



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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Name and date of Committee	Finance and Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee: Wednesday 14 June 2023
Report Number	Agenda Item No. 10
Subject	Service Performance Report 2022-23 Quarter Four
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	All relevant Executive Members
Accountable officer	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Tel: (01993) 861658 Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk Elizabeth Griffiths, Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Finance Officer Tel: (01993) 861188 Email: elizabeth.griffiths@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	This report provides details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2022-23 Quarter Four (Q4)
Annexes	Annex A – Service Dashboards
Recommendation	That the 2022/23 Q4 service performance be noted
Corporate priorities	Putting Residents First Enabling a Good Quality of Life for All Creating a Better Environment for People and Wildlife Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. 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. On 13 July 2022, the Executive agreed to revise the Council Plan and develop an Action Plan that will set out how the priorities in the Council Plan will be delivered. Following consultation with stakeholders, a final draft was presented to the Executive on 11 January 2023 and adopted at Full Council on 18 January 2023.
- 1.2. A high level Commissioning Framework was approved by the Executive in October 2020 which sets out the relationship between Publica and the Council and their respective responsibilities. Publica provides the necessary information, including a range of performance indicators, 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.
- 1.3. The Council's Chief Executive has received a report on service performance and has assessed it in line with the high level Commissioning Statement. Particular attention has been drawn to the following:
 - i. The rising energy prices and higher cost of living is affecting householders, in particular those on low incomes. At the end of Q4, the council tax collection rate was slightly higher than the previous two years, but is short of the target by 1.64%. The improved collection rates have been helped by the Recovery Cycle being up to date with reminders and summonses being issued when needed. Debts are only ever written off when all avenues of recovery have been exhausted. The rising cost of living has affected the annual in-year collection rates. Overall customer contact with the service has increased and the number of applications for reductions in council tax in special circumstance (Section 13A) is rising. The Council Tax Support schemes have been revised in line with inflation to support more households and will be introduced in 2023-24. As expected, workloads did increase during Q4 as both the Revenues and Benefits teams implemented the additional £25 payment to all working age and pension age individuals in receipt of Council Tax Support; as well as the alternative energy payments. Running a regular reminder schedule helps in maximising collection across the authorities.
 - ii. Business rates collection rate improved by nearly four percent compared to last year but has not returned to pre-Covid levels. Recovery is expected to take longer due to the impact of the cost of living crisis. Extended retail relief continued through Q4 at a relief of 50%, and will increase to 75% in 2023-24 for leisure and retail businesses. However, the criteria for eligibility is more stringent than during covid times so some businesses will miss out. The service will be writing to those businesses affected. Some businesses will see their rates increase as a result of the business rates revaluation 2023-24.;
 - iii. The Council is continuing to support the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme in which people in the UK are sponsoring/hosting a Ukrainian individual or family. As at 31 March 2023 there were 124 guests at 49 active hosts/households. Re-matching guests with new sponsors is continuing as relationships break down or the sponsor does not wish to continue in the scheme;

- iv. Affordable housing completions are ahead of the year to date target (Actual: 309; Target: 276). Working in partnership with housing associations and developers to bring forward more affordable homes will help to alleviate some of the pressures in Housing Support;
- v. The Executive agreed to additional resources in the budget 2022-23 to increase enforcement activities around fly tipping and improving its response to issues raised. The new Environmental Services Officer has had an impact on the number of FPNs issued for fly tipping offences and is developing good relations with the police and other agencies such as the EA dealing with fly tipping and rural crime. 389 fly tips were reported in the quarter and 11 FPNs, 1 warning letter and 14 formal cautions were issued.

2. COUNCIL PRIORITIES

- 2.1. The West Oxfordshire Council Plan 2023 – 27 was adopted at Full Council on 18 January 2023. This presents five strategic priorities, of equal importance, for the District:
 - Putting Residents First
 - A Good Quality of Life for All
 - A Better Environment for People and Wildlife
 - Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency
 - Working Together for West Oxfordshire
- 2.2. Portfolio Holders will work with Officers to develop an Action Plan that will identify a range of actions to be taken over the next 12 months and beyond to make progress on the delivery of the Council Plan priorities.

3. SERVICE PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

- 3.1. Overall, performance for the quarter appears mixed. Over the last year, a number of services have highlighted the potential impact of the cost of living crisis on households, businesses and the Council's services in particular Revenues and Benefits, Planning, Housing Support and Leisure. Some services such as Revenues and Benefits have reported increased customer contact and workloads while Planning has reported a slow-down in applications and potentially fewer applications for large developments due to a loss of confidence in the housing market. The business rates collection rate has been depressed over the last couple of years due to Covid and may now take longer to recover.
- 3.2. Some areas that have performed well include planning determination times, customer satisfaction, high risk food premises visits and gym memberships/leisure visits.
- 3.3. There are a number of improvement programmes in progress across services focussed on improving the way services communicate with customers, increasing automation and self-serve options for customers (OpenPortal in Revenues and Benefits and the Channel Choice project), and improving the monitoring of workflows using case management tools to help services to actively manage resources (Enterprise in Planning).

KEY POINTS BY SERVICE AREA THEMES

3.4. Customer services

- Service delivery can be affected by a range of factors both within the service and in other services. For example, shortage of staff, new systems, how the Council communicates with residents/clients.
- Average waiting time increased slightly during Q4 as expected because workloads are higher due to annual billing, garden waste renewals and the introduction of voter ids.
- The staggered approach to comms regarding annual billing and garden waste sign ups has had a positive impact in helping to manage demand.
- The service continues to have a higher turnover of staff as advisors move onto other roles within the business but a new highly structured training programme means that new starters can usually be ready for all phone lines within 3 months.
- Despite an increase in calls from Q3, the annual number of calls continues to drop in line with improved online reporting and the advisors promoting the online services with leaflets and QR codes. There was around 14% drop in calls from 2021-22 to 2022-23
- Further work on automation and integration of forms to the back office systems is continuing, aimed at improving the on-line offer for customers and reducing call volumes and call length time.

3.5. Revenues and Benefits

- Although the Collection Rates for both Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates have increased year-on-year, they are both still below the target.
- The rising cost of living has affected the annual in-year collection rates. Overall customer contact with the service has increased and the number of applications for reductions in council tax in special circumstances (Section 13A) is rising. The Council Tax Support schemes have been revised in line with inflation to support more households and will be introduced in 2023-24.
- As expected, workloads did increase during Q4 as both the Revenues and Benefits teams implemented the additional £25 payment to all working age and pension age individuals in receipt of Council Tax Support; as well as the alternative energy payments.
- Running a regular reminder schedule helps in maximising collection across the authorities.

3.6. Finance

- Further detail on the Council's financial performance will be provided as a separate item.

3.7. The service dashboards are attached at **Annex A**.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1. None

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

5.1. None

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

6.1. None

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1. None