



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and date of Committee	Finance & Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee 13 April 2022
Report Number	Agenda Item 6
Subject	DRAFT PUBLICA BUSINESS PLAN 2022-25
Wards affected	All
Accountable members	Cllr Michele Mead, Leader of the Council Email: Michele.mead@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
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Summary/Purpose	To consider the draft Publica Business Plan 2022-25 and provide comments for the Cabinet to review before it recommends that the Leader (as Shareholder Representative) approves the plan, subject to any comments the Cabinet wishes to make.
Annex	Annex A – Draft Publica Business Plan 2022-25
Recommendation	<i>That members provide comments on the draft Publica Business Plan 2022-25 for the Cabinet to consider before approval of the Plan by the Leader, as Shareholder Representative for Publica.</i>
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
Consultees/ Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Publica Board and Publica Shareholder Forum (Council Leaders and Chief Executives/Heads of Paid Service)• All Publica shareholder Councils

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. As part of the establishment of Publica Group (Support) Ltd. (Publica), twelve items were identified as Reserved Matters for Shareholder approval to ensure that shareholder Councils retained the necessary control over their Teckal company. The Reserved Matters were approved by the Council in October 2016 as part of the governance principles underpinning the establishment of Publica and are set out in Schedule I of the company's Members' Agreement, signed by the Council in May 2017.
- 1.2. The Reserved Matters decisions fall to the Shareholder Representatives to determine. For each shareholder Council the Shareholder Representative is designated as the Leader of the Council.
- 1.3. "Adopting or amending the Business Plan in respect of each Financial Year" is one of the Reserved Matters. To assist the Leader in reaching her decision both the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet will review the draft business plan for 2022-25 before it is approved by the Leader. The plan will be reviewed and approved by the Leader on an annual basis, in accordance with the company's governance.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1. A new, three year, draft Publica Business Plan (2022-25) is attached at Annex A. This business plan sets out the high level, strategic objectives and ambition for Publica over the next three years and how it will deliver both day-to-day services and the key priorities for each shareholder Council. The three year plan enables a medium term financial horizon to be taken as the increasingly challenging financial circumstances of the Councils will be a major driver for the focus of Publica's work. The three year horizon of the plan will also enable a sustained focus on delivering Council priorities and improving service delivery.
- 2.2. Each shareholder Council has its own delivery plans and this business plan is designed to show how Publica will operate to deliver these, complementing them by providing the flexibility to deliver different priorities in an individual way for each Council but also making the most of shared services and ambitions.
- 2.3. Three key themes are addressed in this business plan that flow from the shareholder Councils' priorities and will underpin everything Publica does over the lifespan of this business plan. These are:
 - **Planet** - Tackling the climate and ecological emergency. This is the challenge of our generation and a priority for all of the shareholder Councils and Publica.
 - **People** - People are at the heart of Publica as a company, so it needs to employ and retain the right people and be a 'best in class' employer in order to deliver successfully for the shareholder Councils.
 - **Place** - Delivering great services and local priorities for the Councils' communities, residents, and businesses.
- 2.4. Detailed actions emanating from the business plan will be incorporated into individual service plans and/or addressed through Publica's project management framework to ensure delivery is closely aligned to Council priorities and reported appropriately.

- 2.5. The consultation process for the production of the new plan is quite extensive. Early discussions were held with the Chief Executives/Heads of Paid Service from the four shareholder Councils to check that the plan was evolving in line with expectations. The initial draft was also discussed with the Publica Board in mid January 2022.
- 2.6. The Publica Shareholder Forum (comprising the Leader and Chief Executive/Head of Paid Service from each of the four shareholder Councils, together with the Publica Board Chair and Managing Director) met in late January to review the draft plan and the feedback received from the Publica Board and the Chief Executives/Heads of Paid Service.
- 2.7. Comments and additional feedback from the Shareholder Forum have now been incorporated in the final draft plan attached at Annex A. The draft plan is being presented to the relevant scrutiny committee at each of the four shareholder Councils, seeking comments prior to its presentation to the Cabinet meeting at each Council in April. Each Cabinet will be asked to consider feedback from the scrutiny consultation and recommend to their Council Leader that the plan be approved. As it is a three year plan, there will be an annual review and approval process put in place for the following two years, in line with Publica's governance.
- 2.8. The plan will be designed and published on the internet and shared with the shareholder Councils once it has been approved by the Council Leaders.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 There are no direct financial implications arising from approval of the business plan.
- 3.2 The business case approved by the shareholder Councils in September/October 2016 set a target of a cumulative reduction in the Councils' base revenue budgets of £2.1m by the end of 2022/23. Publica is on track to deliver a baseline budget saving of £2.7m by the end of 2022/23 – some £0.6m ahead of target. In addition, c.£1.8m of one-off savings have also been made and returned to the Councils for reinvestment in their service priorities.
- 3.3 The new business plan acknowledges the financial challenge that all the shareholder Councils are facing over the next few years and sets out Publica's role in supporting the Councils to address this challenge.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Publica Business Plan has to be approved on an annual basis by the Council's Shareholder Representative (the Leader) in accordance with the Articles of Association and Members' Agreement for Publica Group (Support) Limited.

5. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 5.1. The People theme within the new business plan encompasses how Publica will lead, support and develop its employees, celebrating diversity and challenging inequality.

6. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. Tackling the climate and ecological emergencies is a key theme within the new business plan, setting out how Publica will work to embed this into all its work.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 7.1. The draft business plan has been subject to early consultation with the Council's Head of Paid Service and the Leader (through the Publica Shareholder Forum) to reduce the risk that it does not meet this Council's expectations and needs.
- 7.2. If the Council's Shareholder Representative (the Leader) does not approve the plan there is a risk that Publica will not be able to commence activities that are necessary for supporting the Council to deliver against its Corporate Plan priorities and meet its financial challenges.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 8.1. None.