



WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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Name and Date of Committee	EXECUTIVE – 10 SEPTEMBER 2025
Subject	SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT 2025-26 QUARTER ONE
Wards Affected	ALL
Accountable Member	Councillor Andy Graham – Leader of the Council. Email: andy.graham@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable Officer	Giles Hughes – Chief Executive Officer. Email: giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Alison Borrett – Senior Performance Analyst. Email: alison.borrett@westoxon.gov.uk
Purpose	To provide details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2025-26 Quarter One (Q1).
Annex	Annex A - Council Priorities report Annex B - Corporate Plan Action Tracker Annex C - Performance indicator report
Recommendation.	<i>That the Executive Resolves to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Note the 2025/26 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	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Publica Directors, Assistant Directors, Business Managers, Service Managers and Service Leads.

I. BACKGROUND

- I.1** The new Council Plan was adopted in January 2023 and the Action Plan, setting out how the priorities within the Council Plan will be delivered, then followed. Additionally, following on from the external audit report in August 2023 which included a recommendation to review performance management to match the Council Plan and measure performance, a new performance framework has been developed. This includes a Corporate Action Plan Tracker and a Priority Report alongside the service output metrics.
- I.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.
- I.3** The Council's Chief Executive is responsible for reviewing and approving the information provided in this report prior to its publication.

2. COUNCIL PRIORITY REPORT

- 2.1** Progress on actions in the Corporate Plan for Q1 include:
- The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) examination hearing session took place on 10 June, and the examiner's report has now been received for fact-checking. The Council intends to present the charging schedule for formal adoption by the Executive and Full Council in September and October, with an effective commencement date to follow for qualifying developments.
 - A strategic meeting was held with Enterprise Oxfordshire (formerly the LEP) to explore green investment opportunities across key development areas, with a focus on aligning economic growth with sustainability goals through initiatives such as the Carterton Masterplan and the Oxford–Cambridge Growth Corridor.
 - The Local Plan Preferred Policy Options consultation launched on 26 June and ran until 8 August 2025. It included a range of proposals related to infrastructure and green infrastructure, with further consultation on development locations scheduled for October.
 - The Outline Business Case for the Woodford Way development was presented to the Executive on 9 July. The report outlines a balanced approach to delivering affordable housing and car parking, along with a proposed delivery model aligned with Council priorities.
 - A new commercial operator has been appointed to manage the Charter Markets in Witney and Chipping Norton following a revised tender process. This appointment is expected to bring renewed energy and innovation to the markets, with operations commencing on 1 August.
 - A hearing session for the Salt Cross Area Action Plan (AAP) was held on 30 June 2025. The Council is now awaiting the Inspector's post-hearing note, which will guide the next steps toward adoption of the AAP and enable determination of the outline planning application.
 - The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) continue to be actively delivered and managed. Three new grant schemes have been launched to support local business resilience and growth: the Shop Front Improvement Grant, the Rural Enterprise Growth Grant, and the Visitor Economy Grant Scheme.

- 2.2 The Council Priority highlight report is attached at Annex A with an overview of progress against all actions in the Corporate Plan is attached at Annex B.

3. SERVICE PERFORMANCE

Overall, the Council's performance has remained broadly positive, building on the strong foundations laid in the previous quarter. Continued improvements were seen in key areas such as Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates collection, planning determination times, and customer satisfaction. Leisure centre visits and gym memberships also remained high, reflecting sustained public engagement with health and wellbeing services. Notably, the number of affordable homes delivered in Q1 exceeded the quarterly target. However, some challenges persist. Processing times for Council Tax Support and Housing Benefit change events remained above target, largely due to operational adjustments linked to Universal Credit automation. Additionally, the percentage of household waste recycled continued to decline, impacted by seasonal factors and broader national trends.

3.1 Service performance above target:

- Percentage of Council Tax Collected (33.04% against a target of 33%)
- Percentage of Non-Domestic Rates Collected (36.34% against a target of 33%)
- Processing times for Council Tax Support new claims (18.57 days against a target of 20 days)
- Percentage of Housing Benefit overpayment due to LA error/admin delay (0.08% against a target of 0.35%)
- Customer Satisfaction (98.21% against a target of 90%)
- Percentage of major planning applications determined within agreed timescales (100% against a target of 70%)
- Percentage of minor planning applications determined within agreed timescales (90% against a target of 65%)
- Percentage of other planning applications determined within agreed timescales (98.46% against a target of 80%)
- Percentage of official land charge searches completed within 10 days (98.87% against a target of 90%)
- Number of Affordable Homes Delivered (89 against a target of 69)
- Percentage of high-risk food premises inspected within target timescales day (100% against a target of 90%)
- Percentage of high-risk notifications risk assessed within 1 working day (100% against a target of 95%)
- Residual Household Waste per Household (kg) (90.56 against a target of 93)
- Missed bins per 100,000 (61 against a target of 110)
- (Snapshot) Number of gym memberships (5,554 memberships against a target of 4,947 memberships)
- Number of visits to the leisure centres (243,112 visits against a target of 206,370)

3.2 Service Performance near target:

- Percentage of FOI requests answered within 20 days (89.1% against a target of 90%)

3.3 Service Performance below target:

Processing times for Council Tax Support Change Events (14.49 days against a target of 5 days) and Processing times for Housing Benefit Change of Circumstances (8.85 days against a target of 4 days)

The Council experienced an increase in processing times for both Council Tax Support change of events and Housing Benefit changes of circumstances, exceeding the respective targets of 5 and 4 days. Council Tax Support changes averaged 14.49 days, while Housing Benefit changes averaged 8.85 days. This rise was primarily driven by a planned one-month pause in uploading Universal Credit (UC) applications, which allowed the team to focus on clearing a backlog of manual applications and to collaborate with partners on improving automation processes. The pause also provided an opportunity to accommodate changes introduced by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), who had updated the UC data feed to include additional items.

Prior to the pause, UC automation rates typically ranged between 60% and 70%. Since resuming uploads, batch automation rates have consistently exceeded 90% and daily processing has stabilised. Notably, processing times for CTS change of events have significantly improved, with the average for July falling to just 3.14 days. Processing times are expected to improve steadily over the coming months, but given the cumulative nature of the metric, they are unlikely to return to within target until Quarter 3.

The ongoing managed migration from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit has also introduced greater complexity into the remaining caseload, with many cases involving exceptional or nuanced circumstances. As the volume of Housing Benefit change of circumstances continues to decline, any delays now have a more pronounced impact on average processing times. The service continues to explore targeted initiatives, including the use of the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) tool, to help residents access unclaimed benefits and improve financial resilience.

Percentage of Planning Appeals Allowed (cumulative) (50% against a target of 30%)

Between 1 April 2025 and 30 June 2025, eight appeals were decided, with four supported, resulting in an allowance rate of 50%. Of these, four were Upland applications, with two supported, resulting in a 50% allowance rate. The remaining four were Lowlands applications, with two supported, equating to a 50% allowance rate.

Of the eight appeal decisions, one related to an application refused by the Uplands Planning Committee, which was subsequently dismissed at appeal. The other seven appeals stemmed from delegated officer decisions, with four of these resulting in allowed appeals.

As this metric is cumulative, the allowance rate may fluctuate throughout the year depending on the number and outcome of appeal decisions received.

While the general target is for no more than 30% of appeals to be allowed, the Growth and Infrastructure Act 2013 introduced a formal system for assessing the performance of local planning authorities. Under the designation criteria, an authority may be identified as underperforming if 10% or more of its total planning decisions are overturned at appeal.

This measure of decision quality is assessed over a rolling two-year period and is applied separately to major and non-major development categories. It's important to note that the 10% threshold is based on the total number of decisions made, not just those that are appealed. Authorities exceeding this threshold in either category may be designated, allowing applicants to submit certain types of applications directly to the Secretary of State.

Percentage of household waste recycled (57.2% against a target of 62%)

During Q1, the Council recorded a slight decline in its household recycling rate compared to the same quarter last year. This mirrors a broader national trend, where recycling rates have been under pressure due to seasonal and structural factors.

Despite this dip, West Oxfordshire continues to perform strongly. For the 2023/24 financial year, the district ranked among the top 20 councils in England for household waste recycling and remains within the top quartile of all English local authorities. This reflects the Council's ongoing commitment to environmental sustainability and effective waste management.

However, recycling rates across the country are facing challenges. The district experienced unusually dry weather conditions, leading to a 25% reduction in garden waste tonnages compared to the same period last year. As garden waste makes up a substantial portion of the recycling stream, this seasonal drop is expected to impact overall recycling performance.

Looking ahead, national policy changes may further influence local recycling figures. The UK-wide Deposit Return Scheme (DRS), scheduled to launch in October 2027, will introduce a refundable deposit on single-use drinks containers made from PET plastic, aluminium and steel. While this initiative is designed to reduce litter and improve material quality, it is anticipated that many of these containers will be diverted away from household kerbside collections. As a result, councils may see a measurable decline in kerbside recycling rates, even as national recycling infrastructure improves.

3.4 A full report is attached at Annex C and should be looked at in conjunction with this report.

3.5 As previously agreed, where possible, broader benchmarking has been included in the full performance report to gain a more robust and insightful evaluation of performance.

4. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

4.1 This report will be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 3 September 2025. The draft minutes of that meeting will be circulated to all Members and any recommendations from the Committee will be reported to the 10 September 2025 Executive meeting.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no direct financial implications from this report.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 None specifically because of this report. However, a failure to meet statutory deadlines or standards in some services may expose the Council to legal challenge and/or financial liability.

7. RISK ASSESSMENT

7.1 Contained in this report.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.1 None

9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Contained in this report.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None

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