

 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	Economic & Social Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 5 July 2023
Report Number	Agenda Item No. 12
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. Development Management

- Overall, planning determination times for all types of applications have made good improvements over the course of the year, with the majority of targets now being met or exceeded. In fact the last 5 quarters have seen improvements.
- Workloads are more manageable as the number of applications continues to slow in line with the national trend. Better capacity in the DM team means that there is more scope for upskilling but a shortage of ecologists is still delaying response times for some planning applications.
- As a result of the PAS report, further improvements and revisions have been compiled in a report which is due to go to cabinet in Q1 of 2023-24
- The validation checklist was launched in February as part of the improvement roadmap. It has largely been well received and a better quality of applications is being received. The sections around Biodiversity and Sustainability have had more significant changes in preparation for new legislation coming later in the year. Following feedback from agents, these sections will be reviewed.

3.5. Housing

- The pressures on Housing services, systems and pathways remain high. The numbers of people contacting the Housing team continues to rise due to the cost of living crisis and the evolving Refugee schemes, specifically Homes for Ukraine and Afghan Resettlement. The continuing cost of living crisis has resulted in some people who would normally be staying between family and friends becoming homeless which has required greater use of hotel placements. The use of this type of placement impacts on the Council's budget as not all of the costs can be recovered by claiming Housing Benefit. The Council's owned and managed hostels are operating at capacity however the use of specialist Temporary Accommodation officers are able to offer dedicated support and bespoke solutions for helping clients move on successfully from emergency accommodation..
- The Housing Team have been successful in addressing some complex issues surrounding accommodation for 4 entrenched rough sleepers during the winter months and have now brought them into longer term accommodation. Although West Oxfordshire's entrenched rough sleeping population of 6 to 7 people sleeping out at any one time has been traditionally low compared to neighbouring areas, thanks to the dedicated work of our Rough Sleeping Specialist and our county Outreach partners, West Oxfordshire is now reporting one entrenched rough sleeper. Any one new to the streets are contacted swiftly and accommodation solutions offered at the earliest opportunity. The aim is to end rough sleeping for all however, where it does unfortunately occur, this is rare and short lived.
- Our three grant funded Housing Specialist Officers, including our Ukraine Specialist Officer are also working with families and to prevent homelessness wherever possible and assist families to secure their own accommodation in the private sector. The successful recruitment of a further Complex Needs specialist will complete the Team by offering

bespoke and early interventions to our most vulnerable clients to further prevent homelessness from occurring.

- Seventy-five affordable homes (50 affordable rent, 2 first homes and 21 shared ownership) reached practical completion in Q4.. Overall, a total of 309 for the year has been completed against a target of 274.
- Proactive work continues with individual property owners to reduce the number of LTE properties in the District - During Q4, 238 properties were removed from the LTE list, but 215 were added.

3.6. The service dashboards relevant to the work of this Committee 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