

Corporate Strategy 2012 - 20152014/15 Update and Corporate PlanForeword

Welcome to the Council's Corporate Strategy Update and Corporate Plan for 2014/15. This is the last annual update to our Corporate Strategy for 2012 to 2015.

We have made good progress since 2012 and the key things that we have achieved are outlined in this document. They include generating savings by further development of joint working with other councils and transferring services to other providers. This has meant that we were able to reduce our share of Council Tax by 5% and freeze charges such as Garden Waste, Car Parking and Leisure. We have also had success in helping to deliver more affordable housing for local people and the completion of flood alleviation schemes.

Because of the ongoing financial climate in which all councils are working, finding ways to be more efficient and make savings continues to be a key focus. We stated that our aim is to be recognised as the most efficient council in the country and some of the things we have done towards this are set out below. We have also reviewed our priorities and agreed that these are still relevant and important to local people.

This document briefly outlines our progress since we originally agreed our Aim and Priorities for the period 2012 to 2015 and sets out the key things we hope to achieve in 2014/15. We have also shown our progress against the group of performance indicators used to measure our aim of being recognised as the most efficient council in the country.

Councillor Lynden Stowe
Leader of the Council

Key Issues for the Council

The 2011 Census¹ highlighted a number of challenges for Cotswold District. It showed that we have an ageing population, which impacts upon the services we provide, for instance the type of housing needed, the demand for Disabled Facilities Grants, and the types of activities provided at leisure centres. The number of households is also increasing, which has implications for planning, other local services and infrastructure in general. Due to the high quality environment of the Cotswolds, the difference between house prices and people's earnings locally is greater than in many other areas and therefore the demand for affordable housing remains an issue.

No part of the District is significantly deprived overall, but because of the rural scarcity in large parts people have difficulty in gaining access to housing and services such as GPs' surgeries and Post Offices.

Cotswold District has weathered the economic downturn of recent years fairly well, with unemployment being lower than in many other areas. However, we continue to be aware of the effects of the economic situation on local businesses and local people. The Coalition Government has aimed to reduce public spending and, as a result, grants to this Council have been cut by 53% over four years (2011/12 to 2014/15), which means that we have had to find even more innovative ways to become more efficient and make savings whilst protecting services that local residents want.

How We Are Addressing the Challenges

The Council has developed a programme of savings to meet its financial challenges. Indeed, our success in making efficiency savings meant that we could reduce our Council Tax requirement by 5% for 2013/14, the largest reduction in the country.

Much of our savings programme has been based around sharing Officers and services with other Councils, expected to save the Council £1.5m per annum by 2017/18. We have a strategic partnership with West Oxfordshire District Council and we share our Chief Executive and many other Officers, and have a number of joint services. The Council has also joined with West Oxfordshire and Forest of Dean District Councils and Cheltenham Borough Council to share financial, human resources and payroll services. We are currently developing further joint service arrangements and expect that shortly almost all of our services will be shared in some form.

A further part of our savings has been achieved by finding alternative arrangements for our environmental services. In 2012 we transferred our waste and grounds maintenance service to Ubico Ltd., a company we established jointly with Cheltenham Borough Council. In the first year, this saved £1m between the two Councils, compared with a target of £500,000. This puts us on target to achieve joint savings of £4.5m over five years. An added bonus of this change has been that we have been able to introduce the kerbside collection of plastics, which has helped us to stay in the top 10 Shire District Councils for recycling rates.

Further savings have been made by the transfer of the management of our leisure centres at Bourton-on-the-Water, Cirencester and Chipping Campden, and the Corinium Museum, to 'Everyone Active', and Tetbury and Fairford to the local Schools, which will result in savings of about £3m over 10 years. Our parking service has also been outsourced, which will give us further savings of £83,000 a year.

¹ Fuller details of the 2011 Census and other key statistics about the District can be found in the Corporate Strategy Update for 2013/14.

To help address housing issues, we have worked with communities, developers and Housing Associations. Through the planning process, we enabled 393 new homes to be built in the District in 2012/13. Of these, a total of 194 homes were affordable, almost double our target. These local homes will help to meet the needs of different groups of people, including older people and those living in rural areas.

We have also made progress in developing a Local Plan to balance the need for housing and economic growth with preserving the unique character of the Cotswolds. We carried out public consultation in 2013 and workshops with local communities in January 2014. We are aiming to be one of the early adopters of a Local Plan which complies in full with the National Planning Policy Framework. Consultation on a draft Local Plan document will take place in the summer of 2014.

Having regard to the problems for local communities caused by flooding, working with partners we have completed major flood alleviation schemes at Chipping Campden, Northleach, Lower Slaughter, Weston-sub-Edge and Fairford, with work at Moreton-in-Marsh and Lechlade still progressing.

To continue our work into the future, we have reviewed our Aim and Priorities and agreed our top tasks for 2014/15, as set out in the following pages.

Council Aim and Priorities 2012 - 2015

In the original Corporate Strategy for 2012 to 2015, we set out our Aim and Priorities, having regard to the economic situation and financial pressures on the Council at that time and those things which we felt were important for local people. The Council has made progress since 2012 but we feel that our original aim and priorities are still appropriate.

The Council's aim is:

To be recognised as the most efficient council in the country

Our Priorities are as follows:

- Freeze Council Tax until 2016 whilst protecting front line services that matter to our residents;
- Maintain and protect our environment as one of the best places to live, work and visit;
- Work with local communities to help them help themselves.

Progress Towards the Council's Aim

Our aspiration is to be regarded as the most efficient Council in the country. Although local government has been widely recognised as the most efficient part of the public sector, in the current economic climate the need to increase productivity and be more efficient has become ever greater as budgets continue to be reduced.

In our model of efficiency, we developed a 'basket' of indicators based on cost, outputs and outcomes, against which we would be able to compare ourselves with other Shire District Councils.

How is it Calculated?

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'.

How Do We Compare?

The first ranking exercise for 2011/12 forms the baseline against which we will gauge future improvements. Overall, we performed well against our 'basket' of indicators compared to other similar councils, with a baseline ranking of 9 out of 201 Shire District Councils (low is good).

In 2012/13, the Council's overall ranking for the 'basket' of indicators improved from 9 to 5, with the majority of the indicators being ranked within the top 25% of Shire District Councils. On inspection of the individual measures within the 'basket', we can see that, in general, there were small changes in ranking position - the best improvements in both performance and ranking position were for the rate of Council Tax increase, and the speed of processing Housing Benefit/Council Tax new claims.

Individual rankings can improve without a similar or any improvement in performance and vice-versa, as the main aim is to understand how we compare with other councils. So, although the percentage of Council Tax collection fell marginally (by 0.3 percentage points), the ranking position fell by 13 places - this was mainly due to a low degree of variability or 'spread' within the dataset.

Sickness absence rates in the Council increased in 2012/13 (due largely to higher than anticipated long-term chronic illnesses across a small number of employees), while our ranking did not change. Some sources suggest that sickness absence rates in both the private and public sector increased in 2012/13 by one day per employee. During 2013/14, we have seen a large decrease in long-term absences which, if continued to the end of the year, will lead to a large improvement in ranking.

Indicator	Baseline time period 2011/12	Baseline		2012/13 ²		Improvement trend for rankings
		Outturn	Ranking	Outturn	Ranking	
Overall cost of council services per head of population (Revenue Estimates)	2012/13	£109.81	77	£107.80	73	↑
Rate of increase in council tax	2012/13	0%	36	-5%	1	↑
Time taken to process housing benefit/council tax benefit - new claims	2011/12	13 days ³ (12.3 days ⁴)	14	10 days ³ (9.4 days ⁴)	5	↑
Percentage of council tax collected	2011/12	99.2%	4	98.9%	17	↓
Amount of residual household waste per household (kg)	2011/12	362kg	12	361kg	15	↓
Percentage of household waste sent for recycling, composting and reuse	2011/12	58.65%	11	58.57%	9	↑
Sickness absence rate (average full-time equivalent days per full-time equivalent)	2011/12	8.5 days	142	9.1 days	142	↔
Unemployment claimant rate (job seekers allowance)	Dec 2012	1.4%	20	1.1%	26	↓
Overall crime rate per 1,000 population	2011/12	40.4	40	36.4	40	↔
Overall ranking			9		5	↑

² Time periods for 2012/13 are 2011/12 plus one year

³ Ranking based on DWP reported figure

⁴ Council reported

Top Tasks for 2014/15

Each year we set ourselves a number of Top Tasks. These are the key pieces of work which we need to accomplish during the year if we are to achieve our Priorities.

The Top Tasks for 2014/15 are set out below:-

Priority 1: Freeze council tax for the next three years whilst protecting front line services that matter to our residents
1a. Commission services that provide best value
Develop a permanent waste depot, and transfer additional services to Ubico
1b. Drive down administrative and management costs
Implement the Joint Working Strategy with West Oxfordshire District Council to deliver savings of £600,000 over the next five years (from April 2013)
Complete a review into the potential for joint working based upon the broader GO Shared Service Partnership of West Oxfordshire, Forest of Dean and Cheltenham Councils
Rationalise the Council's land and property portfolio (including office accommodation), and generate increased rental income and/or new capital receipts where possible whilst meeting service delivery objectives
Priority 2: Maintain and protect our environment as one of the best places to live, work and visit
2a. Protect the built and natural environment
Implement a programme of car park improvements
Provide assistance to communities to have energy efficient homes which are warm through the Green Deal Together Community Interest Company and through the delivery of Warm and Well Plus
Produce a robust, evidenced Draft Local Plan for public consultation and subsequent submission for independent examination which meets the requirement of the National Planning Policy Framework in full
Priority 3: Work with local communities to help them help themselves
3a. Provide local homes for local people including bringing empty properties back into use
Deliver 400 affordable homes between 2012 and 2016
3b. Work with town and parish councils to meet local needs
Provide financial and technical support for flood alleviation projects, and work in partnership with agencies and communities to reduce the risk of property flooding

How We Monitor Our Progress

The way in which we turn our Priorities into actions is by the development of an annual Service Delivery Plan for each Council service. These Plans set out the key tasks required to deliver the Priorities (the Top Tasks above), as well as other aspects of the Council's work, and the level of quality we want to achieve.

On a quarterly basis, Cabinet and Audit and Scrutiny Committee Members receive a financial and service performance report for review and challenge, which includes progress on the Council's Top Tasks and performance indicators.

We also measure our performance in relation to our aim to be regarded as the most efficient Council in the country.

The Council's Values

As an organisation, we have a set of values which set out the way we operate, from developing our Aim and Priorities to how we work with each other. Our values are currently as set out below, but we are in the process of reviewing them as it is important that they continue to reflect the organisation that we are striving to be.

Our Values

In everything we do, Councillors and staff will always:

- work with respect and respond to community needs;
- be fair and equitable;
- act with honesty and integrity;
- support the culture of teamwork, co-operation and safety;
- be creative and innovative;
- be open and accessible;
- value people's contribution.

(END)