

# PUBLICA

## Business Plan

2024-2025

# PUBLICICA

We are proud to present to the shareholder councils the Publica Business Plan for 2024-2025.



Christine Gore  
Chair of the Board



Frank Wilson  
Interim Managing Director

In August 2023 the shareholder councils commissioned a review of Publica to examine whether the business model still suited the needs of the councils moving forward. The review's conclusions were presented to the Councils in the Autumn and recommended that most services be transferred back to council control. Over the following two months the councils took decisions to endorse the recommendations in the report. As a consequence of this decision the current three-year 2022-2025 business plan needs refreshing for the final year.

Our three priorities in the current business plan (Place, People, Planet) are supplemented by a further priority called Transition. This will ensure the organisation is focused on delivering the councils' priorities as well as supporting our employees through the transition to a new operating framework over the next year.

Firstly, **Place** - We are committed to delivering the Shareholder Councils' priorities and realising the benefits for local communities. We are also focused on maintaining our high performance and service quality through the transition, with residents and businesses at the heart of what we do.

Next, our **People** - We are incredibly proud of our employees and their commitment to delivering public services; they frequently go the extra mile to help and support residents. We are committed to supporting them through the transition and working with Trade Unions and Shareholder Councils.

Next, **Planet** - Tackling climate change is the challenge of our generation, and with each shareholder council declaring a climate emergency as well as an ecological/biodiversity emergency, we will make our response central to all we do.

Finally, **The Transition** - As part of the transition, we will support the Shareholder Councils implement a partnership operating model to reflect the new arrangements and we are fully committed to working collaboratively to deliver a safe and secure structure and governance arrangements that delivers the ambitions of the councils and meets the needs of residents.

This business plan and the priorities will be delivered against a very significant local government financial challenge with latest forecasts suggesting that our shareholder councils will need to fill an emerging funding gap in the future.

# The Publica Business Plan

Publica's Articles of Association have twelve reserved matters for Shareholder Council approval, these ensure they retain the necessary control over their Teckal company. Adopting or amending the Business Plan is one of the reserved matters.

The previous business plan was for three years, but this one is for twelve months to reflect the transition period the partnership is in. The main purpose of this plan is to:

## Focus

Focus the organisation on delivering the Shareholder Councils priorities.

## Provide

Provide clear messaging to employees on the priorities over the next year.

## Acknowledge

Acknowledge Publica (and the shareholder councils) are in a 'transition period'.

## Ensure

Ensure there is a clear focus on supporting Publica employees through transition and manage service changes effectively.

## Focus

Focus on the planning for the 'New Publica' and co-creating a new operating model and governance arrangements in partnership with the Shareholder Councils.

## The Publica Values

The Publica values will continue to help and guide us through the transition.

### Authentic

We act genuinely and transparently. We do the right thing for our customers, our organisation and each other.

### Modern

We are not set in our ways. We are constantly looking to find ways to innovate and do things smarter.

### Flexible

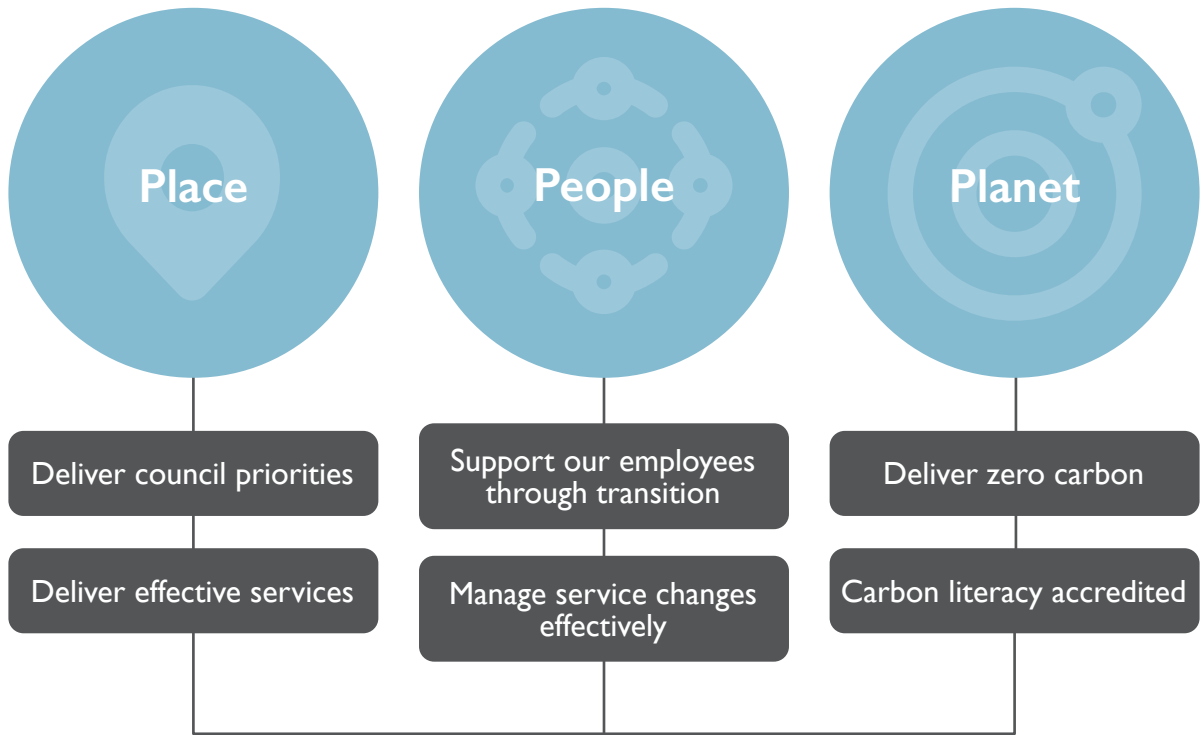
We are agile - adapting how and what we do to meet the demands of our customers, our colleagues, our local communities and the needs of the modern world.

### Thoughtful

We take pride in delivering a great service, taking the time to understand and care about the planet and the environment, as well as our customers and their needs.

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# Our Priorities



Support the transfer of services

Explore options for a new operating model

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# Place: Deliver council priorities & effective operational services

## Deliver council priorities

Shareholder councils have ambitious plans to deliver their priorities which are outlined below. We are committed to delivering key projects with the shareholder councils, being flexible and agile to emerging priorities, and realising the benefits for local communities. The Councils and Publica produce annual reports which highlight progress against their priorities and key achievements.

## Deliver effective services

Publica delivers a collection of front line operational, back-office support, and strategic policy functions for the shareholder councils. Effective, modern services are at the heart of ensuring that we deliver the best possible outcomes for local residents and businesses at the best possible value for the shareholder councils.

Services work closely with a multitude of local stakeholders to deliver Council priorities including community groups, the voluntary sector, and Town and Parish Councils. They also have contracts with service providers delivering services like leisure and waste.

We know that these services are performing effectively because national headline performance reports place shareholder councils well above the midpoint, in the upper and top quartiles, when compared to other district authorities. Through the

transition period we will carefully monitor business performance through the Performance Board and corporate reporting, ensuring that the hard work we have put into improvement is maintained. Recent advances, enabling the provision of current performance information, will be critical in supporting a high level of assurance to the councils during the transition.

The Shareholder Councils and Publica have already delivered £3m of recurring annual savings since 2017 (Total cumulative cash savings are forecast to reach £21m by the end of March 2025 based on current projections) alongside making significant investment and progress in transforming and modernising services, leading to high levels of customer satisfaction. The challenge is to maintain this progress during and after transition to the new operating framework.

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The Shareholder Councils and Publica have already delivered £3m of recurring annual savings since 2017





Cotswold District Council	Cheltenham Borough Council	Forest of Dean District Council	West Oxfordshire District Council
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delivering Good Services</li> <li>• Responding to the Climate Emergency</li> <li>• Delivering Housing</li> <li>• Supporting Communities</li> <li>• Supporting the Economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhance Cheltenham's reputation as the cyber capital of the UK</li> <li>• Working with residents, communities and businesses to help make Cheltenham net zero by 2030</li> <li>• Increasing the number of affordable homes through our £180m housing investment plan</li> <li>• Ensuring residents, communities and businesses benefit from Cheltenham's future growth and prosperity</li> <li>• Being a more modern, efficient and financially sustainable council</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thriving Communities - To foster resilient and inclusive communities that are motivated and competent to adapt to the challenges and opportunities posed by the climate and nature emergencies</li> <li>• Decarbonisation and Nature Recovery - For the Forest of Dean to have a protected and enhanced natural environment, and be on target to be carbon neutral by 2030</li> <li>• Sustainable Economy - To foster economic prosperity while ensuring environmental sustainability and social well-being</li> </ul>	<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 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>





# People: Supporting our employees through transition and manage service changes effectively

As a people organisation, we are very proud of our employees and their commitment to delivering public services; they frequently go the extra mile to help and support residents. We will only accomplish our collective aims and deliver our priorities if the very best in class people work for us across our partnership. We need to harness the enthusiasm our employees have to deliver great services and ensure that they are focused on delivering council priorities over the next year through the transition period.

## Supporting our people through transition

During 2023, an options appraisal was undertaken by the shareholder councils. The final report recommended that a number of operational services should be moved back to the councils to provide them with more autonomy over individual strategies for service delivery and shaping future services. This will leave the Publica of the future as a leaner organisation. Each of the four councils are working in partnership to create a phased transition plan to establish which services and the order in which they will be transferred. We are committed to working with them and our recognised trade unions to ensure the transition is seamless for our employees and minimises the impact on service performance or quality.

- I Clear communication and engagement channels - We have already held employee briefings and created a dedicated page on the portal
- II A clear migration proposal and consultation plan to ensure that the transition is expeditious and successful
- III Upskilling managers to ensure that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to support employees through change - We have completed a training needs survey with our employees that will shape this
- IV Raising awareness of employees' support services to maintain employee wellbeing - We provide our employees with an extensive free wellbeing support programme.

## Manage service changes effectively

A transition team, led by a Programme Director, has been established to oversee the entire transition process. The team will be responsible for managing and coordinating a programme of change and providing a clear route forward in agreement with the Shareholder Councils. As our employees are at the heart of all we do, we recognise the importance of keeping them informed and engaged with the change process and this will include:

We have already completed an employee welfare survey and adopted an action plan to improve wellbeing as part of monitoring the impact of the transition on our employees. We are also committed to working with recognised trade unions to achieve the best possible outcomes for employees. Our meetings with local and regional trade union representatives, as well as the Employees Forum, provide the framework by which we can obtain useful feedback, share ideas and discuss issues.



# Planet: Reach Net-Zero Carbon and obtain Carbon Literacy Accreditation

Tackling climate change is a global challenge. Each shareholder council has declared a climate emergency as well as an ecological and biodiversity emergency, and we will continue to make our response to these crises central to all we do. Tackling the climate emergency will become a key focus through all our activity at Publica, meaning we will put it at the centre, so it has the urgent focus it requires.

Publica's carbon footprint is intrinsically linked with that of our shareholding councils, so it is vital that we play our full part in the push to achieve net zero carbon by 2030. We will demonstrate our commitment to net zero carbon by putting the climate emergency at the heart of service delivery, ensuring all staff understand and consider climate and ecological impacts in their day-to-day work and the decisions that they advise on. We will do this by:

- I Rolling out formal Carbon Literacy Training to our employees, aiming to be recognised as a Gold Level Carbon Literate Organisation
- II Securing advanced climate emergency training for planning officers and other employees, whose professional role requires that they have a greater understanding of issues around energy use, low emission building and transport technologies
- III Embedding climate, ecological and social value considerations in procurement processes to maximise the use of sustainable suppliers and support local businesses
- IV Making climate implications a core consideration in decision making, alongside finance, legal and risk
- V Implementing our Agile Working Strategy, which will reduce unnecessary business travel, staff commuting journeys, in addition to excess heating and lighting in under occupied offices
- VI Making use of our video-link technology as the default option for internal meetings and events, which is already reducing business mileage dramatically. By halving our business mileage, we can save the equivalent of 98 tonnes of carbon dioxide each year



Working together to reach a target of net-zero carbon by

# 2030



# Transition: Support the transfer of services & explore options for a new operating model

We recognise that this is a significant and complex change programme but we are committed to supporting the Shareholder Councils to develop and implement a new target operating model for local and shared services.

The Local Partnerships report, commissioned by the Shareholder Councils, stated that *“It is likely that in the short-medium term, Publica will be leaner and focused on a smaller number of largely support/back-office services.”* As Publica transitions into this leaner organisation, we are committed to working collaboratively with Shareholder Councils to deliver a safe and secure structure and governance arrangements that deliver the ambitions of the councils and meets the needs of residents.

In accordance with the recommendations made in the Local Partnerships report, Publica will support the councils in strengthening those key governance areas that the councils have identified as requiring focus; including:

- I Refreshing the Shareholder Forum through a review of composition and Terms of Reference to ensure that it has sufficient oversight of Publica
- II Reviewing the Board of Directors, ensuring that its size and nature is appropriate for the revised size of Publica, and that Non-Executive Directors have the relevant skills to steer the company through the next phase i.e. transition/business change skills

- III Ensuring that council committees such as Audit and Governance, Overview & Scrutiny are regularly reviewing the performance of the company, as opposed to council services, in accordance with the councils' requirements
- IV Supporting a strong client function to manage the day-to-day oversight of the remaining Publica contract. Including improving clarity over the contract specification and quantifying deliverables.

As we emerge from the initial stage of transition planning we will need to focus on building on our strengths within Publica for the services that remain and which are critical to the broader partnership of Councils including Ubico, our sister Teckal company.

*It is likely that in the short-medium term, Publica will be leaner and focused on a smaller number of largely support/back-office services.*





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