

 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET – 20 APRIL 2022
Report Number	Agenda Item 6
Subject	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
Report authors	Jan Britton, Managing Director, Publica Group (Support) Ltd Email: jan.britton@publicagroup.uk Bill Oddy, Group Manager – Commercial Development Email: bill.oddy@publicagroup.uk
Summary/Purpose	To consider the Publica Business Plan 2022-25 and any comments made by the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the draft Business Plan and to recommend that the Leader (as Shareholder Representative) approves the plan, subject to any comments the Cabinet wishes to make and those made by other Shareholder Councils.
Annex	Annex A – Publica Business Plan 2022-25
Recommendation	That, subject to any comments it makes, the Cabinet recommends the Publica Business Plan 2022-25 be approved by the Leader, as the Council's Shareholder Representative for Publica Group (Support) Ltd and subject to any minor amendments that might arise from the final stages of consultation with the Shareholder Councils and/or general editing.
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) • Publica shareholder Councils' scrutiny committee and Cabinets

I. 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 as set out in Schedule 1 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 the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the draft business plan for 2022-25 at its meeting on 3rd March 2022 and their views are set out in section 3 below.
- 1.4. The Publica Board agreed the final draft plan at its meeting on 11th March.
- 1.5. The Cabinet is invited to consider the points raised by the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee and provide any additional comments they wish to make before the plan is approved by the Leader.
- 1.6. The plan will be reviewed and approved by the Leader on an annual basis, in accordance with Publica's company governance.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1. A new, three year, 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 position 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 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 were incorporated in the draft plan which was then addressed by the relevant scrutiny committee at each of the four shareholder Councils in February/March.
 - 2.8. The Publica Board agreed the final draft plan at its meeting on 11th March 2022. Cabinet is now asked to consider feedback from the consultation with the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 13th April, add any comments they wish to make and recommend to the 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.
 - 2.9. The business plan will be published on the internet and shared with the shareholder Councils once it has been approved by all the Council Leaders.
3. **FEEDBACK FROM FINANCE AND MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**
 - 3.1. This will be provided verbally at the meeting at this report is published before the Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 13th April.
 4. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**
 - 4.1. There are no direct financial implications arising from approval of the business plan.
 - 4.2. 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.
 - 4.3. 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.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1. 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.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT

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

7. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

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

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1. The draft business plan was subject to early consultation with the Council's Chief Executive and the Leader (through the Publica Shareholder Forum) to reduce the risk that it does not meet this Council's expectations and needs.
- 8.2. 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.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1. None.