

Cotswold District Council

Corporate Strategy - 2018/19 Update

Leader's Introduction

Welcome to the 2018/19 and the last annual update of the Council's Corporate Strategy 2016-19.

We will continue to work towards achieving our agreed aim and priorities for the period to April 2019 as set out below:

Our Aim is to be recognised as the most efficient Council in the country.

Our Priorities are:

- Provide high quality services at the lowest possible cost to Council Taxpayers
- Protect and enhance the local environment whilst supporting economic growth
- Champion issues which are important to local people

This document sets out how we have addressed the challenges facing the Council over the past year, the progress made towards achieving our aim to be recognised as the most efficient Council in the country, and the new 'top tasks' that we expect to undertake during 2018/19.

This is one of the most beautiful parts of the country and I am proud to live here and to have the opportunity as Leader of the Council to play a role in preserving its unique character, as well as ensuring that it remains a vibrant and economically viable area. The Council recognises that issues like the affordability of housing, car parking capacity and the provision of superfast broadband in rural areas - to name but three - are of prime importance in the Cotswolds.

We are also working hard to reduce our costs whilst continuing to provide high quality services to local people. During 2017, the Council, in partnership with Cheltenham Borough, Forest of Dean District and West Oxfordshire District Councils created a new company, Publica Group Ltd, which has been responsible for delivering services on behalf of the partner Councils since Autumn 2017. Please be assured that this will not affect the level of service which we provide and that we will not be losing any of our independence. We will still determine our own priorities, policies and decisions in the best interests of local people.

These are challenging times for the Council, but I believe that the plans we have in place in our Corporate Strategy 2016-2019, and this update, are the right ones to take us forward.

Councillor Mark Annett
Leader
Cotswold District Council

Addressing the Challenges

One of our objectives is to reduce the costs of services which is largely being achieved by working with Cheltenham Borough, Forest of Dean and West Oxfordshire District Councils on a project previously known as 2020 Vision. The Vision is for each of the four Councils to retain their independence and identity, but working together and sharing resources to maximise mutual benefit, which will lead to more efficient and effective delivery of local services. This approach is expected to save this Council £1.85m per annum by 2020, but we aim to ensure that the public will see no reduction in the services they receive. During 2017, the four partner Councils created Publica Group Ltd as the vehicle for delivering services on behalf of the Councils. The business plan, which sets out the key actions to deliver the transformation programme, was approved in early 2018 by the partner Councils; and a transformation team has been set up to support the transformation and re-design of our services and how we deliver them to the public, over the next year. This work will include the development of digital solutions to provide 24/7 access for customers to many of our transactional services; improved collection and use of data to ensure that customers only need to contact us once to undertake multiple transactions; and designing services which respond directly to user needs.

We also want to keep Council Tax as low as possible and to freeze charges for car parking, green waste and pest control until 2020. Our grant from central Government has continued to reduce over the years; however, as a result of the steps we have taken to improve the efficiency of our services, our share of council tax and other charges continue to be frozen in 2018/19.

A key priority for the Council is to protect and enhance the local environment whilst supporting economic growth. A significant element of meeting this priority is the development of a Local Plan and the Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule (CIL), which aims to balance the need for economic growth and housing with the need for preserving the character of the Cotswolds and help fund infrastructure, respectively. Over the last year, we have made significant progress towards adopting the Local Plan and CIL. The Local Plan Submission Draft and CIL were submitted to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government on 7th July 2017, and underwent a rigorous examination during the latter part of 2017. The Inspector identified a number of modifications which were required to make the Local Plan sound; these were consulted upon in early 2018. Representations were sent to the Inspector in April 2018 for review and subsequently the Council received the examining inspector's reports on 5th June 2018. The reports conclude that the Local Plan and CIL provide an appropriate basis for the planning of the District so long as modifications are incorporated into the Local Plan. The Council will be recommended to adopt the Cotswold District Local Plan 2011-2031 incorporating modifications in early August 2018. The Council will also be recommended to adopt the CIL and implement the levy from April 2019.

Increasing car parking capacity in Cirencester town centre is a key priority for the Council as it will unlock opportunities to redevelop key sites which have been allocated for development in the Local Plan. The Local Plan contains a strategy for Cirencester and during 2018/19 the Council will be developing, in co-operation with key stakeholders such as the Town Council, a Master Plan for Cirencester Town Centre to help deliver increased car parking capacity and unlock development opportunities. This will complement work that is being addressed and overseen by the Cirencester Parking Demand Board, which during the past year has identified the future demand for car parking

in the District and parking capacity, in particular in Cirencester. Independent consultants have reviewed the available options for increasing the capacity of our car parks, and concluded that development of the Waterloo car park would be the most suitable site for decked car parking. We have appointed consultants to provide specialist parking project management support for the scheme and they are undertaking the internal operational design before The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) undertakes a two stage procurement for an architect, which will include a design competition. In the shorter term, we are working on some 'quick wins' to provide extra capacity to 'smooth out' usage of the car parks. This includes free offers to encourage off-peak parking, improving cycle parking in the town, and working with local businesses and landowners to identify extra parking spaces which can be delivered relatively quickly.

With housing growth there is an increase in demand for waste collections and street cleaning, which places pressure on existing services. We have undertaken round rezoning to increase the efficiency of our existing services but will be planning some service growth to ensure all households receive a good service. Recycling performance is high and a review of waste service provision over the next year will consider how we meet demand, maintain or enhance recycling performance, whilst managing the service cost.

Cotswold District is an attractive area to live, with many second or holiday homes. The area has high property prices and affordability of housing has been an issue for some years. In 2016, on average, working people in the District could expect to pay 13 times their annual earnings to purchase a home compared to the average of 7.6 times in England and Wales (Housing Affordability in England and Wales Statistical Bulletin, ONS 2017). Private sector rents have also risen faster than earnings across the county. Affordability of housing is an issue for many people in the District, and we are committed to continuing our work with developers to ensure that a sensible number of new affordable homes are built for local people of all ages. During 2017/18, we delivered 247 affordable units, exceeding the annual target by nearly 100 units. The properties comprised a mixture of social rented, affordable rented and low cost home ownership properties for families and single households at sites across the District including Bourton-on-the-Water, Chipping Campden, Cirencester, Fairford, Mickleton, Moreton-in-Marsh and Tetbury. We expect delivery to continue to exceed the target of a minimum of 150 affordable homes in 2018/19.

One of our objectives is to campaign on issues which are of concern to local people, including access to services such as health services, new technologies and community facilities. Access to health services will always be a major issue in rural districts, with secondary care based in district general hospitals. The impact of early treatment on survival rates for those experiencing cardiac arrest is absolutely key to reducing what is a major cause of mortality. Over the last year, we have worked with the South West Ambulance Foundation Trust (SWAFT) to extend the availability of defibrillators across the District with particular attention given to the more rural communities of Cotswold District. The Cabinet approved the sum of £2,000 for each Councillor to use in their Wards towards the cost of purchasing and installing a defibrillator. Since the introduction of the scheme, we have processed 37 applications resulting in £19,500 of investment, and we are continuing to offer the scheme in 2018/19.

Local people and local businesses have been disadvantaged by poor internet speeds and the unavailability of high speed broadband especially in the more rural areas. In partnership with Fastershire and BDUK, superfast broadband is being rolled out across the District, and reached over 20,000 premises during Phases 1 and 2. Additional funding has been secured from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to extend superfast broadband to those areas not currently in the plan for delivery under Phases 1 or 2. The latest position indicates that 97% of the District is covered by superfast broadband, ahead of the government target of 95%. With the addition of the potential EAFRD properties, coverage should reach 98% of the District. In terms of full fibre coverage Cotswold District has the 8th best coverage in the UK out of 437 local authority areas.

Progress towards the Council's Aim

Our aim is 'to be recognised as the most efficient council in the country'. Although local government has been widely recognised as the most efficient part of the public sector, the need to increase productivity and be more efficient has become ever greater as budgets continue to be reduced.

We have developed a system of comparing ourselves with other District Councils, and our latest ranking exercise places us in 1st position out of 201 councils.

How is it calculated?

We have developed a basket of indicators based on cost, outputs and outcomes, against which we can compare ourselves with other shire district councils.

For each indicator, we have ranked ourselves against the performance of all shire district councils; the council with the best performance is ranked 1, and the worst performance is ranked 201. The rankings for the indicators are aggregated to produce an overall ranking for each council. The council with the lowest score is the best performing or 'most efficient council'.

Each year, we complete an assessment of how we compare, once all the benchmarking data has become publicly available. The latest rankings exercise (primarily based on 2016/17 data) was completed recently and placed the Council in 1st position - two places up on the previous year (3rd) and eight places better than the baseline year (9th) (low is good). With the exception of sickness absence which has been prone to fluctuations, there was a strong and consistent performance across the basket of indicators, with a number of indicators having performed exceptionally well over the last few years, including time taken to process new housing benefit claims, the percentage of council tax collected, and percentage of household waste recycled.

Indicator	Baseline Ranking (Outturn)	2016/17 Ranking (Outturn)	Improvement trend for rankings
Overall cost of council services per head of population (Revenue Estimates)	77 (£109.81)	68 (£94.57)	↑
Rate of increase in council tax	36 (0%)	6 (0%)	↑
Time taken to process housing benefit/council tax benefit – new claims	14 (13 days)	9 (13 days) (HB only)	↑
Percentage of council tax collected	4 (99.2%)	4 (99.3%)	↔
Amount of residual household waste per household (kg)	12 (362kg)	28 (383 kg)	↓
Percentage of household waste sent for recycling, composting and reuse	11 (58.65%)	11 (59.6%)	↔
Sickness absence rate ¹ (average full-time equivalent days per full-time equivalent)	142 (8.5days)	69 (7.5 days)	↑
Unemployment claimant rate (job seekers allowance)	20 (1.4%)	8 (0.6%)	↑
Overall crime rate per 1,000 population	40 (40.4)	20 (35.8)	↑
Percentage of major applications determined in time within the assessment period	n/a	34 (92%)	n/a
Overall ranking	9	1	↑

¹ This measure has been removed from the basket as the majority of Council staff transferred to Publica Group Ltd on 1st November 2017

Corporate Plan Top Tasks

Every year we set ourselves a number of top tasks, which are the key pieces of work we need to accomplish during the year and beyond in order to achieve our Priorities.

Since the beginning of the Corporate Strategy 2016-19, we have completed a number of tasks which are shown below with our new top tasks for 2018/19.

Priority: Provide high quality services at the lowest possible cost to Council Taxpayers	
Work with Publica Group Ltd to deliver savings of £1.85m per annum by 2020	2018/19
Start work on the preparation of a new Corporate Strategy for the period 2019-2023	2018/19
Support the Gloucestershire One Public Estate Cirencester project	2018/19
Lead the Implementation of Anti-Fraud arrangements with partner Councils and deliver savings as planned	Achieved
Improve buildings and asset utilisation to deliver revenue savings by working with key partners in the public and voluntary sector, by the end of March 2018	Partially Achieved
Implement the new shared Public Protection service by the end of 2016	Achieved

Priority: Protect and enhance the local environment whilst supporting economic growth	
Adopt the Local Plan by Summer 2018	2018/19
Adopt and implement the Community Infrastructure Levy jointly with West Oxfordshire District Council by April 2019	2018/19
Review service options for the future Cotswold waste service, in preparation for the renewal of the fleet in 2019, including consultation on service design	2018/19
Progress work on the Cirencester Town Centre Master Plan	2018/19
Work to progress the Brewery Court developer-led scheme for a cinema and retail scheme	2018/19
Work to address Cirencester's car parking needs, by pursuing a range of solutions including the provision of a decked car park at the Waterloo site and permit parking at the Cirencester Rugby Club	2018/19
Submit the Local Plan to the Department of Communities and Local Government for examination, by early summer 2017	Achieved
Complete further flood alleviation works, including Moreton-in-Marsh by the end July 2017	Achieved
Assess future car parking demands in Cirencester by the end of 2016	Achieved
Deliver initiatives to reduce waste to landfill and increase recycling, for example by improving the amount of composting of food waste, to help the Council's target by the end of March 2017	Achieved

Deliver the Local Plan Strategies including progressing a new strategic development site and associated infrastructure in Cirencester, to support housing and employment needs in the area	Achieved
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Priority: Champion issues which are important to local people	
Participate in Gloucestershire County Council's Fastershire initiative to improve the roll-out of high speed broadband to all parts of the District , including hard to reach areas, by the end of this Strategy	2018/19
Deliver a minimum of 150 affordable homes in 2018/19	2018/19
Increase the number of electric vehicle charging points in the District for both public and council business use by end of March 2019	2018/19
Support the improvement works to the Corinium Museum	2018/19
Review emergency housing accommodation and consider options for direct provision by the end of March 2018	Achieved
Roll out the community defibrillator project across the District and support communities in improving health through enabling physically active lifestyles during 2017/18	Achieved
Deliver a minimum of 150 affordable homes each year for the next two years (starting in 2016/17)	Achieved