



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Wednesday 8 July 2021
Report Number	Agenda Item No. 9
Subject	Council Priorities and Service Performance Report 2020-21 Quarter Four
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	All relevant Cabinet Members
Accountable officer	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Tel: (01993) 861658 Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	This report provides details of service performance during Q4
Annexes	Annex A – Council Plan Annual Statement Annex B – Performance Indicator report
Recommendation	That the Committee reviews, and challenges as appropriate, performance for 2020-21 Q4
Corporate priorities	Climate Action: Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity Healthy Towns and Villages: Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone A Vibrant District Economy: Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Local Industrial Strategy Strong Local Communities: Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population: Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for a wide range of householders making their home in West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No

I. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. The Council monitors service performance each quarter as well as progress towards achieving the aim and priorities set out in the Corporate Plan at the end of Q2 and Q4.
- 1.2. Performance in those service areas relating to the work of this Committee is provided in this report.

2. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK - PERFORMANCE REPORTING

- 2.1. A high level Commissioning Framework was approved by Cabinet in October 2020. The Commissioning Framework identifies that the provision of robust performance data – quantitative and qualitative, together with a robust analysis of that data and evidence – is vital to ensure that the Council has the information to assess whether its commissioned services are being delivered to a high quality.
- 2.2. A new performance management framework has been developed; a much broader framework than previous frameworks. It sets out six key strands of information on which assurance needs to be provided, with a key shift in focus from performance monitoring to performance management:
 - Business analytics and service assurance
 - Place based measures and comparators
 - Publica Business Plan strategic actions
 - Council Plan priority actions
 - Project and programme management assurance
 - Risk and opportunity management
- 2.3. The quarterly performance report will continue to evolve in line with the Performance Management Framework as well as feedback from senior officers and Members.
- 2.4. As an example of this, a selection of publically available benchmarking data has been included in the Q4 Performance Indicator report on a trial basis. Benchmarking can be a useful tool for driving improvement; by comparing our performance with other similar organisations, we can start a discussion about what good performance might look like, and why there might be variations, as well as learning from other organisations about how they operate (process benchmarking).
- 2.5. Two comparator groups that are commonly used to benchmark Councils' performance are: all shire districts councils and CIPFA Nearest Neighbours (NN). Whilst performance benchmarking can be useful as a tool for driving improvement, it is important to remember that performance needs to be viewed within context i.e. a range of both internal and external factors contribute to the level of performance achieved; therefore benchmarks should be used as a 'guide' and as a starting point for discussion.
- 2.6. The Commissioning Framework also sets out the relationship between Publica and the Council and their respective responsibilities. Publica's Executive Director (Commissioning) is accountable to the Council for the services commissioned from Publica, and also for the services commissioned by Publica from third parties on behalf of the Council. Publica must ensure that it provides the necessary information to the Council so it can assess whether the commissioned services are being delivered in accordance with the agreed quality and

standard. The Council's Chief Executive is responsible for reviewing and approving the information provided in this report prior to its publication.

2.7. The Council's Chief Executive has received a report on service performance, and he has assessed it in line with the high level Commissioning Statement. He has noted the progress that has been made to deliver the actions in the Council Plan as well the lower level of operational performance in Q4 as a result of the ongoing pandemic and its impact on resources and the delivery of services. The Chief Executive has also noted the continued impact of Covid-19 on communities, businesses, customers, services, and staff as the nation moves from response to recovery and back to response again. He has drawn particular attention to the following:

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

3. COUNCIL PRIORITIES

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

- Adoption of Carbon Action Plan and Climate Change Strategy by Full Council;
- Submission of Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan to the Planning Inspectorate, setting out strategic planning policy for zero-carbon development;

- Appointment of Market Towns Officer to work with Witney, Chipping Norton and Carterton on Town Plans as a means of supporting economic recovery from Covid-19;
- Application of Health Impact Assessments to major planning applications as a means of delivering 'healthy place-shaping';
- Scoping work underway to explore the establishment of well-being hubs, as a means of enabling partner organisations (other public service providers and the Voluntary and Community Sector) to work alongside each other to provide accessible and joined up services for residents.

4. SERVICE PERFORMANCE

- 4.1. Since the start of the pandemic, many services, both customer facing and support services have been impacted by Covid-19; the Council's leisure facilities have had to close during multiple lockdowns and tier restrictions, while other services including housing, revenues and benefits, planning, land charges and customer services have experienced higher workloads due to customer demand or because colleagues were supporting residents, communities, and businesses through the crisis. Support services such as ICT, Accountancy and Accounts Payable have also played a part in supporting the administration of business grants and other payments. The majority of staff have continued to deliver services from home which has meant that services have had to adapt and find new ways of working. This has presented a major challenge for some services such as planning and food safety and resulted in backlogs. The impact of these challenges coupled with delivering key projects such as the new revenues and benefits system has affected performance in some areas.
- 4.2. The services which relate to the work of this Committee are Housing Support, Planning and Strategic Housing, Land Charges, and Leisure and Communities; and the relevant indicators are listed at the front of the Performance Indicator report at Annex B with pages **12 to 21** of that Annex providing the further relevant information.
- 4.3. Of the eight targeted indicators, five indicators achieved their targets (Green), two indicators achieved their targets 'within tolerance' (Amber), and one indicator did not achieve its target (Red). The number of households in emergency accommodation over 28 days was set to 'Amber' to recognise that the service has worked hard to place all households into emergency accommodation that have approached the Council, and then created exit plans to move them on to more secure tenancies. The households that remain in emergency accommodation for longer periods of time will generally have more complex needs. A full report is attached at Annex B.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. None

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1. None

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 7.1. None

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

8.1. None