



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Name and date of Committee	<b>Economic and Social Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Thursday 27 January 2022</b>
Report Number	<b>Agenda Item No. 7</b>
Subject	<b>Service Performance Report 2021-22 Quarter Two</b>
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 Q2
Annexes	Annex A - Performance Indicator report
Recommendation	That the Committee reviews, and challenges as appropriate, performance for 2021-22 Q2
Corporate priorities	<p>Climate Action: Leading the way in protecting and enhancing the environment by taking action locally on climate change and biodiversity</p> <p>Healthy Towns and Villages: Facilitating healthy lifestyles and better wellbeing for everyone</p> <p>A Vibrant District Economy: Securing future economic success through supporting existing local businesses and attracting new businesses to deliver the economic ambitions of the Local Industrial Strategy</p> <p>Strong Local Communities: Supporting and building prosperous and inclusive local communities</p> <p>Meeting the Housing Needs of our Changing Population: Securing the provision of market and affordable housing of a high quality for a wide range of householders making their home in West Oxfordshire</p>
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No

## I. BACKGROUND

- I.1. The Council monitors service performance each quarter, and a report on progress towards achieving the aim and priorities set out in the Corporate Plan is produced at the end of Q2 and Q4. The Q2 update on progress on the priorities will be encompassed within the Annual Monitoring Report and presented to Cabinet in December 2021 followed by the Overview and Scrutiny committees.
- I.2. A review of performance indicators is currently underway, and Portfolio Holders are having discussions with relevant managers about priority areas and finding metrics that would be most representative and provide assurance as to how the Council is performing.
- I.3. The Commissioning Framework sets out the relationship between Publica and the Council and their respective responsibilities. Publica must ensure that it provides the necessary information to the Council so it can assess whether the commissioned services are being delivered in accordance with the agreed quality and standard. The Council's Chief Executive is responsible for reviewing and approving the information provided in this report prior to its publication.
- I.4. The Council's Chief Executive has received a report on service performance, and he has assessed it in line with the high level Commissioning Statement. He has noted the capacity issues and high workloads in some services which have contributed to a reduced level of operational performance in those services over the last few months, as well as the actions that are being taken to improve performance. He has drawn particular attention to the following:
  - i. 19 July marked the lifting of all Covid-19 restrictions, and some staff have returned to the office while others are working in a hybrid style in line with Publica's Agile Working Strategy 2020. Whilst we need to ensure that staff are available to deliver services whether in the office or not, the change to more flexible working practices has presented an opportunity to review office space requirements and identify any space that can be repurposed. Draft office layouts have been developed for Woodgreen with proposals for desk layouts, meeting rooms, breakout areas and new tenanted areas. The Chief Executive will be consulting with Members on the proposals shortly;
  - ii. Leisure visits and gym memberships are operating at around 75% and 70% of previous levels respectively. Both Chipping Norton Leisure Centre and Carterton have good membership levels, while Windrush is facing competition from PureGym which is a self-serve 'no frills' gym offer. In response, GLL is revising its marketing and promotions for Witney;
  - iii. Customer satisfaction ratings for services delivered by phone have continued to remain high throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. West Oxfordshire ranked within the top 10 councils on the GovMetric Telephone Channel Satisfaction Index for August 2021. Face to face surveys which only restarted in July are also indicating that satisfaction is high with this channel, although the number surveyed was low due to low footfall;
  - iv. The website satisfaction indicator has been suspended while the service explores other methods for assessing the effectiveness of this communication channel. The Council recognises that it needs to focus on the ability to provide more options for accessing the Council's services including the potential for channel shift to quicker and more cost effective methods of communication where possible, such as the website. The Channel

Choice project has commenced, and processes are beginning to be reviewed in those service areas that receive high volumes of calls.

## **2. SERVICE PERFORMANCE**

- 2.1. 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 A** with pages **11 to 19** of that Annex providing the further relevant information.
- 2.1. Performance for services that relate to the work of this Committee was mixed. Of the 10 targeted indicators, four indicators achieved their targets (Green), four indicators achieved their targets 'within tolerance' (Amber), and two indicators did not achieve their targets (Red).
- 2.2. Additional resources have been secured in particular over the last quarter to support services to reduce the backlog of work, and services are reporting that workloads have become more manageable, although it will take time for performance to improve. In the planning service, there has been a successful recruitment campaign with a total of 20 appointments made across the partnership, many of which are internal, encouraging the retention of a significant number of existing staff. A second round of recruitment has now commenced to complete the consequential vacancies created from the first round and bring the teams up to the new increased resource levels.
- 2.3. Concurrently, improvement work and programmes are on-going. The Planning service has an improvement programme in place which has already delivered significant improvements in the validation of applications, and a service re-designer has commenced work to improve processes in Land Charges.
- 2.4. The indicators that did not meet their targets (RED) are considered below together with rectifying actions:
  - Overall, the percentage of 'Other' planning applications (mainly householder applications) determined within timescales has been falling since summer 2020 when the number of applications coming through started to increase in line with the national trend. The increase in demand coincided with a reduction in capacity due to a number of vacant posts which created a backlog of applications awaiting determination. During Q2, the service had four vacant posts.

Resolution: Given the anticipated ongoing nature of increased workloads, the Council agreed to fund an additional two posts to support the team and to provide an improved career structure to support the recruitment and retention of planning staff. In total, five career graded posts have been successfully recruited to, with the majority starting in Q3. The increased capacity over the next few weeks will help to restore performance to previous levels, however, new staff will need to undergo training and the backlog of applications will need to be cleared before this can happen. We expect to see an improvement in performance in Q4. Furthermore, an improvement action plan for the next 12 months is in place across the whole of the Development Management service which is being overseen by both the Group and Business Manager.

- The number of land charge searches increased by over 20% during the 'stamp duty holiday' compared to the five quarters prior to the 'stamp duty holiday', although numbers started to tail off over the last six months. In spite of the increase in searches, in addition to responding to customer queries, performance targets were achieved until the end of Q4 when there was a significant reduction in capacity in the service. An injection of additional resources to support the service and the recruitment of two new posts in Q1 resulted in improved performance in July which the service was unable to sustain as some aspects of the role are more complex and are dealt with by experienced staff.

Resolution: The new starters in the service completed further training in October on the more complex processes which will reduce delay; and the additional resources brought in to support the service in Q1 will remain in place as a temporary measure. Furthermore, a service re-designer has started to review the land charge search process to identify where improvements can be made especially around the way customers communicate with us.

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

### **3. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1. None

### **4. RISK ASSESSMENT**

4.1. None

### **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

5.1. None

### **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

6.1. None