



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Name and date of Committee	Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Wednesday 9 February 2022
Report Number	Agenda Item No. 6
Subject	Service Performance Report 2021-22 Quarter Two
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	Modern Council Services and Sustainable Finance: Delivering excellent modern services whilst ensuring the financial sustainability of the Council
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. 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.3. 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 Customer Services and Revenues and Benefits; the relevant indicators are listed at the front of the Performance Indicator report at **Annex A** with pages 4 to 10 of that Annex providing the further relevant information.
- 2.2. Of the 10 targeted indicators, three indicators achieved their targets (Green) and seven indicators did not achieve their targets (Red). A full report is attached at **Annex A**.
- 2.3. Performance continues to be mixed for a third consecutive quarter. The main issue has been a lack of capacity due to both high workloads as a result of both internal (improvement work /new systems) and external factors (Covid-19 related, economic) and vacant posts in some services.
- 2.4. 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.
- 2.5. Some of the performance indicators that are falling short of their targets or are indicating a downward trend are considered below together with rectifying actions:

- The percentage of calls responded to within 20 seconds and the abandoned rate has started to show improvements following a decline in performance over the previous six months. Staff in this service are more likely to apply for internal promotions which results in a temporary reduction in capacity.

Resolution: The Customer service team is continuing to recruit to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to deliver the service, however, we need to be mindful that it takes up to six months to train new staff. A review of the customer services indicators to ensure that they are appropriate to customers' needs concluded that these indicators have become outdated and were based on the 'old ways of working', and more emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that satisfaction for our services remains high while also taking into account the benefits of channel shift and providing more options for accessing our services. The Channel Choice project has commenced, and the processes in services with high call volumes will start to be reviewed to reduce the need for customer contact and to reduce call length time.

The service is also identifying 'quick wins' to reduce call waiting time, for example, improvements to call waiting messages were implemented in Q2. Callers now receive a tailored message for the service they are calling about that signposts to easier ways to complete the transaction, which will be digital/online in most cases.

- At the end of Q2, both the average days to process Council Tax Support (CTS) new claims and the average days to process CTS changes was similar to the previous quarter at 33.76 days and 44.42 days respectively. The reduced performance over the last few months was primarily due to high workloads related to the increase in Universal Credit claims since the start of the pandemic (with much of the New Claims time delays beyond our control), the implementation of the new benefits system, Covid-19 related work, and supporting the administration of discretionary housing grants to the most vulnerable residents in the District. The backlog of work that was created following the

implementation of the new benefits system was exacerbated by a software failure that prevented the automatic upload of changes of circumstances. Although a partial fix was applied nationally, all councils are awaiting a further fix which is expected to be released in November. In the interim, some cases are being processed manually.

Similarly, the average days to process Housing Benefit changes of circumstances remained at a similar level to the previous quarter at 26.21 days.

Resolution: With the injection of additional resources during the quarter, the backlog of work is being managed and reduced. In addition, three experienced temporary staff have either taken up their positions or will do shortly. A recovery plan is in place which should result in an improvement in performance although this will not be notable this year, aided by the software release as well as the soft launch of the open portal in November. The open portal provides a facility for clients to self-serve, which will reduce the burden in the back office.

3. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1. None

4. RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1. None

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

5.1. None

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

6.1. None