



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and Date of Committee	FINANCE & MANAGEMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 6 SEPTEMBER 2023
Subject	SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2023-24 QUARTER ONE
Wards Affected	ALL
Accountable Member	All accountable Executive Members.
Accountable Officer	Giles Hughes – Chief Executive Officer. Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Purpose	To provide details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2023-24 Quarter One (Q1).
Annex	Annex A – Service Dashboards
Recommendation.	<i>That the Executive Resolves to:</i> <i>1. Note the 2023/24 Q1 service performance report.</i>
Corporate Priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	YES
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 Officer 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. At the end of Q1, the council tax collection rate was the highest it has been for Quarter One since before 2019-20. The service reports progress in collecting previous year's debt following the reinstatement of recovery process and the current cycle being up to date. There is still a sizeable sum outstanding, but manageable payment schedules to collect the arrears have been issued to those residents affected.
 - ii. For Business Rates, the collection rate is back to pre-pandemic levels for Q1 and the reinstated recovery process has made progress with collecting previous years debt:
 - a. 17.69% of outstanding 2020-21 arrears
 - b. 16.55% of outstanding 2021-22 arrears
 - c. 5.60% of outstanding 2022-23 arrears

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. The Council's performance has been mixed, with progress in Tax Collection Rates. However, the cost-of-living crisis continues to result in increased customer contact for certain services.

The challenging economic situation has put additional strain on residents, leading to an upsurge in queries and concerns.

- 3.2. Processing times for Housing Benefit Changes of Circumstance and New Claims for Council Tax Support are showing a negative trend but processes have been implemented to mitigate this and at the time of writing, the service reports much improved performance due to the changes.
- 3.3. Customer Satisfaction continues to be high, and the Council topped the Gov Metric league table in May.
- 3.4. The Council remains committed to further improving its performance and service delivery and actively investing in the development and implementation of automation and self-serve options for customers. By providing accessible and efficient self-help tools, customers can address their queries and concerns independently, leading to a decrease in the need for repeated interactions with services. It will continue to monitor and assess the impact of improvement programs in reducing customer contact and enhancing operational efficiency.

KEY POINTS BY SERVICE AREA THEMES

3.5. Customer Services

- Average call waiting time for QI saw a reduction in average waiting time from Q4 by 8 seconds to 77 seconds. This is a marked improvement from Q1 2022-23 with a reduction in average by over 100 seconds.
- Call numbers continue to decrease. This trend is expected to continue with further work surrounding Channel Choice encouraging customers to self-serve where possible. The service is proactively working with other services to reduce processing times and repeat contact by using direct links to back-office systems resulting in improved customer experience.
- The spike in 'After Call' work in the top chart in May has been attributed to Council Tax reminder letters and residents calling in to discuss these letters.
- Customer Satisfaction continues to be high, and the Council has been in the top four of the Gov Metric league table each month placing 2nd in April, 1st in May and 4th in June. Although this is based on a small proportion of our calls, numbers are comparable to other District Councils, hence the 'league tables' being a useful comparator.
- Welch Way reopened on 24 July for face-to-face customers. In the interim, advisors had been working out of Woodgreen to ensure continued service.

3.6. Revenues and Benefits

- Q1 started with a backlog of work for new claims and change of circumstances cases and an increased number of applications from residents because of the Cost-of-Living Crisis continue to be received.
- To improve performance, investigations were made into the automation capability. On speaking with other councils, who were able to achieve 70% of processing automation as opposed to the 40-45% that the service was achieving, it became apparent that the same capability was possible, but processes had to change to maximise on the capabilities of the system. This way of working will continue to be tested and monitored but week-by-week, the processing stats are reducing.

- A recent audit of the Council Tax Services indicated that a significant sum of arrears had accumulated during challenging circumstances associated with the pandemic. The recovery of these arrears had been suspended to support customers in difficult financial circumstances and to facilitate the adoption of a new Council Tax platform enabling self service payments. The recovery process has now been reinstated and the current cycle is up to date, resulting in significant improvements in the collection of those arrears through manageable payment schedules for those residents affected.
- The collection rate for Q1 is well above target and the highest it has been since prior to 2019/2020. Officers will look to reinstate pre-pandemic targets moving forward.

3.7. Finance

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

3.8. The service dashboards relevant to the work of this committee are attached at Annex A.

3.9. As the new Council Plan and Action Plan adapt to address shifting priorities and dynamics, the performance indicators will need to be reviewed to provide assurance that the Plans are being delivered and to offer appropriate insights towards accomplishing the strategic aims.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1. None

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

5.1. None

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

6.1. None

7. BACKGROUND OPTIONS

7.1. None