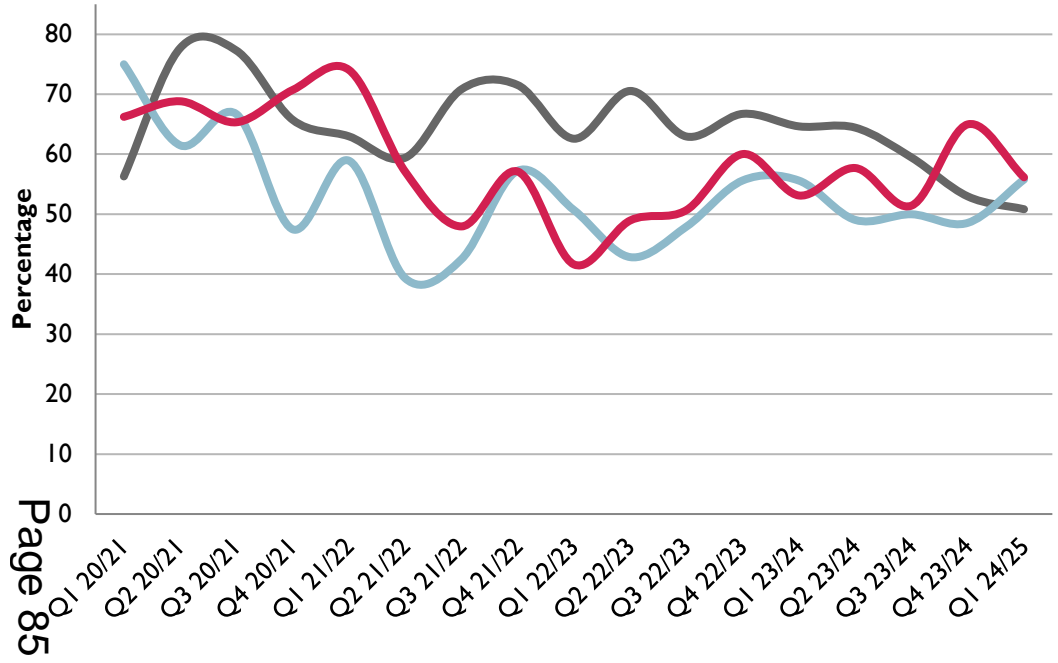
The Govmetric Channel Satisfaction Index is a monthly publication of the top performing councils across the core customer access channels. At least 100 customers need to be transferred to the survey to be included in the league table so even if satisfaction is high, it may not be included i.e. Forest in the below table. This is a national comparator.

Services provided via the telephone consistently yield high satisfaction.

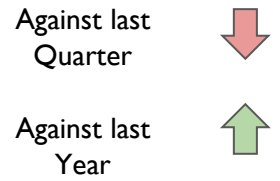
The Council continues to achieve top-tier performance levels when a sufficient number of surveys are included in the Satisfaction Index. Although this is a very small proportion of our calls, the numbers are comparable to those of other District Councils, hence the 'league tables' being a useful comparator.

	April Rank	April Net Sat.	May Rank	May Net Sat.	June Rank	June Net Sat.
Cotswold	2	95%	1	96%	6	93%
Forest	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
West Oxfordshire	3	95%	6	91%	1	99%

# Customer Satisfaction - Email



### Direction of Travel



Declined since last quarter but increased since last year

### Q1 - Higher is Good

No Target  
56.12%

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572 residents responded to the survey, of which 321 were satisfied. This equates to a rate of 56.12% satisfaction for the quarter, down from 64.95% during Q4.

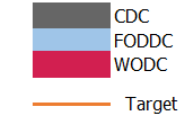
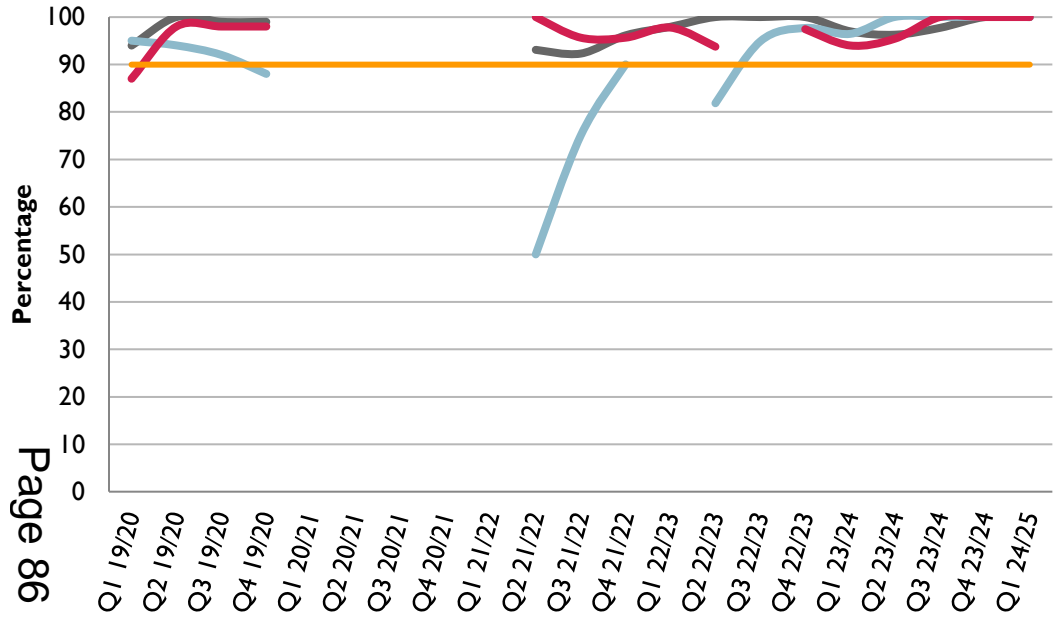
### How do we compare?

Benchmarking currently not available. The Data & Performance Team will investigate options.


All outbound emails sent by customer services from Salesforce contain a link to the survey.


A piece of work was undertaken to review the responses from the email surveys due to the more negative responses. Upon review, it appears to be dissatisfaction surrounding service failures such as missed bins, container deliveries, responses from Planning or Housing etc. System and process improvements by the individual services are being implemented, which may affect these figures in the future.

# Customer Satisfaction - Face to Face



**Direction of Travel**

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

Same as last quarter but improved since last year

**Q1 – Higher is Good**

Target	90%
Actual	100%

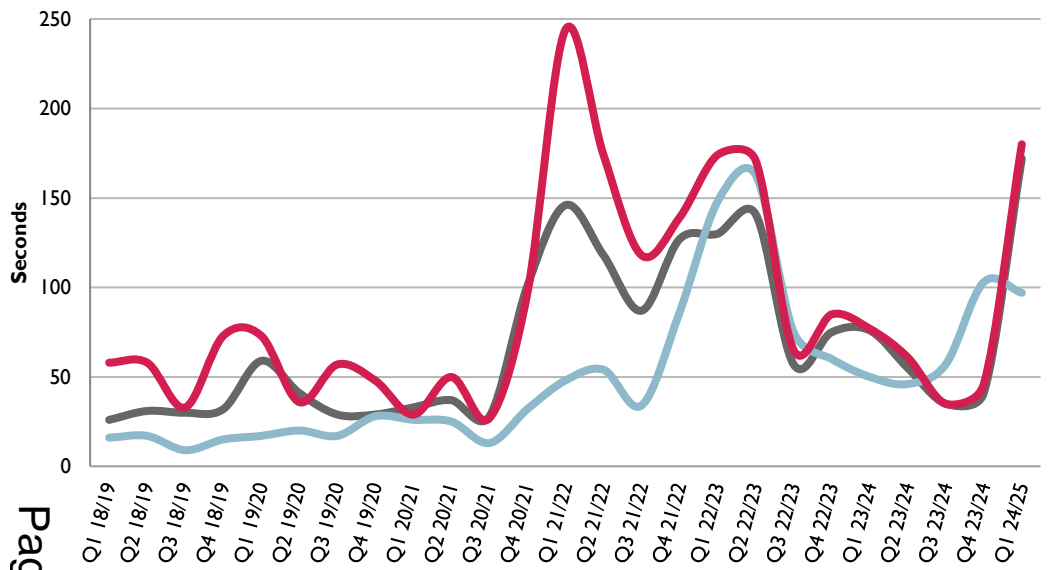
Page 86

## How do we compare?


Benchmarking currently not available. The Data & Performance Team will investigate options.


Customer Satisfaction from face to face interactions continues to be high, with a 100% satisfaction rate for the quarter, with all 14 individuals surveyed satisfied with the service.

# Customer Call Handling - Average Waiting Time



### Direction of Travel

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

Increased since last quarter and last year

### Lower is Good

*No Target*

180 Seconds

Page 87

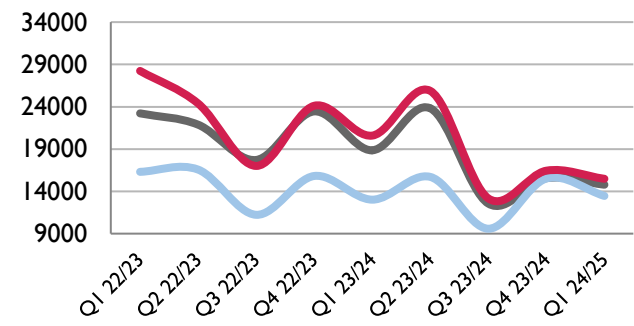
## How do we compare?

*SPARSE are investigating pulling together Customer Services benchmarking data and if there is sufficient demand and suitably similar metrics to provide comparison across similarly rural local authorities we will work with them to assess any crossover in metrics and potential presentation.*

The average wait time at the Council has significantly increased compared to the last quarter, driven by several key factors. Among these is a notable surge in call volumes, particularly due to the General Election, which led to a substantial number of inquiries. Additionally, there was a marked increase in calls related to garden waste services and council tax, further burdening the system. Staff resourcing challenges compounded the problem, with the team experiencing vacancies equivalent to six full-time employees. These factors, together, resulted in much longer wait times. To address this, the service is actively recruiting to fill these vacancies.

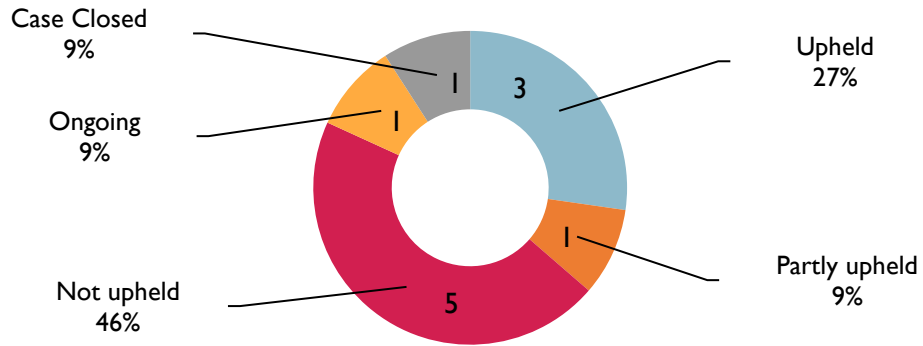
The Council saw a decline of over 4,000 calls compared to the same period the previous year, as depicted in the chart to the right. This data reflects an overarching trend of lower call numbers over time, a trajectory expected to persist owing to sustained initiatives in Channel Choice, aimed at fostering customer self-service options.

Call Volume over Time




# Number of complaints upheld

## Complaints by Status




### Direction of Travel

Complaints upheld or partly upheld at Stage 1

Against last Quarter 

*No Target*

Against last Year 

Declined since last quarter and last year

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### How do we compare?

The complaints and enquiries received in the period by the Ombudsman.  
The decisions made in the period by the Ombudsman.  
Compliance with recommendations recorded during the period by the Ombudsman.

During Q1, the Council experienced a decrease in complaints received from last quarter.

See the table on the following page for a breakdown of those upheld and partially upheld.

2022-23	Complaints Investigated	Percentage Upheld	Upheld decisions per 100,000 residents	Percentage Compliance with Recommendations	Percentage Satisfactory Remedy	CIPFA Rank	Quartile
<b>West Oxfordshire</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>12/16</b>	<b>Third</b>
Harborough	11	0	0	N/A	N/A	1/16	Top
Mid Sussex	5	20	0.7	100	0	5/16	Second
Lichfield	2	100	1.9	100	0	16/16	Bottom

A new Customer Feedback Procedure went live on the 1st October 2021. The new process has the following stages:

- Stage 1: Relevant service area responds to complaint within 10 working days
- Stage 2: Complaint is reviewed by Corporate Responsibility Team, response is signed off by relevant Business Manager, and sent to complainant within 10 working days
- Stage 3: Complaint is reviewed by relevant Business Manager, signed off by relevant Group Manager, and sent to complainant within 15 working days

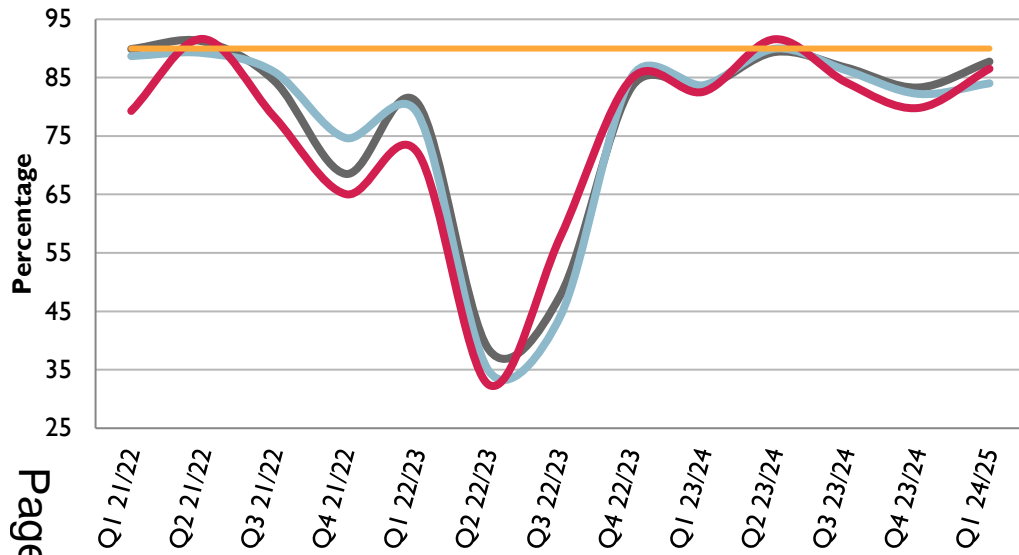


# Complaints Upheld or Partially Upheld Breakdown


Service area	Description	Outcome/learning	Decision	Response time (days)
Flooding	Grant not issued despite meeting criteria	Dealt with by Service	Upheld	10
Waste	Lack of waste collections	Dealt with by Service	Upheld	8
ERS	Lack of communication	Dealt with by Service and apology offered	Partly Upheld	7
ERS	Issues with inspection and lack of communication	Dealt with by Service	Upheld	10+


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# Percentage of FOI requests answered within 20 days



## Direction of Travel

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

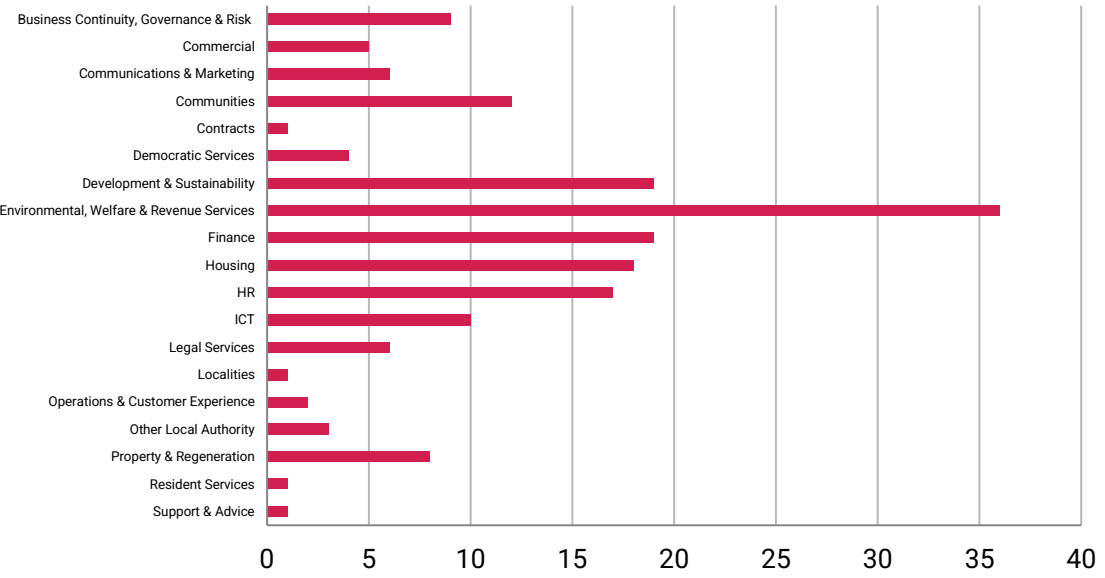
Improved since last quarter and last year

## Q1 – Higher is Good

Target	90%
Actual	86.5%

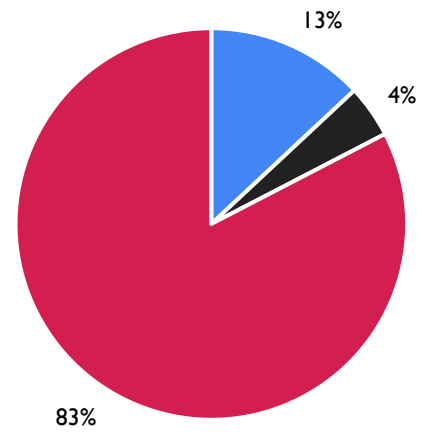
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Requests by Service Area

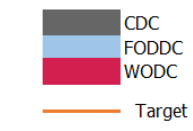
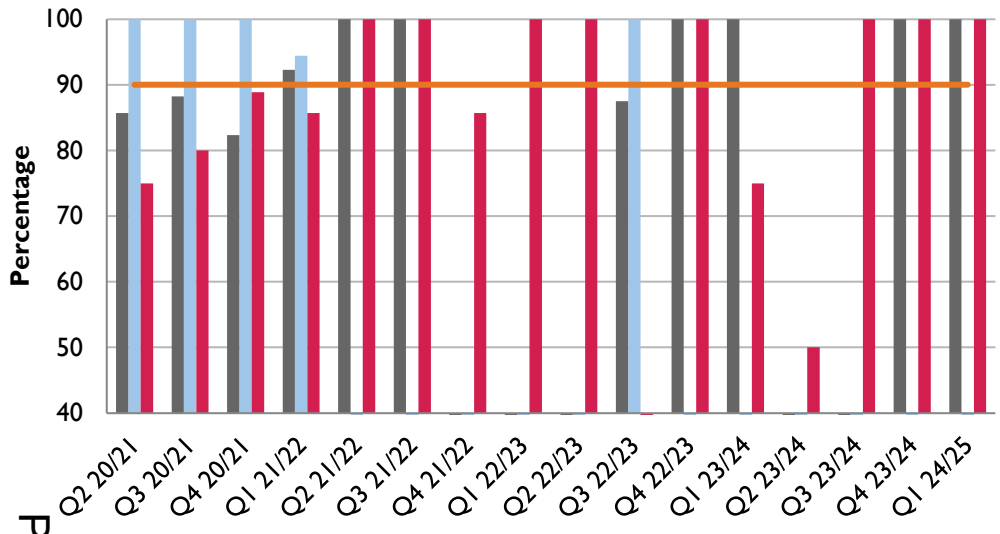


## Reason FOI request was not Answered within 20 Days

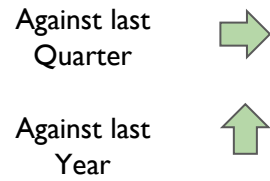
- Awaiting clarification from requester
- FOI admin backlog
- Service Area not provided Information in time



# Building Control Satisfaction



### Direction of Travel



Same as last quarter but improved since last year

### Q1 – Higher is Good

Target	90%
Actual	100%

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Each month, the service conducts telephone interviews with customers who have received a completion certificate during the month. The customer rates the service on helpfulness of staff, quality of technical advice and other information, responsiveness, value for money, and overall satisfaction.

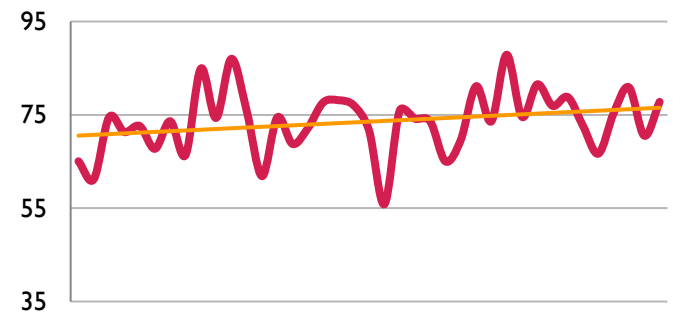
The data on satisfaction surveys still faces challenges with a low number of returns, ten surveys were received during Q1.

Due to legislative changes, Building Control has become a regulated activity. From 1st April, all individuals must hold specific qualifications or experience and register with the Building Safety Regulator (BSR) as Registered Building Inspectors (RBIs). The team has been preparing for these changes, with many individuals undertaking courses and assessments. All team members, except one surveyor who is awaiting exam results, have passed and are now appointed as RBIs.

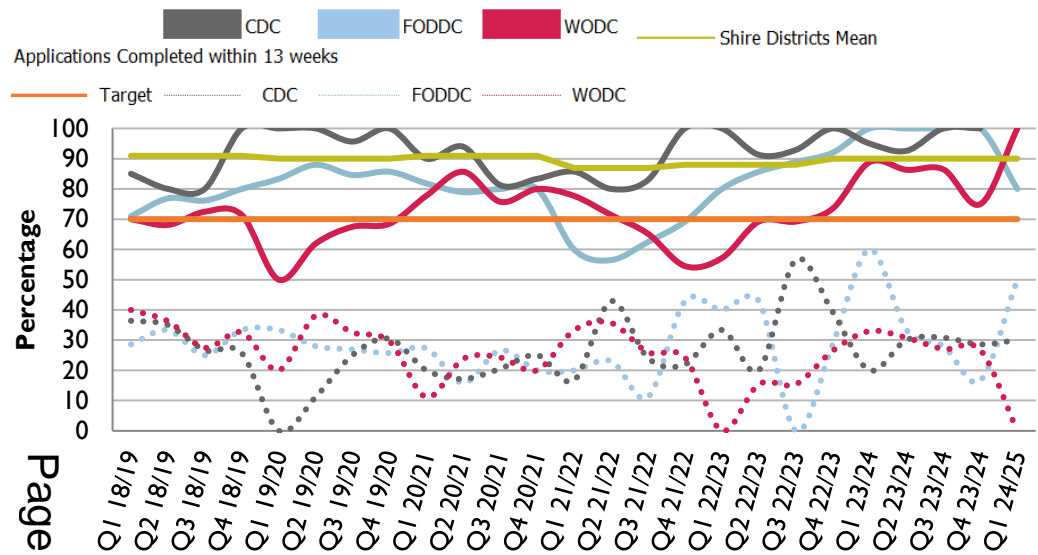
## How do we compare?

Percentage of share in the market	April	May	June	Number of Apps for Quarter
Cotswold	61%	54%	41%	131
Forest	69%	63%	39%	88
<b>West</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>178</b>


The below chart shows market share over time from April 2021




# Percentage of major planning applications determined within agreed timescales (including AEOT)



### Direction of Travel

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

Improved since last quarter and last year

### QI – Higher is Good

Target	70%
Actual	100%

## How do we compare?

Major Developments - % within 13 weeks or agreed time – LG Inform

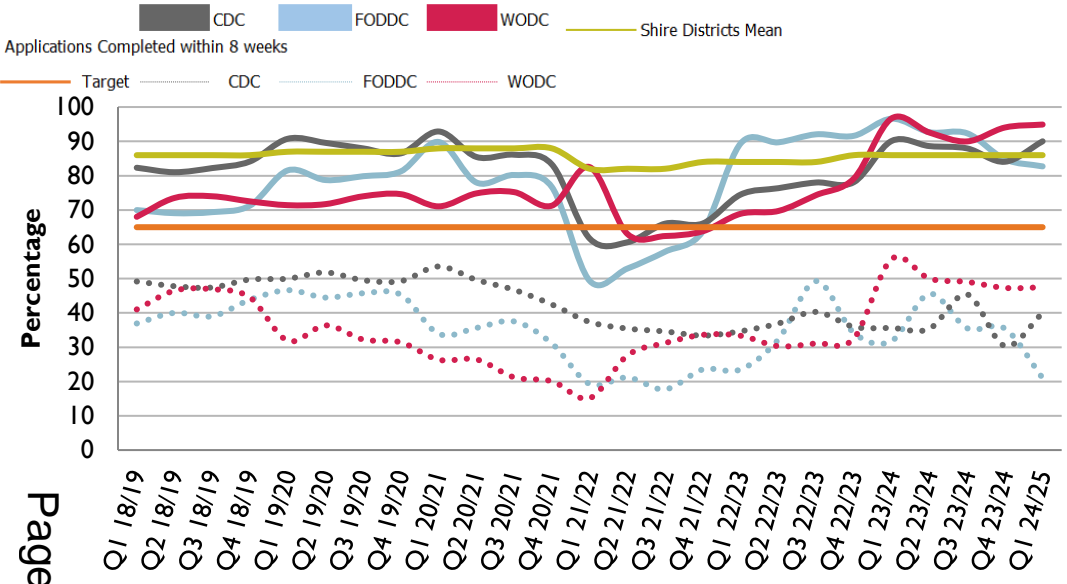
Q4 23-24 Benchmark	%	CIPFA Rank	Quartile
<b>West Oxfordshire</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>14/16</b>	<b>Bottom</b>
East Cambridgeshire	100	1/16	Top
Rushcliffe	100	1/16	Top
Hinckley and Bosworth	90	10/16	Third
Test Valley	80	13/16	Bottom
Lichfield	67	16/16	Bottom

The service has performed very well processing Major applications within time, slightly increasing by 25% in comparison to last quarter, from 75% to 100% for Q1.


During Q1, four major applications were determined.


[See slide for Minor Developments for further narrative](#)

# Percentage of minor planning applications determined within agreed timescales (including AEOT)



### Direction of Travel

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

Improved since last quarter but slightly declined since last year

### Q1 – Higher is Good

Target 65%

Actual 94.92%

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### How do we compare?

Minor Developments - % within 8 weeks or agreed time – LG Inform

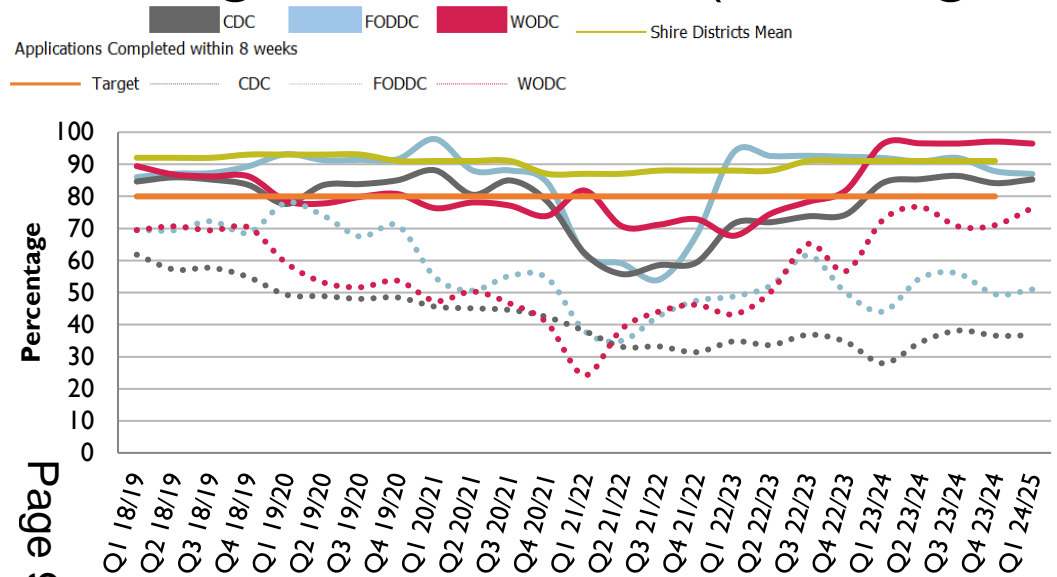
Q4 23-24 Benchmark	%	CIPFA Rank	Quartile
<b>West Oxfordshire</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>2/16</b>	<b>Top</b>
Mid Sussex	98	1/16	Top
Horsham	90	5/16	Second
Harborough	83	10/16	Third
Lichfield	77	13/16	Bottom
East Hampshire	62	16/16	Bottom

The Council has continued to perform well in processing minor applications within the allotted timeframes, with a slight increase in the number of applications determined within the agreed timeframes compared to last quarter, despite resourcing challenges. However, it is anticipated that the number of applications determined within the timeframe may decrease over the next quarter.



59 minor applications were determined in Q1.

The Development Management Improvement Plan, initiated following the PAS report, remains actively pursued, with significant progress achieved on many key recommendations. Work is underway to create a concise householder application report template.

# Percentage of other planning applications determined within agreed timescales (including AEOT)



### Direction of Travel

- Against last Quarter 
- Against last Year 

Slightly decreased since last quarter but slightly improved since last year

### QI – Higher is Good

Target	80%
Actual	96.41%

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## How do we compare?

Other Developments - % within 8 weeks or agreed time – LG Inform

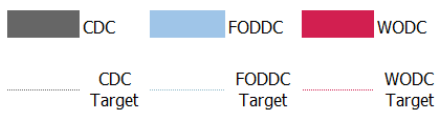
Q4 23-24 Benchmark	%	CIPFA Rank	Quartile
<b>West Oxfordshire</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>3/16</b>	<b>Top</b>
Mid Sussex	99	1/16	Top
Horsham	96	5/16	Second
Stroud	90	12/16	Third
Rushcliffe	89	13/16	Bottom
Stafford	80	16/16	Bottom

Determination times for other applications have decreased slightly by 0.62% since last quarter but have improved marginally by 0.05% compared to the same period last year.

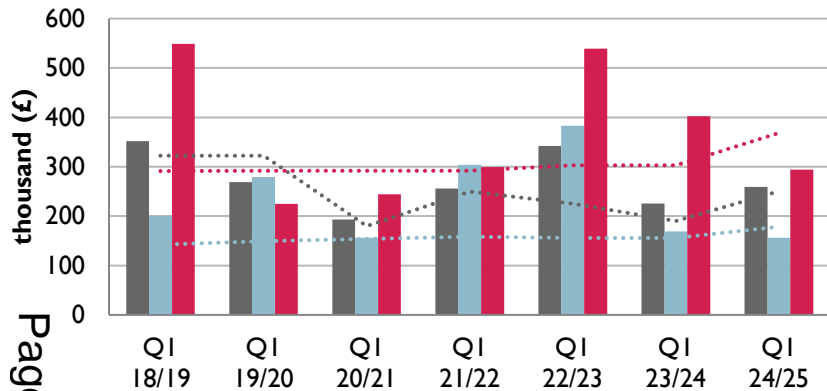
In Q1, 195 other applications were determined.

[See slide for Minor Developments for additional narrative](#)

# Percentage of other planning applications determined within agreed timescales (including AEOT)

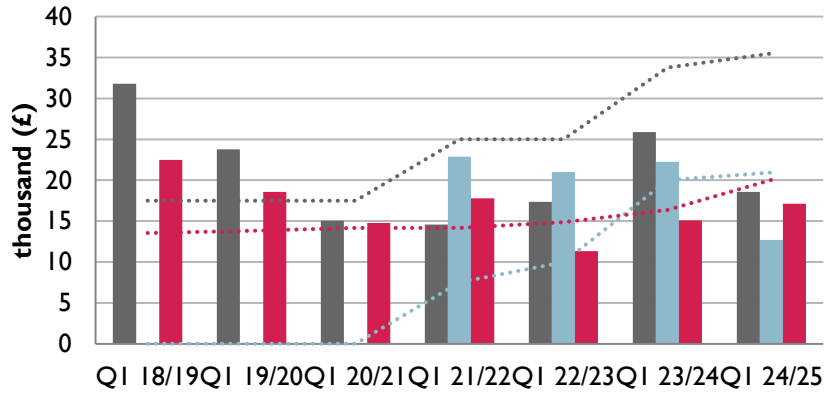


## Total planning income



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## Pre-application income



## Direction of Travel

**Q1 – Higher is Good**

<b>Total Planning Income</b>		
Against last Quarter	↓	Total Planning Income (£)
Against last Year	↓	Target <span style="background-color: #f08080; padding: 2px;">368,494</span>
		Actual <span style="background-color: #f08080; padding: 2px;">294,065</span>
<b>Pre-Application Income</b>		
Against last Quarter	↑	Pre-Application Income (£)
Against last Year	↑	Target <span style="background-color: #f4a460; padding: 2px;">20,044</span>
		Actual <span style="background-color: #f4a460; padding: 2px;">17,105</span>

Total Income decreased since last quarter and last year  
 Pre-App Income increased since last quarter and last year

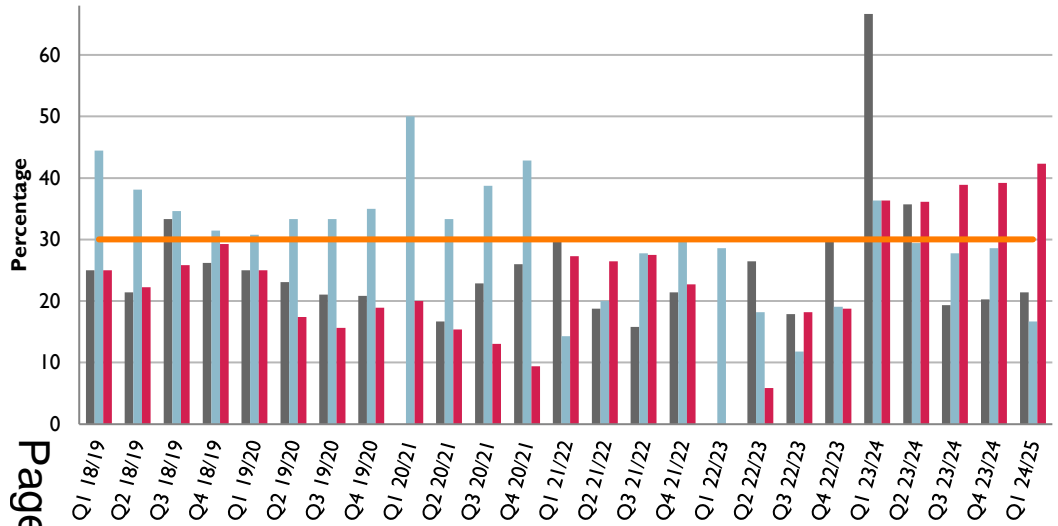
By the end of Q1, planning income for the Council fell short of its target. The service reported a lower number of Major and Minor applications, which typically generate higher fees. This decline may be linked to the introduction of Biodiversity Net Gain for these application types.

Despite an increase in pre-application fees, the Council did not meet its target. However, pre-application income has increased by 13% compared to the same period last year and by 64% since last quarter.

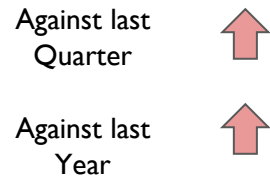
## How do we compare?

Planning Advisory Service (PAS) planned to benchmark back in 2021. No data is available in the public domain.

# Percentage of Planning Appeals Allowed (cumulative)



### Direction of Travel



Increased since last year and last quarter

### QI – Lower is Good

Target	30%
Actual	42.31%

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## How do we compare?

Percentage of planning appeals allowed – LG Inform

Q4 23-24 Benchmark	%	CIPFA Rank	Quartile
<b>West Oxfordshire</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>7/16</b>	<b>Second</b>
East Hampshire	0	1/16	Top
Test Valley	25	6/16	Second
Horsham	38	9/16	Third
South Oxfordshire	50	14/16	Bottom
Hinckley and Bosworth	83	16/16	Bottom

This indicator seeks to ensure that no more than 30% of planning appeals are allowed (low is good).

Between 1 April 2024 and 30 June 2024, thirteen appeals were decided, with eight supported, including a split decision. Of the thirteen appeals determined this quarter, six were Upland applications, with four supported, resulting in a 33.33% allowance rate. Seven applications were related to Lowlands, with four supported, including a split decision, equating to a 50% allowance rate.

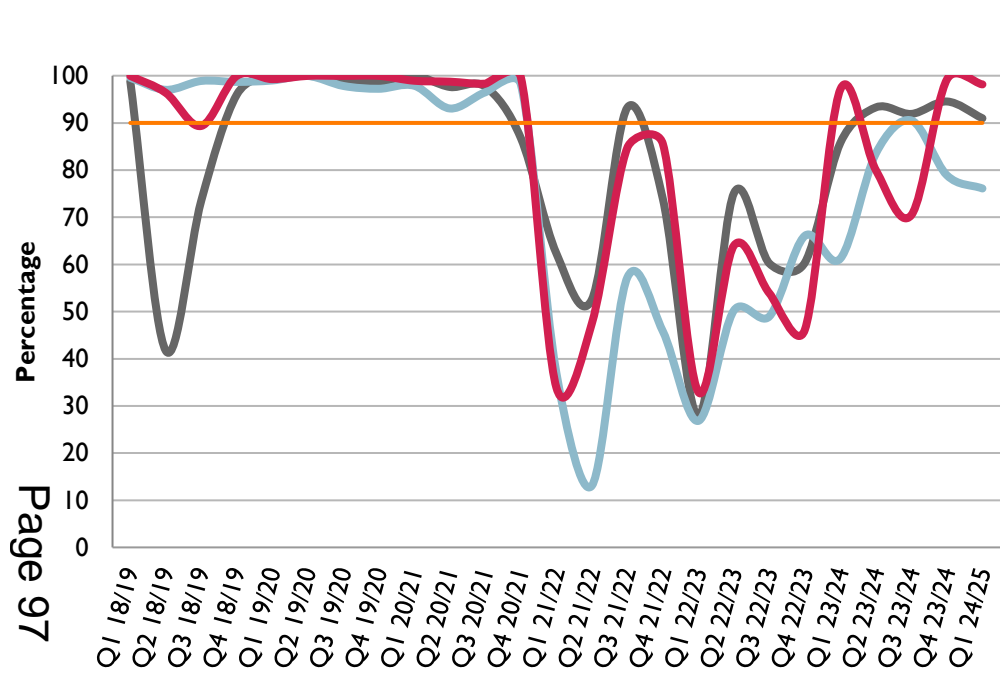
The below shows the appeal split between Uplands and Lowlands for the year;

	Decided	Allowed	% Allowed
Uplands	6	2	33.33%
Lowlands	7	3.5	50%


As this metric is cumulative, it may well reduce throughout the year depending on how many appeals are received.




# Percentage of official land charge searches completed within 10 days



### Direction of Travel

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

Slightly increased since last year but slightly decreased since last quarter

### Q1 – Higher is Good

Target	90%
Actual	98.19%

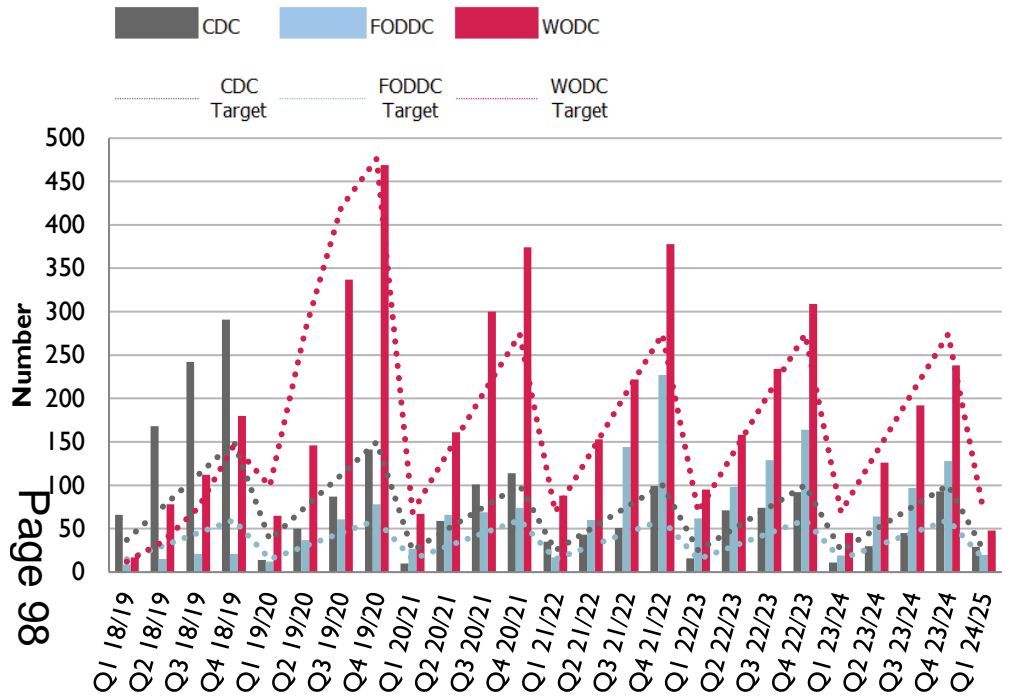
### How do we compare?

Benchmarking currently not available. The Data & Performance Team will investigate options.


During Q1, the Council exceeded its target for completing land charge searches within 10 days.


Efforts to strengthen relationships with the answering teams have improved communication and workload management. This enhanced collaboration has enabled team members to address tasks more efficiently, ultimately boosting overall productivity.

# Number of affordable homes delivered (cumulative)



### Direction of Travel

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

Slightly increased since last year and last quarter

### Q1 – Higher is Good

Target	69
Actual	48

### How do we compare?

Benchmarking currently not available. The Data & Performance Team will investigate options.

During Q1, a total of forty-eight properties were delivered in West across Woodstock and Carterton comprising 36 for affordable rent and 12 for shared ownership. Properties delivered in Carterton include 10 homes acquired using Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) funding. Handover delays, attributed to works required from statutory service providers and highway work scheduling, have affected the expected completions in Carterton and Enstone, pushing delivery back to later in the year.

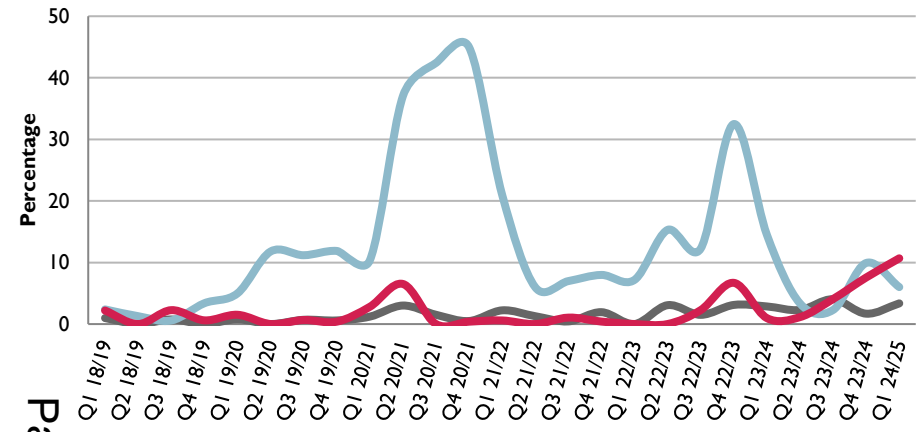
The service reports that completions fluctuate over the year. A housing development period is at least 12 months, with some schemes phased over several years.

Note: this data is collected cumulatively from the beginning of the financial year to account for peaks and troughs

# To combat fly-tipping, the Council has installed new surveillance cameras in rural hotspots

## Number of fly tips collected and percentage that result in an enforcement action


(defined as a warning letter, fixed penalty notice, simple caution or prosecution)




CDC  
FODDC  
WODC


### Direction of Travel


Number of Fly Tips

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

Percentage Enforcement Action

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

*No Target*

Number of Fly Tips Collected  
135

Percentage Enforcement Action  
10.66%

Fly Tips – Decreased since last quarter and but increased since last year  
Enforcement Action – Increased since last quarter and last year

### How do we compare?

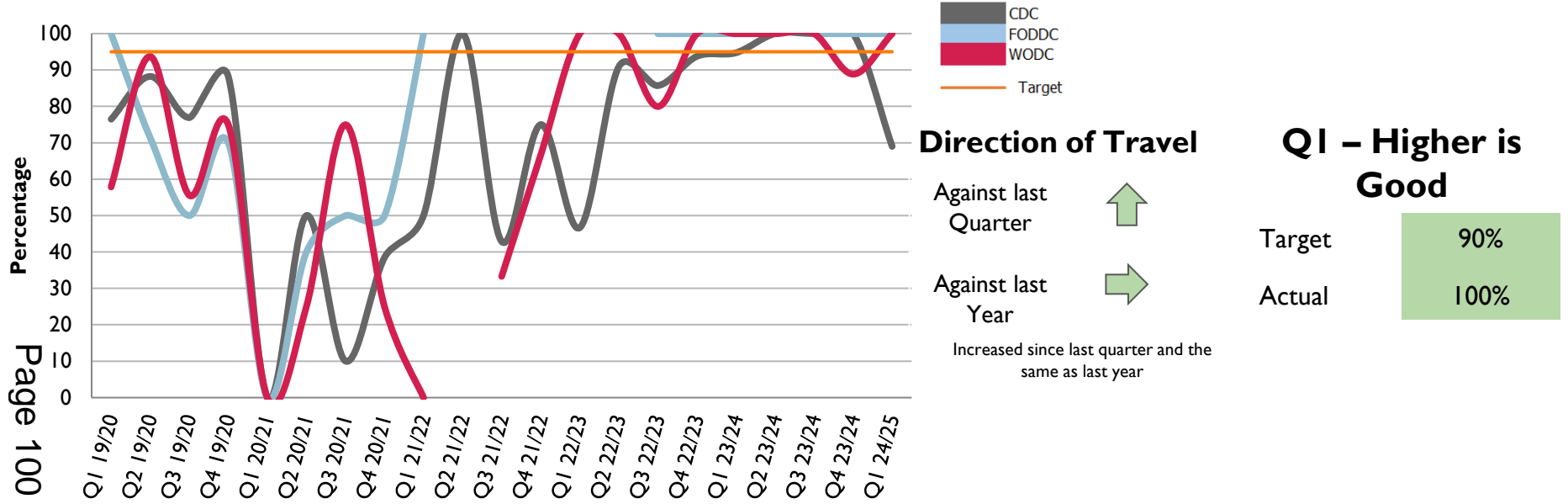
Number of Fly Tips reported for year 2022-23 for Local Authorities in England – Gov.uk. The latest dataset available is 2022-23.

	Total Fly Tips	Total Enforcement Actions	Total FPNs	% FPNs per Fly Tip	CIPFA Nearest Neighbours Rank	Quartile
<b>West</b>	<b>1150</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>1.22</b>	<b>6/16</b>	<b>Second</b>
Horsham	1212	287	65	5.36	1/16	Top
Tewkesbury	655	29	1	0.15	10/16	Third
Stroud	859	11	0	0	16/16	Bottom

In Q1, there was a notable decrease in the number of fly-tipping incidents reported, while the percentage of enforcement actions experienced an increase of around 3%.

To combat fly-tipping, the Council has installed new surveillance cameras in rural hotspots. Funded by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley and the Home Office's Safer Streets initiative, this project adds 20 cameras to the four currently shared with a neighboring authorities. These specialized cameras use invisible 'No Glow' night vision LEDs to address rural crime, including fly-tipping.

# Percentage of high risk food premises inspected within target timescales



## How do we compare?

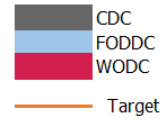
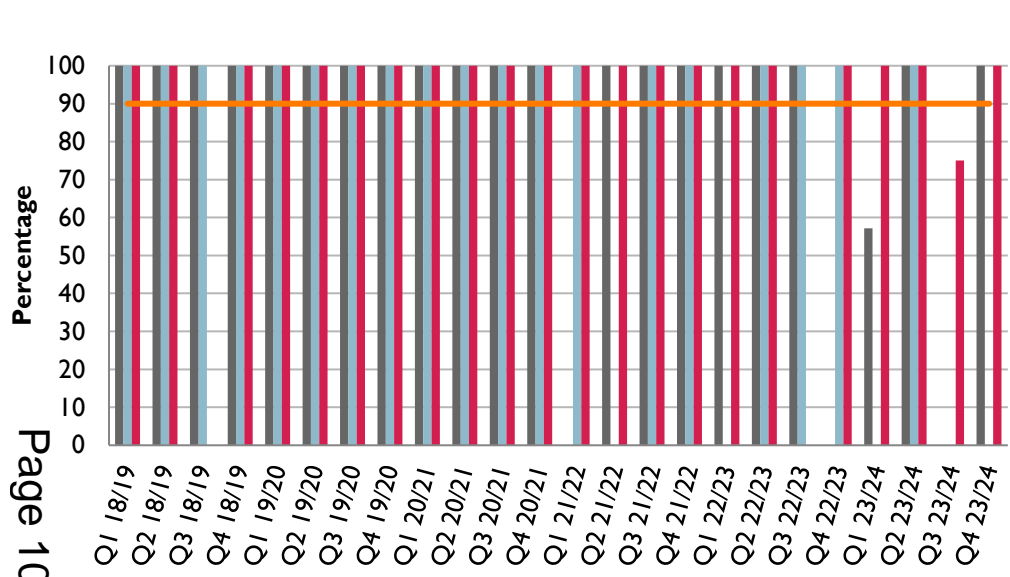
APSE performance networks are introducing benchmarking for environmental sectors for 2023-24

The Council conducted eight inspections during Q1, all of which were completed within the timescale.

High risk work is naturally prioritised, which can have an impact on lower risk scheduled inspection rates. The service now has a useful dashboard, which is helpful for monitoring team performance and tracking lower risk scheduled inspections within the team.

# Percentage of high risk notifications risk assessed within 1 working day

(including food poisoning outbreaks, anti-social behaviour, contaminated private water supplies, workplace fatalities or multiple serious injuries)



### Direction of Travel

- Against last Quarter →
- Against last Year →
- Same as last quarter and last year

### QI – Higher is Good

Target	90%
Actual	100%

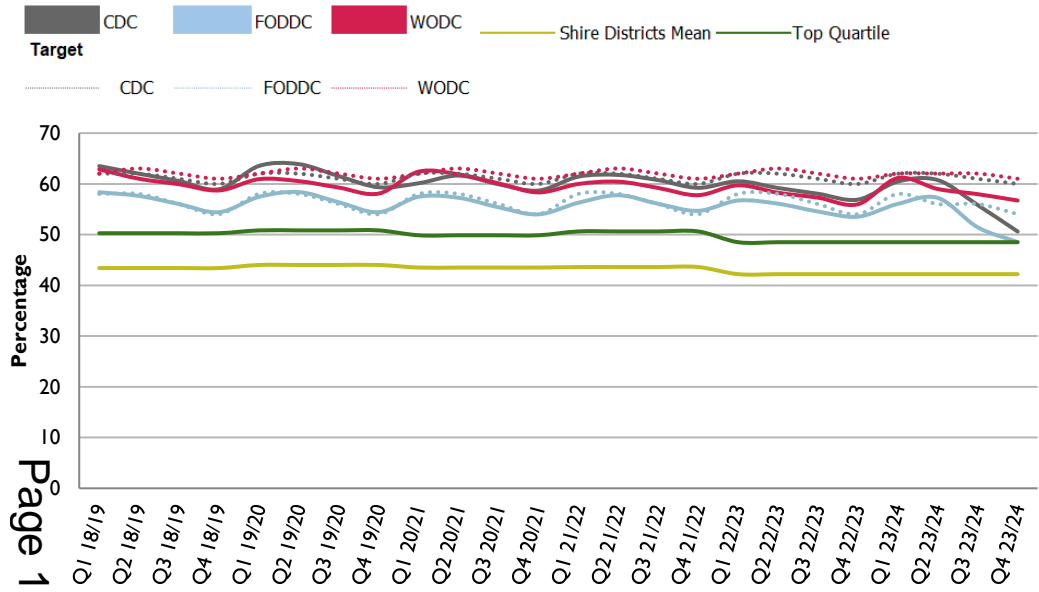
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### How do we compare?

Benchmarking currently not available. The Data & Performance Team will investigate options.

One notification was received during Q1 which was assessed within one working day.

# Percentage of household waste recycled



## Direction of Travel

Against last  
Quarter

Against last  
Year

## Q1 – Higher is Good

Target 62%

Actual Awaiting Data

## How do we compare?

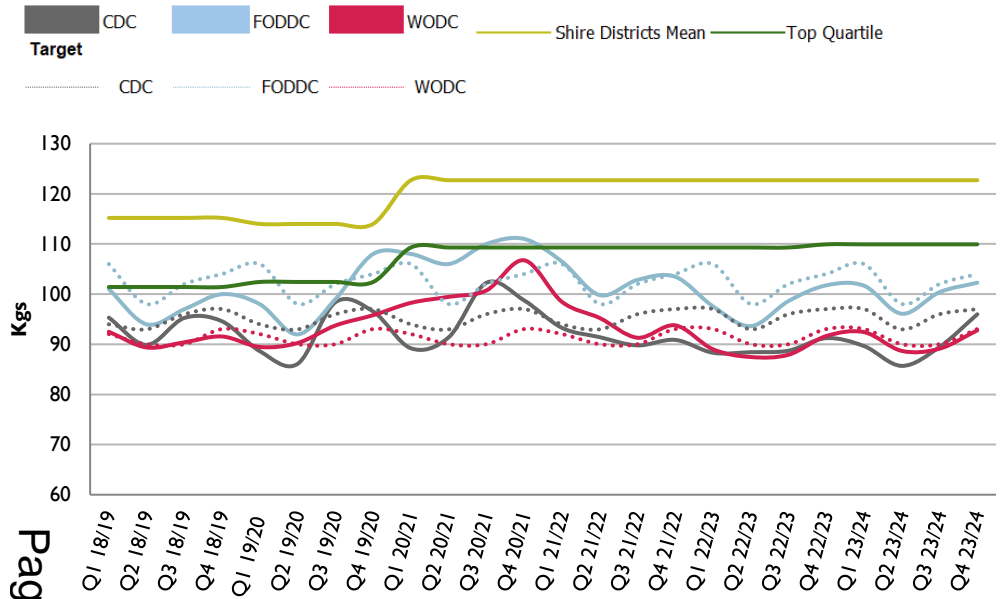
Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling or composting

Q4 22-23 Benchmark	%	CIPFA Rank	Quartile
<b>West Oxfordshire</b>	<b>53.1</b>	<b>4/16</b>	<b>Top</b>
South Oxfordshire	55.42	1/16	Top
Tewkesbury	47.58	6/16	Second
Harborough	38.5	10/16	Third
Hinckley and Bosworth	36.68	14/16	Bottom
Bromsgrove	31.98	16/16	Bottom

The team is currently awaiting the recycling rates for June from Oxfordshire County Council. The recycling rates for April and May stand at 57.99%, which is approximately 3% higher than the same period last year.

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

# Residual Household Waste per Household (kg)



### Direction of Travel

Against last  
Quarter

Against last  
Year

### Q1 – Lower is Good

Target                      93

Actual                      Awaiting Data

## How do we compare?

Residual household waste per household (kg/household)

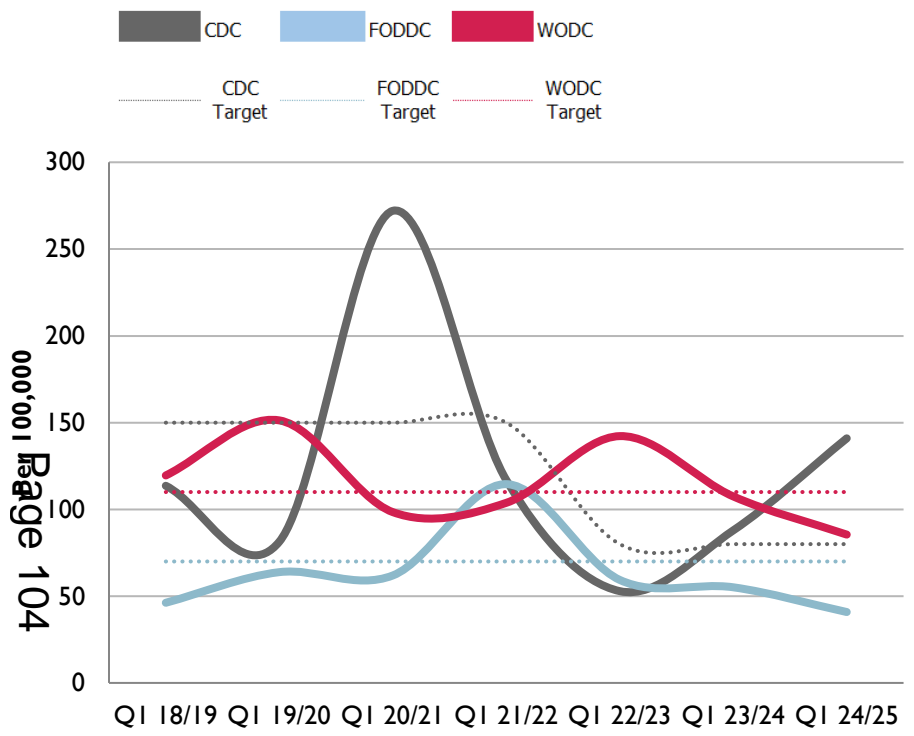
Q4 22-23 Benchmark	Kg	CIPFA Rank	Quartile
<b>West Oxfordshire</b>	<b>85.56</b>	<b>4/16</b>	<b>Top</b>
Stroud	76.83	1/16	Top
Tewkesbury	104.61	7/16	Second
Rushcliffe	114.93	11/16	Third
Lichfield	117.41	14/16	Bottom
Bromsgrove	126.69	16/16	Bottom

The team is currently awaiting the data for June from Oxfordshire County Council. The pattern of residual waste throughout the year is cyclical and targets are profiled according. We typically see an increase in Q3 due to the Christmas period.


In general, the Council is experiencing a lower presentation of all types of waste.


Based on the data available, the residual waste per household is lower than or in line with the comparative period of the previous year.

# Missed bins per 100,000



## Direction of Travel

Against last Quarter 

Against last Year 

Slightly increased since last quarter but decreased since last year

## Q1 – Lower is Good

Target	110
Actual	85.59

## How do we compare?

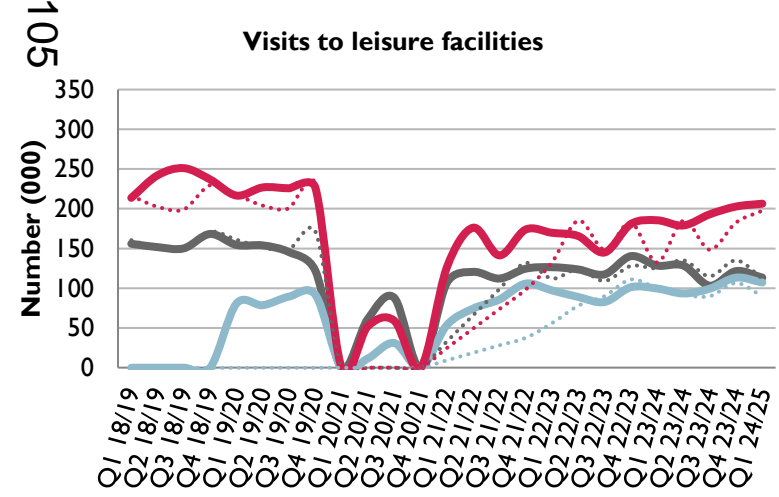
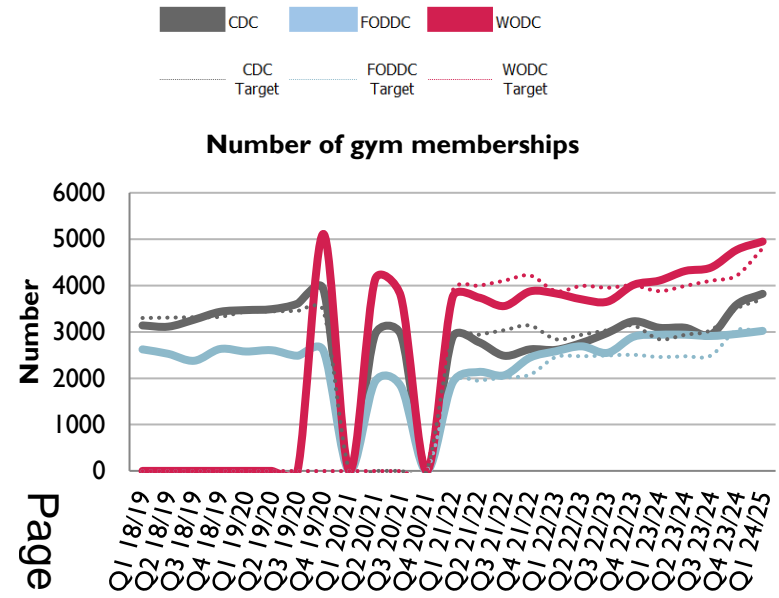
*The Data & Performance Team will investigate options.*

In Q1, the number missed bins per 100,000 collections stayed below target but did see a slight increase of around 5%.. In comparison to the corresponding period last year, the number of missed bins per 100,000 collections decreased by roughly 25%.

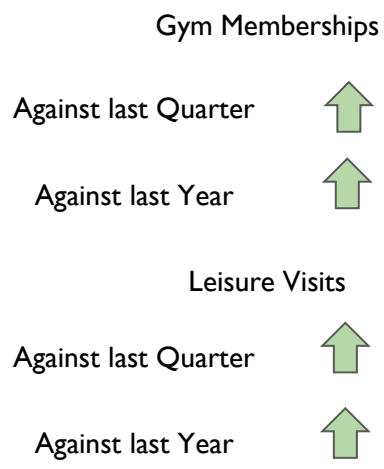
Note: since the implementation of In-Cab technology, the data source for missed collections is Alloy, In-Cab's back office system. This data source is more accurate than the previous data source.



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



## Direction of Travel



## Q1 - Higher is Good

Gym Memberships	
Target	4,800
Actual	4,949

Leisure Visits	
Target	197,500
Actual	206,370

Gym Memberships - Improved since last quarter and last year  
Leisure Visits - Improved since last quarter and last year

The leisure targets were reviewed at the end of 2021-22, resulting in higher visitor number targets. Visits to leisure facilities increased compared to the previous quarter, surpassing the quarterly target by 4.5%. During Q1, gym memberships also rose compared to both the previous quarter and the same period last year.


Learn to Swim participation figures have remained steady but experienced a slight decline decline across all three sites. This trend is attributed to the national shortage of swim instructors and the backlog reduction resulting from the COVID-19 facility closures.

## How do we compare?

The Data & Performance Team will investigate options.

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

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 <b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>	<b>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and Date of Committee	<b>EXECUTIVE – 11 SEPTEMBER 2024</b>
Subject	<b>PROPOSED REFORMS TO THE NPPF AND OTHER CHANGES TO THE PLANNING SYSTEM</b>
Wards Affected	ALL
Accountable Member	Councillor Hugo Ashton – Executive Member for Planning Email: <a href="mailto:hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk">hugo.ashton@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Accountable Officer	Chris Hargraves – Planning Policy Manager Email: <a href="mailto:chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk">chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Report Author	Chris Hargraves – Planning Policy Manager Email: <a href="mailto:chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk">chris.hargraves@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Purpose	To consider a number of proposed changes to National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and to agree West Oxfordshire District Council's response to those proposed changes.
Annexes	Annex A – Draft Consultation Response
Recommendations	That the Executive resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Note the content of the report including the summary overview of the proposed changes to national planning policy;</li> <li>2. Delegate responsibility to the Planning Policy Manager, in consultation with the Executive Member for Planning, to agree, finalise and submit the suggested draft consultation response attached at Annex A.</li> </ol>
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Putting Residents First</li> <li>• A Good Quality of Life for All</li> <li>• A Better Environment for People and Wildlife</li> <li>• Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency</li> <li>• Working Together for West Oxfordshire</li> </ul>
Key Decision	NO

Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	The proposed national planning policy changes are the subject of public consultation from 30 July 2024 – 24 September 2024. The purpose of this report is to consider the proposed changes and to agree the District Council's response to the consultation.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 The Government is consulting on a series of proposed changes to national planning policy.
- 1.2 This includes a number of specific changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and a number of broader reforms relating to planning fees, local plan intervention and the thresholds used for determining applications under the Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project (NSIP) regime.
- 1.3 The consultation is running from 30 July – 24 September 2024 and the Government has indicated that a new version of the NPPF will be published before the end of the year.
- 1.4 The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the proposed changes together with an initial Officer response, highlighting, where possible, any particular implications for West Oxfordshire.
- 1.5 Annex A then provides a more detailed suggested draft response to each of the specific questions included within the consultation document.

## **2. BACKGROUND CONTEXT**

- 2.1 In terms of the overall rationale for the proposed changes, the preamble to the consultation reinforces the following key points:
  - Sustained economic growth is needed and this will be delivered through a focus on three pillars; stability, investment and reform.
  - The planning system is seen as being in decisive need of reform, with the Chancellor’s speech of 8 July 2024 having committed to consulting on changes to the NPPF to take a different, growth-focused approach.
  - The proposed changes are vital to delivering the Government’s commitments on economic growth including the construction of 1.5 million new homes.

## **3. OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY CHANGES**

- 3.1 The proposed changes fall into a number of broad topics as follows:
  - Housing
  - Previously developed (brownfield) land
  - Green Belt
  - Design
  - Infrastructure
  - Delivering community needs
  - Green energy and the Environment
  - Plan-making
  - Planning fees and cost recovery
- 3.2 Set out below is a summary overview of the most significant changes proposed under each topic. This should be read in conjunction with the full consultation proposals which are available to view [online](#).

## Housing

- 3.3** Many of the proposed changes relate to housing – reflecting the importance being placed by Government on securing economic growth by building 1.5 million new homes.
- 3.4** The most significant change relates to the use of the ‘standard method’ for assessing local housing need.
- 3.5** Members will be aware that the standard method is essentially a formula that is used to establish the minimum number of new homes needed in any particular area. The current formula is based on household projections which are then adjusted to take account of affordability. In some circumstances that figure is capped to limit the increase, and finally an urban uplift (35%) is applied to some larger urban areas.
- 3.6** The consultation proposes a completely new standard method which is based on a set percentage of an area’s existing housing stock (0.8%) and then applies a stronger affordability multiplier to increase the baseline in proportion to price pressures. No cap or urban uplift is applied.
- 3.7** This new method is intended to be more ambitious in relation to housing growth, provide greater certainty, achieve a more balanced distribution of homes across the country and be easier to understand and apply.
- 3.8** The table below illustrates the impact of the proposed change on the level of housing need across Oxfordshire.

Local Authority	Current standard method	Proposed standard method	Average annual net additions (2020 – 2023)
Cherwell	706	1,095	1,242
Oxford	762	1,051	437
South Oxfordshire	579	1,179	1,010
Vale of White Horse	633	937	1,162
West Oxfordshire	549	889	865

- 3.9** It is evident that the new standard method significantly increases the level of housing need across Oxfordshire. For West Oxfordshire, the need increases from 549 homes per year to 889 homes per year. Over the 20-year period of the proposed new West Oxfordshire Local Plan (2021 – 2041) this equates to a total of 17,780 new homes compared to 10,980 under the current standard method.
- 3.10** Other important changes include the fact that the standard method will no longer be an ‘advisory starting point’ – rather it will be mandatory and there will no ‘exceptional circumstances’ for departing from it.

- 3.11** The consultation also makes it clear that Councils will be expected to make *'all efforts to allocate land in line with their housing need as per the standard method'*. This is particularly important because whilst a local authority may choose to set a lower housing requirement through their local plan, this would need to be robustly evidenced and justified.
- 3.12** In particular, Councils would need to demonstrate they have taken all possible steps to meet their housing need in full, including optimising densities, sharing need with neighbouring authorities, and reviewing Green Belt boundaries, before a lower housing requirement will be considered.
- 3.13** The consultation invites views on a number of other important housing-related changes including a reinstatement of the requirement for Councils to continually demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply.
- 3.14** In addition, the requirement to add a 5% buffer to the 5-year supply calculation is to be reinstated (increased to 20% in areas of significant under-delivery) and past over-supply will no longer be able to be taken into account.
- 3.15** Other housing related changes include:
- Increased emphasis on achieving higher densities in urban areas with reference to consideration of 'local character' being removed as being overly restrictive;
  - A shift away from District-wide design codes and towards more localised design codes, masterplans and guides for areas of greatest change and potential;
  - The presumption in favour of sustainable development to be amended to clarify that the 'tilted balance' is engaged when policies relating to the supply of land are out of date and to ensure that location, design and the provision of affordable homes are particular considerations when any adverse impacts of proposed development are weighed against the harms;
  - Increased emphasis on strategic planning across LPA boundaries including the use of Spatial Development Strategies (SDSs) with particular reference to housing needs, strategic infrastructure and building economic and climate resilience;
- 3.16** With specific regard to affordable housing provision, the consultation places an increased emphasis on social rented housing including a requirement for Councils to specify the minimum proportion of social rented homes needed.
- 3.17** The current requirement for 10% of affordable homes on major sites to comprise affordable home ownership options will be removed and will instead be a matter for local decision-making. Similarly, the current requirement for 25% First Homes will also become a matter of local discretion.
- 3.18** Additional support is proposed to be given to mixed tenure sites in the interests of accelerating delivery and creating more diverse communities. The consultation also seeks views on how the current requirement for 10% of a Local Plan's housing requirement to be met on smaller sites of less than 1 hectare could be strengthened and clarified.

**3.19** Specific reference is proposed to be made to ‘looked after children’ in the context of those groups whose housing needs should be assessed and reflected in planning policies. Support for community-led housing is to be further strengthened by expanding the definition of such development and by removing the size-limit for community-led exception sites where an alternative limit is established through the Local Plan.

*Officer Response*

**3.20** Given the Government’s stated ambitions around economic growth and the delivery of new homes, it is unsurprising that many of the proposed national policy changes relate to housing.

**3.21** A number of the proposed changes are supported in principle, including the increased emphasis on social rented and community-led housing, greater local discretion on the provision of First Homes and other affordable home ownership options and the increased drive towards more tenure diverse communities.

**3.22** Also supported is the push towards more strategic planning which is considered to be an effective tool for dealing with important cross boundary issues such as housing, jobs and infrastructure. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was a good example of the merits of such an approach.

**3.23** The proposals around achieving higher densities in urban areas are sensible although Officers do not consider it necessary to remove the reference to ‘local character’ as the current NPPF wording is not felt to be overly restrictive. It is perfectly possible to achieve higher density development whilst respecting local character – indeed this should be a pre-requisite of such development.

**3.24** Also supported is the move away from District-wide design codes and towards more local-level documents in areas of potential change and opportunity. This is of particular relevance to key locations such as Salt Cross Garden Village.

**3.25** The clarification provided on the application of the ‘tilted balance’ is welcome, however there are concerns that the additional safeguards on location, design and affordable housing will not be sufficient to offset the inevitable increase in speculative applications and planning appeals that will ensue upon the introduction of the new standard method.

**3.26** It is notable that the consultation document itself acknowledges that more Councils will be brought into the scope of the ‘tilted balance’ in the short-term and simply inserting some additional text on relatively subjective matters including location and design are unlikely to provide much of a safeguard.

**3.27** This leads onto the more substantive concerns of Officers which revolve around the proposed standard method and its mandatory application by all local planning authorities. Whilst Officers accept that such an approach would provide greater certainty (insofar as there would no longer be any debate about what constitutes ‘exceptional circumstances’) the impact of the new method will be significant and will inevitably pave the way for a very difficult period of speculative planning applications and planning by appeal.



- 3.28** In basing the calculation on a proportion of an area's existing dwelling stock, the approach seems arbitrary compared to the current method which takes into account anticipated household formation. Whilst the number of existing dwellings is a fixed, known quantity, it is not clear why this should be seen as a key determinant for the number of new homes that are needed in the future.
- 3.29** In addition, the proposed affordability multiplier serves to greatly inflate the level of identified housing need to potentially unachievable levels whilst in reality, doing very little to influence the cost of market housing to buy or rent. New-build homes make up such a small percentage of the overall housing stock, that simply saturating the market with new build homes will have very little impact on overall affordability.
- 3.30** Linked to the concerns around the introduction of the standard method, Officers have strong concerns around the related issue of 5-year housing land supply. As the proposals currently stand, many Councils, including West Oxfordshire, will not be able to demonstrate a 5-year supply and thus the 'tilted balance' of the NPPF will be engaged as soon as the new NPPF is published.
- 3.31** This will inevitably lead to increased pressure for development in inappropriate and unsustainable locations and will diminish the ability of LPAs to resist it.
- 3.32** This will be exacerbated by the intention to bring the new standard method in immediately and by reinstating the requirements to annually demonstrate a 5-year supply and apply a 5% or 20% buffer to the calculation.
- 3.33** If the new standard method is introduced, it should be introduced on a phased basis to enable Councils to properly plan for it in a sustainable and co-ordinated manner.
- 3.34** With regards to the calculation of 5-year housing land supply, there should be no requirement to annually report this, provided that the Local Plan is less than 5-years' old, or where the Council is consistently achieving housing delivery levels above identified needs.
- 3.35** No buffer should be required given the significant step-change in housing need arising from the new standard method and consideration should also be given to the definition of 'deliverable' housing land such that outline planning permissions and local plan allocations can be more readily counted within the 5-year supply period.
- 3.36** Moreover, the application of the tilted balance and calculation of housing land supply should recognise the fact that the number of housing completions coming forward within a 5-year period is beyond the control of local planning authorities and is effectively at the behest of landowners and developers.
- 3.37** A revised measure should be considered based on the number of permissions granted rather than the number of homes expected to be completed. This would more fully reflect the role, responsibility and degree of influence which LPAs have.

### Previously developed (brownfield) land

- 3.38** The consultation includes a number of changes which are intended to further encourage the re-use of previously developed (brownfield) land. In short, the NPPF is to be amended such that development involving brownfield land is to be generally regarded as acceptable in principle.
- 3.39** With specific regard to the re-use of brownfield land in the Green Belt, the text is to be amended to make it clear that such development will not be considered inappropriate provided it would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.
- 3.40** Views are also sought on whether the current definition of brownfield land should be expanded to include hardstanding and glasshouses without compromising the needs of the horticultural sector.

### *Officer Response*

- 3.41** The current NPPF already lends significant support to the re-use of previously developed (brownfield) land. The proposed changes are intended to further reinforce this and are therefore welcomed in principle. Although the wording relating to development in the Green Belt is proposed to be more flexible, the main safeguard of preserving the openness of the Green Belt remains in place.
- 3.42** With regard to the definition of brownfield land, Officers have a slight concern the inclusion of glasshouses could lead to increased pressure for the re-development of such sites even when they are in active use. As such, it is suggested that the definition should only be applied to sites that are no longer in active use or capable of being brought back into active use.

### Green Belt

- 3.43** A number of key changes are proposed in relation to Green Belt policy.
- 3.44** Importantly, where a local authority is unable to meet its housing, commercial or other needs after fully considering all opportunities to make effective and efficient use of brownfield land and wider opportunities, it should undertake a Green Belt review.
- 3.45** In undertaking any such review, the authority should apply a sequential approach which prioritises the release of previously developed (brownfield) land, followed by other 'grey belt' sites and then, higher performing Green Belt sites.
- 3.46** The consultation includes a proposed definition of 'grey belt' land which is land within the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and any other parcels and/or areas of Green Belt land that make a limited contribution to the five Green Belt purposes.
- 3.47** Whether land can be judged to be making a 'limited contribution' will depend on the following considerations:
- Not strongly perform against any Green Belt purpose; and
  - Have at least one of the following features:
    - Land containing substantial built development or which is fully enclosed by built form;

- Land which makes no or very little contribution to preventing neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
- Land which is dominated by urban land uses, including physical developments;
- Land which contributes little to preserving the setting and special character of historic towns

**3.48** Importantly, in recognition of the fact that it will take time to reflect the above through local plan preparation, a further amendment to the NPPF is proposed to take more immediate effect through the development management process.

**3.49** Specifically, a new paragraph is to be inserted such that where a local planning authority cannot demonstrate adequate housing delivery, or there is unmet commercial or other need, development within the Green Belt will not be considered inappropriate provided that it is on sustainable 'grey belt' land and would not fundamentally undermine the function of the Green Belt across the area of the plan as a whole.

**3.50** Such development would be subject to a number of 'golden rules' being met including:

- in the case of residential schemes, at least 50% affordable housing, with an appropriate proportion being Social Rent, subject to viability;
- Necessary improvements to local or national infrastructure; and
- The provision of new, or improvements to existing, local green spaces with residential schemes having to ensure new residents are able to access good quality green space.

**3.51** Notably, the consultation emphasises that the proposed changes to Green Belt policy are intended to support the release of land to address unmet needs for traveller sites.

*Officer Response*

**3.52** On the whole, the proposals are supported. Notwithstanding the concerns outlined earlier in relation to the new standard method, if it is introduced and levels of identified housing need increase as anticipated, it is entirely appropriate to expect local authorities to undertake a Green Belt review before they conclude that they are unable to meet their housing need in full.

**3.53** Inevitably across large areas of Green Belt there will be parcels of land that differ in their existing use, character and quality and thus the contribution that they make to the function and purpose of the Green Belt. Clearly some areas of land may be suitable for development and the proposed sequential approach which seeks to prioritise brownfield land first, followed by other 'grey belt' land and then, higher performing Green Belt land, is sensible.

**3.54** The specific references made to Green Belt land release helping to address the unmet needs for traveller sites is particularly welcome.

**3.55** However, Officers are concerned that the proposed definition of 'grey belt' land is very broad in referring to 'previously developed land and *any other parcels and/or areas of Green Belt land that make a limited contribution to the five Green Belt purposes*'.

- 3.56** Although the consultation seeks to define how a ‘limited contribution’ could be judged, the wording is quite vague and open to interpretation. The likely outcome is that additional parcels of land will be actively promoted with developers arguing that they make a limited contribution to the purposes of the Green Belt, that they meet the Government’s proposed ‘golden rules’ and that the Council does not have a 5-year housing land supply.
- 3.57** In short, the proposals appear to ‘open the door’ too widely to speculative development within the Green Belt. As such, the proposed changes should be limited to plan-making and should not applied with immediate effect to the development management process.
- 3.58** There also appears to be a contradiction in some of the proposed wording. For instance, at paragraph 151, the proposed NPPF text refers to previously developed land which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, whereas paragraph 152 in referring to grey belt land (which includes previously developed land) requires development not to undermine the function of the Green Belt across the area of the plan as a whole. The proposed definition of grey belt land then refers to land which makes a limited contribution to the five Green Belt purposes.
- 3.59** The text should therefore be checked for consistency and to avoid any contradiction it may be sensible to make a clearer distinction between previously developed land and other ‘grey belt’ land.

#### Design

- 3.60** Some minor changes are proposed in relation to design – specifically, it is proposed that all current references in the NPPF to the concept of ‘beauty’ and ‘beautiful’ buildings and places are removed as they are overly subjective and difficult to define.
- 3.61** A minor amendment is also proposed in relation to the use of the National Model Design Code as the primary basis for preparing and using local design codes.

#### *Officer Response*

- 3.62** The proposed changes are minor in nature and raise no concerns. Officers agree that the terms ‘beauty’ and ‘beautiful’ are overly subjective and could usefully be deleted.

#### Infrastructure

- 3.63** A number of changes to the NPPF are proposed in relation to the provision of infrastructure to help grow the economy. Specifically, wording changes are proposed to provide particular support for lab space, gigafactories (battery cell manufacturing), digital infrastructure (e.g. data centres) and freight and logistics.
- 3.64** The consultation also seeks views on whether digital infrastructure projects should be integrated into the NSIP (nationally significant infrastructure projects) regime.

#### *Officer Response*

- 3.65** The proposed changes are generally supported. The issue of whether digital infrastructure projects should be classed as nationally significant infrastructure projects and thus considered under the NSIP regime rather than via the traditional planning application route will largely

depend on the scale and thresholds used but in principle, it would seem to be sensible for larger digital infrastructure projects to be considered via this route.

#### Delivering Community Needs

- 3.66** A number of important changes are proposed in relation to community needs.
- 3.67** Firstly, increased emphasis is to be placed on the importance of facilitating new, expanded, or upgraded public service infrastructure, with such considerations to be afforded significant weight when development proposals are considered.
- 3.68** The consultation also places an increased emphasis on the provision of a sufficient number of early-years and post-16 education places.
- 3.69** In relation to transport planning, the consultation includes proposed amendments to the NPPF to emphasise the importance of taking a ‘vision-led’ approach, whereby local authorities set a vision for how places should be and then design the transport and behavioural interventions needed to help achieve that vision. This represents a purposeful shift away from the traditional approach of ‘predict and provide’ based on past trends and projections.
- 3.70** The consultation also seeks general views on how national planning policy could better support health and well-being.

#### *Officer Response*

- 3.71** The proposed changes are supported, in particular the increased emphasis placed on the provision of supporting infrastructure – which is a key concern often raised through local plan consultation.
- 3.72** Also supported is the increased emphasis on early years and post-16 education places and the proposed shift towards a more vision-led approach to transport planning.
- 3.73** In Oxfordshire, the County Council’s Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5) is already rooted in a move away from ‘predict and provide’ and towards ‘decide and provide’ and the proposed changes are entirely consistent with this approach.

#### Green Energy and the Environment

- 3.74** A number of important changes are proposed in relation to green energy and the environment more generally.
- 3.75** Firstly, in relation to on-shore wind, changes to the NPPF are proposed to remove the current restrictions placed on such development compared to other forms of renewable energy.
- 3.76** It is also proposed that on-shore wind proposals would be re-integrated into the NSIP regime and thus, beyond a certain scale, will not be a matter for local authorities to determine directly. Specifically, the consultation proposes that the NSIP threshold for on-shore wind generating schemes should be increased from 50 megawatts (MW) to 100 MW. An increase for solar projects from 50 MW to 150 MW is also proposed.
- 3.77** Secondly, the text of the NPPF is to be amended to give increased weight to the benefits associated with renewable and low carbon energy generation and to set a stronger expectation that authorities proactively identify sites for renewable and low carbon development when producing local plans.

- 3.78** Other proposed changes include the provision of greater clarity over which nationally important water infrastructure projects should fall within the NSIP regime, minor changes to the NPPF text to reflect the new name for legally designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty – ‘National Landscapes’ and the removal of text relating to best and most versatile agricultural land being considered alongside other policies when deciding which sites are most appropriate for development.
- 3.79** The consultation also invites general views on how national planning policy could do more to address climate change mitigation and adaptation including in relation to flood risk management.

*Officer Response*

- 3.80** With regard to the issue of on-shore wind, the proposed changes to footnotes 58 and 59 of the NPPF, which effectively ease the current restrictions placed on such development, are supported.
- 3.81** Wind energy has a key role to play in facilitating a transition towards a net zero carbon future and whilst often controversial, there is no reason for such proposals to be considered any differently to other forms of renewable energy. The proposed change effectively introduces a more level playing field and is thus supported.
- 3.82** The principle of large-scale onshore wind projects being considered through the nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIP) regime is also supported. The proposed threshold of 100MW appears reasonable, however the significant resource implications of local authorities having to deal with planning applications falling below this threshold must be recognised, along with the resource implications of dealing with very large NSIP projects – particularly for host authorities.
- 3.83** Also supported is the proposed wording change to paragraph 164 of the NPPF which will help to ensure that all local authorities support planning applications for renewable and low carbon energy development as well as the proposed wording change to paragraph 160 which sets a stronger expectation for local authorities to pro-actively identify suitable sites rather than relying on criteria-based policies.
- 3.84** Officers are however concerned about the proposed changes relating to best and most versatile agricultural land which effectively seek to revoke a previous change made to the NPPF in December 2023 which was intended to ensure that the availability of agricultural land used for food production is considered alongside other policies in the NPPF, when deciding which sites are most appropriate for development.
- 3.85** The protection of best and most versatile agricultural land is an important consideration and Officers can see no reason why this should not be explicitly referenced as a factor to be taken into account by local authorities when determining which sites should come forward for development.
- 3.86** Finally, Officers agree that it would be helpful to provide greater clarity over which strategic water infrastructure projects should fall within the scope of the NSIP regime and this aspect of the consultation is therefore supported.

### Plan-Making

- 3.87** The consultation proposals include a number of proposed changes to plan-making including the criteria used to determine when central Government may intervene and the transitional arrangements that will apply to local plans currently in preparation such as the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041.
- 3.88** With regards to central Government intervention, views are sought on whether the current criteria for intervention should be updated or removed, the rationale being that future intervention should be swifter and more proportionate, justified by local circumstances and providing the Secretary of State with greater flexibility.
- 3.89** In terms of transitional arrangements, the consultation usefully clarifies that the proposed changes to the system of plan-making previously set out under the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act will be introduced from summer or autumn 2025.
- 3.90** However, in recognition of the significant implications of the various national policy changes set out in this current consultation, the deadline for submitting local plans has been extended from June 2025 to December 2026, meaning that all local plans submitted by December 2026 will be examined under the current plan-making system.
- 3.91** The transitional arrangements stipulate that any emerging Local Plan that has already been submitted for examination will continue to be examined under the current NPPF. This will apply for example to Oxford City's Local Plan 2040 which is currently at examination.
- 3.92** Those plans that have been formally published under Regulation 19 but not yet submitted for examination can progress to examination under the current NPPF provided there is a gap of no more than 200 dwellings per annum between their proposed housing requirement and their revised local housing need under the new standard method. If the gap is more than 200 dwellings per annum, they will be required to revise their plan in line with the new NPPF before submitting for examination.
- 3.93** Other Local Plans that are at a relatively early stage and have not yet reached the formal Regulation 19 stage (such as the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041) should be progressed as quickly as possible against the revised version of the NPPF.

### *Officer Response*

- 3.94** With regards to the proposed changes to current Local Plan intervention criteria, Officers have no firm view on this. Clearly in some instances it will be appropriate for central Government to intervene in respect of plan-making to ensure timely progress is made.
- 3.95** The most important issue is that any such intervention criteria must be clear and reasonable so that the local authority is given every opportunity to remedy the situation themselves before matters are effectively taken out of their hands.

### Planning Fees and Cost Recovery

- 3.96** The consultation proposals include a number of proposed changes to current planning application fees as well as the possible introduction of new fees for certain types of application that do not currently attract a charge.
- 3.97** In short, it is proposed that the current fee for householder applications will increase from £258 to £528 (the rationale being that the current fee is inadequate for recovering the cost of processing such applications).
- 3.98** In addition, more general views are sought on whether there are any other types of application (e.g. prior approval) where a fee increase should be sought to better reflect the cost incurred by the Council as well as whether there are any other applications that do not currently attract a fee but should do (e.g. listed building consent).
- 3.99** Views are also being sought on the potential localisation of planning fees whereby they would be set locally rather than nationally as is currently the case. Two possible models for localised fee setting are identified including 'full localisation' where no national fees would exist and all local authorities would have to set their own fees (capped so as to not exceed cost recovery) and 'local variation' whereby nationally set 'default' fees would remain in place but local authorities would have the option to vary these within prescribed limits if they wished to do so.
- 3.100** In addition, views are sought on the extent to which planning fees might reasonably be increased to cover the costs of wider planning services (e.g. conservation and design).
- 3.101** In addition to the various potential changes to planning fees outlined above, views are also being sought on how local authorities could better recover the costs of dealing with planning applications that are dealt with under the NSIP regime (e.g. Botley West Solar Farm).
- 3.102** Currently, any such cost recovery is dealt with on an informal basis for example through a planning performance agreement (PPA). Views are sought on whether 'host authorities' (both lower and upper tier in two-tier authority areas such as Oxfordshire) should be able to charge a fee directly to the applicant. To provide flexibility, host authorities would be able to continue to rely on a PPA to recover their costs if they wished to. Any costs incurred by neighbouring authorities (which will generally be much less) would continue to be recovered via a PPA.

#### *Officer Response*

- 3.103** The proposed increase to householder application fees is supported as this will better reflect the true costs of dealing with such applications. Also supported in principle is the need to further explore fees being charged on other types of application that do not currently attract a charge. These can in some instances require a good proportion of Officer time and resource and so it would seem appropriate that some form of charge is applied. For this reason, Officers also support in principle the extension of fees to cover the costs of wider service input e.g. heritage and design.
- 3.104** In terms of the localisation of planning fees, Officers have concerns that this could lead to considerable variation across the country. Conversely, nationally set fees provide greater certainty for all parties and consistency of approach. If a localised model were to be



introduced, this should be on the basis of the 'local variation' model which has been identified whereby nationally set default fees would remain in place but with some scope for local variation.

**3.105** With regard to the recovery of costs for projects dealt with under the NSIP regime, the proposals are fully supported. It is essential that local authorities are able to properly recover the costs incurred and setting an application fee would provide certainty to all parties, whilst retaining the flexibility to rely on a planning performance agreement if preferred.

#### **4. NEXT STEPS**

**4.1** Subject to the agreement of Members, the draft consultation response attached at Annex A will be submitted to Government. The Government has indicated that a revised version of the NPPF will be published before the end of 2024. The other, wider planning reforms outlined in the consultation are anticipated to follow.

#### **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

**5.1** The District Council could choose not to respond to the consultation but that would represent a missed opportunity to input into some significant proposed changes to national policy that will have a direct impact on West Oxfordshire including the preparation of its new Local Plan to 2041.

#### **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

**6.1** The report raises no direct financial implications. Indirectly, there may be some additional costs associated with the preparation of the Local Plan as evidence needs to be re-worked, updated and commissioned to take account of the potential increase in housing need arising from the new standard method.

#### **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

**7.1** The report raises no direct legal implications.

#### **8. RISK ASSESSMENT**

**8.1** The proposed introduction of the new standard method will result in a significant increase in housing need for West Oxfordshire. In the absence of any transitional arrangements, as soon as this is introduced through the new NPPF (expected before the end of 2024) the Council will be under increased pressure from speculative development as a result of not being able to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply.

**8.2** There is also a significant risk that the timetable for preparing the new West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 will need to be amended to enable further work to be undertaken as a result of the proposed increase in housing need.

**9. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 9.1** The consultation invites views on whether the proposals contained therein have any particular implications for businesses, or any differential impact on persons with a relevant protected characteristic as defined by the Equality Act 2010 compared to persons without that protected characteristic.

**10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1** A number of aspects of the consultation relate to the climate and ecological emergencies, with the proposals, in the main, seeking to strengthen national policy in this respect.

**11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None.

(END)

**Question 1: Do you agree that we should reverse the December 2023 changes made to paragraph 61?**

Yes, the proposed changes will help to clarify the purpose and status of the standard method and will avoid unnecessary debates about what constitutes ‘exceptional circumstances’ for departing from it.

We do however have concerns about the rationale for the new standard method and the significant increase in housing need that results from its application (see responses to Questions 15 – 19).

**Question 2: Do you agree that we should remove reference to the use of alternative approaches to assessing housing need in paragraph 61 and the glossary of the NPPF?**

Yes, this will help to avoid unnecessary debate at examination. We do however have concerns about the rationale for the new standard method and the significant increase in housing need that results from its application (see responses to Questions 15 – 19).

**Question 3: Do you agree that we should reverse the December 2023 changes made on the urban uplift by deleting paragraph 62?**

No. Larger urban areas should be expected to provide a proportionately larger number of new homes as they are the most sustainable locations for new development with the largest range of services and facilities and ability to travel by non-car modes of transport.

The proposed changes to the standard method result in an increase in many rural areas and a decrease in larger urban areas which is entirely counter-intuitive. In essence, it is imposing the exportation of unmet housing needs from larger urban centres and circumventing the duty to co-operate.

**Question 4: Do you agree that we should reverse the December 2023 changes made on character and density and delete paragraph 130?**

Yes. The concept of higher density development and safeguarding the character of an area are not mutually exclusive. As currently drafted, paragraph 130 infers that they are. Balancing the design merits of a scheme in terms of density and character of the surrounding built form is a standard planning consideration and doesn’t warrant being singled out within the NPPF as a particular consideration.

**Question 5: Do you agree that the focus of design codes should move towards supporting spatial visions in local plans and areas that provide the greatest opportunities for change such as greater density, in particular the development of large new communities?**

Yes. Design Coding across a larger (e.g. authority-wide) area is often difficult and the take up of such documents appears to have been poor. Whilst Design Guides can be prepared successfully on a larger-scale basis, design codes are more effectively focused on smaller geographical areas including areas of significant opportunity for change.

**Question 6: Do you agree that the presumption in favour of sustainable development should be amended as proposed?**

No. Whilst the proposed clarification regarding which policies may be considered out of date in relation to the 'tilted balance' (i.e. those relating to the supply of land) is helpful and supported, the amendments made in relation to the location and design of development and the provision of affordable housing are considered to represent inadequate 'safeguards' against the proliferation of speculative applications that are likely to ensue upon introduction of the new standard method.

Simply identifying location, design and affordable housing provision as particular considerations to be taken into account when weighing up the potential harms of development against the benefits, will not help local authorities that are drawn immediately into the position of having a significant housing land supply shortfall.

**Question 7: Do you agree that all local planning authorities should be required to continually demonstrate 5 years of specific, deliverable sites for decision making purposes, regardless of plan status?**

No. Once a Local Plan has been adopted, there should be no requirement to have to demonstrate a 5-year supply of deliverable housing sites. Instead, they should be required to report on the progress of allocated sites and larger planning permissions as part of their Annual Monitoring Report.

Only where it is apparent that the anticipated housing trajectory is falling behind schedule and that an insufficient number of homes will be delivered within a 5-year period, should the LPA be required to publish an updated housing land supply position statement in order to quantify the extent of any such shortfall so it is able to be weighed in the balance with all other relevant material considerations.

**Question 8: Do you agree with our proposal to remove wording on national planning guidance in paragraph 77 of the current NPPF?**

No. Housing delivery is cyclical by nature and there will inevitably be periods of over and under-supply. If there is a particular period of over-delivery, it seems counter intuitive that a local authority could then find itself unable to demonstrate a 5-year supply of land without being able to reference the past over-delivery in some way. Where is the incentive to encourage LPAs to permit new development if any periods of over-delivery are simply excluded from any future calculation?

**Question 9: Do you agree that all local planning authorities should be required to add a 5% buffer to their 5-year housing land supply calculations?**

No. The proposed new standard method results in a very significant increase in housing need for many local authorities. The consultation acknowledges that the result of this will be many authorities being unable to demonstrate a 5-year supply and thus the tilted balance of the NPPF will be engaged.

In the absence of any phased introduction of the proposed standard method, to apply a 5% buffer on top, will simply exacerbate the situation and lead to an increase in speculative applications and planning by appeal. Many local authorities will quickly find themselves having to then apply a 20%

buffer and will end up trapped in a cycle of never being able to demonstrate a 5-year supply and take a sustainable plan-led approach to development. Speculative development will become rife and local authorities will face significant resource implications as they are drawn into an increasing number of costly appeal situations.

That could then in turn lead to greater central Government intervention depending on the proportion of appeals that are upheld and a loss of control at the local authority level.

**Question 10: If yes, do you agree that 5% is an appropriate buffer, or should it be a different figure?**

No buffer should be applied to the 5-year housing land supply requirement given the significant increase in housing need associated with the new standard method.

**Question 11: Do you agree with the removal of policy on Annual Position Statements?**

Yes. We are not aware of any local authorities that have taken up this opportunity and so it would seem sensible to remove the requirement.

**Question 12: Do you agree that the NPPF should be amended to further support effective co-operation on cross boundary and strategic planning matters?**

Yes. It is essential that national policy requires effective cross-boundary co-operation on strategically important matters and it is helpful that paragraph 24 is proposed to make specific reference to housing, infrastructure and economic and climate resilience.

The proposed introduction of paragraph 27 is supported in principle, however it should be recognised that the investment plans of infrastructure providers do not always align with local plan timescales and priorities. It may be more appropriate for the text to require alignment with local plan infrastructure evidence rather than local plan policies themselves.

**Question 13: Should the tests of soundness be amended to better assess the soundness of strategic scale plans or proposals?**

No, but the text of the NPPF should be amended to clarify that Inspector's will apply the tests of soundness on a proportionate basis taking account of the strategic nature of the plan or proposals being examined.

The current text refers to the tests of soundness being applied proportionately in relation to non-strategic policies and could easily be amended to cover strategic policies too.

**Question 14: Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?**

The District Council supports the use of spatial development strategies and welcome the reference made to such strategies being potentially rolled out beyond mayoral areas. The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 was a good example of the merits of such an approach before a decision was taken to cease further progress with it.

**Question 15: Do you agree that Planning Practice Guidance should be amended to specify that the appropriate baseline for the standard method is housing stock rather than the latest household projections?**

No. Whilst using a proportion of the existing household stock provides a known, fixed quantity, there appears to be no rationale provided as to why this is the starting point under the new standard method. It will simply penalise more populated areas including those that have already absorbed significant growth in recent years such as Oxfordshire.

Conversely, household projections provide an informed forecast of future household formation based on a range of factors including migration flows. They are a much more appropriate starting point and should be retained.

If there are concerns around the use of such projections, consideration should be given as to how the outputs could be improved before they are discarded completely.

**Question 16: Do you agree that using the workplace-based median house price to median earnings ratio, averaged over the most recent 3 year period for which data is available to adjust the standard method's baseline, is appropriate?**

No. The proposed methodology is geared too strongly towards housing affordability, resulting in an unreasonable upward push to overall housing need. This is particularly exacerbated in areas of high house prices such as Oxfordshire.

Whilst increasing the overall supply of new homes will increase to an extent the number of new affordable homes provided, in reality, because new builds make up such a small percentage of the overall housing stock, it will do very little, if anything, to suppress the overall level of house prices through supply and demand type arguments.

Whilst we fully recognise that issues of housing affordability need to be addressed, using it as a reason to inflate overall housing need is simply not reasonable or sustainable. In Oxfordshire, there has been a significant increase in the number of new homes built since 2014 and yet house price affordability has worsened rather than improved.

**Question 17: Do you agree that affordability is given an appropriate weighting within the proposed standard method?**

No – see response to Question 16. It is being given too significant a weighting which is pushing the overall level of identified housing need to unreasonable and unsustainable levels. For a rural authority like West Oxfordshire, delivering 889 new homes every year consistently over the period of our new Local Plan to 2041 would represent a huge if not unachievable challenge.

**Question 18: Do you consider the standard method should factor in evidence on rental affordability? If so, do you have any suggestions for how this could be incorporated into the model?**

The rental market is becoming increasingly significant in many areas and so it would seem sensible that rental affordability should be factored into any calculation of housing need. We have no specific suggestions as to how this should be done. If it is incorporated in the final methodology, it will be essential that it does not further inflate overall levels of identified housing need for the reasons outlined in response to Questions 16 and 17.

**Question 19: Do you have any additional comments on the proposed method for assessing housing needs?**

The concept of an agreed 'standardised' method for assessing housing need is welcome. In the absence of such an approach, there is a danger that local authorities will all take different approaches, leading to considerable delay and debate at examination.

For this reason, we are supportive of the proposals to remove the NPPF reference to 'exceptional circumstances' which will ensure that everyone is working to the same point of reference.

However, as set out in our response to the other consultation questions, we have significant concerns about the proposed standard method both in terms of the methodology that underpins it and the outcomes it leads to.

Whilst the desire to bolster house building is fully recognised, the delays experienced in recent years are not due to local authorities developing local plans with overly low housing requirements. Rather, they are a result of a complex, multitude of issues including land assembly, lengthy Section 106 negotiations, infrastructure funding constraints etc.

There are other areas of the planning system which should be tackled first in order to bolster housing delivery, rather than adopting a new method that simply inflates the overall level of need from the outset. This will lead to unsustainable development in inappropriate locations and significant pressure on local communities and supporting infrastructure to accommodate it.

**Question 20: Do you agree that we should make the proposed change set out in paragraph 124c, as a first step towards brownfield passports?**

Yes, although the wording should be caveated so that brownfield sites which are currently in active use are not put under undue pressure from new development e.g. pressure for new homes on a site that is currently actively used for employment or commercial uses.

**Question 21: Do you agree with the proposed change to paragraph 154g of the current NPPF to better support the development of PDL in the Green Belt?**

Yes, the proposed change would encourage the use of previously developed land without compromising the openness of designated areas of Green Belt.

**Question 22: Do you have any views on expanding the definition of PDL, while ensuring that the development and maintenance of glasshouses for horticultural production is maintained?**

We support the inclusion of areas of hardstanding within the definition of previously developed land on the basis that should development come forward, there will be policy safeguards in place to ensure that no substantial harm is caused to the openness of the Green Belt.

The inclusion of glasshouses requires more careful consideration as this could lead to increased pressure from speculative development leading to the loss of existing glasshouses, including those in active use.

We would suggest that if the definition is to be expanded to include glasshouses that it should only be applied to sites that are no longer in active use or capable of being brought back into active use.

**Question 23: Do you agree with our proposed definition of grey belt land? If not, what changes would you recommend?**

No. For clarity, a distinction should be made between previously developed land and grey belt land. At the moment, grey belt land includes previously developed land which is confusing. As there is an existing definition of previously developed land within the NPPF, this should be retained and amended as appropriate (e.g. to include areas of hardstanding).

There should then be a separate and clear definition of what other land within the Green Belt could reasonably be classified as 'grey belt' land. At present, the proposed definition is vague and open to interpretation in referring to land that makes a limited contribution to the five Green Belt purposes.

Although an attempt has been made to quantify how a 'limited contribution' might be judged, those in themselves are open to interpretation. More specific criteria/guidance should be provided.

We are supportive of the concept of lower grade 'grey belt' land coming forward within the Green Belt to help meet identified development needs, but greater clarity is needed in terms of how any such land is defined and identified.

**Question 24: Are any additional measures needed to ensure that high performing Green Belt land is not degraded to meet grey belt criteria?**

This could be incorporated into a clearer definition of grey belt land. In other words, the definition should explicitly state that it will exclude any land which has obviously been purposefully degraded in order to try and meet the definition.

**Question 25: Do you agree that additional guidance to assist in identifying land which makes a limited contribution of Green Belt purposes would be helpful? If so, is this best contained in the NPPF itself or in planning practice guidance?**

Yes. As outlined above, we have concerns about the vague criteria currently identified to identify whether land makes a limited contribution and so anything that provides additional clarity on this would be welcome. In the interests of brevity, this would be better addressed within separate planning practice guidance.



**Question 26: Do you have any views on whether our proposed guidance sets out appropriate considerations for determining whether land makes a limited contribution to Green Belt purposes?**

Yes – the proposed guidance is too vague and open to interpretation. A clearer definition of grey belt land should be developed which would avoid the need for criteria to define what is meant by a ‘limited contribution’ to Green Belt purposes.

If a definition can be produced for previously developed land, we can see no reason why a definition cannot be produced for ‘grey belt’ land.

**Question 27: Do you have any views on the role that Local Nature Recovery Strategies could play in identifying areas of Green Belt which can be enhanced?**

Whilst LNRS are an emerging concept, they are likely to be able to play a key role in identifying areas of potential enhancement within the Green Belt.

The text of the NPPF or associated planning practice guidance could usefully be amended to stipulate that when Green Belt reviews are undertaken, as part of that process, full regard should be had to any existing or emerging LNRS.

**Question 28: Do you agree that our proposals support the release of land in the right places, with previously developed and grey belt land identified first, while allowing local planning authorities to prioritise the most sustainable development locations?**

Yes. The application of a sequential approach to the release of land within the Green Belt whereby the primary focus is previously developed land, followed by grey belt land then higher performing Green Belt sites, is logical and thus supported.

**Question 29: Do you agree with our proposal to make clear that the release of land should not fundamentally undermine the function of the Green Belt across the area of the plan as a whole?**

Yes, the proposed change is supported.

**Question 30: Do you agree with our approach to allowing development on Green Belt land through decision making? If not, what changes would you recommend?**

The intention to apply the release of land through decision making (as opposed to plan-making) only to previously developed land and ‘grey belt’ sites is supported. However, as set out in our response to earlier questions, the vague definition of grey belt sites is likely to lead to significant pressure from speculative development, particularly in those areas where a significant increase in housing need renders the local authority unable to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply.

Developers will simply argue that the proposed ‘golden rules’ have been met, that the site makes a limited contribution to the purpose of the Green Belt and that planning permission should be forthcoming.

We strongly feel that the proposed change to Green Belt policy, including the concept of grey belt land, if introduced, should be confined to plan-making only and properly assessed through Green Belt reviews where necessary.

**Question 31: Do you have any comments on our proposals to allow the release of grey belt land to meet commercial and other development needs through plan-making and decision-making, including the triggers for release?**

In respect of non-residential development, the proposed 'golden rules' set out in paragraph 155 of the NPPF only cover two issues – provision of necessary improvements to infrastructure and the provision of new or improved green space.

Given that these should be pre-requisites of new development in any case, it is hard to see how they provide any particular justification for releasing land within the Green Belt, either through plan-making or decision-taking.

**Question 32: Do you have views on whether the approach to the release of Green Belt through plan and decision-making should apply to traveller sites, including the sequential test for land release and the definition of PDL?**

Yes – the proposed amendments to Green Belt policy should be seen as a positive opportunity to consider the accommodation needs of the travelling community – particularly in areas of high need and unmet need.

**Question 33: Do you have views on how the assessment of need for traveller sites should be approached, in order to determine whether a local planning authority should undertake a Green Belt review?**

No specific view but it would seem sensible to benchmark the level of identified need against supply in some way so as to justify the need for Green Belt release or otherwise. As local authorities are required to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply for travelling communities, the NPPF should be revised to require a Green Belt review where there is an inadequate supply of sites identified.

**Question 34: Do you agree with our proposed approach to the affordable housing tenure mix?**

Whilst we have in principle concerns with the application of the proposed golden rules and the release of 'grey belt' land through the decision-making process, if they are to be introduced, it would seem appropriate to stipulate a high proportion of affordable housing and yet leave the proportion of different tenures, including social rented housing, to local discretion. This would allow any existing or emerging local plan policies to be able to be taken into account.

**Question 35: Should the 50 per cent target apply to all Green Belt areas (including previously developed land in the Green Belt), or should the Government or local planning authorities be able to set lower targets in low land value areas?**

The proposed wording already allows for a reduction in the proportion of affordable homes provided subject to viability. As such, the 50% target should apply as a general requirement to all Green Belt areas and not be 'tailored' individually by local authorities.

**Question 36: Do you agree with the proposed approach to securing benefits for nature and public access to green space where Green Belt release occurs?**

Yes, although the proposed wording is not ambitious or challenging enough.

If land is to be released from the Green Belt, it would be entirely appropriate to require a developer to go 'above and beyond' the standard provision of green space that would be expected from all development and yet as proposed to be worded, all that is currently required is the provision of new or improved green space that is accessible to the public.

That hardly seems particularly aspirational and should be strengthened to ensure that where land is released from the Green Belt, there is a demonstrable improvement in the level of green space provided or enhanced beyond the standard 'do minimum'.

Similarly, there is no specific reference to nature recovery. One option would be to amend the text of the NPPF to stipulate that when land is released from the Green Belt either through plan preparation or decision-making, that the national minimum default for BNG should be increased from 10% to 20%.

**Question 37: Do you agree that Government should set indicative benchmark land values for land released from or developed in the Green Belt, to inform local planning authority policy development?**

Not specific benchmark land values as this is likely to be difficult to do across a wide area with significant variables. However, it would seem appropriate for the NPPF to build on the current 'existing use value plus' approach set out in national policy and planning guidance and stipulate that when land is released for development in the green belt, in recognition of the lower 'development value' of the land, that any uplift in value should be calculated at the lower end of the spectrum e.g. no more than 10x existing use value.

**Question 38: How and at what level should Government set benchmark land values?**

See response to Question 37 above.

**Question 39: To support the delivery of the golden rules, the Government is exploring a reduction in the scope of viability negotiation by setting out that such negotiation should not occur when land will transact above the benchmark land value. Do you have any views on this approach?**

We support this approach. If land is transacting above a minimum defined benchmark land value, there must be a presumption that it is viable and a stipulation that no further negotiations in relation to viability are to take place, other than in very exceptional circumstances.

**Question 40: It is proposed that where development is policy compliant, additional contributions for affordable housing should not be sought. Do you have any views on this approach?**

By policy compliant, we assume this to mean the 'at least 50% affordable housing' referred to in proposed new paragraph 155 of the NPPF. Given the text refers to at least 50% it would seem contradictory to then stipulate that no additional contributions for affordable housing should be

sought on the grounds of viability. In some instances, it may be perfectly possible to deliver more than 50% affordable housing and this should be recognised in the new text inserted at Annex 4.

**Question 41: Do you agree that where viability negotiations do occur, and contributions below the level set in policy are agreed, development should be subject to late-stage viability reviews, to assess whether further contributions are required? What support would local planning authorities require to use these effectively?**

Yes, but the cost of any such late-stage review should be borne exclusively by the applicant and not the local authority.

**Question 42: Do you have a view on how golden rules might apply to non-residential development, including commercial development, travellers sites and types of development already considered 'not inappropriate' in the Green Belt?**

As proposed to be worded, the 'golden rules' relating to infrastructure and green space provision would apply equally to residential schemes and non-residential schemes which is appropriate. The only difference is in relation to the application of proposed criteria a) relating to affordable housing.

We have no firm view on this but it may be possible for other non-residential development to stipulate some form of alternative 'catch-all' benefit that would effectively act as a substitute for the affordable housing requirement that is intended to apply to residential development.

**Question 43: Do you have a view on whether the golden rules should apply only to 'new' Green Belt release, which occurs following these changes to the NPPF? Are there other transitional arrangements we should consider, including, for example, draft plans at the regulation 19 stage?**

So as to not impact on plans that have already reached an advanced stage of preparation, the proposed golden rules should only be applied to 'new' Green Belt release. As stipulated elsewhere under the proposed transitional arrangements for plan-making, in some instances, LPAs will be required to revise and re-publish plans that have reached the Regulation 19 stage, in which case those authorities would have the opportunity to consider how to apply the proposed 'golden rules' in any plan revisions that they are having to make.

In cases where there is no requirement to review and re-publish a local plan, it should be allowed to proceed to examination without consideration of the proposed new golden rules.

**Question 44: Do you have any comments on the proposed wording for the NPPF (Annex 4)?**

Only that it is unlikely to be possible to stipulate a single benchmark land value for greenfield and previously developed land within areas of Green Belt and that this would therefore be better expressed as 'no more than X times existing use value (EUUV)'.

**Question 45: Do you have any comments on the proposed approach set out in paragraphs 31 and 32?**

We support the concept of a potentially strengthened role for local authorities in assembling land to bring forward policy-compliant development.

**Question 46: Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?**

In referencing the provision of at least 50% affordable housing subject to viability, the proposed golden rules could usefully specifically reference the provision of a proportion of social rented homes as part of this, in line with the proposed amendments to paragraph 63 of the NPPF.

**Question 47: Do you agree with setting the expectation that local planning authorities should consider the particular needs of those who require Social Rent when undertaking needs assessments and setting policies on affordable housing requirements?**

Yes, we are fully supportive of proposals to bring forward additional social rented properties as part of the overall delivery of new affordable homes. The proposed amendments will help to strengthen the expectation that the need for social rented properties is properly assessed and reflected in planning policy.

As set out in response to Question 46 above, we can see no reason why the proposed golden rules relating to the release of Green Belt land, should not stipulate that a proportion of the 50% affordable requirement should be in the form of social rented housing.

**Question 48: Do you agree with removing the requirement to deliver 10% of housing on major sites as affordable home ownership?**

Yes. Whilst affordable home ownership options clearly have an important role to play, it should be a matter of local discretion and decision-making as to what proportion is sought rather than an arbitrary national minimum proportion.

**Question 49: Do you agree with removing the minimum 25% First Homes requirement?**

Yes, for the reasons provided in response to Question 48 above.

**Question 50: Do you have any other comments on retaining the option to deliver First Homes, including through exception sites?**

No specific comment although First Homes have a valuable role to play and should continue to be recognised in national policy including in relation to exception sites.

**Question 51: Do you agree with introducing a policy to promote developments that have a mix of tenures and types?**

Yes, mixed-tenure sites have a number of clear benefits and it is appropriate for national planning policy to provide stronger support in this respect without being overly prescriptive.

**Question 52: What would be the most appropriate way to promote high percentage Social Rent/affordable housing developments?**

This should be a matter for local plan-making based on identified housing needs and stakeholder consultation.

**Question 53: What safeguards would be required to ensure that there are not unintended consequences? For example, is there a maximum site size where development of this nature is appropriate?**

This should be a matter for local plan-making based on identified housing needs and stakeholder consultation.

**Question 54: What measures should we consider to better support and increase rural affordable housing?**

The current threshold of 5 units or lower for affordable housing provision in designated rural areas should be extended to apply to all rural areas – either in the form of on-site provision, where feasible and practical, or in the form of an off-site contribution.

The wording around the proportion of market homes on rural exception sites could also possibly be reviewed so that it is clearer that any such provision should be subsidiary to the provision of new affordable homes.

**Question 55: Do you agree with the changes proposed to paragraph 63 of the existing NPPF?**

Yes, it is essential that the needs of looked after children are taken into account in assessing housing needs. However, clarity could usefully be provided (e.g. within the supporting PPG) on how planning policies can meaningfully influence the provision of accommodation to meet such identified needs.

**Question 56: Do you agree with these changes?**

Yes, the additional flexibility regarding the definition of community-led development is considered appropriate as is the ability for local authorities to set a different size-limit for community-led exception sites through local plan making. In referring to the ‘development plan’ it is assumed that footnote 39 is intended to apply to both local plans and neighbourhood development plans but this could usefully be clarified.

**Question 57: Do you have views on whether the definition of ‘affordable housing for rent’ in the Framework glossary should be amended? If so, what changes would you recommend?**

The current definition already recognises the potential for non-registered providers to come forward in relation to build to rent schemes and so it would seem sensible to expand this to apply to other forms of affordable housing for rent, potentially with specific reference to community-led development as set out in the consultation proposals.

**Question 58: Do you have views on why insufficient small sites are being allocated, and on ways in which the small site policy in the NPPF should be strengthened?**

The 10% small-site requirement raises a number of potential difficulties for local authorities which perhaps explain why it is has not been successfully applied ‘on the ground’. In simple terms, the more allocations that are included in a local plan, the more objections tend to be raised, the more evidence needed to demonstrate soundness and the more complex the process becomes.

Smaller sites often raise issues around their cumulative impact on local infrastructure such that the infrastructure requirements of one large scheme of 1,000 homes will be much easier to identify and deliver than 100 allocations of 10 homes.

The consultation does not mention how many, if any local plans have been rejected on the basis of an insufficient number of small sites having been identified but it would be helpful to understand this.

Arguably, the national policy requirement could be strengthened and it could be made more explicit that plans will be rejected at examination if they do not make sufficient provision for a proportion of smaller schemes as part of their overall housing supply (i.e. option a as set out in the consultation).

However, this would require careful consideration so as to not impinge on plan delivery for the reasons outlined above.

Arguably greater clarity (e.g. a specific definition) of small and medium sites could assist although the same reasons for local authority reticence would probably remain.

It is not clear what is meant in the consultation by small-site strategy and so we are unable to comment on the merits of such an approach.

**Question 59: Do you agree with the proposals to retain references to well-designed buildings and places, but remove references to ‘beauty’ and ‘beautiful’ and to amend paragraph 138 of the existing Framework?**

Yes, the current references to ‘beauty’ and ‘beautiful’ are subjective and add little to the importance placed on well-designed buildings and places.

**Question 60: Do you agree with proposed changes to policy for upwards extensions?**

Yes. It was never clear why mansard roofs were singled out in particular and the proposed change to refer to mansard roofs as one form of upward extension are supported in seeking to achieve the same aim of maximising the use of existing space, whilst providing a much greater degree of local flexibility as to how this is best achieved.

**Question 61: Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?**

No.

**Question 62: Do you agree with the changes proposed to paragraphs 86 b) and 87 of the existing NPPF?**

Yes, the particular support now offered for modern economic uses is supported however the amended wording could be more neatly woven in as follows:

*‘set criteria, and identify strategic sites, for local and inward investment to match the strategy and to meet anticipated needs over the plan period. This should include consideration of appropriate sites and space for commercial development which meet the needs of a modern economy such as laboratories, gigafactories, data centres, digital infrastructure, freight and logistics’.*

**Question 63: Are there other sectors you think need particular support via these changes? What are they and why?**

It would be helpful if green industries were to be specifically referenced here in recognition of the climate emergency and the economic potential that exists in this key sector.

**Question 64: Would you support the prescription of data centres, gigafactories, and/or laboratories as types of business and commercial development which could be capable (on request) of being directed into the NSIP consenting regime?**

Yes, subject to the setting of an appropriate threshold and any other specific requirements as appropriate.

**Question 65: If the direction power is extended to these developments, should it be limited by scale, and what would be an appropriate scale if so?**

We have no specific threshold suggestion, but would simply observe that it will be important for local authorities to retain the ability to determine the majority of any such applications and so the threshold should be set such that only the very largest proposals would fall under the NSIP regime.

**Question 66: Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?**

No.

**Question 67: Do you agree with the changes proposed to paragraph 100 of the existing NPPF?**

Yes, it is entirely appropriate to afford significant weight on the provision of new, expanded or enhanced public service infrastructure when development proposals are considered.

**Question 68: Do you agree with the changes proposed to paragraph 99 of the existing NPPF?**

Yes, the proposals relating to the provision of post-16 education and early year's provision are strongly supported.

**Question 69: Do you agree with the changes proposed to paragraphs 114 and 115 of the existing NPPF?**

Yes, it is essential that local authorities move away from a past-trend based 'predict and provide' approach and towards a more visionary 'decide and provide' approach. This is already being reflected in an increasing number of local transport plans including the Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5). As such, it will be helpful for such an approach to be embedded in the NPPF and any associated planning practice guidance.

**Question 70: How could national planning policy better support local authorities in (a) promoting healthy communities and (b) tackling childhood obesity?**

National planning policy could usefully be amended to refer specifically to the concept of 'healthy place shaping' which could usefully be defined within the glossary of the NPPF and in any accompanying planning practice guidance.



Specific reference could also usefully be made to the use of Health Impact Assessments (HIA) both in plan-making and decision-taking.

The specific example provided in the consultation of avoiding hot food takeaways near schools is a helpful example to include as we understand some local authorities have successfully taken forward such policies, whilst others have failed at examination.

If the NPPF were to explicitly state that the locational aspects of development should take into account health considerations including the availability of healthy food choices, that would be very helpful in providing clarity to local authorities on what policies are likely to succeed at examination.

**Question 71: Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?**

No.

**Question 72: Do you agree that large onshore wind projects should be reintegrated into the NSIP regime?**

Yes, given the potential scale and nature of such proposals, it would seem appropriate that they are dealt with under the NSIP regime.

**Question 73: Do you agree with the proposed changes to the NPPF to give greater support to renewable and low carbon energy?**

The proposed amendment to paragraph 160 is supported in strengthening the expectation that local authorities identify suitable areas for renewable and low carbon energy sources. The text (or accompanying practice guidance) could usefully be amended to clarify that this is referring to both the delineation of broad areas of suitability as well as specific sites.

The proposed amendments to paragraph 163 and 164 are also supported but could usefully be strengthened with cross-reference to the December 2023 Written Ministerial Statement on Energy Efficiency, making it clear that local authorities are able to set their own standards in excess of current and planned building regulations subject to specific caveats.

**Question 74: Some habitats, such as those containing peat soils, might be considered unsuitable for renewable energy development due to their role in carbon sequestration. Should there be additional protections for such habitats and/or compensatory mechanisms put in place?**

An additional criteria should be added to the re-numbered paragraph 161 to ensure that in plan-making, local authorities take account of any such sensitivities in seeking to increase the supply and use of renewable and low carbon energy and heat.

Paragraph 164 in applying to decision-taking should be amended in the same way.

**Question 75: Do you agree that the threshold at which onshore wind projects are deemed to be Nationally Significant and therefore consented under the NSIP regime should be changed from 50 megawatts (MW) to 100MW?**

Yes, for the reasons set out in the consultation paper, it would seem appropriate to increase the threshold.

**Question 76: Do you agree that the threshold at which solar projects are deemed to be Nationally Significant and therefore consented under the NSIP regime should be changed from 50MW to 150MW?**

Yes, for the reasons set out in the consultation paper, it would seem appropriate to increase the threshold.

**Question 77: If you think that alternative thresholds should apply to onshore wind and/or solar, what would these be?**

Not applicable.

**Question 78: In what specific, deliverable ways could national planning policy do more to address climate change mitigation and adaptation?**

National policy should be strengthened in a number of ways.

Firstly, in relation to the issue of new build development it should be made clear that local authorities can set energy efficiency requirements which exceed building regulations in line with the December 2023 Written Ministerial Statement.

Policy should be updated to refer to the use of water efficiency standards, making it clear that subject to evidence on water scarcity and viability, that local authorities can choose to introduce more stringent requirements that go beyond the current optional building regulations.

It should also be updated to emphasise the importance of an integrated approach being taken in relation to the water environment such that issues of flood risk, drainage, supply, waste water and efficiency are dealt with in a holistic manner.

National policy could also be stronger in relation to the issue of retro-fitting renewable and low carbon energy solutions, with specific planning practice guidance on how such issues should be approached in areas where there are heritage sensitivities.

Stronger reference should also be made in relation to the inter-relationship between local plan policy and nature recovery strategies. Current references to LNRS are very limited and could usefully be expanded to ensure that they are properly reflected through plan-making.

**Question 79: What is your view of the current state of technological readiness and availability of tools for accurate carbon accounting in plan-making and planning decisions, and what are the challenges to increasing its use?**

TBC

**Question 80: Are any changes needed to policy for managing flood risk to improve its effectiveness?**

As per our response to Question 79, national policy should be updated to emphasise the importance of an integrated approach being taken in relation to the water environment such that issues of flood risk, drainage, supply, wastewater and efficiency are dealt with in a holistic manner.

**Question 81: Do you have any other comments on actions that can be taken through planning to address climate change?**

TBC

**Question 82: Do you agree with removal of this text from the footnote?**

No, we cannot see any reason for this footnote to be removed. It is entirely appropriate for agricultural land classification to be taken into account as one of a number of considerations in determining which sites should come forward for development.

**Question 83: Are there other ways in which we can ensure that development supports and does not compromise food production?**

Yes, linked to the issue of healthy place shaping, there should be stronger national policy support for the creation of healthier food environments, use of local food production (e.g. allotments and community gardens) and shortening of food supply chains.

**Question 84: Do you agree that we should improve the current water infrastructure provisions in the Planning Act 2008, and do you have specific suggestions for how best to do this?**

Water scarcity is a live issue for Oxfordshire and the wider south-east region and so we are fully supportive of proposals to provide greater water supply resilience. It is essential that the primary focus of Government action is on ensuring that water companies remedy existing deficiencies within the water supply infrastructure network (leaks etc.) and also seek to provide any necessary upgrades to supply and disposal at the earliest possible stage.

National planning policy should be strengthened to ensure that as part of the infrastructure planning work that accompanies local plan-making, that proper regard is had to the timely provision of supporting water infrastructure.

It may be appropriate for national planning policy to make reference to the use of Grampian planning conditions whereby the occupancy of development is restricted until the necessary upgrades to supporting infrastructure (e.g. foul water capacity) have been made.

On the basis that subsuming certain water infrastructure projects within the NSIP regime has the potential to improve the effectiveness and timeliness of delivery, we would be supportive of such intentions.

**Question 85: Are there other areas of the water infrastructure provisions that could be improved? If so, can you explain what those are, including your proposed changes?**

See previous response to Question 84 above.

**Question 86: Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?**

No.

**Question 87: Do you agree that we should we replace the existing intervention policy criteria with the revised criteria set out in this consultation?**

Yes, the revised criteria are succinct and clear, whilst providing flexibility and the ability for LPAs to put forward any exceptional circumstances. As such, they are supported.

**Question 88: Alternatively, would you support us withdrawing the criteria and relying on the existing legal tests to underpin future use of intervention powers?**

No, we support the use of the revised criteria outlined in relation to Question 87.

**Question 89: Do you agree with the proposal to increase householder application fees to meet cost recovery?**

Yes, this appears to be evidentially based and whilst the fee increase is not insignificant, it will remain a relatively small proportion of the overall cost of any such development.

**Question 90: If no, do you support increasing the fee by a smaller amount (at a level less than full cost recovery) and if so, what should the fee increase be? For example, a 50% increase to the householder fee would increase the application fee from £258 to £387.**

No – we support the proposed increase to £528 for the reasons outlined above.

**If Yes, please explain in the text box what you consider an appropriate fee increase would be.**

We support the proposed increase to £528 for the reasons outlined above.

**Question 91: If we proceed to increase householder fees to meet cost recovery, we have estimated that to meet cost-recovery, the householder application fee should be increased to £528. Do you agree with this estimate?**

Yes

**If No, please explain in the text box below and provide evidence to demonstrate what you consider the correct fee should be.**

N/a

**Question 92: Are there any applications for which the current fee is inadequate? Please explain your reasons and provide evidence on what you consider the correct fee should be.**

TBC

**Question 93: Are there any application types for which fees are not currently charged but which should require a fee? Please explain your reasons and provide evidence on what you consider the correct fee should be.**

TBC

**Question 94: Do you consider that each local planning authority should be able to set its own (non-profit making) planning application fee?**

Yes

**Please give your reasons in the text box below.**

To provide greater local discretion whilst set within an overarching national framework (i.e. a local variation model) – see response to Question 95 below.

**Question 95: What would be your preferred model for localisation of planning fees?**

Local Variation – Maintain a nationally-set default fee and giving local planning authorities the option to set all or some fees locally.

**Please give your reasons in the text box below.**

This would provide a good degree of local discretion based on evidence of incurred costs and the type of applications that come forward whilst providing a degree of certainty for applicants by being set within a guideline national framework.

**Question 96: Do you consider that planning fees should be increased, beyond cost recovery, for planning applications services, to fund wider planning services?**

Yes, in principle and the adoption of a local variation model would allow this to happen based on evidence of incurred costs and the type of applications that come forward whilst providing a degree of certainty for applicants by being set within a guideline national framework.

**If yes, please explain what you consider an appropriate increase would be and whether this should apply to all applications or, for example, just applications for major development?**

This should be a matter for local discretion based on a local variation model with each LPA required to assess and determine an appropriate increase set within a national framework of guideline fees.

**Question 97: What wider planning services, if any, other than planning applications (development management) services, do you consider could be paid for by planning fees?**

Climate, heritage, landscape, design and tree advice would all seem appropriate candidates for the application of wider planning fees, as these often require significant input and resource which will stray well beyond current fees, particularly for householder applications.

**Question 98: Do you consider that cost recovery for relevant services provided by local authorities in relation to applications for development consent orders under the Planning Act 2008, payable by applicants, should be introduced?**

Yes, the costs incurred by local authorities in dealing with NSIP projects are often significant and yet dealt with on an informal basis through planning performance agreements. The introduction of specific planning application fees would help to provide greater certainty for all parties and potentially better meet the actual costs incurred.

**Question 99: If yes, please explain any particular issues that the Government may want to consider, in particular which local planning authorities should be able to recover costs and the relevant services which they should be able to recover costs for, and whether host authorities should be able to waive fees where planning performance agreements are made.**

Cost recovery through planning application fees should be in place for category 'B' and 'C' (host) local authorities who directly incur the greatest proportion of costs in dealing with such applications. The costs of any neighbouring authorities (categories A and D) should continue to be recovered through planning performance agreements.

We support the proposed flexibility of the arrangement whereby a planning fee can be waived in favour of a planning performance agreement where this is already in place or where the local authority determines this to be the more appropriate route.

**Question 100: What limitations, if any, should be set in regulations or through guidance in relation to local authorities' ability to recover costs?**

No limitations should be prescribed. We support the use of a 'local variation' model for charging planning fees and this should be extended to include fees payable under the NSIP regime to provide an overarching national framework within which local authorities can then choose to set an appropriate local fee based on the scale and specific nature of the application proposed.

**Question 101: Please provide any further information on what the impacts of full or partial cost recovery are likely to be for local planning authorities and applicants. We would particularly welcome evidence of the costs associated with work undertaken by local authorities in relation to applications for development consent.**

As outlined in response to the previous consultation questions above, in some instances, the nature and scale of NSIP proposals are such that significant LPA resources are required to facilitate the process, particularly for host authorities.

We consider that the Government should adopt a local variation model for the charging of planning fees and that this should be extended to include the NSIP regime. In doing so, the Government could usefully undertake some analysis of the costs incurred by engaging directly with host authorities involved in a selection of NSIP schemes. This would help to determine a suitable national guideline fee framework within which local authorities could then seek a local variation where appropriate and evidenced.

**Question 102: Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?**

No.

**Question 103: Do you agree with the proposed transitional arrangements? Are there any alternatives you think we should consider?**

Whilst we support the proposed transitional arrangements in a general sense, it would seem appropriate to allow those authorities that have reached the Regulation 19 stage to proceed to examination under the current NPPF irrespective of any differences in housing requirement.

**Question 104: Do you agree with the proposed transitional arrangements?**

Yes, in particular the proposed extension of time from June 2025 to December 2026 for plans to be submitted and examined under the current plan-making regime. This is essential given the significant implications associated with the proposed new standard method.

**Question 105: Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?**

No.

**Question 106: Do you have any views on the impacts of the above proposals for you, or the group or business you represent and on anyone with a relevant protected characteristic? If so, please explain who, which groups, including those with protected characteristics, or which businesses may be impacted and how. Is there anything that could be done to mitigate any impact identified?**

No.

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WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE WORK PROGRAMME  
INCORPORATING NOTICE OF DECISIONS PROPOSED TO BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE  
SESSION AND NOTICE OF INTENTION TO MAKE A KEY DECISION  
1 SEPTEMBER 2024 – 31 DECEMBER 2024 V3

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 Executive 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 Executive. 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 Executive are made available on the Council's website at [www.westoxon.gov.uk/meetings](http://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 Executive 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, Oxfordshire 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 £150,000 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 Executive, that decision will not be a key decision.

### **Matters To Be Considered in Private**

The great majority of matters considered by the Council's Executive 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](mailto:democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk) Tel: 01993 861000.

West Oxfordshire District Council: Executive Members 2024/25

Name of Councillor	Title and Areas of Responsibility
Andy Graham (Leader)	<b>Leader of the Council:</b> Overview of all Executive Portfolios; Policy Framework; Town and Parish Council Engagement; Council Plan; Strategic Partnerships (including Pan Regional Partnership, Future Oxfordshire, South East Councils and OXLEP); Oxfordshire Leaders; Publica and Partnerships Authorities and Ubico; Democratic Services; Communications; Legal Services; Counter Fraud; Emergency Planning; Assets of Community Value; Customer Services.
Duncan Enright (Deputy Leader)	<b>Economic Development:</b> Economic Development; Business Development; Visitor Economy; Town and Village Regeneration; Customer Services.
Alaric Smith	<b>Finance:</b> Finance & Management; Council Tax and Benefits; Asset Management; South West Audit Partnership; Performance Management; Capital Investment Strategy; Strategic Housing Investment; Financial Aspects of Major Projects; Customer Services.
Hugo Ashton	<b>Planning:</b> Local Plan; Government Planning Policies and Guidance; Development Management; Ensuring Planning Policies meet 2030 Requirements; Customer Services.
Tim Sumner	<b>Leisure and Major Projects:</b> ; Conservation and Historic Environment; Leisure Provision (including Swimming Pools); Culture and Heritage; Public Art; Agile Working; Car Parking; Customer Services.
Rizvana Poole	<b>Stronger, Healthy Communities:</b> Voluntary Sector Engagement; Health and Safety; Community and Public Health; Refugee Resettlement Programme; Young People; Equality and Diversity; Customer Services.
Geoff Saul	<b>Housing and Social Care:</b> 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; Customer Services.
Lidia Arciszewska	<b>Environment:</b> Flood Alleviation/Natural Flood Management and Sewage; Environmental Partnerships – WASP and Evenlode; North East Cotswold Cluster; Waste Collection and Recycling; Landscape and Biodiversity; Air Quality; Land Use, Food Production and Farming; Street Scene (Cleansing, Litter and Grounds Maintenance); Customer Services.
Andrew Prosser	<b>Climate Action and Nature Recovery:</b> Energy Advice; Renewable Energy and RetroFit Investment; Biodiversity (Across the District); Carbon Neutral by 2030; Fossil Fuel Dependence Reduction; Local, National and County Liaison on Climate Change; Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Rollout; Customer Services.

For further information about the above and all members of the Council please see [www.westoxon.gov.uk/councillors](http://www.westoxon.gov.uk/councillors)

Item for Decision	Key Decision (Yes / No)	Open or Exempt	Decision – Maker	Date of Decision	Executive Member	Lead Officer
Mid-Point Review of Car Parking Strategy	No	Open	Executive	11 Sep 2024	Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects - Cllr Tim Sumner	Susan Hughes, Business Manager for Support and Advice <a href="mailto:Susan.Hughes@publicagroup.uk">Susan.Hughes@publicagroup.uk</a>
Financial Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter One	No	Open	Executive	11 Sep 2024	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance <a href="mailto:madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk">madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Service Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter One	No	Open	Executive	11 Sep 2024	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst <a href="mailto:Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk">Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk</a>
Storage of Non-Motor Vehicles and Structures on the Public Highway Policy	No	Open	Executive	11 Sep 2024	Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment.	Mandy Fathers, Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service <a href="mailto:mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk">mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk</a>
Allocation of S106 Monies to Witney Town Council to Design, Build and Operate a New Third Generation (3G) Pitch at West Witney Sports Ground	No	Open	Executive	11 Sep 2024	Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects - Cllr Tim Sumner	Rachel Biles – Strategic Leisure Lead <a href="mailto:rachel.biles@publicagroup.uk">rachel.biles@publicagroup.uk</a>
Carterton Leisure Centre Decarbonisation	Yes	Open	Executive	11 Sep 2024	Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery - Cllr Andrew Prosser	Assistant Director - Property and Regeneration - Claire Locke <a href="mailto:claire.locke@publicagroup.uk">claire.locke@publicagroup.uk</a>
Witney & Chipping Norton Air Quality Action Plan	No	Open	Executive	11 Sep 2024	Executive Member for Environment - Cllr Lidia Arciszewska	Susan McPherson – Senior Officer <a href="mailto:Susan.McPherson@publicagroup.uk">Susan.McPherson@publicagroup.uk</a>

Proposed Reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the Planning System	No	Open	Executive	11 Sep 2024	Executive Member for Planning - Cllr Hugo Ashton	Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager <a href="mailto:chris.hargraves@publicagroup.uk">chris.hargraves@publicagroup.uk</a>
Dry Mixed Recycling Bulking and Haulage Contract	Yes	Part exempt	Executive	11 Sep 2024	Executive Member for Environment - Cllr Lidia Arciszewska	Simon Anthony, Business Manager - Environmental Services <a href="mailto:Simon.Anthony@publicagroup.uk">Simon.Anthony@publicagroup.uk</a>
Waste Fleet Purchase	No	Open	Executive	9 Oct 2024	Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment	Bill Oddy, Assistant Director for Commercial Development <a href="mailto:Bill.Oddy@publicagroup.uk">Bill.Oddy@publicagroup.uk</a>
Public Health Funeral Policy	No	Open	Executive	9 Oct 2024	Executive Member for Environment - Cllr Lidia Arciszewska	Mandy Fathers, Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service <a href="mailto:mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk">mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk</a>
Council Tax Premiums – Second Homes and Long Term Empty Properties	Yes	Open	Executive	9 Oct 2024	Executive Member for Housing and Social Care - Cllr Geoff Saul	Mandy Fathers, Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service <a href="mailto:mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk">mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk</a>
West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 – Preferred Options Consultation	No	Open	Executive	9 Oct 2024	Executive Member for Planning - Cllr Hugo Ashton	Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager <a href="mailto:chris.hargraves@publicagroup.uk">chris.hargraves@publicagroup.uk</a>
Infrastructure Funding Statement 2023/24	No	Open	Executive	9 Oct 2024	Executive Member for Planning - Cllr Hugo Ashton	Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager <a href="mailto:chris.hargraves@publicagroup.uk">chris.hargraves@publicagroup.uk</a>
Adoption of Asset Management Plan	Yes	Open	Executive	9 Oct 2024	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Assistant Director - Property and Regeneration - Claire Locke <a href="mailto:claire.locke@publicagroup.uk">claire.locke@publicagroup.uk</a>
Long Term Empty Properties	Yes	Open	Executive Council	9 Oct 2024 27 Nov 2024	Executive Member for Housing and Social Care - Cllr Geoff Saul	Mandy Fathers, Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service <a href="mailto:mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk">mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk</a>

Funding for Works on Investment Property	Yes	Open	Executive	9 Oct 2024	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Jasmine McWilliams, Assets Manager <a href="mailto:jasmine.mcwilliams@publicagroup.p.uk">jasmine.mcwilliams@publicagroup.p.uk</a>
Strategic Outcomes Planning Model (Leisure and Wellbeing Strategy)	No	Open	Executive	13 Nov 2024	Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects - Cllr Tim Sumner	Rachel Biles – Strategic Leisure Lead <a href="mailto:rachel.biles@publicagroup.p.uk">rachel.biles@publicagroup.p.uk</a>
Annual Monitoring Report	No	Open	Executive	13 Nov 2024	Executive Member for Planning - Cllr Hugo Ashton	Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager <a href="mailto:chris.hargraves@publicagroup.p.uk">chris.hargraves@publicagroup.p.uk</a>
Financial Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Two	No	Open	Executive	13 Nov 2024	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance <a href="mailto:madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk">madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit Collaboration Agreement	No	Open	Executive	13 Nov 2024	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Emma Cathcart, Head of Service, Counter Fraud and Enforcement Unit <a href="mailto:emma.cathcart@cotswold.gov.uk">emma.cathcart@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Council Tax Support Scheme 2025/2026	Yes	Open	Executive	13 Nov 2024	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Mandy Fathers, Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service <a href="mailto:mandy.fathers@publicagroup.p.uk">mandy.fathers@publicagroup.p.uk</a>
Funding for Works at Carterton Investment Property	Yes	Open	Executive	13 Nov 2024	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Jasmine McWilliams, Assets Manager <a href="mailto:jasmine.mcwilliams@publicagroup.p.uk">jasmine.mcwilliams@publicagroup.p.uk</a>
Climate Change Strategy	Yes	Open	Executive	13 Nov 2024	Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery - Cllr Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon, Climate Change Manager <a href="mailto:hannah.kenyon@westoxon.gov.uk">hannah.kenyon@westoxon.gov.uk</a>

Knights Court Business Case	No	Open	Executive	11 Dec 2024	Executive Member for Housing and Social Care - Cllr Geoff Saul	Business Manager Assets & Council Priorities - Andrew Turner <a href="mailto:Andrew.turner@publicagroup.uk">Andrew.turner@publicagroup.uk</a>
Service Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Two	No	Open	Executive	11 Dec 2024	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst <a href="mailto:Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk">Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk</a>
Draft Budget 2025 – 2026, Version One	No	Open	Executive	11 Dec 2024	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance <a href="mailto:madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk">madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Affordable Housing Delivery Update	No	Open	Executive	11 Dec 2024	Executive Member for Housing and Social Care - Cllr Geoff Saul	Michael David, Housing Delivery Programme Manager <a href="mailto:michael.david@westoxon.gov.uk">michael.david@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Contract Award for the Parking ICT System	No	Fully Exempt	Executive	11 Dec 2024	Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects - Cllr Tim Sumner	Maria Wheatley, Shared Parking Manager <a href="mailto:maria.wheatley@publicagroup.uk">maria.wheatley@publicagroup.uk</a>
Draft Budget 2025 – 2026, Version Two	No	Open	Executive	15 Jan 2025	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance <a href="mailto:madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk">madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Budget 2025 – 2026	No	Open	Executive Council	12 Feb 2025 26 Feb 2025	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance <a href="mailto:madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk">madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Financial Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Three	No	Open	Executive	12 Mar 2025	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance <a href="mailto:madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk">madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Service Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Three	No	Open	Executive	12 Mar 2025	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst <a href="mailto:Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk">Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk</a>

West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 – Regulation 19 Pre-Submission Draft Consultation	No	Open	Executive	12 Mar 2025	Executive Member for Planning - Cllr Hugo Ashton	Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager <a href="mailto:chris.hargraves@publicagroup.uk">chris.hargraves@publicagroup.uk</a>
<b>Key Decisions Delegated to Officers</b>						
Standing Delegation: Settlement of Legal Claims	Yes	Open	Interim Head of Legal Services - Helen Blundell	Before 31 Dec 2024	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham, Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Helen Blundell, Interim Head of Legal Services <a href="mailto:helen.blundell@fdean.gov.uk">helen.blundell@fdean.gov.uk</a>
Review and Repurpose Earmarked Reserves to Mitigate against Four Main Financial Risks	No	Open	Director of Finance - Madhu Richards	31 Dec 2024	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance <a href="mailto:madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk">madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Allocation of New Initiatives Funding	Yes	Open	Chief Executive & Head of Paid Service - Giles Hughes	Before 31 Mar 2025	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive <a href="mailto:giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk">giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Allocate Funding from the Project Contingency Earmarked Reserve	Yes	Open	Director of Finance - Madhu Richards	Before 31 Mar 2025	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance <a href="mailto:madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk">madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
<b>Other Business for Council Meetings</b>						
Polling District and Places Review	No	Open	Council	25 Sep 2024	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Sharon Ellison, Electoral Services Manager <a href="mailto:sharon.ellison@westoxon.gov.uk">sharon.ellison@westoxon.gov.uk</a>
Appointment of Independent Persons	No	Open	Council	25 Sep 2024	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business Manager <a href="mailto:andrew.brown@publicagroup.uk">andrew.brown@publicagroup.uk</a>



District Boundary Review - Council Size Proposal	No	Open	Council	27 Nov 2024	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business Manager <a href="mailto:andrew.brown@publicagroup.uk">andrew.brown@publicagroup.uk</a>
Long Term Empty Properties	Yes	Open	Council	27 Nov 2024	Executive Member for Housing and Social Care - Cllr Geoff Saul	Mandy Fathers, Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service <a href="mailto:mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk">mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk</a>
Review of Members' Allowances Scheme	No	Open	Council	29 Jan 2025	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business Manager <a href="mailto:andrew.brown@publicagroup.uk">andrew.brown@publicagroup.uk</a>
Community Governance Reviews	No	Open	Council	26 Mar 2025	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business Manager <a href="mailto:andrew.brown@publicagroup.uk">andrew.brown@publicagroup.uk</a>

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WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME  
1 JULY 2024 – 31 OCTOBER 2024

**Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Council currently operates the Strong Leader and Executive form of governance. The Council has appointed one Overview and Scrutiny Committee which has the power to investigate Executive decisions and any other matters relevant to the district and its people, making recommendations to the Council, Executive or any other Committee or Sub-Committee of the Council. Overview and Scrutiny has an important role in holding the Executive to account and in contributing to policy development.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee operates a work plan which is agreed annually but provides for flexibility to enable the Committee to respond to emerging issues or priorities. The work plan will include a mix of Executive reports that have been selected for pre-decision scrutiny, and reports on other Council services, topics or issues which have been specifically requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In setting and reviewing its work plan, the Committee will be mindful of the constraints of the organisation and may prioritise based on the following considerations (TOPIC criteria):

**Timeliness:** Is it timely to consider this issue?

**Organisational priority:** Is it a Council priority?

**Public Interest:** Is it of significant public interest?

**Influence:** Can Scrutiny have meaningful influence?

**Cost:** Does it involve a high level of expenditure, income or savings?

**Call in**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider any “call-in” of an executive decision that has been made but not yet implemented. This enables the Committee to consider whether the decision made is appropriate given all relevant information (but not because it would have made a different decision). It may recommend that the Executive, an Executive Member or the Council should reconsider the decision.

Item	Executive Member	Lead Officer
<b>Wednesday, 4 September 2024</b>		
Development Management Improvement Programme	Executive Member for Planning - Cllr Hugo Ashton	Phil Shaw, Business Manager - Development Management phil.shaw@publicagroup.uk
Responding to external consultations	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Service Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter One	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk
Financial Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter One	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk
<b>Wednesday, 2 October 2024</b>		
Supporting market town and village centres	Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development - Cllr Duncan Enright	Philippa Lowe, Business Manager Localities philippa.lowe@publicagroup.uk
<b>Wednesday, 6 November 2024</b>		
Climate Change Strategy	Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery - Cllr Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon, Climate Change Manager hannah.kenyon@westoxon.gov.uk
District Boundary Review - Council Size Proposal	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Andrew Brown, Democratic Services Business Manager andrew.brown@publicagroup.uk

Annual Monitoring Report	Executive Member for Planning - Cllr Hugo Ashton	Chris Hargraves, Planning Policy Manager chris.hargraves@publicagroup.uk
Financial Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Two	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk
<b>Wednesday, 4 December 2024</b>		
Knights Court Business Case	Executive Member for Housing and Social Care - Cllr Geoff Saul	Business Manager Assets & Council Priorities - Andrew Turner
Affordable Housing Delivery	Executive Member for Housing and Social Care - Cllr Geoff Saul	Charlie Jackson, Assistant Director - Planning and Sustainability charlie.jackson@publicagroup.uk
Service Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Two	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk
Draft Budget 2025 – 2026, Version One	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk
<b>Wednesday, 8 January 2025</b>		
Draft Budget 2025 – 2026, Version Two	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk
<b>Wednesday, 5 February 2025</b>		
Budget 2025 – 2026	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance

	Smith	madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk
<b>Wednesday, 5 March 2025</b>		
Service Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Three	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk
Financial Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Three	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk
Community Grants	Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities - Cllr Rizvana Poole	Andy Barge, Assistant Director for Communities andy.barge@publicagroup.uk
<b>Wednesday, 16 April 2025 - no items currently scheduled</b>		