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COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Friday, 27 August 2021

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CABINET

A meeting of the Cabinet will be held in the Council Chamber at the Council Offices, Trinity Road, Cirencester on **Monday, 6 September 2021 at 6.00 pm.**

Rob Weaver
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Cabinet
(Councillor Joe Harris (Leader), Rachel Coxcoon, Tony Dale, Andrew Doherty, Mike Evemy, Jenny Forde, Joe Harris, Juliet Layton and Lisa Spivey)

Recording of Proceedings – The law allows the public proceedings of Council, Cabinet, and Committee Meetings to be recorded, which includes filming as well as audio-recording. Photography is also permitted.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings please let the Committee Administrator know prior to the date of the meeting.

AGENDA

1. **Apologies**
2. **Declarations of Interest**
To receive any declarations of interest from Members and Officers, relating to items to be considered at the meeting.
3. **Minutes (Pages 5 - 12)**
To approve the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 5 July 2021.
4. **Chair's Announcements (if any)**
5. **Council, Priority and Service Performance Report - 2021/22 - Quarter One (Pages 13 - 98)**
Purpose
To provide an update on progress on the Council's priorities and service performance.
To provide information on the Council's financial position

Recommendations
 - a) review overall progress on the Council priorities, service delivery and financial performance for 2021-22 Q1; and
 - b) approve the proposed changes to the performance indicator set.
6. **Ombudsman Decision - Reference 20 008 553 & Council Tax Section 13A Policy (Pages 99 - 124)**
Purpose
This report updates Cabinet of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) report in compliance with the Council's statutory duties under Section 31(2) of the Local Government Act 1974 and outlines proposals to introduce a Council Tax Section 13A Policy to support the Council in making decisions when considering such applications from Council Tax payers in the District.

Recommendations
That Cabinet:
 1. Notes and acknowledges the important role of the Ombudsman in scrutinising and reviewing the actions of local authorities, together with the legally binding nature of the findings made against the Council;
 2. Endorses the actions already taken, namely:
 - a) a written apology to the complainant sent on 23 August 2021 with payment on 26 August 2021 as recompense of £300 for "distress and uncertainty";
 - b) reconsideration of the complainant's request to write-off his arrears in line with the Council's Revenues and Housing Support Services Recovery Policy (2019);
 - c) training and guidance provided to the relevant Revenues & Benefits staff ensuring they provide residents of any opportunities to apply for benefits, discounts or

relief in line with the relevant policies; and;

- d) guidance to staff reiterating the need to provide clear information to Council Tax payers regarding payment plans from the outset, including how or when they will end, details of any review and warning of any further recovery action.
3. Approve the Draft Council Tax Section 13A Policy
 4. Endorses a written invitation to the complainant to apply for discretionary relief, subject to approval of the Section 13A Policy at annex B.

The recommendations in paragraphs 2 a) to d), 3 and 4 form the Council's formal response to the Ombudsman's recommendations under section 31 of the Local Government Act 1974, and that the ombudsman be notified of the actions that the Council has taken.

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Minutes of a meeting of Cabinet held on Monday, 5 July 2021 at the Council Chamber, Trinity Road, Cirencester.

Councillors present:

Joe Harris	Mike Every
Rachel Coxcoon	Jenny Forde
Tony Dale	Juliet Layton
Andrew Doherty	Lisa Spivey

Officers present:

Rob Weaver, Chief Executive
Jenny Poole, Deputy Chief Executive
Angela Claridge, Interim Monitoring Officer
Ben Sadler, Democratic Services

13 Apologies

There were no apologies for absence received.

14 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers in attendance at the meeting.

15 Minutes

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 7 June 2021 be approved as a correct record subject to the following amendment to Minute 12:

‘Members commented that the schools were educational establishments and were not set up to run leisure facilities. They were concerned that the money was granted to the schools without an understanding of the risks of the viability of the centres’.

16 Chair's Announcements (if any)

The Leader congratulated the England football team on reaching the semi-finals of the European Championships.

17 Contain Outbreak Management Fund ("COMF") for the Visitor Economy and Broader Mitigation Against Covid-19

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The Committee received a report from the Business Manager, Localities which asked Members to consider agreeing a broad approach to the use of the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), including the visitor economy fund.

The report advised that funding had been allocated to Cotswold District Council by Gloucestershire County Council from their Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF), as part of the response to Covid-19. The Council, as well as all the other Districts in Gloucestershire, had been allocated £50,000 specifically to reduce the risk of Covid-19 transmission linked to the visitor economy, through measures to enable residents and visitors to be and to feel safe.

The intention was that the potential projects and initiatives eligible for funding should be identified and agreed as soon as possible to enable the funding to be spent by 31 March 2022. The report noted that guidance as to the criteria for funding had been produced and these were outlined in section I of the report.

The Council had also received a direct allocation of £97,403.03 funding from government, which was ring fenced for public health purposes in relation to the mitigation against, and management of, local outbreaks of Covid-19.

The report recommended that the proposed approach be endorsed and authority be delegated to the Business Manager (Localities) to agree how best to use the funding in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing.

An alternative option was that Members could choose not to spend its allocation of COMF funding but this was not recommended because helping local communities to recover from the impact of Covid-19 was paramount.

Councillor Forde introduced the report and proposed the recommendations as laid out. This was seconded by Councillor Evemy.

Councillor Layton advised that she would be pleased to be consulted.

Having considered the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

Resolved that the proposed approach to the COMF allocations from the County Council and the Government is endorsed and authority is delegated to the Business Manager (Localities) to agree how this funding is used to best effect in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing.

Record of Voting - for 8, against 0, abstention 0, absent 0.

18 Funding for Essential Maintenance of Council Service Property Assets

The Committee received a report from the Property and Facilities Manager which requested approval to fund essential repairs at the Council's properties: Cirencester Leisure Centre and Packers Leaze Waste Vehicle Depot.

The report advised that the two sites referred to above required funding allocation for essential maintenance in order for the properties to continue to support key services. The Waste Depot required works to the drainage at the site to reduce surface water flooding to

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the waste vehicle parking area. The poor drainage in the area caused health and safety issues for Ubico staff accessing the waste collection vehicles.

With regard to the Leisure Centre, specialists had been engaged to agree a scope of work which would give more sustainable, longer-term and low maintenance solutions and address the existing corrosion following a number of problems identified with the painted steel structural support columns and roof struts. The report also noted the need to shut the facility whilst work was completed.

The report recommended that Cabinet approve the funding requested for flood works at the Packers Leaze Depot, totalling £55,000. In addition, Cabinet was asked to recommend that Council approve the funding request for the Leisure Centre Pool Hall and asked that authority be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive to update the Capital Programme and Strategy and the Treasury Management Strategy as appropriate. Authority would also be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive, in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Group Manager for Commissioning to agree the final funding on receipt of tenders, and award the contracts as necessary.

An alternative option was that the Council could choose not to undertake the works highlighted but this was not recommended due to the health and safety and reputational risks identified.

Councillor Every introduced the recommendations and highlighted the key sections of the report.

Following questions from Members, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that any contingency to address loss of earnings from either the Leisure Centre or Ubico would be considered separately.

The recommendations were seconded by Councillor Doherty.

Members noted that as the funding required for the Leisure Centre was over £100,000, that decision would require approval from Full Council at the next meeting.

Having considered the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

Resolved that funding of: £55,000 for flood works at the Packers Leaze Depot is approved.

Recommend that Council:

- a) approve the funding request of £110,000 for maintenance within the Cirencester Leisure Centre Pool Hall;
- b) delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive to update the Capital Programme, the Capital Strategy and the Treasury Management Strategy to include the requested funding;
- c) delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and the Group Manager for Commissioning to agree the final funding on receipt of the tenders and to award the contracts for the necessary works set out in the report, if funding is approved.

Record of Voting - for 8, against 0, abstention 0, absent 0.

19 Review of Options and Need for Additional Parking Provision Cirencester

The Chief Executive addressed the meeting and advised that this report would be deferred until the September 2021 meeting to enable more work to be completed around the evidence base.

He advised that this had been included on the agenda in error.

Resolved that the report stand deferred to the September Cabinet meeting.

20 Creation of Cotswold District Council Flood Warden Programme

The Committee received a report from the Chief Executive which asked Members to consider the creation of a Cotswold Flood Warden Programme.

The report reminded Members of the impact that flooding had on residents of the District, in particular following the winter of 2020/21 which saw properties affected in Siddington, Mickleton, Moreton in Marsh, Daglingworth, Coberley and Adlestrop. The Council had worked alongside Ubico to support residents and had held an online 'flooding forum' to gather views and offer support and advice. It was felt that the creation of a flood warden programme was another way in which the Council could provide a supportive role and Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) had been approached following their successful track record of supporting councils in the creation and management of voluntary flood warden programmes.

An overview of the programme that GRCC could provide was detailed at Appendix I and the key deliverables were listed at section 1.8 of the report. The report recommended that the Flood warden programme be funded from the Severe Weather Recovery earmarked reserve and that authority be delegated to the CEO, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Waste and Recycling to liaise and finalise the details of the programme.

An alternative option was that Members could choose not to support the creation of the volunteer Flood Warden Programme.

Councillor Doherty introduced the report and proposed the recommendations as laid out. These were seconded by the Leader.

Having considered the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

Resolved that

- (a) the flood warden programme in 2021/22 be funded from the Severe Weather Recovery earmarked reserve; and
- (b) authority is delegated to the CEO, in consultation with the Cabinet member for the Environment, Waste and Recycling to liaise with GRCC to finalise the detail of the programme and identify the initial towns and parishes to be approached with a view to them being part of the initial programme.

Record of Voting - for 8, against 0, abstention 0, absent 0.

21 Local Climate Bond Pledge

The Committee received a report from the Deputy Chief Executive, which asked Members to consider making a pledge to issue a Local Climate Bond using the Community Municipal Investment (“CMI”) model.

The report advised that following the Council’s commitment to taking a Climate Emergency leadership role, it was working with partners on various initiatives to facilitate reduction of carbon emissions in the District. The Council’s Recovery Investment Strategy set out the Council’s strategic aims associated with planned investment of £54 million. The sources of funding for this investment were set out in the Council’s Treasury Management Strategy and included traditional borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board but also “special purpose companies created to enable local authority bond issues.” One such bond was a CMI.

It was noted that the use of a CMI would enable the Council to promote the work it was carrying out in relation to the Climate Emergency and would facilitate community buy-in to addressing the Climate Emergency throughout communities in the District. In addition, there were no direct financial implications because the issue of a Local Climate Bond, using the CMI model, would be subject to a further report to the Council.

An alternative option was that Cabinet could choose not to issue the CMI pledge.

Councillor Evely introduced the report and highlighted paragraph 1.6 of the report, which explained the provided some background to The Green Finance Institute. He concluded by stating that he hoped the pledge would strengthen the belief that Cotswold District Council were committed to tackling the Climate Emergency. Councillor Evely proposed the recommendations as laid out.

Councillor Coxcoo provided some background on the climate bond and gave examples of other authorities already taking up the opportunities. She therefore seconded the proposals.

Following a question from Councillor Doherty, the Deputy Chief Executive explained that it was hoped this work would tie in with the other climate change projects the Council were pushing forwards with.

Having considered the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

Resolved to pledge to issue a Local Climate Bond, using the CMI model.

Record of Voting - for 8, against 0, abstention 0, absent 0.

22 Financial, Council Priority and Service Performance Report - 2020-21 Quarter Four

The Committee received a report from the Chief Executive, which provided an update on progress on the Council’s priorities and service performance. The report also outlined the Council’s current financial position.

The report reminded Members that since September 2019 the Council adopted the high-level council aim and priorities. A new performance management framework was developed, setting out six key strands of information as listed at paragraph 1.2 of the report. Members were also reminded of the impact of Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns encountered throughout the UK and a full update was provided at section 2 of the report.

Despite the impact of Covid-19 on resources, progress had been made to deliver the actions in the Corporate plan and the Council Priority report was attached at Annex A. The Service Performance Report was attached at Annex B.

Section 5 of the report updated on the Financial Performance of the Council, with the Revenue Summary and Variances and a Summary of gross capital expenditure attached as appendices C and D.

The report recommended that, alongside noting the progress detailed, Cabinet delegate authority to the CEO in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive, Leader, Deputy Leader and any other relevant Cabinet Members to approve additional funding to Publica as set out in the report.

Members were also asked to approved the use of funds for consultancy support as set out in paragraph 5.33 of the report.

There were no alternative options identified.

The report had been considered at the Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 29 June 2021 and the scrutiny members' comments would be reported to the Cabinet.

The Chief Executive outlined the report and reminded Members of the impact of Covid-19 on staffing levels. He took Members through the key findings of the report including the impact on Leisure Centres, parking income and other Council income streams.

It was therefore proposed and duly seconded that the recommendations be approved.

Having considered the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

Resolved that

- a) the overall progress on the Council priorities, service delivery and financial performance for 2020-21 Q4, is noted;
- b) authority is delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive and the Leader, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and any appropriate Cabinet Members to approve additional funding to Publica as set out in paragraph 5.32 of this report; and
- c) the use of £30,000 for consultancy support on the Council's Leisure Strategy is approved, subject to consideration of a detailed proposal by the Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing as set out in paragraph 5.33 of this report.

Record of Voting - for 8, against 0, abstention 0, absent 0.

23 Inquorate Parish Councils - Procedure for Appointing Temporary Members

The Committee received a report from the Monitoring Officer, which asked Members to consider adopting a procedure to ensure that the Council could promptly to situations where Town and Parish Councils became inquorate and would enable them to continue to work effectively.

The report advised that explained that a Town or Parish Council had to be quorate in order to operate and make decisions. A quorum was defined as one third of the Council's membership but no less than three.

The report recommended that moving forwards these approvals be delegated to senior officers, in conjunction with the political group leaders to enable Town or Parish Council members to be appointed promptly.

An alternative option was that Cabinet could choose to retain the decision making power on this however, due to the frequency of Cabinet meetings this could cause delay for Town and Parish Councils. It was felt that the appointment of temporary members could be delegated to officers in consultation with Group Leaders to ensure member involvement in the process.

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report and provided some background as to the impact that being inquorate could have on a Parish Council. It was noted that this had recently occurred at Poulton Parish Council leaving them unable to function.

Members raised a number of queries in relation to the practicalities of the process and the Monitoring Officer addressed their concerns.

It was therefore proposed and duly seconded that the recommendations be approved.

Having considered the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet

Resolved that the procedure set out in Annex A for making appointments to inquorate Town and Parish Councils under section 91 of the Local Government Act 1972, is adopted.

Record of Voting - for 8, against 0, abstention 0, absent 0.

24 Proposal for Loan Finance to Cottsway Housing Association

The Committee received a report from the Deputy Chief Executive which asked Members to consider a proposal to provide loan financing to Cottsway Housing Association Ltd through its subsidiary company, Cottsway 2. The lower cost of finance would enable the provision of green energy generation via solar PV installation on fifteen houses at Davies Road, Moreton-in-Marsh.

The report reminded Members that Council had approved a Capital Investment and Recovery Strategy in September 2020 and this report was the first investment proposal under that strategy.

The report outlined a summary of the proposals, the views of the Capital Programme Investment Board, detailed the financial implications, legal implications and risks associated with the proposals.

Alternative options were that Cabinet could choose not provide the loan financing to Cottsway 2 Ltd but this would mean that Solar PV was not financially viable and would not be provided on the development. Cabinet could also request a higher rate of interest on the loan. However, this would reduce the financial viability of the development and would impact upon the provision of Solar PV on the development.

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Councillor Evely introduced the report and highlighted the key details.

Members raised a number of queries including possible amendments to the agreement to further improve the security of the loan (subject to agreement with Cottsway).

Members noted that appropriate due diligence work had been undertaken which had resulted in no significant issues being flagged.

It was therefore proposed and duly seconded that the recommendations be approved.

Having considered the report, and having heard from the Members present, Cabinet


Recommended that

- (a) the loan arrangement is approved by Council;
- (b) the loan is financed through Prudential Borrowing in line with the Council's Capital and Treasury Management Strategies;
- (c) subject to the approval by Council of recommendation (a), the negotiation of the detailed terms for the transaction be delegated to the Deputy Chief Executive, following consultation with the, Head of Legal Services, Monitoring Officer and the Cabinet Member for Finance; and
- (d) the Audit Committee review performance as part of regular Treasury Management updates.

Record of Voting - for 8, against 0, abstention 0, absent 0.

The Meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and closed at 7.15 pm

Chair

 <p>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	<p>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p>CABINET – 6 SEPTEMBER 2021</p>
<p>Report Number</p>	<p>AGENDA ITEM 5</p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p>FINANCIAL, COUNCIL PRIORITY AND SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT – 2021-22 QUARTER ONE</p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>ALL</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>All relevant Cabinet Members</p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Robert Weaver, Chief Executive Tel: 01285 623607 Email: robert.weaver@cotswold.gov.uk</p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>To provide an update on progress on the Council's priorities and service performance To provide information on the Council's financial position</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Annex A – Changes to the performance indicator set Annex B - Council Priorities report Annex C - Performance indicator report Annex D - Revenue Summary and Variances Annex E - Summary of gross capital expenditure</p>
<p>Recommendation/s</p>	<p><i>That the Cabinet:</i> <i>a) reviews overall progress on the Council priorities, service delivery and financial performance for 2021-22 Q1;</i> <i>b) approves the proposed changes to the performance indicator set.</i></p>
<p>Corporate priorities</p>	<p>Deliver services to the highest standards Respond to the climate crisis Provide socially rented homes Make our Local Plan green to the core Support health and well-being Enable a vibrant economy</p>
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Exempt</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Consultees/ Consultation</p>	<p>None</p>

I. BACKGROUND

- I.1. In September 2019, the Council adopted the high level council aim and priorities in lieu of a full Corporate Plan. The more detailed work was partly delayed by the impact of Covid-19 but presented an opportunity to re-examine the Council's priorities as part of the Covid-19 recovery work. The recovery work has been embedded within the new Corporate Plan 2020-24 which was adopted by the Council in September 2020.
- I.2. To support the new plan a new Performance Management Framework has been developed and is a much broader framework than previous frameworks. It sets out six key strands of information on which assurance needs to be provided and represents a shift in focus from performance monitoring to performance management:
 - Business analytics and service assurance
 - Place based measures and comparators
 - Business Plan strategic actions
 - Council Plan priority actions
 - Project and programme management assurance
 - Risk and opportunity management
- I.3. The quarterly performance report will evolve in line with the Performance Management Framework as well as feedback from senior officers and Members.
- I.4. In line with normal practice at the end of 2020-21, services reviewed their indicators to ensure that they remain appropriate and relevant. Some revisions have been proposed to the indicator set to reflect how services have changed and current thinking especially around customer services indicators. For example, on reviewing the indicator to achieve '70% of telephone calls within 20 seconds', the findings concluded that 20 seconds was set at a time when the service was a simple phone answering service rather than advisors attempting to resolve calls at first point of contact. Similarly, the abandoned call rate and target of 5% was originally based on the premise that if a call is abandoned, the service has performed poorly; this is not the case as call waiting messages are used to provide alternative ways of accessing the Council's service including the website. Therefore, it is proposed that performance in this service should focus on customer satisfaction and the ability to provide more options for accessing the Council's services including the potential for channel shift to quicker and more cost effective methods of communication where possible, such as the website. Over the next few months, officers will be developing a framework for measuring digital take-up so that we can better understand the impact of digitisation on demand for customer services. A list of changes to the indicator set is attached at Annex A.
- I.5. A selection of publicly available benchmarking data for the most recent period at that time (2019-20) was included in the 2020-21 Q4 Performance Indicator report on a trial basis. Some of the 2021-21 data has started to be released with the majority available by the end of December 2021. It is proposed that the benchmarking data is updated and reported on an annual basis.
- I.6. A high level commissioning statement was approved by Cabinet in January 2020 which sets out the relationship between Publica and the Council and their respective responsibilities. Publica must ensure that it provides the necessary information 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.

1.7. The Council's Chief Executive has received a report on progress towards achieving the Council's priorities and service performance. He has assessed performance in line with the high level commissioning statement. He has noted the progress that has been made to deliver the actions in the Corporate Plan; and where a reduced level of operational performance has been identified, the actions that are being taken to improve performance. He has drawn particular attention to the following:

- In February 2021, the Government set out its 4 stage roadmap out of lockdown with the lifting of all restrictions on 21 June, which was delayed until 19 July. As infection rates have been high over the last few weeks, staff are being encouraged to continue to work from home;
- There were over 106,000 visits to the Council's leisure facilities in Q1 which is encouraging. The Council's leisure centres re-opened on 12 April (Stage 2), with most activities and classes re-starting on 17 May. Some government grant funding has been made available to cover Council losses from waiving management fees, as well as costs incurred by leisure operators during the lockdown, and to support re-opening. The Museum re-opened on 17 May in line with stage 3 of the roadmap, and has welcomed 6551 visitors (to end of Q1);
- A number of services have continued to support businesses to access grants, and carrying out 'test and trace'. Between the November 2020 lockdown and the end of Q1, around £33,145,000 has been distributed in both mandatory and discretionary grants to 2099 businesses across the District. These schemes ended on 30 June 2021, with final payments to be made by the end of July 2021. However, the 'test and trace' work carried out by the Benefits team has been extended to the end of September;
- The Council's business rates collection figure (in year) continues to be affected by the impact of Covid-19 on businesses, as is the case with other councils throughout the country. The Government supported certain businesses with 100% business rate relief last year, but there are still businesses which are struggling financially. At the end of June 2021, the relief was reduced to 66% which will run until the end of the financial year.

2. COUNCIL PRIORITY REPORT

2.1. Progress on actions in the Corporate Plan include:

- The second phase of the cashless parking project has been completed with the change to cashless payment methods implemented at car parks at the Abbey Grounds, Old Station and the Leisure Centre from June 2021. This project will deliver multiple benefits including supporting the Council's carbon reduction commitment and reducing cash collection costs. As use of the Council's Rissington Road Car Park in Bourton-on-the-Water has increased, the Council has received some complaints regarding the ability to pay for car parking by payment card at the payment machines. Some customers have also experienced problems with downloading the pay by phone application on to their mobile phones due to poor mobile phone signal strength in the car park. There were 33 complaints made in June. Officers have been working with the supplier to improve the performance of the payment machines by installing an antenna to boost the mobile phone signal strength. The machines will also be upgraded to use "roaming sims" which will utilise the strongest mobile phone signal rather than being limited to one mobile network provider. Officer resources have been made available to provide support to car park users at peak demand time. A survey of mobile signal strength is being carried out at all car parks prior to the roll out of further phases

of the cashless car parking project to minimise the risk of similar issues occurring. A pragmatic approach has been taken to the implementation of further phases of the project with phase 3 delayed by a month until the end of September 2021;

- The Council completed the procurement of a contractor, and design work has commenced to install energy efficiency and carbon reduction technologies at Cirencester and Bourton-on-the-Water leisure centres, Moreton-in-Marsh Area Centre and the Museum Resources Centres at Northleach. The carbon reduction measures will be funded from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme operated by the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS);
- Following the adoption of the Electric Vehicle Charging Point delivery plan in January 2021, an electric vehicle charge point installer was procured in April; and design work is underway starting with Council-owned public car parks and Council offices. This project is therefore on track and progressing;
- In May 2021, the Cabinet approved the Local Development Scheme, and the Draft Cotswold District Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy for public consultation. The GI Strategy forms part of the Local Plan evidence base; and responds to the Council's Climate and Ecological emergencies and corporate priorities to improve health and wellbeing. The purpose of the GI strategy is to assist in the creation of sustainable places to live, which are resilient to climate change and the challenges it brings.
- There has been a great deal of interest in the Crowdfund Cotswold platform (the Council's new approach to community grants). In late May, the Council determined its first set of pledges, agreeing to support 13 projects with pledges to the value of around £72,000.
- The Council has been awarded nearly £73,000 from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to improve employment outcomes or prospects of future employment outcomes for long-term unemployed young people and groups facing the most complex and intractable barriers to work.

2.2. The Council Priority report is attached at Annex B.

3. SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT

- 3.1. Over the last two quarters, performance has been mixed. The nation started to emerge from the third lockdown in March 2021 with the lifting of restrictions over four stages; however in line with government advice the majority of staff have continued to deliver services from home. This has presented challenges to some services most particularly in respect of the planning service.
- 3.2. In response the service has been piloting a hybrid working solution over recent months which should help improve the efficiency of the service (whilst still respecting social distancing to protect staff). However, the time taken to complete statutory consultations has also created delays due to the working arrangements of consultees. The recent ending of the 'work from home' directive has already started to improve this position.
- 3.3. The Council has agreed additional resource to increase the number and grading structure of planning officers to better balance workloads and resources. Other service pressures are considered in detail below.
- 3.4. Some of the performance indicators that are falling short of their targets are considered below together with rectifying actions;

- The average call waiting time has increased over the last six months; the average was 146 seconds for Q1, which has since reduced to 71 seconds in July. Although the average call waiting time is higher than has been achieved historically, it is still considerably lower than the three minutes that GovMetric has indicated to be a good level of service for local authorities. The fourth quarter of 2020/21 was challenging due to the high call volumes related to annual council tax and garden waste billing processes and Covid-19, as well as staff turnover in the Customer Services team.

Resolution: Although the staffing issues were resolved in Q1, it takes time for new staff to be fully trained up by the more experienced staff; and a further recruitment drive has commenced as the turnover in this service tends to be high as staff take opportunities to progress in the organisation. Work has also started on understanding if there are any other reasons for the increase in call waiting time.

- The average days to process Council Tax Support new claims have increased over the last six months from 27.75 days to 45.75 days, and Council Tax Support changes have increased over the last quarter from 6.78 days to 30.93 days. This was primarily due to high workloads related to the increase in Universal Credit claims since the start of the pandemic (with much of the New Claims time delays beyond our control), the implementation of the new revenues and benefits system, Covid-19 business grants work, as well as providing welfare support to the most vulnerable residents in the District.

Resolution: The service is managing its workload with support from an external provider. As mentioned above, the processing times for new claims and changes is not wholly dependent on the actions of the service and frequently the service needs to wait for information or evidence from either the DWP (Universal Credit) or the client, which can create lengthy delays in completing the claim or change. An analysis of the data is planned to provide an accurate picture of the 'down time' and to find solutions for addressing any delays for which the service is responsible.

- Similarly, the average days to process Housing Benefit changes of circumstances also increased over the last quarter, from 5.27 days to 16.95 days. Following the implementation of the new Benefits system, a software failure on the facility for automatically uploading changes of circumstances and applying them to system records has stopped functioning. Around 80% of changes are applied in this way.

Resolution: A software fix has now been applied and the automation reinstated which should be reflected in an improvement in performance in the second half of Q2.

- The percentage of planning applications determined within timescales has been falling since summer 2020 when the number of applications (in particular 'Other' applications which include householder applications) coming through started to increase in line with the national trend. This increase is now projected to continue to rise. This increase in demand has coincided with reduced capacity due to staff turnover creating a backlog of work.

Resolution: Given the anticipated ongoing nature of increased workloads, the Council has agreed additional resource to support the team and provided an improved career structure to support the recruitment and retention of planning staff. The planning improvement programme has already addressed the build-up of applications awaiting validation (cutting validation times by 75%) and is seeking to improve other workflows within the system.

- The council tax collection rate appears to have rebounded. The service collected 33.5% of the council tax due in the year compared to 29.81% a year ago;
- Thirty-five affordable homes were delivered in the quarter including the final three social rented homes at Bath Road, Tetbury, 14 rented and shared ownership homes in South Cerney (including two social rent), the first six affordable rented homes at the Dyers Lane site in Chipping Campden, and 12 new shared ownership homes in Moreton in Marsh;
- The Council's customers are highly satisfied with services delivered by phone, with over 95% of customers responding positively. The Building Control service commenced a new satisfaction survey a year ago, and although the sample size is relatively small, the majority of customers were fully satisfied with the service provided based on helpfulness of staff, quality of technical advice and other information, responsiveness, and value for money;
- The number of missed bins per 100,000 achieved its target comfortably despite some staffing issues related to positive Covid-19 cases, when crew members working within the same bubble had to then self-isolate. Unfamiliar routes contribute to higher misses, however, the crew was supported by In-Cab technology which was implemented in April, and is still undergoing improvements. Evidence has been seen elsewhere of missed collection reducing by 30% when In-Cab is introduced. In addition, performance is expected to improve from 16 August when crews will not have to self-isolate if double jabbed following contact with a positive Covid case, although they are advised to take a PCR test.

3.6. The waste management data for May and June are still being processed, and we expect to be able to provide a full update in the Q2 report.

3.7. A full report is attached at Annex C.

4. FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Financial Performance (Revenue)

4.1. This report sets out the profiled income and expenditure variances for the period April to June 2021 against the Council's budget.

4.2. At 30 June 2021, the Council had spent £3,396,716 against its net profiled budget of £3,628,567. After taking account of lower than expected income from Government grants of £77,223, which is related to the sales, fees and charges income compensation scheme, the overall underspend against the budget at the end of the first quarter was £154,268.

4.3. The continuing impact of the pandemic has meant that demand has continued to be lower for some of the Council's income generating services, especially car parking and the leisure management fee whilst planning and green waste demand has improved. In addition, the Council has continued to face pressures on its expenditure budgets. In particular, continuing to provide emergency accommodation for individuals and families facing homelessness, collecting additional waste and recycling materials and providing financial support to the Council's leisure contractor to enable the district's Leisure Centre and Corinium Museum to open to the public whilst complying with social distancing restrictions in the first quarter of 2021/22.

4.4. A full list of all cost centres and budget variances is attached to this report at Annex D and includes commentary against the most significant variances. This report highlights a number of budget variances across a range of service areas; excluding those where the income and expenditure variance are comparable and offset each other (net nil variance).

Income

- 4.5. Income from car park fees, fines and permits was significantly impacted by Covid-19 with the 2020/21 outturn position being only 38% of original budget for the year. In Q1 this trend has continued with performance to budget sitting at 58%, £315,000 less than budget. The impact of this is partially offset by the Government's sales fees and charges compensation grant as detailed at 4.2. In July, as lockdown restrictions have eased, income has improved to 85% of the monthly budget and further improvement has been achieved in August.
- 4.6. Conversely, at the end of the first quarter £110,000 more income has been received in respect of green waste annual subscriptions in comparison to the full year budget as a result of higher take up than anticipated.
- 4.7. The Government has confirmed it will continue to reimburse authorities for 75% of Covid-19 related income losses for the first quarter of 2020/21 (after the first 5% of losses is absorbed by local authorities). To qualify, income losses must be related to the delivery of services. The compensation scheme excludes commercial and rental income. The Council is estimated to receive £278,000, reducing the impact of Covid-19. This is £77,000 less than estimated due to income losses being lower overall than budgeted.

Expenditure

- 4.8. Repairs and maintenance expenditure in relation to Council buildings have remained below budget with an expenditure underspend at the end of June 2021 of £26,000 across the Trinity Road, Moreton-in Marsh Offices and Corinium Museum repair and maintenance budgets.
- 4.9. Homeless expenditure has continued to exceed budget but is matched by an increase in grant funding which is expected to be utilised during the financial year. The overall favourable variance of £61,000 across the Revenues and Housing services will reduce over the year as the grant received is matched to operational expenditure.
- 4.10. There were no significant planning appeals during the first quarter of the financial year, resulting in an underspend in the appeals costs budget of £21,000.
- 4.11. The Council has continued to work with SLM to manage the financial impact of Covid-19. Council approved a further financial support package for SLM for the period April to July 2021 at a total capped cost of £280,403. This has been paid on an open book basis and has resulted in expenditure of £119k for the period to 30th June 2021. This is to be funded from the 2020/21 underspend on support for SLM and grant funding of £104,000 received from the National Leisure Recovery Fund.
- 4.12. The management fee payable by SLM was also waived as part of the financial support package for SLM agreed for the period April – July 2021. 71% of this fee will be recoverable via the Government sales, fees and charges income compensation scheme. With the remainder funded through the 2020/21 underspend on support for SLM and grant funding. At Q1 this results in an underachievement of income against budget of £26,000.
- 4.13. Discretionary pension payments paid to Gloucestershire LGPS in Q1 were £25k less than budgeted.
- 4.14. The 2021/22 budget includes contingency funding for expenditure related directly to the impact of Covid-19 and reduced income from fees and charges. The contingency budget is funded from Government Covid-19 grants. The largest expenditure impact is from the Council's contract for environmental services provision with Ubico Ltd. As Ubico Ltd is a wholly local authority owned company, the Council pays for the actual cost of service

delivery. Due to a combination of additional waste being presented by households for collection and Ubico Ltd needing to protect its own employees in response to Covid-19 health and safety requirements, Ubico Ltd incurred unavoidable additional costs. These costs including: agency staff, hire vehicles and personal protective equipment have amounted to £111,000 in the first quarter of the year.

- 4.15. The net variance in respect of the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) is currently £147,000, due to the receipt of unbudgeted grant income. This is expected to reduce in future periods as plans are firmed up to utilise the grant income received from both Gloucestershire County Council and the Department of Health and Social Care.

Capital Activity

- 4.16. The Council's capital budget for 2020/21 is £26,060,000. A total of £276,096 has been spent against these schemes at the end of Q1 with a further £1,133,940 committed.
- 4.17. The most significant variances include £15.2m (Recovery Investment Strategy), opportunities and options are being explored by officers, and detailed reports seeking approval will be presented to Cabinet and Council as appropriate.
- 4.18. A further variance of £4.3m (nil expenditure against budget) is reported in relation to the 'Investment in Strategic Property Acquisition'. Discussions with landowner are on-going.
- 4.19. A variance of £1.5m (nil expenditure against budget) has been reported in respect of the BEIS decarbonisation project, a contractor has now been appointed with work expected to commence in Q3. It is expected that the project will complete by the end of the financial year.
- 4.20. A full list of expenditure and explanation for variances against budget is attached to this report at Annex 'E'.

Capital receipts and disposals

During Q1 a £10k capital receipt was received from a claimant who had received a Disabled Facility Grant having sold the property on which the property adaptations were made. This receipt will be transferred to reserves at end of year.

- 4.21. There were no disposals during the first quarter of the financial year.

5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN (LGO) ANNUAL REVIEW 2020/21

- 5.1. The latest Annual Review Letter sets out the complaints that were made against the Council in 2020/21, as well as the outcome of those complaints.
- 5.2. During the first wave of the Covid-19 outbreak, the LGO temporarily paused its casework for three months to allow authorities to concentrate efforts on vital frontline services. This reduced the number of complaints the LGO received and decided in the 2020-21, and should be considered when comparing data from previous years.
- 5.3. In total, the LGO received eight complaints/enquiries about this Council, half of these related to Planning and Development. The other complaints related to Benefits and Tax (two), Corporate and Other services (one), and Environmental services and Public Protection (one). In the previous year, the Council received six complaints/enquiries, of which four related to Planning and Development.

- 5.4. Five decisions were made by the LGO in 2020/21; three complaints were closed after initial enquiries, one complaint was referred back to the Council for a local resolution; and one complaint was investigated in detail.
- 5.5. The complaint that was investigated related to Environmental services and Public Protection, and more specifically, a Health and Safety in the workplace case. The Ombudsman found no fault with the Council's enforcement process; the case was not upheld.

6. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 6.1. This summary performance report was reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 31 August; and any comments from that Committee will be reported to the Cabinet.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. As described in Section 4 of the report

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. None

9. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 9.1. Contained in this report

10. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 10.1. None

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1. None

(END)

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Annex A Changes to the Performance Indicator Set

Service	Indicator	Change	Reasons
Benefits	Average days to process HB new claims	Remove	The number of new claims has reduced by approx. 70% since the introduction of Universal Credit which is resulting in the overall average being skewed by a small number of claims that have taken significant time to process. The service will continue to monitor this indicator as management information
	Average days to process Council Tax Support new claims	New	Average days to process CTS new claims replaces Average days to process HB new claims. The majority of CTS claims are related to Universal Credit claims
	Average days to process Council Tax Support change events	New	
Building Control	Satisfaction for building control service	New	The service considers that customer satisfaction focussing on quality of advice and information, and value for money is a better indicator of performance than speed of service
Customer services	% of calls answered within 20 seconds	Remove	The 20 seconds target was set when the service was a simple phone answering system rather than advisors attempting to resolve calls at first point of contact. It is proposed that performance in this service should focus on customer satisfaction and the potential for channel shift to quicker and more cost effective methods of communication such as the website. Publica will explore potential indicators as part of the development of a framework to measure digital take-up
	Abandon rate	Remove	The 5% target was set when the service was a simple phone answering system rather than advisors attempting to resolve calls at first point of contact. In addition, call waiting messages encourage customers to abandon the call and use alternative methods of completing their transactions such as the website. Therefore a high abandon rate may not necessarily reflect poor performance
	Average call waiting time	New	Introduce as an interim measure to help to understand workload and response times in the service

Service	Indicator	Change	Reasons
Development Management	Planning application income	New	Income generation is a key factor for the Council. It is also a good indicator of workload in the service and any changes in the landscape e.g. whether a recession is coming
	Pre-planning application income	New	
Housing support	Number of households in emergency accommodation under 28 days	Remove	<p>The ability to achieve the targets (zero for over 28 days, six for under 28 days) is directly reliant on long term accommodation (mainly through HA's) becoming available within 28 days of someone going into B&B. Historically, it has been difficult to achieve these targets as tenants need to give 4 weeks' notice, and there may also be additional delays due to void works. The challenging conditions have been exacerbated since the start of the pandemic. The number of homeless clients in B&B has been at an all-time high, and properties were not coming through due to the Eviction Ban (now expired). Few properties come in via the Private Rented sector.</p> <p>Three new indicators are proposed to give a wider and more informative picture of homelessness in the District</p>
	Number of households in emergency accommodation over 28 days	Remove	
	Number of households in B&B /Hotel type accommodation	New	
	Number of households in Hostel (LA owned or managed)	New	
	The number of successful 'Move On' into suitable independent / long term accommodation from B&B/Hotel/Hostels	New	



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT
April 2021 - June 2021

Cotswold District Council Corporate Plan 2020-24

Our Aim

To rebuild the Council so it can be proactive and responsive to the needs of our residents and businesses in a fast changing environment, building for the future whilst respecting our heritage

Our Priorities



Our Principles

- rebuilding trust and confidence in the council by promoting a culture of openness and transparency
- providing value for money for our residents and businesses by using our resources wisely and investing in the district's fabric and future
- listening to the needs of our community and acting on what we hear

Executive Summary Highlights

- The second phase of the cashless parking project has been completed with the change to cashless payment methods implemented at car parks at the Abbey Grounds, Old Station and the Leisure Centre from June 2021; this project will deliver multiple benefits including supporting the Council's carbon reduction commitment and reducing cash collection costs. As the use of the Council's Rissington Road Car Park in Bourton-on-the-Water has increased, there have been some complaints regarding the ability to pay for car parking by payment card at the payment machines, and some customers have experienced problems with downloading the pay by phone application to mobile phones as a result of poor mobile phone signal strength in the car park. Officers have been working with the supplier to improve the performance of the payment machines by installing an antenna to boost the mobile phone signal strength. A survey of mobile signal strength is being carried out at all car parks prior to the roll out of further phases of the cashless car parking project to minimise the risk of similar issues occurring. The machines will also be upgraded to use "roaming sims" which will utilise the strongest mobile phone signal rather than being limited to one mobile network provider. Officer resources have been made available to provide support to car park users at peak demand time. The implementation of further phases of the project has been delayed with phase 3 delayed until the end of September 2021.
- The Council completed the procurement of a contractor, and design work has commenced to install energy efficiency and carbon reduction technologies at Cirencester and Bourton on the Water leisure centres, Moreton in Marsh Area Centre and the Museum Resources Centres at Northleach. The carbon reduction measures will be funded from the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (BEIS).
- In April, the Council completed the procurement of an electric vehicle charge point provider, which will enable the Council to roll out EVCPs in a number of locations in the District. Design work is underway starting with council-owned public car parks and council offices.
- Work is progressing on the Kemble housing site. During April, there was an expressions of interest exercise which was twin tracked with the preparation of a draft contractual JV, which has since been received from Trowers Hamlin. The expressions of interest have been evaluated and a delegated authority report has been issued to the Chief Executive for a decision to appoint a preferred Registered Provider.
- Cottsway Housing Association is working with the Council to deliver 100% social rent on a scheme of 15 units at Davies Road, Moreton in Marsh with commuted sums funding from the Council and match funding from Homes England. The planned scheme included air-source electric heating and improved insulation but will now also include the provision of solar PV. The additional costs will be covered by loan financing to Cottsway Housing Association from the Council.
- In May 2021, the Cabinet approved the Local Development Scheme, and the Draft Cotswold District Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy for public consultation. The GI Strategy forms part of the Local Plan evidence base and other Council strategies; and responds to the Council's Climate and

Ecological emergencies and corporate priorities to improve health and wellbeing. The purpose of the GI strategy is to assist in the creation of sustainable places to live, which are resilient to climate change and the challenges it brings.

- The Council's new approach to community grants, Crowdfund Cotswold, was launched in Q4, and is gaining a great deal of interest. In late May, the Council determined its first set of pledges, agreeing to support 13 projects with pledges to the value of around £72,000.
- The Council has been awarded nearly £73,000 from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to improve employment outcomes or prospects of future employment outcomes for long-term unemployed young people and groups facing the most complex and intractable barriers to work.
- The Council has received £100,000 grant funding from Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group to work with the local Integrated Locality Partnership and others, to build on community focussed work to reduce health inequalities. The Council will be working in partnership with 'We Can Move' and involve residents and relevant community groups in developing ways to make it as easy as possible to become more active, especially for those who need it most, including patients with a long-term condition.
- The Tourism team made a successful bid to Visit England's Destination Management Organisation (DMO) Recovery Fund and received funding (£73,000) for 'Escape to the Cotswolds' – an online digital marketing campaign to develop and promote online bookable experiences and to increase Cotswolds Tourism's social media followers to 150,000 followers across all channels by the end of July.
- The Development Consent Order (the planning application) for the A417 Missing Link was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate by Highways England in June 2021. The project, which at around £450m, is the biggest infrastructure investment in the District for a generation, is designed to reduce congestion and improve road safety on this important link between Cirencester and Gloucester and, more widely, the M4 and M5 motorways.
- The Council is working with the Inward Investment Team at GFirst LEP to support ZeroAvia which has relocated from Cranfield to Cotswold Airport. ZeroAvia is a leading innovator in decarbonising aviation, and is developing a hydrogen-electric powered aircraft. It has increased its staff numbers from 10 to 50 with the potential to continue to grow significantly.

Deliver services to the highest standard



The Context

The Council aims to create services that are inclusive and flexible which meet the diverse and changing needs of its residents and communities. To achieve this, it will be important to listen to residents to understand what is important to them, identify the areas in which they need support, and adapt. In the context of reducing budgets over the last ten years and the phasing out of incentivised income streams such as New Homes Bonus, which has been further exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19, the Council will need to take a strategic approach, and make the best use of the available resources.

The Council will work with a range of public and private sector partners to help deliver its aims and objectives and to provide services seamlessly. The emphasis will be on efficiency and effectiveness whilst remaining true to the Council's commitments on climate change and a green economy.

Actions we are taking

In September 2020, the Council adopted the Recovery Investment Strategy 2020-24 which sets out the framework within which the Council can invest in the infrastructure of the District which will deliver on the Council Priorities whilst also closing the emerging budget gap. The Asset Management Plan sets out how council owned assets including service and commercial properties will be managed, and includes an Acquisition and Disposal Strategy. The current AMP is being reviewed and updated and will support the implementation of the investment strategy.

The Council is taking steps to move to cashless parking including contactless, card, by phone or using an app at all council owned car parks over the next 12 months. Moving to cashless parking has multiple benefits; it will support our carbon reduction commitment and reduce the costs associated with cash collection and vandalism of pay and display machines. Officers drive approximately 20,000 miles each year across the District to collect from the machines in addition to daily travelling to the secure depot to count and bank. In January 2021, Cabinet approved the proposal to remove the option to pay by cash

in all car parks using a phased approach which will enable the Council and its service provider, PayByPhone, to promote the change and assist users over an extended period. The first two phases have been completed with the change to cashless payment methods implemented at car parks at Rissington Road, Bourton on the Water; Mangersbury Road, Stow on the Wold; and Beeches car park, Cirencester from March 2021; and from the Abbey Grounds, Old Station and the Leisure Centre from June 2021. To support the implementation, additional repeater signs for the pay by phone option were located in all the car parks as well as warning signs and increased communications with the media and stakeholders relating to each car park. As the use of the Council's Rissington Road Car Park in Bourton-on-the-Water has increased, there have been some complaints regarding the ability to pay for car parking by payment card at the payment machines, and some customers have experienced problems with downloading the pay by phone application to mobile phones as a result of poor mobile phone signal strength in the car park. Officers have been working with the supplier to improve the performance of the payment machines by installing an antenna to boost the mobile phone signal strength. A survey of mobile signal strength is being carried out at all car parks prior to the roll out of further phases of the cashless car parking project to minimise the risk of similar issues occurring. The machines will also be upgraded to use "roaming sims" which will utilise the strongest mobile phone signal rather than being limited to one mobile network provider. Officer resources have been made available to provide support to car park users at peak demand time. The implementation of further phases of the project has been delayed with phase 3 delayed until the end of September 2021.

Whilst all of the Council's public toilets are of a good standard there are some improvements that could be made to ensure they remain modern and clean. A review of our public toilets was commissioned by the Council's new contractor Danfo Ltd, and a condition survey was carried out by an independent body, the British Toilet Association; recommendations for improvements have been proposed. Alongside the review, officers have gathered a range of information on each site including any major refurbishment work, income, expenditure and footfall. A report, which brings the two strands of work together, has been prepared for the Cabinet Member responsible for public conveniences and Senior Officers for consideration of the next steps.

Whilst the provision of toilets is not a statutory function, the Council provides a number of public conveniences across the District to both support tourism and local visitors, and prevent any environmental health impacts from lack of accessibility. The Council has started to explore opportunities to improve accessibility to public conveniences via 'comfort partnerships'. An information gathering exercise has commenced to understand how other local authorities are operating schemes in which businesses offer their facilities to the public/tourists, with the potential for trialling it in the District; Gloucester City Council is already operating such a scheme.

Currently, the market for building control services is buoyant; the service achieved its best performance during 2020-21 over the last three years. Between January and June 2021, the service dealt with 345 applications compared to 265 and 303 in the comparative periods of 2020 and 2019. To maximise income, the service sends out marketing letters with each planning application requiring a building regulations application, as well as entering into partnerships with architects to take on plan checking work for applications both inside and outside the District. Currently, the service has approximately 20 partners.

In March 2021, the Cabinet approved the creation of the Civic Pride Programme for a two year period, which has now been rebranded 'Clean and Green'. The key strategic outcome of this proposal is to achieve a reduction in enviro-crime within the District, delivering the benefit of a high quality environment where economic growth is supported and where the Council positively engages with the community to not only solve immediate issues, but to prevent

further recurrences. While two new civic pride posts are yet to be recruited to, the Lead Enviro-crime Officer is taking opportunities to engage with communities arising from operational work. For example, a recent investigation into an abandoned vehicle on Council land has led to an opportunity for the local community to get involved in maintaining a small parcel of land with the aim to enhance the environment around them. Furthermore, the enviro-crime work has been successful in establishing routine partnership work with the largest social housing provider, Bromford Housing, in dealing with community ASB related problems. By working closely with the Bromford coach and their 36 neighbour coaches across the District, the Council is able to support and be more effective in reducing enviro-crime.



Respond to the climate crisis

The Context

The national regulatory and policy context for the Council's action on the climate emergency is largely unchanged from that reported in the previous quarter.

The Government has become more visibly focused on hosting the 26th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26) in November, and this, combined with ongoing reporting of climate change-exacerbated extreme weather events, is helping to increase public awareness of the increasingly pressing issue.

Two recent and important reports from the Climate Change Committee are relevant here. The first is the 2021 Progress Report to Parliament (June 2021), looking at both mitigation and adaptation. On **mitigation**, the Progress Report shows that Covid lockdown measures led to sharp falls in emissions in aviation and surface transport during 2020, but despite historic promises on climate action, the Government has been much too slow and inconsistent in turning these into actionable strategies and policies. The report calls for a strong Net Zero Strategy comprising a Net Zero Test for all Government policy; an ambitious Heat and Buildings Strategy; new plans on surface transport, aviation, hydrogen, biomass and food, and strengthened plans for the power sector, industrial decarbonisation, the North Sea, peat and energy from waste. On **adaptation** to the inevitable, already 'baked-in' impacts of climate destabilisation, the report shows worthwhile progress in only five of 34 sectors. Among the report's 50 recommendations, the following are probably more relevant to Cotswold District: plans to address overheating risk in homes through building regulations; making adaptation reporting mandatory for all infrastructure sectors; building a strong emergency resilience capability for the UK against climate shocks, learning from the COVID-19 response; implementing a public engagement programme on climate change adaptation, and rising to the big cross-cutting challenges of public engagement, fair funding and local delivery.

The second important report from the Climate Change Committee (June 2021) is the Independent Assessment of UK Climate Risk, giving statutory advice to the Government on the priorities for the forthcoming national adaptation plans and wider action, and looking at more than 60 risks and opportunities that are fundamental to every aspect of life in the UK - natural environment, health, homes, essential infrastructure, and the economy. Alarming, the evidence shows that the gap between risk and rate of adaptation has widened, as adaptation actions have failed to keep pace with the worsening reality of climate risk. The report shows that (just as with mitigation) acting now will be cheaper than waiting to deal with the consequences, and calls on the Government to lead that action. The report identifies eight priority risk areas needing the most urgent action in the next two years, all of which are relevant to Cotswold District: Risks to the viability and diversity of terrestrial and freshwater habitats and species; risks to soil health from increased flooding and drought; risks to natural carbon stores and sequestration; risks to crops, livestock and commercial trees; risks to supply of food, goods and vital services due to climate-related collapse of supply chains and distribution networks; risks to people and the economy from climate-related failure of the power system;

risks to human health, wellbeing and productivity from increased exposure to heat in homes and other buildings, and lastly multiple risks to the UK from systemic or cascading climate change impacts overseas.

Actions we are taking

The Council's electric vehicle charging point delivery plan was adopted by Cabinet in January 2021, and an electric vehicle charge point installer procured in April. The roll-out has now started and design work is underway starting with Council-owned public car parks and Council offices. Work is being coordinated with Gloucestershire County Council to target installations at residents without off-street parking. The result of these measures will be greater confidence among residents who are considering moving to EV use, which should help a 'snowball' effect of market take-up as EVs become commonplace.

A significant part of both the Council's own emissions footprint, and that of the whole District, is heating buildings (homes and workplaces). In relation to domestic properties in the District, the government announced the premature end of the 'able to pay' sector Green Homes Grant scheme in March 2021. The Council is collaborating with neighbouring second tier authorities in Gloucestershire, and with West Oxfordshire DC, on proposals to access government funding to support improved enforcement of private landlords' compliance with the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards regulation, which will both reduce carbon emissions and help tenants at risk of fuel poverty, and to support the creation of new energy retrofit supports for able-to-pay owner-occupiers.

A housing 'Net Zero Carbon Toolkit' has been produced in collaboration between the partner Councils. The Handbook fills a gap in the market for well designed, visually appealing, direct, authoritative guidance based on the latest understanding of Net Zero Carbon policy and technology, and is aimed primarily at small scale builders, architects, contractors and allied trades, although it is also accessible for householders. It covers both new build housing and retrofit, and once launched by the three partner Councils and disseminated within the Districts, will be made available to all councils for dissemination. The Toolkit should help give confidence to householders, specifiers and installers in achieving much better carbon performance, best value for money, and highest quality.

The Council has commissioned a Renewable Energy Strategy for the District, to feed into the Local Plan review. An interim report from the study has been received by officers, and the study's initial conclusions will now be made public through a consultation portal, allowing residents to consider the consultants' recommendations and record their views and opinions ahead of the final report and conclusions in September. The public consultation will provide a voice to Cotswold residents who will in the future live alongside renewable energy generation in the landscape, help to raise awareness of this important part of the climate crisis response, and make the final study conclusions stronger and therefore more valuable in the context of the Local Plan review and its eventual Examination in Public.

The £1.2m Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding secured in Q4 has enabled the procurement of a contractor to install the energy efficiency and carbon reduction technologies at Cirencester and Bourton on the Water leisure centres, Moreton in Marsh Area Centre and the Museum Resources Centres at Northleach. Design work is underway and completion is now expected before the end of March 2022, subject to confirmation from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). As well as very significant carbon emissions savings, the projects will reduce energy costs for

the Council, and particularly the roof-mounted PV panels will be a visual signal for residents of the Council's intentions, and hopefully an encouragement to others to make similar investments, particularly owners and occupiers of larger buildings, both in the public and private sectors.



Provide socially rented homes

The Context

The high quality natural and built environment makes the District a desirable place to live. Cotswold District has a high number of properties owned outright (37.8%, vs 30.6% national average) reflecting the attractiveness of the District as a place to retire or to purchase a second home.

House prices and rents are relatively high. It has been reported that the stamp duty holiday which will start to be phased out at the end on 30 June 2021 has driven up house prices in particular in rural areas. At the end of December 2020, the median property price in Cotswold District was £385,000, 54% higher than the median property price in England and Wales, while the median monthly rent was £850 in 2020-21, over 16% higher than the national median (Private rental market summary statistics - April 2020 to March 2021, Valuation Office Agency). There is a shortage of good quality rented accommodation that is genuinely affordable. Affordable housing helps to meet the District's housing needs and can include low cost home ownership or rented accommodation which typically has a discount of around 20% on the market rent, however this may still not be truly affordable for some residents. Social rented homes have a rent that is lower than affordable rent and therefore provides homes for those on lower incomes or in receipt of full Housing Benefit.

The high house prices and high rents, coupled with the lower than average earnings from local jobs, means housing affordability is a significant challenge for residents in the District which may result in the out migration of young people or alternatively encourage people to commute into Cotswold for work, while living in areas where housing is cheaper.

Actions we are taking

The Council's Affordable Housing Delivery Strategy and action plan was adopted by Cabinet on 8 February 2021 and sets out the delivery strategy for the Council to accelerate provision of social rented and affordable homes for local people. The current focus is to facilitate the affordable housing identified within the Local Plan and through rural exception sites and community-led housing opportunities, and to work with Housing Associations to maximise affordable housing delivery. The Council plans to go further and bring forward additional affordable homes through enabling and direct intervention which may include provision of land and other funding. In addition, any development the Council acquires or builds must be carbon zero in support of the Council's Climate Change emergency commitment. Although this will increase the cost of affordable housing, it will reduce ongoing revenue costs for tenants. Based on the outcomes from the Member workshop in October, discussions with local Registered Providers, and a review of delivery options, Officers recommended that the Council establishes a formal partnership with one lead Registered Provider.

The February Cabinet report also sets out the options for delivery of the Kemble site. Cabinet agreed that delivery should be in partnership with a Registered Provider. Legal advice was commissioned and obtained on the most suitable partnership model; and a specification was produced and checked by Trowers Hamlin and passed to procurement to commence expressions of interest in a Contractual Joint Venture (JV) for delivery of Kemble and Down Ampney sites. During April, there was an expressions of interest exercise which was twin tracked with the preparation of a draft contractual JV, which has

since been received from Trowers Hamlin. The expressions of interest have been evaluated and a delegated authority report has been issued to the Chief Executive for a decision to appoint a preferred Registered Provider.

Officers are undertaking an options appraisal for future use of Sheep Street Cottages and the Cotswold Club. These options include the potential use for service delivery with regard to homelessness accommodation and other housing options. The Council has commissioned and received Energy reports to understand the feasibility of achieving carbon zero. Both buildings have been viewed by a housing provider for use as specialist accommodation; however, there are concerns about the financial and practical viability to deliver against the Council priorities of affordable housing and carbon reduction.

In March, following recommendation from Cabinet, the Council allocated commuted sums grants to two projects to deliver low carbon affordable housing. A sum of £478,500 was allocated to provide 100% social rent on a scheme of 15 units at Davies Rd, Moreton in Marsh; previously an open market scheme with 40% affordable housing only. A further allocation of £102,000 will be used to enhance the environmental sustainability of the homes. The planned scheme included air-source electric heating and improved insulation but will now also include the provision of solar PV. The additional costs will be covered by loan financing to Cottsway Housing Association from the Council (approved by Full Council in July 2021). Cottsway Housing Association has successfully submitted an application to Homes England for match funding; and the scheme is being progressed by the Housing Association.

The second allocation of commuted sums was to Gloucestershire Rural Housing Association (GRHA) for a scheme of 14 homes at Sunground, Avening. The sum of £332,000 (approx) will deliver this rural exception site, formerly a market cross subsidy development of six affordable rent and five private market homes, as a 100% low carbon affordable housing development. The scheme will receive Homes England funding through Bromford which is developing the scheme on behalf of GRHA. The scheme will provide nine social rented and five shared ownership homes for local people, incorporating rainwater harvesting, air-source heating, solar panels and bio-diversity measures. The development has been delayed due to underground utility issues, but is expected to proceed shortly.

In July 2021, Full Council approved the allocation of commuted sums grants for 28 social rent homes at Stockwells, Moreton-in-Marsh to be delivered by Bromford Housing Association. The new development will be the first modular build of its kind anywhere in the Cotswolds. To support the Council to meet its Climate Emergency Strategy, Bromford has been working on how the introduction of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) can support the move towards delivering net zero homes. The Stockwells regeneration scheme represents an opportunity for the Council and Bromford to create the first social rented, MMC net zero homes within the District. With funding support from the Council, Air Source Heat Pumps will replace traditional gas boilers, reducing CO2 emissions from heating and hot water by around 80%. In addition, the introduction of a large solar PV system will reduce net carbon emissions of the development to zero.

One of the Council's aims is to reduce reliance on bed and breakfast and hotels for emergency homeless accommodation. In June 2020, Cabinet approved funding to implement a 'Housing First' model to help reduce rough sleeping within Cotswold District. 'Housing First' is an approach aimed at people with multiple needs who have faced persistent challenges in sustaining accommodation; they are supported by intensive case management and a personalised

approach to live in their own, permanent home. This approach has been well documented in the USA and Sweden for many years. The UK is gradually adopting the approach which is strongly recommended by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

The funding will be used to identify and place six individuals with the most complex needs into a permanent tenancy, supported by Housing Benefit and/or Universal Credit. Service level agreements have been agreed with Bromford and Aspire (support provider), and a dedicated staff member was appointed by Bromford in December 2020 to provide one to one support for the clients. Six clients who would benefit from the Housing First approach have been identified; with four of them having moved into long term accommodation and are being intensively supported by our partner, Aspire to maintain the tenancy. Aspire is working with the other two clients who are waiting for a suitable property to ensure that they are ready to accept the tenancy when it is offered. The Countywide partnership working that the Housing Team has been involved in has identified a further two clients in the District who need the Housing First type approach and they have been accepted on to the Countywide scheme.

The Housing Team is actively participating in a number of countywide funding bids including the Rough Sleeper Initiative round 4 (RSI4) and the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme round 2 (RSAP) fund. The Council is investigating potential options for submitting a specific bid to RSAP to increase the availability of supported accommodation in the District. The Housing Team has identified a council owned building which could potentially be converted into supported accommodation, however, planning concerns may mean submission for the 2021/22 round of bidding is not feasible. Other funding options are being considered and a full report on the options will be presented to Cabinet later in 2021.



Make our local plan green to the core

The Context

In July 2020, the Council made a further commitment to the environment by declaring an Ecological Emergency. Key to the commitments made in both emergencies is the partial update to the Local Plan and making it green to the core.

Since the adoption of the Local Plan in August 2018, the National Planning Policy Framework has introduced new guidance. The guidance increases the importance of climate change adaptation and mitigation and the role that Local Plans play. In the next few months the Environment Bill and the Agricultural Bill is expected to receive Royal Assent. Along with the Clean Growth Strategy they represent the Government's ambition to combat climate change and give the environment a bigger mandate.

Actions we are taking

The adopted Local Plan has been reviewed and at a meeting of Full Council in June 2020, members unanimously resolved to partially update the Local Plan. A review of Local Plan policies is the first step in the Local Plan process and reveals which policies can be left as they are and which policies are likely to need updating. The process of updating the Local Plan will consider the options available to the Council and local communities. Along with international and national pledges made by the Government, the update will reflect the work being undertaken by other services across the organisation. The Renewable Energy Strategy is a good example of this.

The Local Plan can be seen as the glue that holds various corporate objectives together and provides physical action; it also translates national legislation to a local level. The partial update of the Local Plan will aid the building of new homes, in the right place, with suitable green infrastructure that promotes the transition to carbon neutrality. It will assist in providing services and opportunities to enhance the area both for the wellbeing of the people living here as well as its visitors. It will also provide the tools to enhance, create and protect the local environment and the biodiversity of the District and its neighbours.

During Autumn 2020, Cabinet took a decision to pause the formal and regulatory plan making process until there was clarity on the Government's Planning for the Future White Paper and transitional arrangements from the old system to the new, and consequent change to the National Planning Policy Framework. Specific details are available in the November Cabinet paper and also as part of the Council's response to the government consultations, as well as the Council's Local Plan webpages. Cabinet also confirmed the funding to take forward the Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan.

In February 2021, the Government provided clarity on the District's future housing needs, which has returned housing need to previously anticipated levels; e.g. approximately 490 homes per year down from the proposed 1,200 homes per year. As a result, the Council has recommenced its programme of work to undertake a partial update of the Local Plan. The project will be supported by an updated project plan called the Local Development Scheme (LDS) that sets out key stages in the local plan making process. For example, a statutory public consultation is programmed for the end of 2021. In May 2021, the Cabinet

approved the LDS, and the Draft Cotswold District Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy for public consultation. The GI Strategy forms part of the Local Plan evidence base and other Council strategies; and responds to the Council's Climate and Ecological emergencies and corporate priorities to improve health and wellbeing. The purpose of the GI strategy is to assist in the creation of sustainable places to live, which are resilient to climate change and the challenges it brings.

The Local Plan Programme Board, which has membership of all political parties, met for the first time in March 2021 to discuss and define the Corporate Strategy's priority to make the Local Plan 'green to the core' as well as considering project milestones. During the early months of 2021, the Council prepared a Sustainability Appraisal scoping document, which has been consulted upon with representations from Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England as part of the statutory process. The Sustainability Appraisal scoping document sets out the context, objectives and approach of the assessment; and identifies relevant environmental, economic and social issues and objectives. The Council will be commissioning in the summer months of 2021 an integrated appraisal, Habitats Regulation Assessment and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment to support the partial update of the Council's Local Plan.

Work continues on the Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan project which was officially rebooted in January 2021 and work has already begun on revising the Town Centre Strategy contained in the Council's Local Plan. The Council will be carrying out feasibility studies with Cirencester Town Council during 2021 to assist with the eventual master plan options and also to support Cirencester Town Council's emerging Neighbourhood Plan. Consultants were appointed in May to carry out an assessment of possible changes to retail and other uses in the town centre and to provide scenarios that will assist with anticipating future parking demand. The Council's Cirencester Town Centre Health Check is programmed to be updated during the late spring and early summer months of 2021, and will be a joint project with Cirencester Town Council.

In March 2021, the Council appointed its first Sustainable Transport Strategy Lead officer, responsible for developing and delivering a new Sustainable Transport Strategy to support the partial update of the Local Plan and the transition to a carbon zero future. The Lead officer's work will involve supporting local community groups, parish and town councils in taking local action to support low carbon travel, as well as considering the integration of sustainable travel into the Council's objectives on supporting the visitor economy and economic development. The sustainable transport strategy will also assist the preparation of a new Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan.

Support health and well-being



The Context

The Health and Wellbeing of our residents is generally good and above the England and County average in most measures. We are one of the safest districts with very low crime levels and are surrounded by beautiful countryside. However, we do face some challenges. Cotswold District has an ageing population; over the last 10 years, it has experienced greater growth across all 65+ age groups compared to England and Wales. Many of our older residents live alone, and coupled with the rurality of the District, loneliness and access to services are issues for the District.

We also need to take into account the wider determinants of health - social, economic and environmental factors such as unemployment, low income, poor housing, and lifestyles which have an impact on people's health and wellbeing. This means that we need to work with a wide range of partners, to pool resources and to apply a whole systems and asset-based approach to address challenges together.

Actions we are taking

We want Cotswold District to be the best in the country for health and wellbeing, and promoting healthy lifestyles and providing opportunities for people of all ages to be active is key. A Leisure Strategy determined by local priorities and outcomes was developed with the aim of providing effective and sustainable physical activity and sport opportunities for local communities via investment in our stock of leisure facilities and other non-facility interventions. In March 2021, Cabinet approved the Leisure Strategy and authorised officers to work in partnership with other organisations on the feasibility of the projects identified within the strategy, and to undertake a leisure management options appraisal to determine the most suitable delivery model, contract scope and contract terms for the Council's leisure facilities, when the current contract expires. It is anticipated that a Corporate Programme Manager will need to be appointed to manage the delivery and outcomes of the strategy, and a Members working group has been established to develop the scope for the Contract options appraisal, with the first meeting in July.

Promoting healthy lifestyles, fun and self-care for all ages, and providing the facilities and opportunities to support communities to stay active is important, but we also need to encourage resilient, well-connected and active communities that take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing goals. Some of the actions the Council is taking include a review and revision of the community grant scheme which focus on our priorities, hosting regular community forums, and investing in asset-based/place-based community development.

The Council's new approach to community grants, Crowdfund Cotswold, launched in Q4, with the first deadline of 21 April. There was a huge amount of interest – with more project ideas being registered by the scheme partners, Spacehive, on the Cotswold site than for a comparator site in Liverpool (urban and with a much higher population). In late May, the Council determined its first set of pledges, agreeing to support 13 projects with pledges to the value of around £72,000 (this includes grant resources from the County Council, directed at Covid recovery). The project ideas reflect some of the areas the Council has traditionally invested in, such as play provision and civic buildings, as well as attracting project ideas that reflect the Council's priorities, with some

innovative projects that will help address the climate change emergency (e.g. Kingham to Bourton Recreational Trail), ecological emergency (Cotswold Waterpark 'Perch pod') and health and wellbeing (Cotswold Friends, Into Nature CIC). Moreover, the crowdfund platform is enabling sizeable contributions from both residents and from local businesses which is anticipated to increase with further rounds.

In line with other districts across the county, the Council has received £100,000 grant funding from Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group to work with the local Integrated Locality Partnership and others, to build on our community focussed work to reduce health inequalities. The community wellbeing team will lead this work and collaboration with voluntary and community sector organisations and our communities will feature heavily. The scheme will work in partnership with 'We Can Move' and we will involve residents and relevant community groups in its development and implementation. Through this work, a dedicated physical activity pathway will be developed for Cotswold residents to make it as easy as possible to become more active, especially for those who need it most, including patients with a long-term condition (LTC). The aim is to increase the number of community-based physical activity opportunities across the District, including specialist exercise classes for LTC patients and community-led activities by using existing assets (facilities, green open spaces etc.). The project is likely to start in the autumn for a period up to three years initially.

The Council is taking a range of actions to improve equal access to quality services across the District including actions to tackle food poverty and investing and supporting youth engagement work. The Council has been awarded nearly £73,000 from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to improve employment outcomes or prospects of future employment outcomes for long-term unemployed young people and groups facing the most complex and intractable barriers to work. The Council and Cirencester Town Council in partnership with the wider Cotswold Youth Network, voluntary and community sector, will offer an innovative and responsive service to young people between the ages of 16 -25 who are not currently involved in education, employment or training. The partnership will provide a holistic service to support young people that offers a personalised support programme tailored to the individual needs of the young person. The initiative will start in September 2021 and incorporates two key elements to cover the whole District:

- C-Hub - a bespoke youth hub facility in the heart of Cirencester which will include an outreach service to more remote areas in the south of the District such as Tetbury and Fairford/Lechlade. It will be staffed by a Youth Hub Coordinator (1.0 FTE) and additional support services as required.
- A flexible rural outreach service for the north of the district to ensure young people can access support, even those geographically distanced from Cirencester. Similarly to the C-Hub, it will be staffed by a Youth Hub Coordinator (0.6 FTE). The long-term aim is to develop a second physical Youth Hub in the north of the District.

The co-ordinator roles will support young people using a combination of one-to-one (face to face or virtual/remote) support sessions, online training, and through referrals to other agencies and partners, and community venues as required.

The Community Wellbeing team has worked in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council and the local voluntary and community sector to deliver the 'Holiday Activity and Food programme' (HAF) during the Easter School Holidays aimed at children in receipt of free school meals. This scheme is funded by the Department for Education. Over 550 'Cook Along' food boxes were delivered to families across the District via eight community-led collection points and direct deliveries. The offer also included 'Den Building Kits' as well as free face-to-face activities in line with Covid regulations, in Moreton-in-Marsh,

Bourton-on-the-Water, Cirencester, Fairford and Tetbury. A HAF programme for the summer holidays is currently being coordinated which aims to ensure children are entertained, active, educated, safe, and fed between Monday 2 August and Friday 27 August 2021.

The Cotswold Youth Network planned and delivered the 'Cotswold Youth Roadshow' during the May/June half-term. The aim of the Roadshow was to engage with young people across the District, offer fun activities and to hear views about being a young person in Cotswold District; just under 200 young people in 13 locations participated over a four day period. The consultation activities, in general, showed quite a positive picture of how young people in Cotswold District feel and a more in depth analysis is currently being undertaken. Partnership work was both positive and fruitful and the event provided a great opportunity to promote children and young peoples' services and to involve town and parish councils.

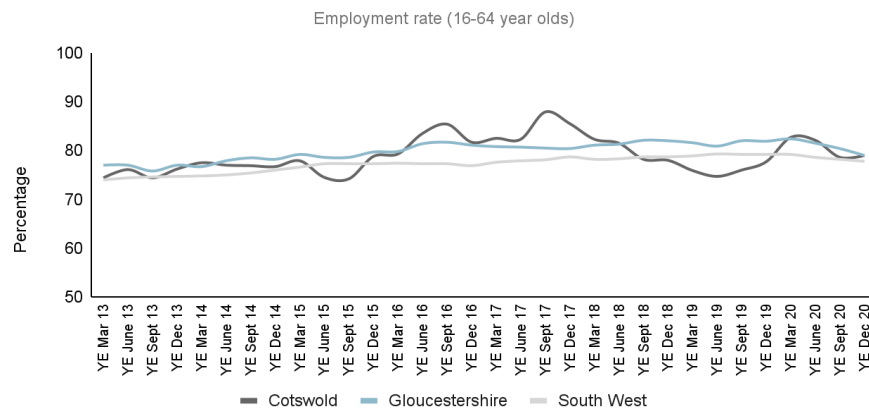
The Council is working with a number of partners to create tools for raising awareness of domestic abuse and other hidden harms such as hate crime, modern slavery and stalking. Meetings with Cirencester 6th Form College to arrange the production of a series of Hidden Harm videos by their students have restarted following a pause due to the Covid-19 pandemic with the aim of raising awareness amongst their peers. The production of videos will start in September 2021. The Cotswold Domestic Abuse Champions Network is being expanded; the Health and Well-being Team has contacted most Hairdressers in the District encouraging them to get their staff trained, as well as training providers for the Hair and Beauty industry with a view to incorporating Domestic Abuse champion training into the basic course.



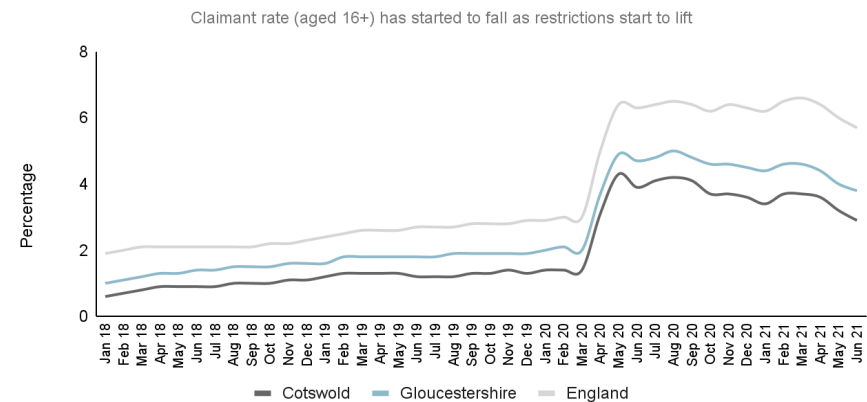
Enable a vibrant economy

The Context

The District supports an economically active population of around 47,700 and has strengths in Finance and Business Services, ICT including Science and Technology, Retail, and Accommodation and Food Services. A large proportion of businesses are small enterprises employing less than 10 people. Median wages for people working in the District are below the national average, and affordability of housing is a significant issue for the District, which can result in skill and labour shortages. Historically, unemployment has been relatively low but has risen since the start of the pandemic but the full extent of job losses has been masked by the Job Retention Scheme (furlough) which has been extended until the end of September 2021.



Source: ONS, Annual Population Survey



Source: ONS, Crown Copyright Reserved (Nomis)

The Cotswolds is well-known as a popular visitor destination and the visitor economy accounts for a significant proportion of the local economy - 7000 jobs or 18% of the total. Many of these jobs have been furloughed during the pandemic, but with restrictions now being eased that number is falling, although some elements like hospitality are reporting difficulty in recruiting. We also have many companies at the cutting edge of innovation and the opportunity to grow key sectors like agritech, cyber and digital, medical equipment and environmental technologies.

The lack of a reliable broadband connection especially in rural districts can add to social isolation as well as reduce opportunities to be economically active. Openreach is currently working in Cirencester and has recently announced plans to deliver full fibre to Tetbury, South Cerney, Lechlade, Northleach, Fairford and Bourton-on-the-Water by 2026 at the latest. A detailed timetable is awaited. Gigaclear are also onsite in Cirencester and Wesonbirt. However, there are still some areas where broadband is poor and even superfast connectivity is not sufficient for some businesses to operate in the way they wish to. The District Council is working with the Fastershire Project to address these areas.

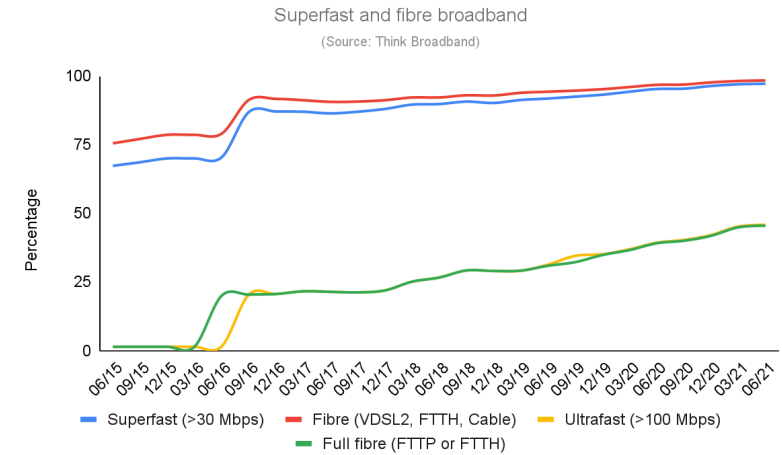
Much of our work to enable a vibrant economy will be achieved in partnership with key stakeholders ranging from the County Council, GFirst LEP, Chambers of Commerce and other business groups, Town and Parish Councils, institutions like the Royal Agricultural University and Cirencester College and individual businesses.

Actions we are taking

The draft Green Economic Growth Strategy was adopted at the Cabinet meeting in December 2020. The Strategy sets out the challenges and issues for the District, and how they will be addressed. It identifies the key areas that will deliver growth in the District, as well as a recovery plan for the local economy. The Cotswold Economic Advisory Group which was set up to advise, oversee and challenge the implementation of the Strategy; and provide a link to the main institutions and the wider business community in the District continues to meet regularly and provide valuable advice and assistance. The group has representation from key stakeholders including Cirencester College, the Royal Agricultural University, Campden BRI, St James's Place, the Federation of Small Businesses and Corin Medical. Most recently the Group considered the six monthly update report on progress against the Green Economic Growth Strategy and the progress in creating a Green Business Pledge for businesses to commit to reducing their carbon emissions.

The economy has started to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic but levels of activity have generally been lower than pre-Covid times. The retail and hospitality sectors have been particularly hard hit including those businesses that are particularly dependent on the visitor economy. The tourism team has been working not only to assist business recovery and future resilience but also to highlight at a national level the continuing impact of the Covid pandemic on the hospitality sector. During English Tourism Week in May, the tourism team met local MPs and the Tourism Minister, as well as holding a virtual meeting with board members of Visit England and local hospitality businesses so that they could highlight the issues they still face.

Much of the focus over the last year has been on preparing town centres to reopen following multiple lockdowns and restrictions as well as supporting businesses to adapt to the changed environment e.g. to transact more digitally where possible. Social media, newspaper and digital campaigns have promoted safety messages and encouraged customers to continue to support local businesses whenever they can and return to town centres in a safe way



when they reopen, supported by the Government's Reopening High Streets Safely fund. In addition, the funding has enabled the Council to engage 'Business Advisers' who contacted town centre businesses in towns across the District to ensure they have the support they need. The Council also arranged a series of webinars aimed at the hospitality sector to assist them in reopening safely and successfully when the economy opened up at the end of the third national lockdown. The Council has been allocated a further £81,144 from the 'Welcome Back Fund', which is an extension of the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund which runs until the end of March 2022. Cabinet has approved indicative allocations of £50,000 for physical works to town centres and £30,000 to create a 'virtual high street' to assist town centres to be more digitally resilient. The Council is currently collating suggestions from town councils and others for the physical works to town centres. An Economic Recovery intern has been taken on to assist with town centre-related work.

Town centres were already having to evolve in order to adjust to changing shopping habits, which has been accelerated by Covid-19 and multiple lockdowns. Our local traders have had to become more digitally able in order to survive in a period when physical footfall has been significantly reduced. The Council is continuing to work with tech company Maybe to support businesses to improve their social media presence which is expected to improve sales, and help to offset the losses from a reduction in physical footfall. The Maybe platform assists businesses to interact on social media in a place-based way which helps to raise their profile. Regular webinars have been held, including three aimed specifically at Cotswold businesses. The project went 'live' in September 2020, initially in Cirencester and Chipping Campden and has been rolled out to other towns in the District, including Tetbury, Northleach, Bourton-on-the-Water, Stow-on-the-Wold, Moreton-in-Marsh, Fairford, Lechlade and South Cerney. Over the last few months we have been increasing our efforts to encourage more businesses to sign up. The Council has also been working with GFirst LEP to launch a digital grant scheme to assist businesses with a grant of up to £3,000 for a project to improve their digital capability, which will be funded by each District Council contributing £60,000 from the Government's Additional Restrictions Grant; the scheme will be administered by the LEP.

The Uncover the Cotswolds Digital Health Check Survey, conducted on behalf of Cotswolds Tourism yielded 126 responses. The aim of the survey was to understand the digital confidence of tourism businesses in the wider Cotswolds area. The results clearly showed that local businesses needed support to improve their digital skills and online presence: only 26% were confident in their digital skills and 29% confident in the online visibility of their business. The areas identified as particular weaknesses were using social media, website content and website SEO/Google analytics. In response to the survey results, the tourism team commissioned 19 short training videos covering a wide range of digital skills. These are all now available online, free of charge, to any local business.

The Digital Health Check Survey also highlighted that many hospitality businesses were failing to take advantage of the opportunities offered by online sales and booking – over 40% had no online booking on their websites. In conjunction with Visit England the tourism team has been working to help businesses become bookable online via Tourism Exchange Great Britain (TXGB). TXGB is a business-to-business platform connecting tourism businesses to a diverse range of domestic and international distributors.

The tourism team made a successful bid to Visit England's Destination Management Organisation (DMO) Recovery Fund and received funding (£73,000) for 'Escape to the Cotswolds' – an online digital marketing campaign to develop and promote online bookable experiences and to increase Cotswolds Tourism's social media followers and organic reach with the aim of reaching 150,000 followers across all channels by the end of July.

A key focus of the Tourism team is to improve the dispersal of visitors across the Cotswolds, increasing visitors to less visited towns and to encourage less visits to places struggling at peak times to cope with visitor numbers. The Real Cotswolds project has identified eight towns across the Cotswolds which are able to accommodate more visitors. The focus will be on improving online presence with increased coverage on the Cotswolds.com website, better imagery and with dedicated e-newsletters to potential visitors; work on Cirencester is most advanced with Tetbury and Northleach to follow later in the year. Conversely, the impacts on some of the most visited areas such as Bourton, Bibury and the Slaughters is being reduced by discouraging media coverage, working with tour operators and accommodation providers to encourage off peak visits, and looking at ways to promote better circulation of visitors within the villages.

In addition to the Covid-19 related work that has taken place during the quarter, the Council is working with partners to bring sites forward which will support the Council's ambition to grow high value, highly skilled, low environmental impact businesses in key areas including agritech, digital/cyber, medical equipment and environmental technologies, and to enhance the opportunities available for local people, particularly young people. So for example, the Council is working with the Royal Agricultural University and their development partner Henry Boot Developments (HBD) to bring forward their Triangle site for agritech or education-related activity. The Council is also working with the prospective purchaser of the Mitsubishi site at Watermoor. The purchaser is proposing to continue with the existing uses, albeit with a new tenant or tenants. The Council is also working with ZeroAvia which has relocated from Cranfield to Cotswold Airport. ZeroAvia is a leading innovator in decarbonising aviation, and is developing a hydrogen-electric powered aircraft. The Council is working with the Inward Investment Team at GFirst LEP to support ZeroAvia which has increased its staff numbers from 10 to 50 with the potential to continue to grow significantly.

The construction of the Applied Digital Skills Centre at Cirencester College moves on at pace, with the structure now out of the ground. The new Applied Digital Skills Centre will give the District a great opportunity both to develop a workforce with the digital skills needed in the 21st century, and also to grow its digital and cyber sectors. The Council continues to work closely with the College, particularly to identify partnerships with business which would be mutually beneficial.

On infrastructure, the Development Consent Order (effectively the planning application) for the A417 Missing Link was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate by Highways England in June 2021; a decision is likely to take some time to make. The project, which at around £450m, is the biggest infrastructure investment in the District and indeed the whole county for a generation, is designed to reduce congestion and improve road safety on this important link between Cirencester and Gloucester and, more widely, the M4 and M5 motorways. While new road building projects can be seen as environmentally damaging, much of our efforts have been focused on delivering opportunities for environmental improvements as well as economic benefits.



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Delivering great services locally

PERFORMANCE REPORT:
April 2021 - June 2021

A note on performance benchmarking

Benchmarking can be a useful tool for driving improvement; by comparing our performance with other similar organisations, we can start a discussion about what good performance might look like, and why there might be variations, as well as learning from other organisations about how they operate (process benchmarking).

A selection of readily available benchmarking data for the most recent period (2019-20) was included in the 2020-21 Q4 performance report on a trial basis. The 2020-21 benchmarking data has started to be released and will continue over the year until around December 2021. An annual exercise will be undertaken to update the CIPFA benchmarking charts and the Shire Districts' median /top quartile lines.

Two comparator groups that are commonly used to benchmark Councils' performance are: all shire district councils and CIPFA Nearest Neighbours (NN). The CIPFA NN Model is based on family groups; it adopts a scientific approach to measuring the similarity between councils taking into account a range of demographic and socio-economic characteristics. The standard model provides the 15 nearest neighbours to each council. In contrast, the all shire districts comparator group is a much larger dataset of 192 councils, and there will inevitably be a much greater variation between the councils in this group.

When we embark on performance benchmarking, it is important to understand that we are often looking at one aspect of performance i.e. the level of performance achieved. Although the CIPFA NN Model groups councils on the basis of similarity, these factors are external and based on 'place'. The model does not take into account how services are resourced or compare in terms of quality or level of service delivered, for example, how satisfied are residents and customers? Furthermore, each council is unique with its own vision, aim and priorities, and services operate within this context.

Therefore, benchmarking data should be viewed as a 'guide' and as a starting point for discussion. It is important to understand performance within context, and there will be a variety of internal factors that determine performance including costs, workloads and quality.

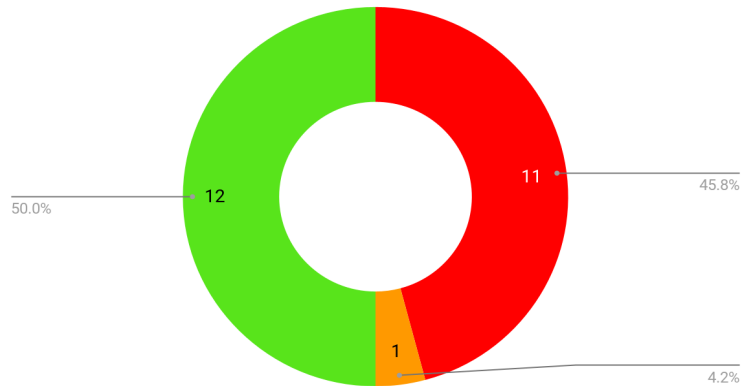
Note

The data benchmarks have been extracted from LG Inform, a benchmarking tool, which contains a range of routinely published data. The median and top (best 25%) quartile lines are based on annual outturns but applied to the quarterly data.

KEY PERFORMANCE METRICS

At a glance...

Summary of Performance



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OVERALL PERFORMANCE

Although the 19 July marked the end of the lockdown restrictions, with high infection rates over the last few weeks, the majority of staff are continuing to work from home which is still presenting a challenge for some services such as planning.

Overall, performance has been mixed over the last six months. There has been a shortage of resources in some services to deal with high workloads; for example, there has been an upward trend in both planning applications and land charge searches since summer 2020. Backlogs have built up in some services due to a number of reasons including the suspension of site visits due to the pandemic e.g. Food Safety; as well as backlogs that built up while implementing new systems e.g. Benefits team.

Some services such as Planning and Food Safety have found it difficult to recruit to vacant posts. The Benefits team was able to access some external resources from Civica OnDemand, and further requests have been made. Temporary staff will be used to reduce the backlog of HB change events

Indicators with targets	Status
Customer satisfaction - phones	Green
Customer satisfaction - F2F	No data
Customer satisfaction - website	Red
Satisfaction for Building Control service	Green
CT collection rate	Green
NNDR collection rate	Red
Average days to process CTS new claims	Red
Average days to process CTS change events	Red
Average days to process HB change events	Red
% HB overpayment	Green
% major applications determined within time	Red
% minor applications determined within time	Red
% others applications determined within time	Red
Total planning income	Orange
Pre-application advice income	Red
% appeals allowed	Green
Affordable homes delivered	Green
% land charge searches dispatched within time	Red
% high risk notifications assessed within time	Green
% high risk food premises inspected within time	Red
Residual waste per household (kg)	Awaiting data
% combined recycling rate	Awaiting data
Missed bins per 100,000	Green
Leisure visits	Green
Gym memberships	Green
Parking enforcement hours	Green

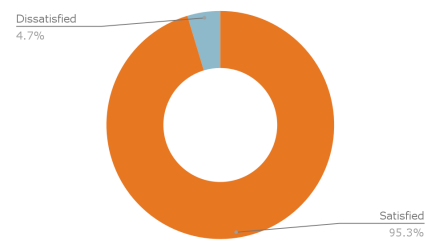
CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer satisfaction

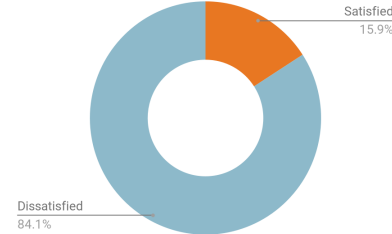
Face to face - no surveys due to Covid19



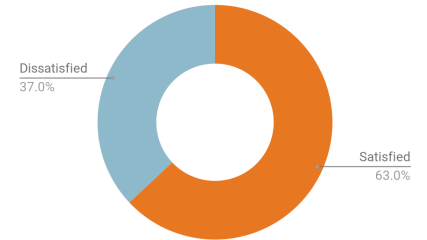
Phone - 171 respondents



Website - 208 respondents



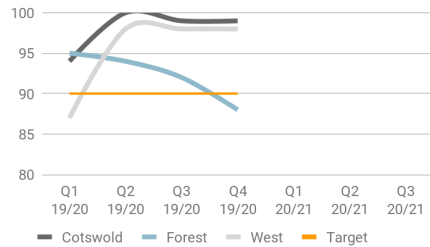
Email - 254 respondents



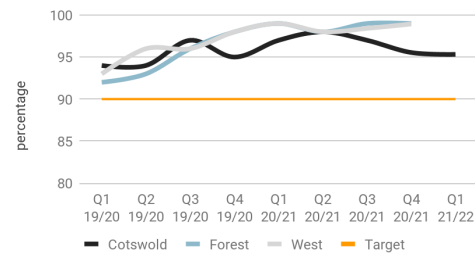
What's the trend?

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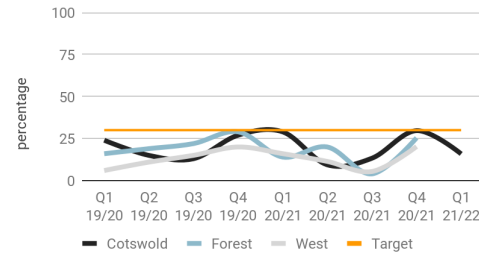
Customer satisfaction - face to face



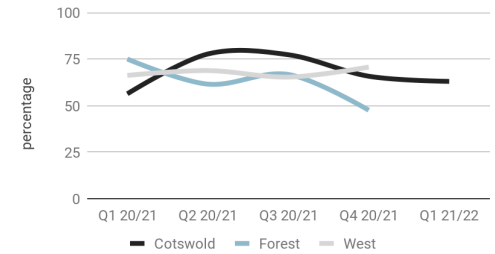
Customer satisfaction - phone



Customer satisfaction - website



Customer satisfaction - email



OBSERVATION:

Due to Covid-19, the Council closed its reception areas in March 2020 and therefore face to face surveys were temporarily suspended. The nation emerged from the third lockdown on the 29 March 2021 in phased stages; and although Trinity Road and Moreton Area Centre re-opened to customers from 12 April 2021, usage is currently low. As 19 July marked the end of the lockdown restrictions, the service is considering re-commencing face to face surveys.

Overall, satisfaction ratings for services delivered via the phone continue to be high, while satisfaction for services via the website appears to be low. The number of feedback responses continues to be extremely low compared to the large proportion of visitors to the website. The 'Dissatisfied' feedback received this quarter was again analysed to establish the cause (website content issues, data processing issues, failure in service provision, user error etc.). These findings are being collated and will feed into a new digital take up framework in which a range of channel shift data including web service interaction information will form a baseline which can then be continually monitored to give a more accurate picture of digital take up across our online services. This data will then enable us to understand where we can do more targeted feedback around particular online services to ultimately improve the online take up and change behaviours to a digital first approach.

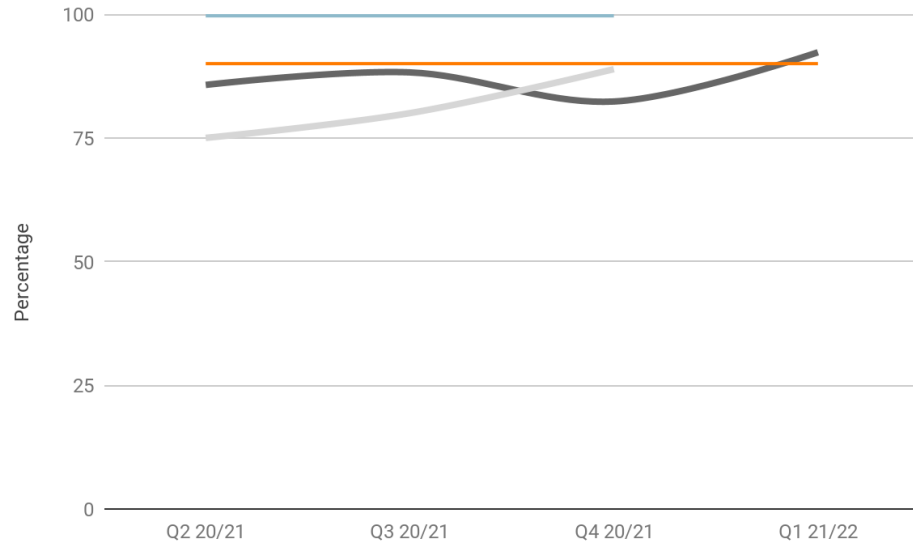
Customer satisfaction for the Building Control service

Cotswold Target

Cotswold

Forest of Dean

West Oxfordshire

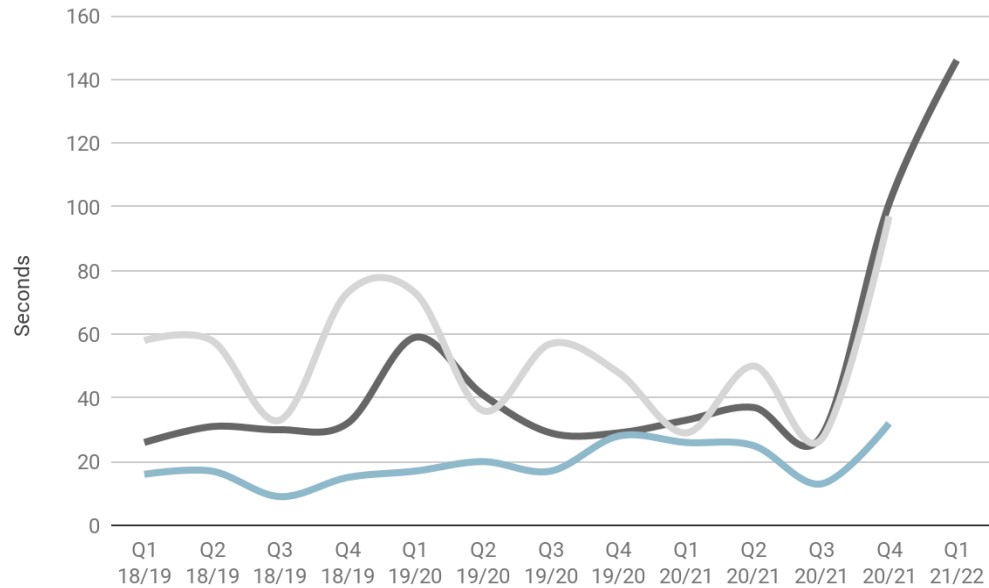


OBSERVATION:

Each month, the service conducts telephone interviews with customers who have received a completion certificate during the month. The customer rates the service on helpfulness of staff, quality of technical advice and other information, responsiveness, value for money, and overall satisfaction.

The Q1 data indicated that 12 out of 13 customers were fully satisfied with service, and one was partly satisfied. Overall, satisfaction for the service is high amongst those surveyed; however, the low number of survey responses will make it more difficult to consistently achieve the target of 90%

Telephone calls - average waiting time



OBSERVATION

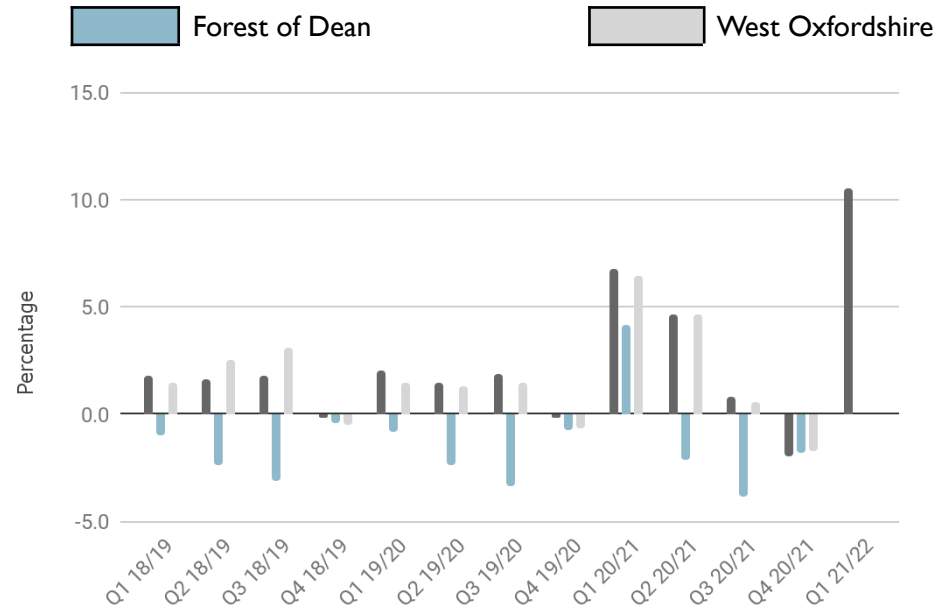
The service reviewed its indicators and targets in preparation for 2021/22 to ensure that they are appropriate to customers' needs; so for example, ensuring that satisfaction for our services remains high while also taking into account the benefits of channel shift and providing more options for accessing our services. Over the next few months, officers will be developing a framework for measuring digital take-up so that we can understand better the impact of digitisation on demand for customer services.

The average wait time has increased over the last six months but has now started to improve. In July, the average wait time reduced significantly to 71 seconds; and our understanding is that a wait time under three minutes is considered to be good standard for local authorities (GovMetric). The service will shortly start work to identify causes, as well as solutions to reduce call waiting time.

Workloads are generally higher in the fourth quarter due to normal annual billing processes, and call volumes related to Covid-19 also increased. Issues with turnover of staff in Q4 have mostly been addressed, however, another recruitment drive is required; staff in this service take opportunities to progress to other roles in the organisation or secondments. Furthermore, it takes around six months to train each advisor with significant support required from experienced staff

Revenues and Benefits

(Cumulative) Percentage of council tax collected & the difference between the percentage of council tax collected and the target



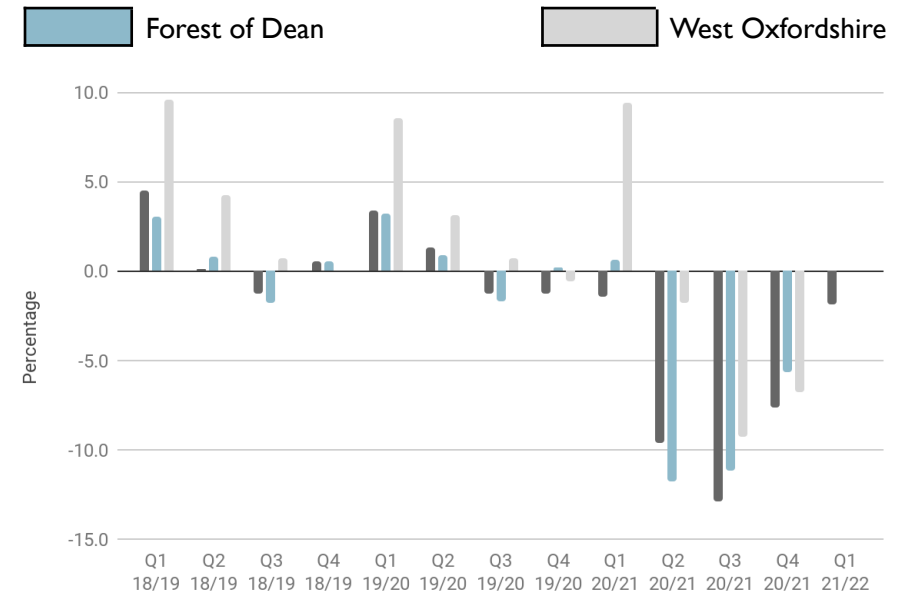
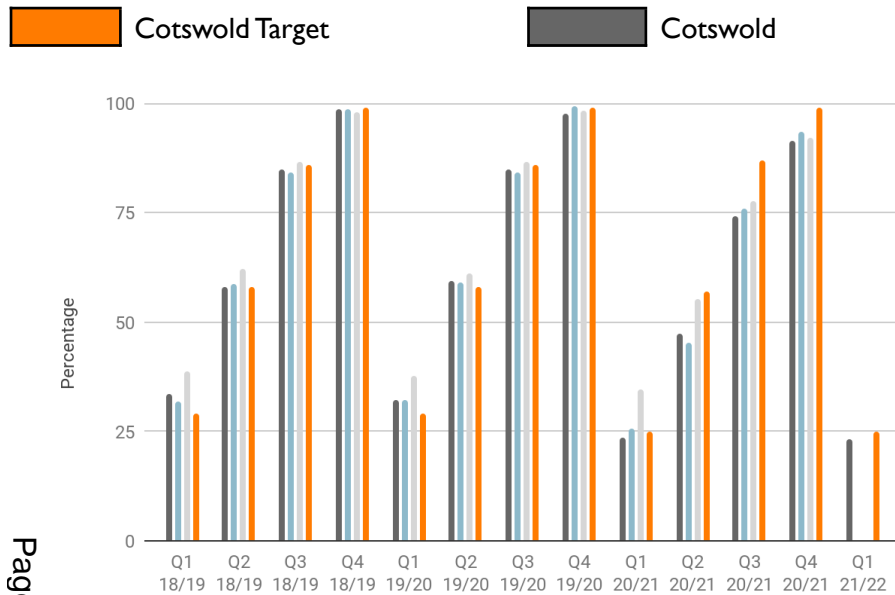
OBSERVATION:

The collection rate appears to be returning to more normal levels, and is up on the same period of the previous year, and historically.

The service continues to support residents, contacting customers by phone and email, as well as including a letter with reminders to encourage customers to contact the Council if they are experiencing problems with council tax payments.

Recovery action re-commenced at the beginning of Q1; and Magistrates Courts have re-opened for liability order hearings

(Cumulative) Percentage of business rates collected & the difference between the percentage of business rates collected and the target



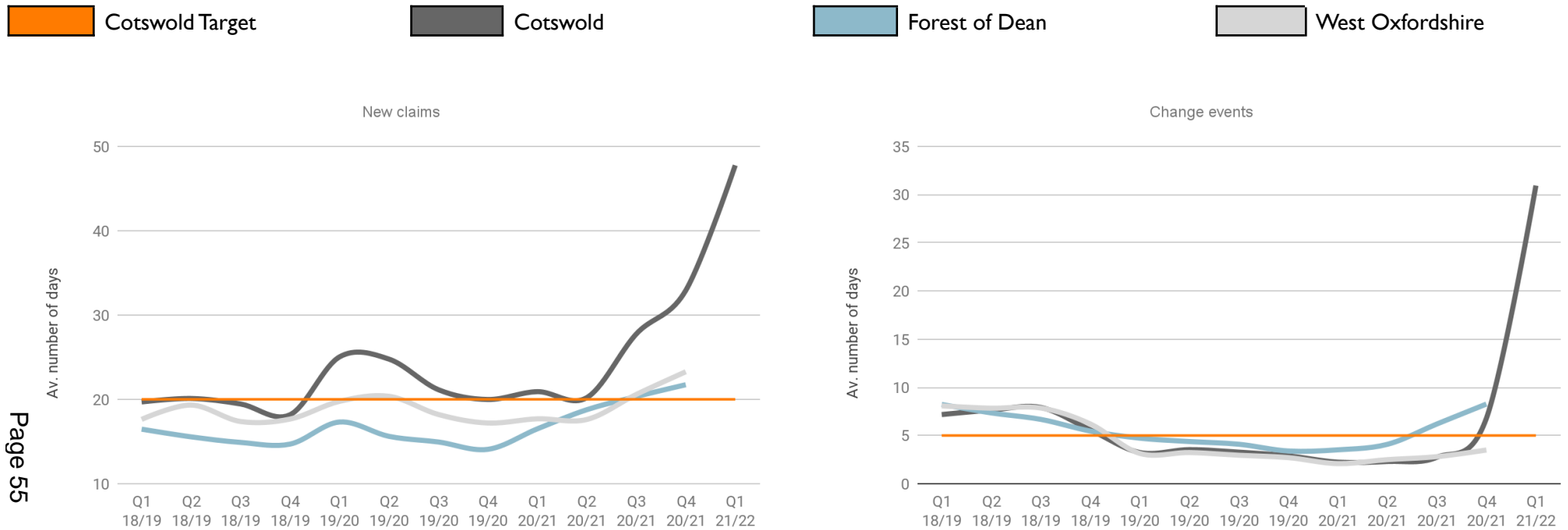
OBSERVATION:

At the end of Q1, the collection of business rates continues to be lower than pre-Covid times. In addition, the Council has had to make some refunds due to changes in rateable value.

The service is continuing to support businesses; sending out reminders, phoning and emailing businesses to encourage them to contact the Council so that we can support them via manageable repayment plans. The Magistrates Courts have re-opened for liability order hearings which will mean the Council can start to formal recovery action and enforce debts that are owed.

The Government has helped certain businesses with 100% business rate relief; the relief was reduced to 66% at the end of June 2021 for the remainder of the financial year. In addition, the window for applying for business grants closed at the end of June with final payments by the end of July 2021

(Cumulative) Average number of days taken to process Council Tax Support new claims and change events



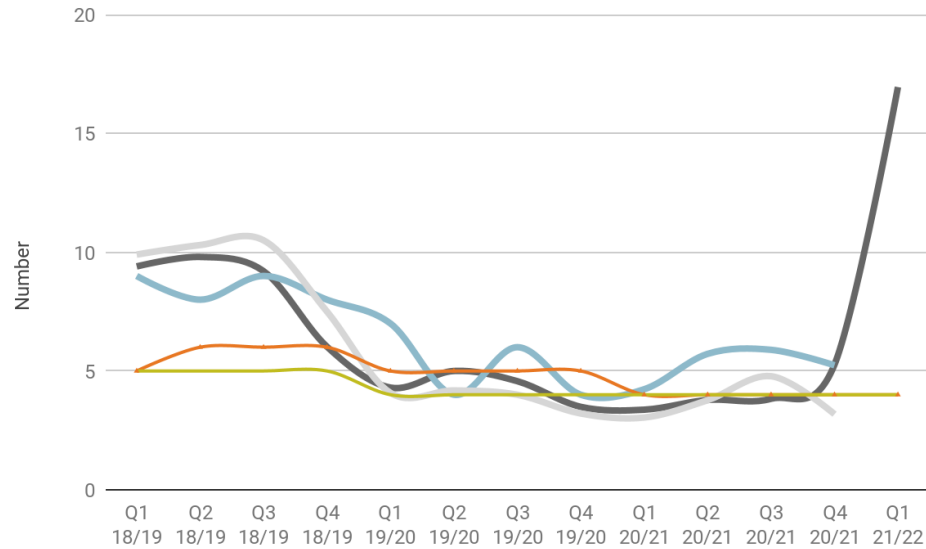
OBSERVATION:

Processing times have increased due to high workloads in the service due to a combination of reasons, as well as a backlog that built up during the implementation of the new revenues and benefits system. Since the start of the pandemic, Universal Credit claims have doubled which has resulted in a significant increase in CTS new claims and changes. In addition, the team has had to prioritise the administration of discretionary housing payments and providing welfare support to the Council's most vulnerable residents.

The backlog is being managed and cleared with the support of Civica OnDemand, and further resources have been requested; however, many councils are trying to access additional resources at this time. Furthermore, team members are still involved in systems work related to the new revenues and benefits system, as well as processing 'Test and Trace' claims which was due to finish at the end of June but has been extended to the end of September. Changes of circumstance have also been impacted by an automated software failure which is discussed in more detail on the following page.

The aims of the new revenues and benefits system are to improve service delivery and make efficiencies and this is still anticipated as workloads ease post pandemic. The new system has been implemented which allows resources to be directed to where it needs to be; and work continues on the open portal which will offer better facilities for clients to self-serve, which is expected to reduce service workloads and improve processing times

(Cumulative) Average number of days taken to process Housing Benefit changes of circumstances



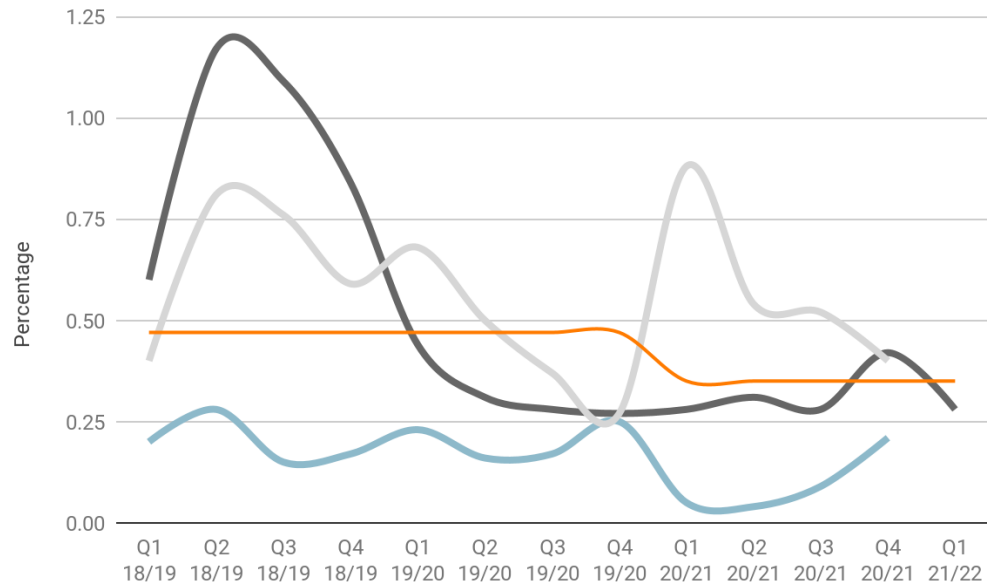
OBSERVATION:

Workloads are higher in Q1 due to end of year changes such as rent increases, pension amendments and earnings amendments; and additional workloads related to the implementation of the new revenues and benefits system, combined with Covid-19 related work, including processing 'Test and Trace' has continued to affect processing times. 'Test and Trace' was due to end on 30 June but has been extended to the end of September.

During the latest stage of the implementation of the new system, the facility to automatically upload and apply changes of circumstances to system records, has stopped functioning. Around 80% of changes are applied in this way which makes the process much more efficient than manual handling. This has now been resolved and should start to impact positively in Q2..

The backlog is being managed and cleared with the support of Civica OnDemand, and further resources have been requested. The service will also be using temporary staff to process the simpler cases and help reduce the backlog.

(Cumulative) Percentage of housing benefit overpayment due to LA error/Admin delay



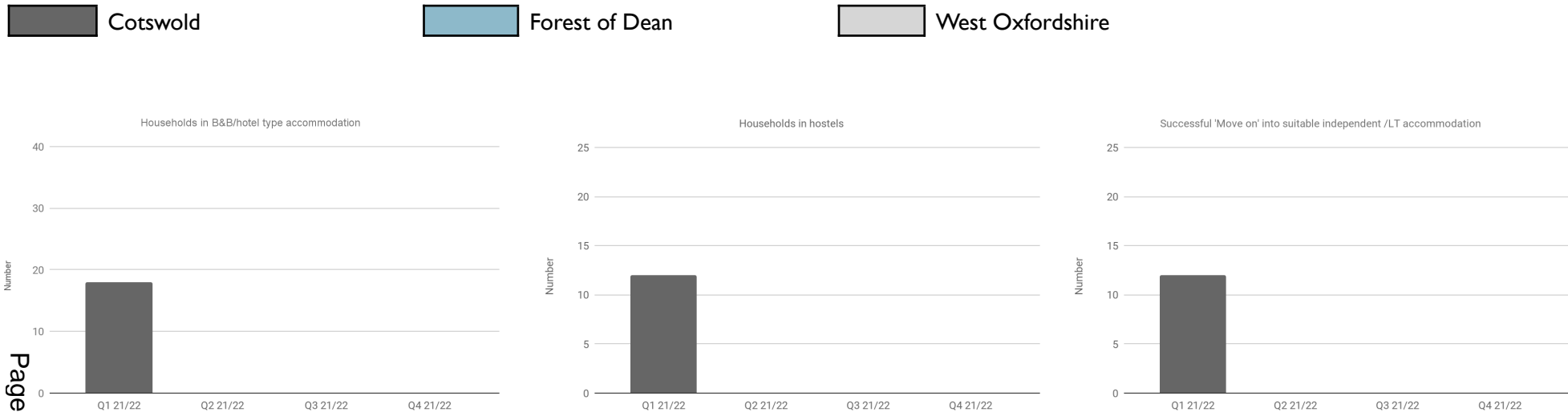
OBSERVATION:

Due to the high volume of HB change of circumstances, we take a sampling approach and target areas which we know have high error rates such as calculation of earnings.

Overall, the Council has performed well considering the backlog of HB change of circumstances that was created during the implementation of the new revenues and benefits system, and the potential for admin delay

Housing Support

(Snapshot) Number of households in B&B/hotel-type accommodation & Hostels (LA owned or managed); and Number of successful 'Move On' into suitable independent/long-term accommodation from B&Bs/hotels/hostels



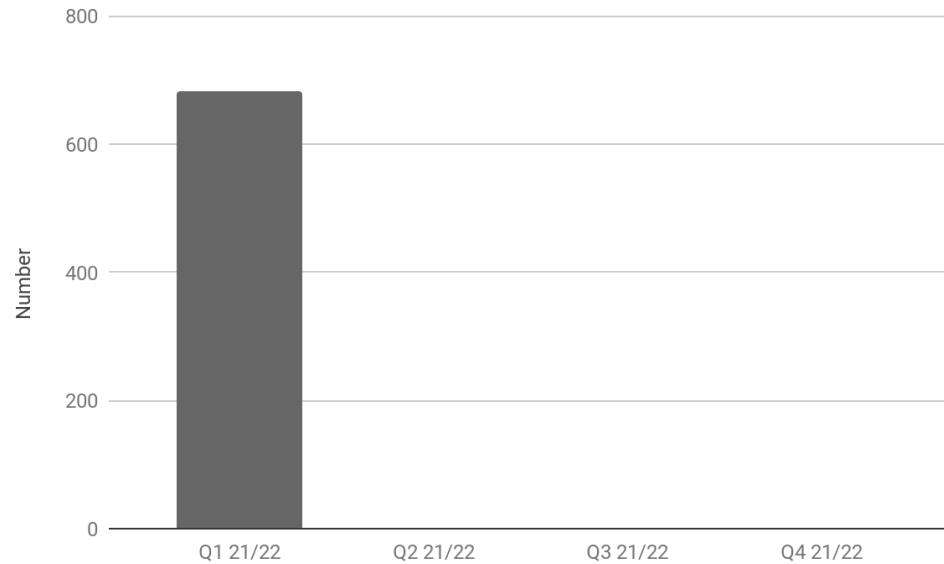
OBSERVATION:

At the beginning of the first lockdown, councils were required to place all clients who are rough sleeping or at risk of imminent homelessness regardless of priority need who have approached the Council, into emergency accommodation, which resulted in a spike in numbers.

The Housing Team created exit plans to move households into more secure tenancies including housing association, supported accommodation, and private rented accommodation. However, the availability of social housing stock is low due to low turnover and households not moving as much during the pandemic. It also takes time to prepare accommodation for new tenants. Furthermore, it is often difficult to place clients in private rented accommodation as these properties require a guarantor.

The County has received funding from MHCLG including funding for Next Steps Accommodation including Housing Led accommodation. The funding is being used to deliver accommodation for rough sleepers and those at risk of rough sleeping. Examples of schemes funded by this award are 'Somewhere Safe to Stay Hubs', support provided in specific housing properties to assist clients address issues preventing them from moving on into longer term tenancies, and countywide specialist officers who assist entrenched rough sleepers to 'come in' or provide upstream advice in order to prevent homelessness.

(Snapshot) Number of Long Term Empty properties (six months and over)



OBSERVATION:

The transition of the new Revenues and Benefits system from Northgate to Civica has presented the opportunity to cleanse the data including de-duplication, as well as streamlining the process for the three partner Councils. This work has identified inconsistencies in historical reporting; therefore, reporting will commence from Q1.

The new LTE officer (in post for three months) is contacting landlords/homeowners to ensure that the Council's data is accurate and up to date. Work is also being undertaken to segregate those properties where no further work is required; for example, Bromford is undertaking an intensive redevelopment of their older properties so some properties are awaiting demolition, Some properties such as retirement properties remain vacant.

Planning and Strategic Housing

(Cumulative) Percentage of major planning applications determined

% of all applications completed within 13 weeks or an agreed timeframe



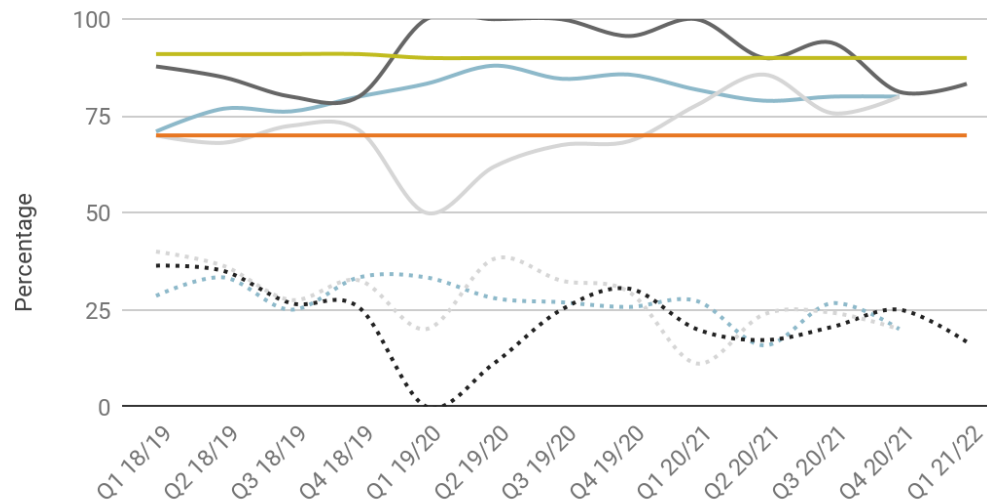
% of all application completed within 13 weeks

----- Cotswold

----- Forest of Dean

----- West Oxfordshire

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Note

The charts for the planning performance measures have been separated to demonstrate the number of applications that are completed within the set time frames and the number that are completed as a result of an agreed extension of time.

Extensions of times are often a result of consultees requesting changes to the scheme or because the consultee response is essential but has not been received within the timetable. They are also used where officers are working proactively with applicants to improve schemes and make developments acceptable.

OBSERVATION:

Six major applications were determined in Q1 compared to four in Q1 in the previous year.

The service has reported that the increase in applications coming in over the last year is projected to continue due to an overstimulated market.

The increasing numbers coming through combined with reduced capacity caused by increased staff turnover and reduced efficiency in the planning process as a result of Covid-19 has reduced performance.

Given improvements made to processes and a gradual return to the office environment it is anticipated that the outlook should start to improve. Some staff have already returned to the office as not all aspects of the statutory process can be or are best achieved electronically; however, social distancing rules remain in place in the office. Site visits continue to be onerous, and due to high infection rates, staff are being cautious. On the other hand, response turnaround times from consultees such as the County and the Environment Agency have improved.

There are a number of improvement projects scheduled and underway which the Customer Experience Improvement Team (CEIT) will help to deliver alongside the planning service, which has already addressed the build up of applications awaiting validation and improved workflow in general.

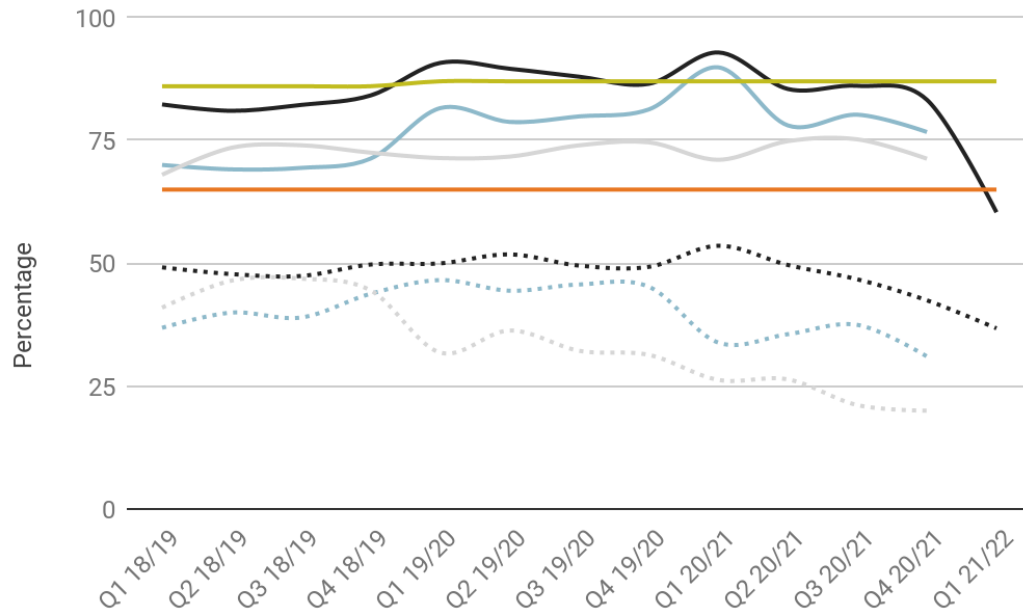
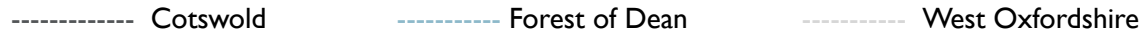
Furthermore, approval has been given for additional resources and recruitment has commenced.

(Cumulative) Percentage of minor planning applications determined

% of all applications completed within 8 weeks or an agreed timescale



% of all applications completed within 8 weeks



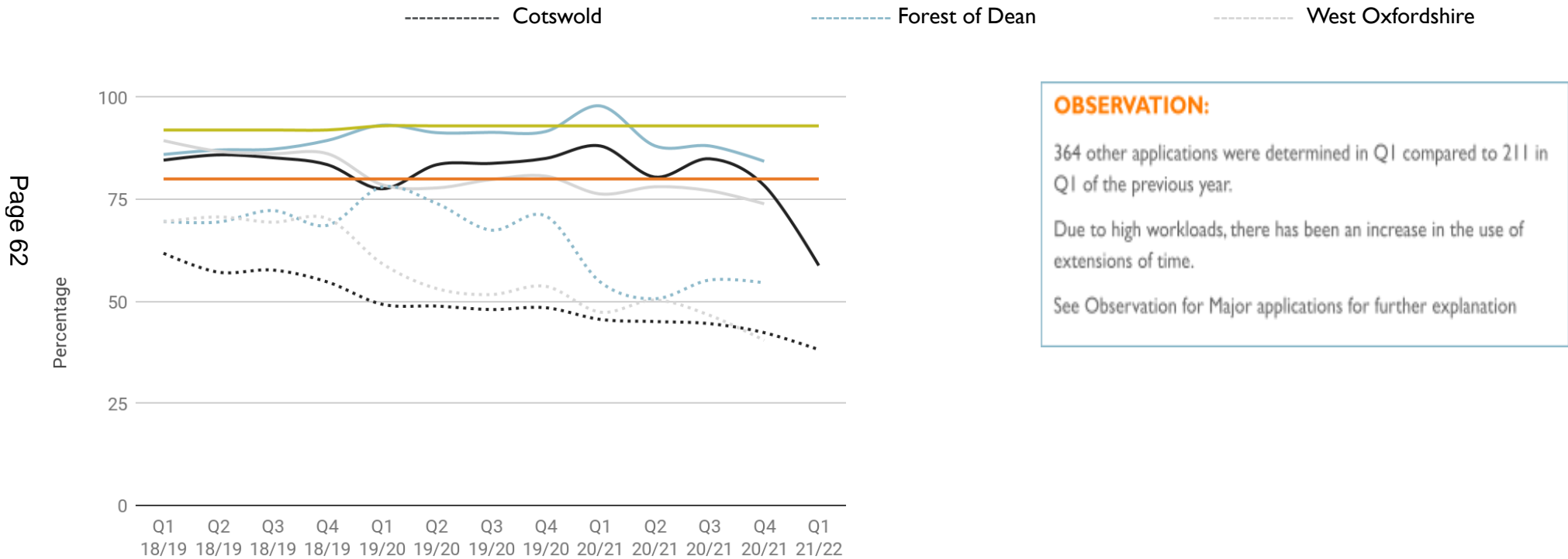
OBSERVATION:
 106 minor applications were determined in Q1 compared to 94 in Q1 of the previous year.
 Due to high workloads, there has been an increase in the use of extensions of time.
 See Observation for Major applications for further explanation

(Cumulative) Percentage of other planning applications determined

% of all applications completed within 8 weeks or an agreed timescale



% of all applications completed within 8 weeks



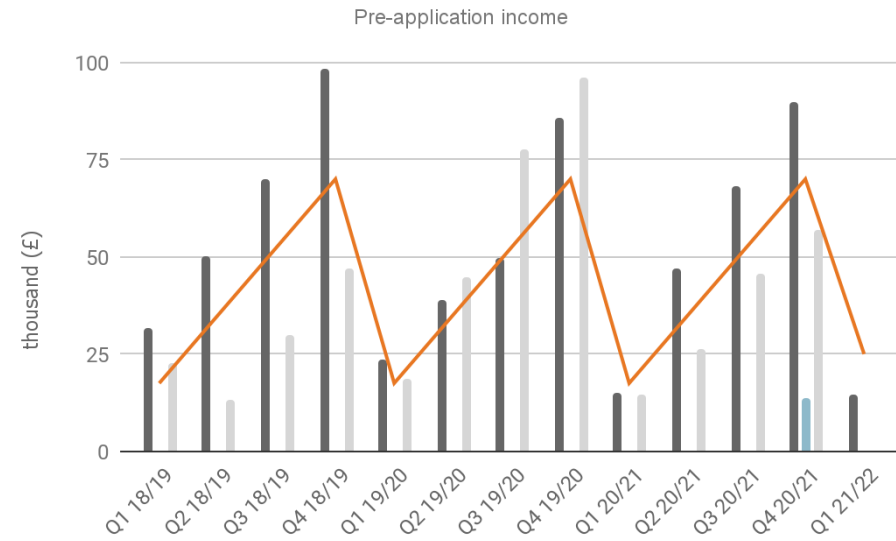
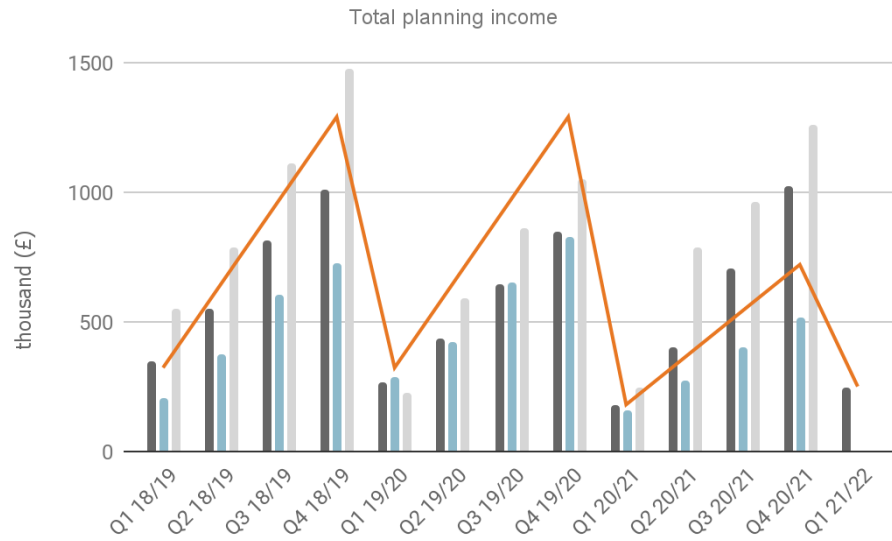
OBSERVATION:

364 other applications were determined in Q1 compared to 211 in Q1 of the previous year.

Due to high workloads, there has been an increase in the use of extensions of time.

See Observation for Major applications for further explanation

(Cumulative) Planning income



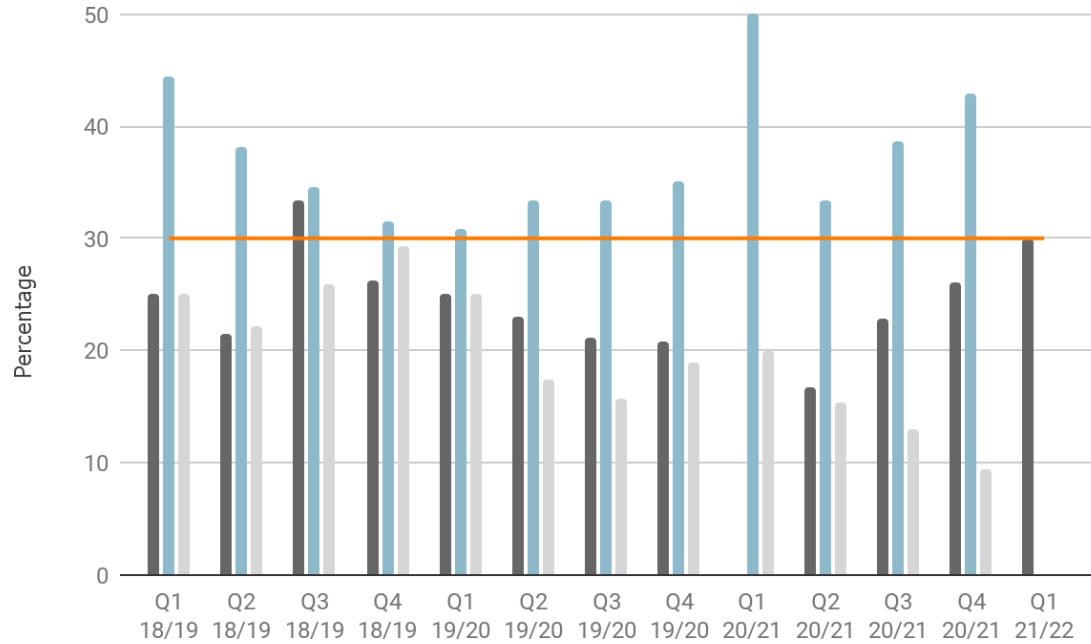
OBSERVATION:

At the end of Q1, total planning income, although marginally down on the target, was higher than the same quarter of the previous year when the number of planning applications dipped as the nation went into the first lockdown, and then rebounded over the summer months to the end of 2020-21.

The service reports that higher volumes are continuing to come through and are projected to remain at high levels. Although some vacant posts were filled during the quarter, there are still two vacant posts

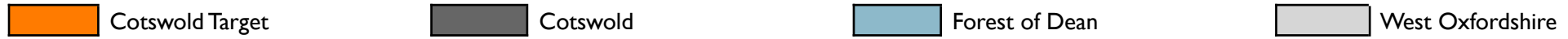
(Cumulative) Percentage of planning appeals allowed

Cotswold Target
 Cotswold
 Forest of Dean
 West Oxfordshire

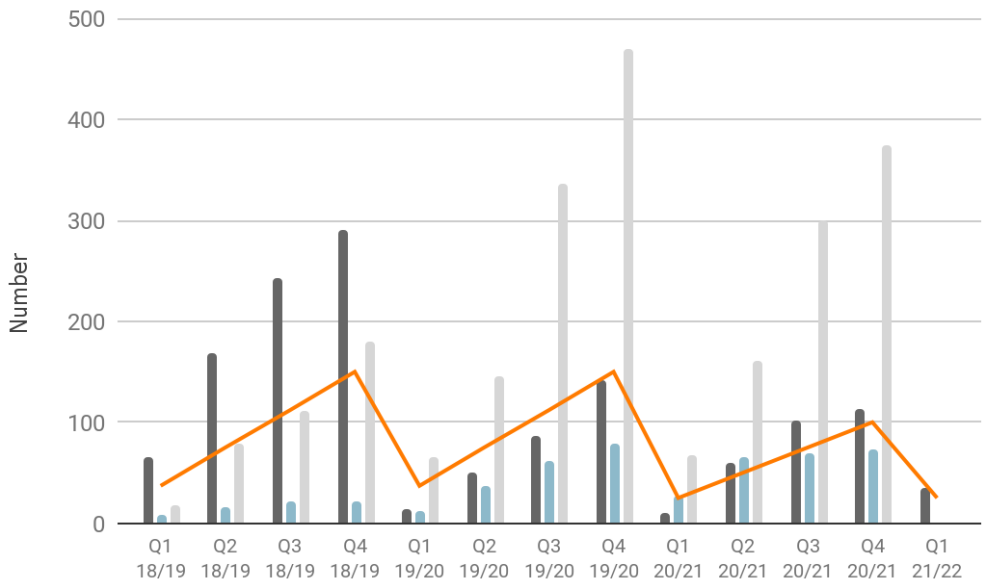


OBSERVATION:
Three out of 10 planning appeals were allowed in Q1

(Cumulative) Number of affordable homes delivered



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OBSERVATION:

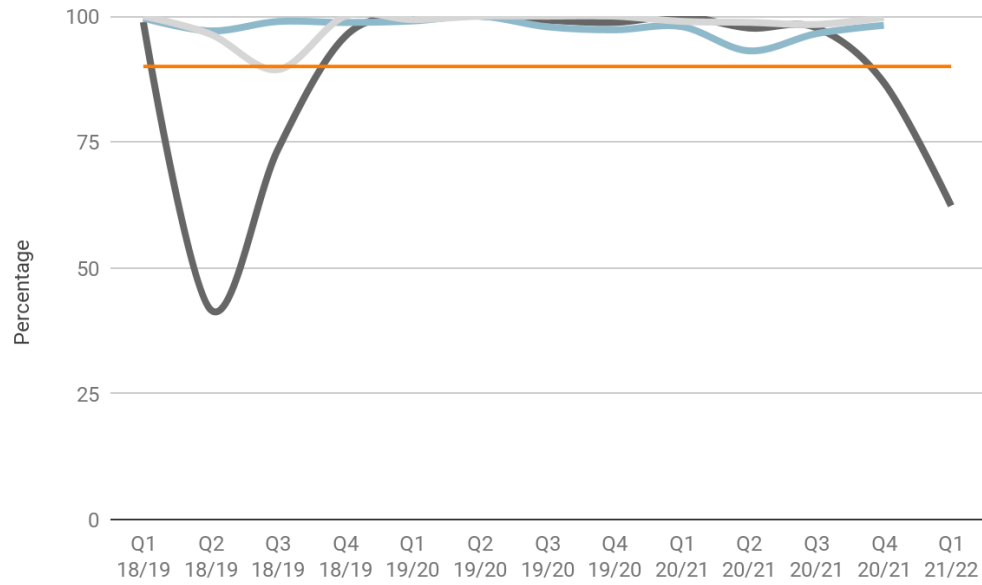
Thirty-five affordable homes were delivered in Q1 for families, couples and single people, including the final three social rented homes at Bath Rd, Tetbury, 14 rented and shared ownership homes in South Cerney including two social rent, and the first six affordable rented homes at the Dyers Lane site in Chipping Campden.

The Council also supported a bid to Homes England for grant funding to acquire unsold private market units which resulted in 12 new shared ownership homes in Moreton in Marsh, supporting delivery of the Council's affordable housing target and providing additional low cost home ownership properties in the District.

In addition, the first eight social rented homes commenced on the 100% affordable housing site at Quercus Rd, Tetbury.

As with many sectors, the construction industry has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, delaying work on site and new schemes commencing. This has effected the planned programme of completions for 2021/22. The majority of schemes due to complete were expected to start on site in 2020, however this did not happen. Those delayed sites are slowly beginning to come forward and the Council is working with Registered Provider partners to deliver the annual target of 100 homes

Percentage of land charge searches dispatched within 10 working days



OBSERVATION:

The service processed 446 official land charge searches in Q1; 278 searches were dispatched within 10 working days.

There was a significant fall in performance in Q1 due to reduced capacity in the service, which has since been resolved with the appointment of new team members. The data for July indicates that performance has returned to the previous high standard with all land charge searches processed within the target of 10 working days.

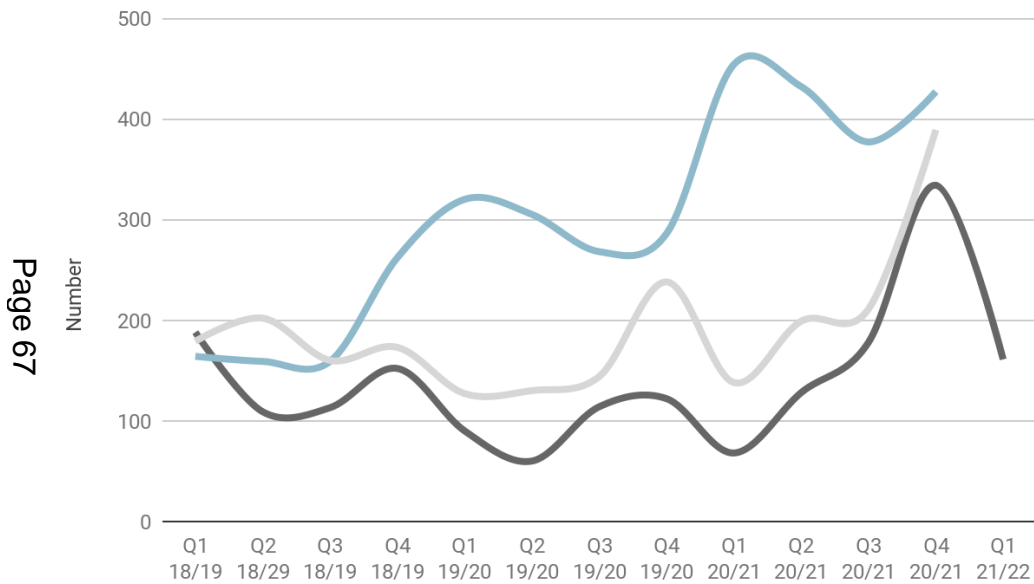
The service is still receiving higher volumes of land charge searches which is likely to be due to the 'stamp duty holiday' which will be phased out from the end of June 2021.

There was a dip in performance in 2018-19 as the planning element of the search had to be done manually while awaiting an upgrade to the Uniform system

Environmental and Regulatory

Number of fly tips collected

Cotswold Forest of Dean West Oxfordshire



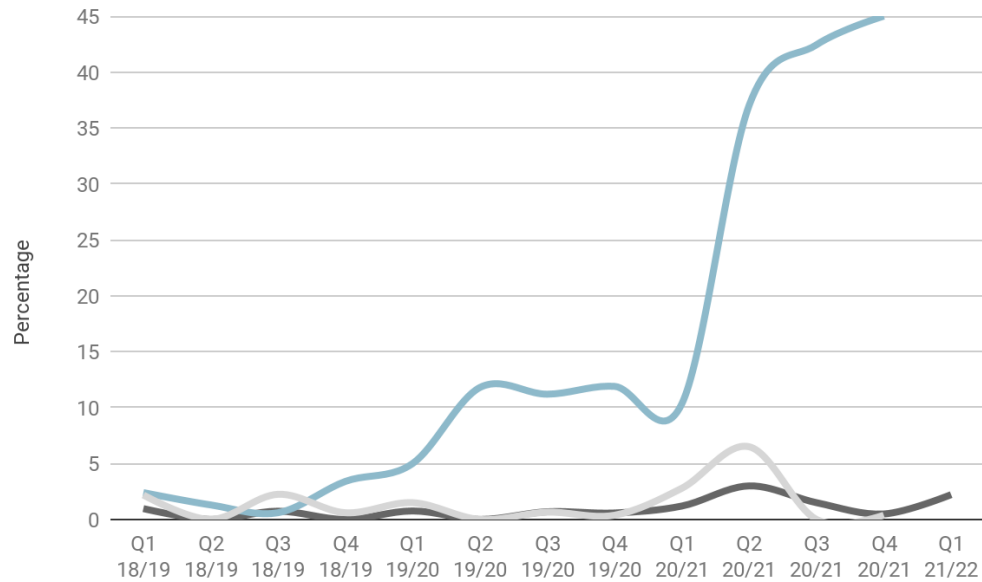
OBSERVATION:

An increase in fly tips has been reported nationally which coincided with the start of Covid-19, and this appeared to be reflected locally. In the most recent quarter, there has been a sharp decrease which again has coincided with the start of the lifting of restrictions in April 2021.

The Council has an Enviro-crime programme designed to tackle a range of enviro-crime including fly tipping, abandoned vehicles and dog fouling. Following a pause due to Covid-19, the Lead Officer has re-commenced duty of care work with businesses and households to support them to manage their waste responsibly; and more investigative work into fly tipping incidents is also being undertaken.

Forest of Dean appears to collect a higher number of fly tips than Cotswold and West as it counts fly tips at recycling sites

Percentage of fly tips that result in an enforcement action taking place (defined as a warning letter, fixed penalty notice, simple caution or prosecution)



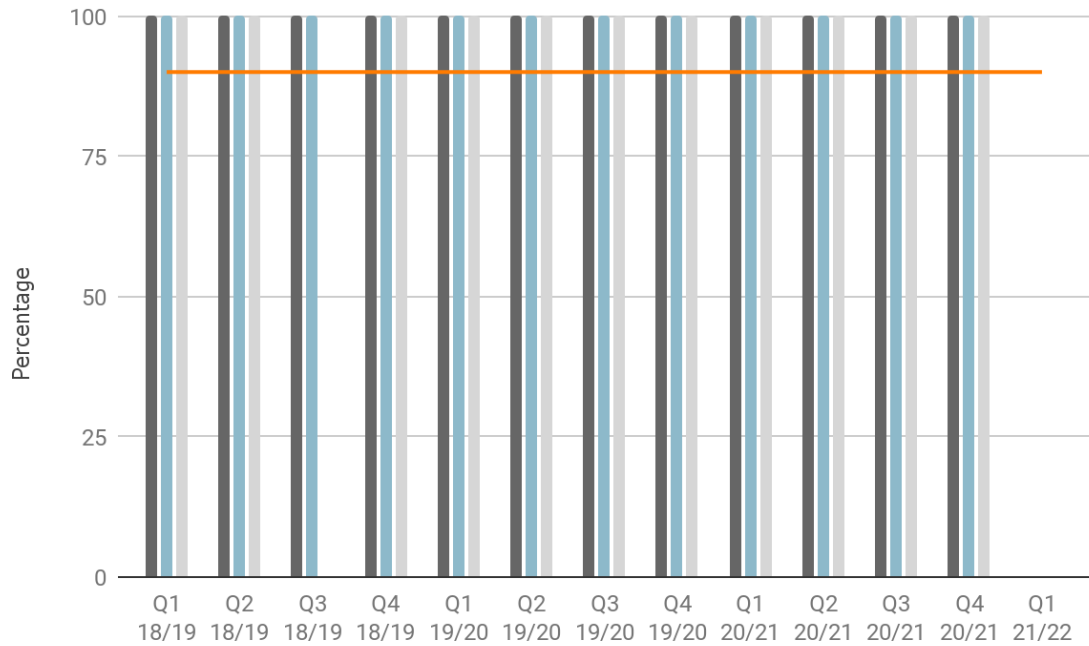
OBSERVATION:

There were 225 notifications of fly tips, down from 412 in the previous quarter; which resulted in five enforcement actions. Following a pause due to Covid-19, the Lead Officer has re-commenced duty of care work with businesses and households to support them to manage their waste responsibly; and more investigative work into fly tipping incidents is also being undertaken.

The Council will always take enforcement action if fly tipping is witnessed.

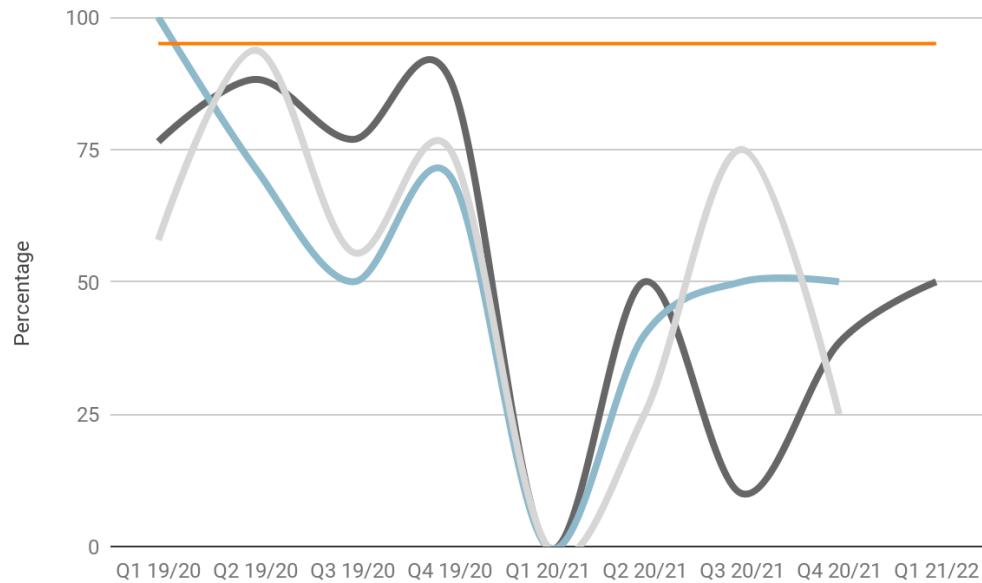
Currently, Cotswold and West operate a small multidisciplinary team. In contrast, at Forest of Dean, there is a dedicated Community Warden team. As part of Cotswold's new 'Clean and Green' agenda, there will be two new community warden type roles to support the Lead Enviro-Crime programmes officer in tackling fly tipping and other enviro-crimes

Percentage of high risk notifications (including food poisoning outbreaks, anti-social behaviour, contaminated private water supplies, workplace fatalities or multiple serious injuries) risk assessed within 1 working day



OBSERVATION:
There were no high risk notifications during Q1

Percentage of high risk food premises inspected within target timescales



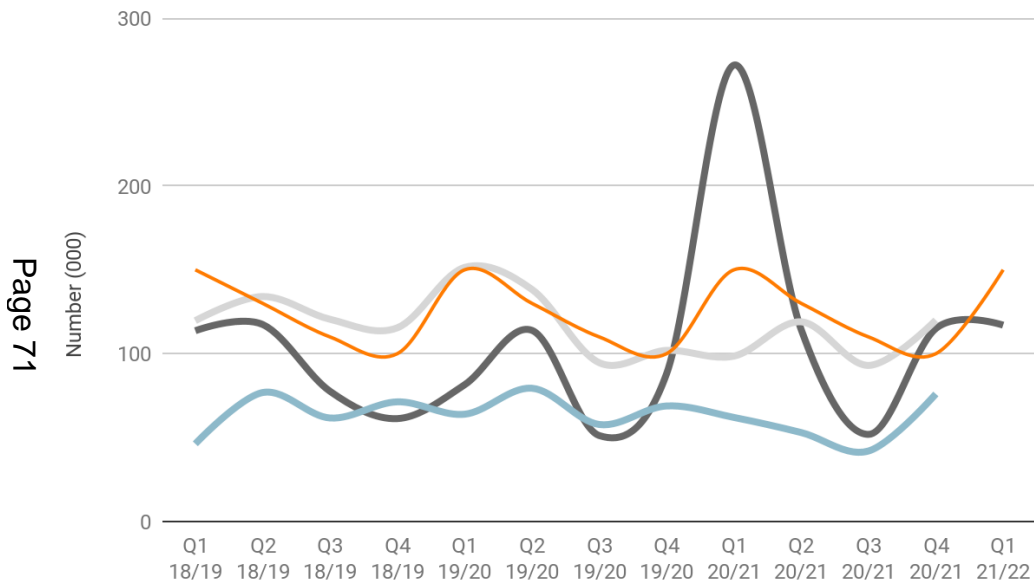
OBSERVATION:

During Q1, Cotswold completed one of the two high risk food inspections due within the timescale; the other inspection has since been completed. There is a small backlog of high risk food inspections which have received a remote inspection but require a site inspection. These inspections have been prioritised.

The FSA has put in place a recovery plan to ensure that both new businesses are prioritised based on risk; and the backlog of the highest risk categories (A's and B's) are cleared by 31 March 2022 and 30 June 2022 respectively. Although officers have cleared the majority of high risk inspections, a backlog of the lower risk categories has started to build up. In addition, reactive work/service requests have to be dealt with.

The service is experiencing some capacity and skills issues, and the recruitment of senior officers is proving difficult. There have been two recruitment campaigns over the last six months, and another one is underway targeted at newly qualified officers who will be trained up

Number of missed bin per 100,000 scheduled collections



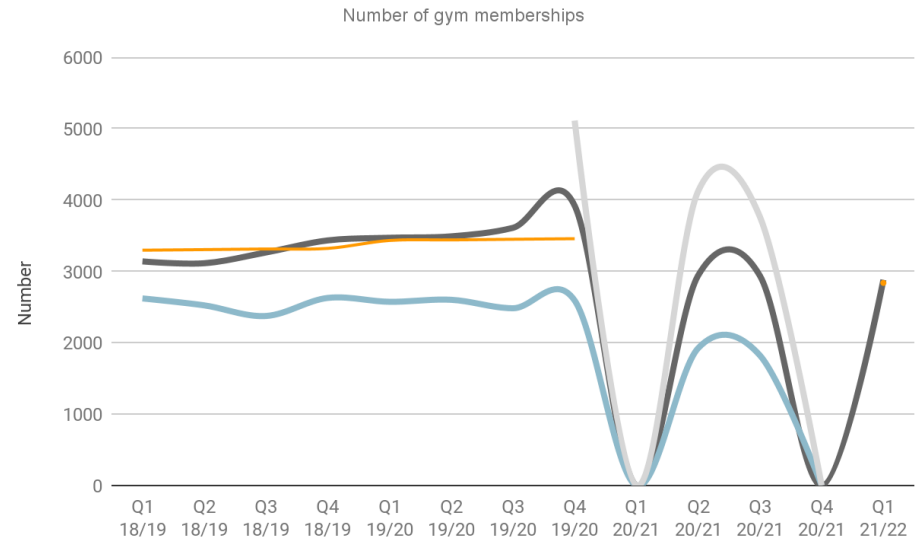
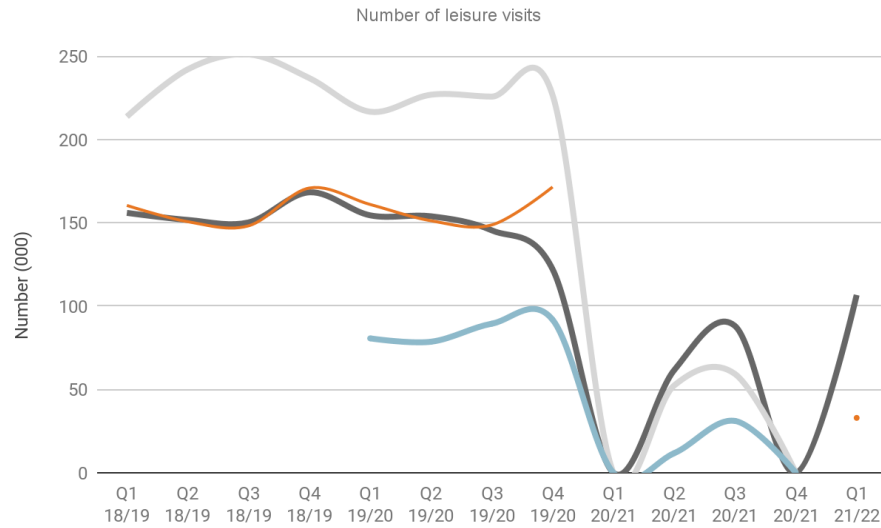
OBSERVATION:

In Q1, the number of missed bins per 100,000 was comfortably within the target, despite staffing issues related to positive Covid-19 cases, and crew members working within the same bubble having to self-isolate, as well as a national shortage of drivers. Some crew members and agency staff were unfamiliar with the allocated rounds, although they were supported by the new In-Cab technology which was introduced in 7 April. The system is still undergoing improvements; and once embedded is expected to reduce the number of missed bins.

There was a spike in missed bins a year ago. As expected, the introduction of the new waste and recycling service on 18 March 2020 resulted in an increase in the number of missed collections in Q1 as residents and Ubico staff got used to the changes. Concurrently, there was an increase in the amount of waste being produced due to the large number of home-workers and others self-isolating or shielding

Leisure

Number of visits to the three leisure centres & (Snapshot) Number of gym memberships



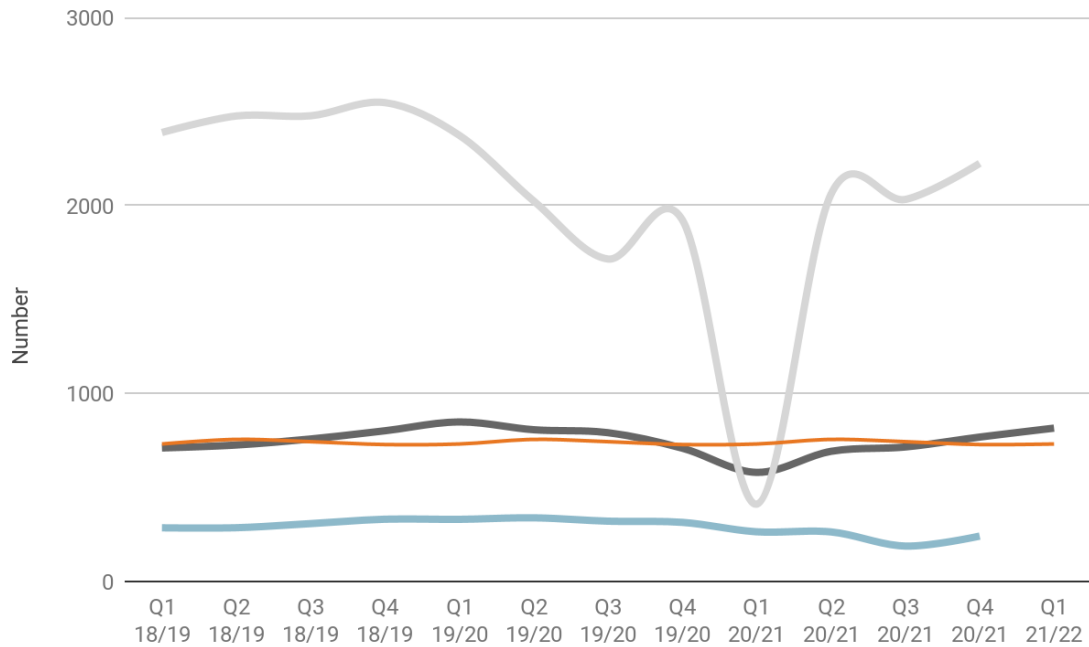
OBSERVATION:

Since April 2021 leisure centres have been following the Government Roadmap and have been able to relax Covid measures, with the final date for relaxation of all measures set for 19 July 2021. The return of customers has been encouraging with many users feeling protected under the new Covid protocols (one-way systems, sanitiser stations, pre-booking etc.) The space available within the facilities has also helped to allow increased numbers without contravening social distancing requirements. As targets were set prior to the end of the last lockdown they were conservative and we have seen a strong return in usage. Although the targets are set to increase each quarter, it may become more challenging over the year should there be further Covid restrictions. Gym memberships are lower than pre-Covid levels and may face a further challenge in September 2021 when PureGym is due to open a new facility in Cirencester.

Note: Gym memberships were frozen during the first and third lockdowns. No targets were set for 2020-21

Parking

Total hours spent undertaking on and off-street parking enforcement visits



OBSERVATION:

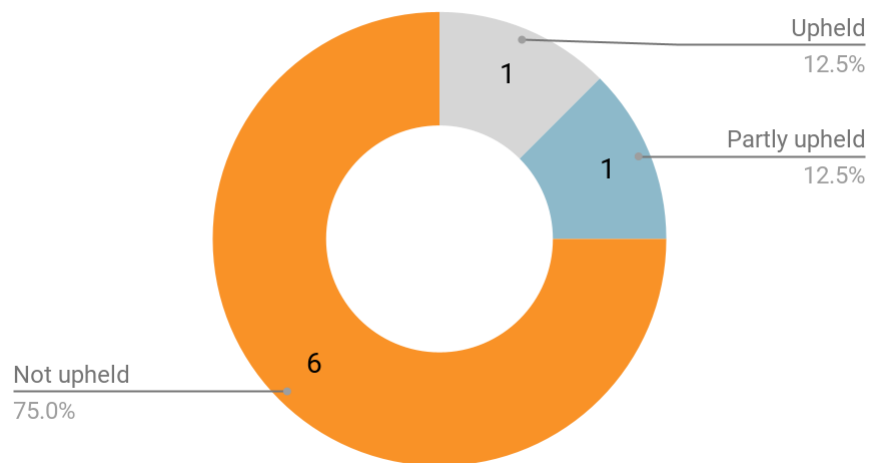
Officers are undertaking their usual enforcement duties of regulating car parks, maintaining pay and display machines and replenishing tickets.

There was a slight increase in enforcement hours in Q1 to support the introduction of cashless parking.

One part-time post (on contract) is being held vacant until usage levels increase

COMPLAINTS - ARE WE DOING THE 'DAY JOB' REALLY WELL FOR OUR COUNCILS?

Complaints decisions at Stage 2



OBSERVATION:

A new Customer Feedback Procedure went live on the 1st July 2020. The Corporate Responsibility team is managing all complaints allowing services to focus on delivery.

The new process has the following stages:

Stage 1: Acknowledgement and Assessment

Stage 2: Investigation

Stage 3: Appeal

The complaints shown below only include upheld or partially upheld complaints

Service area	Description	Outcome/learning	Stage	Decision	Response time (days)
Revenues & Benefits	Complainant unhappy with lack of communication with regards to Council Tax Support payments	It was acknowledged that there had been a system error which meant that communications regarding the complainant's support payments were not sent out when they should have been. An apology was offered for the inconvenience caused	2	Upheld	10 days
Estates	Complainant unhappy with the high number of memorial benches at Chesterton Cemetery, and their locations. The complainant also expressed concern over the absence of a Cemetery Management Policy at the Council.	The part of the complaint relating to memorial benches was not upheld. The benches were placed on ground that could not otherwise be used for interment. The number of benches in each section of the cemetery depends on the number of applications received from relatives of those laid to rest; and applications are considered on a case by case basis. The Council does not currently have a Cemetery Management Policy, however all cemeteries are governed by	2	Partly upheld	29 days

		The Local Authorities Cemeteries Act 1977. The Council is reviewing the need for a Cemetery Management Policy and may adopt one to provide greater clarity on these matters.			
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Cotswold District Council - Revenue Budget Monitoring

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Annex D

Service Area	Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget		Variance	Comments - Variances
	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Total	
Environmental & Regulatory Services	1,008,148	(605,720)	243,651	(155,390)	229,333	(162,980)	(14,317)	(7,590)	(21,908)	Building Control income exceeded budget and small underspends in Public Protection.
Business Support - Finance, HR, Procurement	2,245,722	(1,324,879)	558,678	(292,902)	546,658	(276,956)	(12,020)	15,946	3,926	
Business Support - ICT, Change & Customer Services	1,894,152	(96,957)	476,549	(23,871)	465,884	(25,222)	(10,666)	(1,352)	(12,017)	No Street Naming/Signs expenditure in Q.1.
Assets, Land, Legal & Property	1,521,862	(858,734)	422,498	(214,360)	362,499	(187,577)	(59,999)	26,783	(33,216)	Lower than budgeted repairs and maintenance costs. Lower legal staffing costs and a corresponding reduction in partnership fee income.
Chief Executive and Modernisation Costs	83,247	0	20,424	0	20,381	0	(43)	0	(43)	
Revenues & Housing Support	14,017,205	(13,714,739)	250,397	(100,462)	298,964	(209,896)	48,567	(109,434)	(60,867)	Increased expenditure and corresponding grant income in respect of homeless.
Revenues - Covid Grants	0	0	0	0	12,534,934	(12,521,389)	12,534,934	(12,521,389)	13,545	Expenditure in relation to Covid Business Grants matched by grant funding. Variance relates to additional resource costs related to administering business grants which are expected to continue in to Q2, these expenses will be funded from additional new burden grant funding expected later in the financial year.
Environmental Services	9,484,708	(5,335,288)	3,050,990	(1,870,300)	3,001,679	(1,672,825)	(49,311)	197,475	148,164	Lower than forecast car park income as a result of continued impact of pandemic. Higher than budgeted income from garden waste. Lower contract fees for recycling.
Leisure & Communities	1,833,380	(105,269)	313,481	(26,317)	480,286	(143,957)	166,805	(117,639)	49,165	Support provided to SLM through open book and funding agreements. Additional leisure grant funding received through National Leisure Recovery Fund. National Leisure Recovery Fund Grant of £112k received offsets losses of £26k from waiving of SLM management fee in Q1. Net overspend to be funded from underspend in relation to SLM set aside from 2020/21.
Planning & Strategic Housing	2,568,956	(1,021,487)	631,558	(255,372)	649,859	(315,641)	18,302	(60,270)	(41,968)	Planning income achieved higher than budgeted. Income retained to cover admin costs in relation to CIL, higher than budgeted due to increased CIL receipts.
Democratic and Committee Services	998,214	(25,905)	244,353	(5,976)	501,087	(257,622)	256,734	(251,646)	5,088	
Retained/Corporate Council Services	4,099,287	(1,525,722)	682,768	(378,831)	434,818	(381,924)	(247,950)	(3,094)	(251,044)	Lower discretionary pension payments than budgeted. Contingency for additional expenditure and income losses in relation to Covid income and expenditure as set out elsewhere in service areas.
Corporate Council Services - Covid	0	0	57,000	0	224,206	(197,882)	167,206	(197,882)	(30,676)	£37k of expenditure in respect of reopening the High Street matched by government funding via the 'Welcome Back' Fund. Income includes £50k contribution from Gloucestershire County Council and £97k from DHSC. Plans to spend remaining COMF grant allocation and County Council contributions to be finalised in Q2.
Cost of Services (Gross)	39,754,881	(24,614,700)	6,952,347	(3,323,780)	19,750,587	(16,353,871)	12,798,240	(13,030,091)	(231,851)	
Cost of Services (Net)		15,140,181		3,628,567		3,396,716				

Cotswold District Council - Revenue Budget Monitoring

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Annex D

Financing	Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget		Variance
	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Total
Council Tax income		(5,867,996)		0		0	0	0	0
NNDR income and expenditure	12,522,440	(13,343,154)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Section 31 NNDR grant income		(2,459,000)		0		0	0	0	0
Covid general grant		(377,000)		(377,000)		(377,437)	0	(437)	(437)
Sales, Fees and Charges Compensation Grant		(356,181)		(356,181)		(278,521)	0	77,660	77,660
New homes bonus		(2,092,561)		(523,140)		(523,140)	0	0	0
Other government grants		(1,323,002)		(489,135)		(489,135)	0	(0)	(0)
Balance Sheet Adjustments and Reversals	(1,843,727)			0		0	0	0	0
(Under)/overspend against the budget:	50,433,594	(50,433,594)	1,883,111.155		1,728,483		12,798,240	(12,952,868)	(154,628)
		0							

Comments - Variances

Estimated income received from MHCLG Sales, fees and charges compensation scheme expected to continue for Q1 of 2021/22 only. Income received less than budgeted due to level of income losses being lower than budgeted.

Environmental & Regulatory Services

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre	Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget		Comments - Variance
	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	
BUC001 Building Control - Fee Earning Work	170,566	(360,000)	40,518	(90,000)	40,020	(97,245)	(499)	(7,245)	Building control income exceeded budget.
BUC002 Building Control - Non Fee Earning Work	53,879	0	12,908	0	12,899	0	(8)	0	
BUC003 Dangerous Structures	2,500	0	625	0	441	0	(184)	0	
Building Control total	226,945	(360,000)	54,051	(90,000)	53,360	(97,245)	(691)	(7,245)	
EMP001 Emergency Planning	22,918	0	5,669	0	1,865	0	(3,804)	0	
ESM001 Environment - Service Management	103,924	0	25,981	0	22,841	0	(3,140)	0	
PSH002 Private Sector Housing - Condition of Dwellings	301	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
PSH005 Home Energy Conservation	212	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
REG002 Licensing	205,846	(190,720)	50,479	(45,640)	50,550	(45,910)	70	(270)	
REG006 Caravan Sites - Itinerates	142	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
REG007 Caravan Sites - Licensed	142	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
REG009 Environmental Protection	192,018	(53,000)	45,560	(19,250)	43,857	(18,775)	(1,703)	475	
REG013 Pollution Control	127,651	0	31,913	0	27,499	0	(4,414)	0	
REG016 Food Safety	126,279	(2,000)	29,623	(500)	29,361	(600)	(261)	(100)	
REG021 Statutory Burrials	1,642	0	375	0	0	0	(375)	0	
STC011 Abandoned Vehicles	128	0	0	0	0	(450)	0	(450)	
Public Protection total	781,203	(245,720)	189,600	(65,390)	175,973	(65,736)	(13,626)	(346)	
Total	1,008,148	(605,720)	243,651	(155,390)	229,333	(162,980)	(14,317)	(7,590)	

Business Support Services - Finance, HR, Procurement

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre	Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget	
	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income
SUP009 Accountancy	481,136	(141,169)	99,493	(11,742)	100,120	(9,246)	627	2,496
SUP011 Creditors	101,757	(59,533)	30,383	(14,883)	27,060	(14,883)	(3,323)	0
SUP012 Debtors	51,801	(12,951)	17,894	(3,238)	14,799	(3,238)	(3,095)	0
SUP035 Insurances	58,051	(51,969)	14,513	(12,992)	14,503	(12,995)	(9)	(3)
SUP042 Business World Support and Hosting	46,403	(36,000)	11,601	(9,000)	12,043	(9,000)	443	0
Finance total	739,148	(301,622)	173,884	(51,856)	168,527	(49,363)	(5,357)	2,493
SUP010 Internal Audit	107,302	(21,087)	26,825	(5,272)	26,726	(5,272)	(100)	0
SUP402 Glos. Counter Fraud Unit	462,261	(462,262)	114,715	(115,566)	111,661	(108,842)	(3,054)	6,724
SUP403 CDC Counter Fraud	56,672	(64,212)	15,018	(1,285)	15,198	5,140	180	6,425
Audit and Counter Fraud	626,235	(547,561)	156,559	(122,122)	153,584	(108,974)	(2,974)	13,149
SUP003 Human Resources	514,910	(267,224)	133,812	(66,806)	130,248	(66,806)	(3,564)	0
SUP019 Health & Safety	112,407	(83,677)	27,983	(20,919)	28,206	(20,919)	223	0
SUP020 Training & Development	95,620	(29,292)	22,918	(7,323)	22,628	(7,323)	(289)	0
SUP013 Payroll	100,395	(73,469)	29,270	(18,367)	28,362	(18,367)	(908)	0
HR Support & Payroll total	823,332	(453,662)	213,983	(113,416)	209,444	(113,416)	(4,539)	0
SUP033 Central Purchasing / Procurement	57,007	(22,034)	14,252	(5,509)	15,103	(5,204)	851	305
Procurement total	57,007	(22,034)	14,252	(5,509)	15,103	(5,204)	851	305
Total	2,245,722	(1,324,879)	558,678	(292,902)	546,658	(276,956)	(12,020)	15,946

Comments - Variance

Business Support Services - Customer Services, ICT and Change

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre	Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget	
	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income
SUP017 Business Improvement/Transformation	111,158	0	27,298	0	27,281	0	(17)	0
SUP021 Business Continuity Planning	21,147	0	4,402	0	4,399	0	(3)	0
SUP023 Freedom of Information Act	10,747	0	2,687	0	2,685	0	(2)	0
TMR001 Street Naming	30,524	(20,000)	7,513	(5,000)	0	(5,716)	(7,513)	(716)
Change and modernisation	173,576	(20,000)	41,899	(5,000)	34,365	(5,716)	(7,534)	(716)
ADB411 Moreton-in-Marsh, Offices	78,863	(54,292)	24,669	(13,498)	19,804	(10,688)	(4,865)	2,810
COM420 FOH - Moreton	104,815	(3,665)	25,065	(622)	25,274	(496)	208	127
SUP401 FOH - Trinity Road	550,085	0	136,017	0	135,330	(5,349)	(687)	(5,349)
Customer services	733,763	(57,957)	185,752	(14,120)	180,408	(16,532)	(5,344)	(2,412)
SUP005 ICT	916,033	(19,000)	213,508	(4,750)	213,778	(2,974)	270	1,776
SUP031 Application Support	70,780	0	35,390	0	37,333	0	1,943	0
ICT and applications - total	986,813	(19,000)	248,898	(4,750)	251,111	(2,974)	2,212	1,776
Total	1,894,152	(96,957)	476,549	(23,871)	465,884	(25,222)	(10,666)	(1,352)

Comments - Variance

No Street Naming/Signs expenditure in Q.1.

Assets, Land, Legal & Property

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre	Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget	
	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income
ADB401 Trinity Road, Offices	499,573	(343,268)	172,594	(85,817)	161,620	(76,204)	(10,973)	9,613
ADB412 Moreton-in-Marsh, Offices - Maintenance	43,235	0	10,809	0	5,550	0	(5,259)	0
CUL411 Corinium Museum - Maintenance	41,350	0	10,338	0	95	0	(10,243)	0
ENA401 Housing Enabling Properties	9,110	(23,476)	1,870	(5,545)	1,111	(8,276)	(759)	(2,731)
FIE425 22/24 Ashcroft Road	28,534	0	7,134	0	2,998	0	(4,135)	0
Asset Management total	621,802	(366,744)	202,743	(91,362)	171,374	(84,481)	(31,369)	6,881
LLC001 Local Land Charges	110,362	(250,704)	26,269	(62,676)	25,471	(58,816)	(798)	3,860
SUP004 Legal	467,627	(241,286)	115,592	(60,322)	89,685	(44,230)	(25,908)	16,092
SUP025 Property Services	322,071	0	77,893	0	75,968	(50)	(1,925)	(50)
Land, Legal and Property	900,060	(491,990)	219,755	(122,998)	191,125	(103,096)	(28,630)	19,902
Total	1,521,862	(858,734)	422,498	(214,360)	362,499	(187,577)	(59,999)	26,783

Comments - Variance
Lower than budgeted maintenance. No expenditure to date No expenditure to date
Impact of changes to staffing within legal has resulted in saving £16k in employee costs and reducing partnership income by £14k. There is a further saving of £3k on car mileage & leasing costs and a £7k underspend across supplies and services

Chief Executive and Modernisation

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre	Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget	
	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income
COR011 2020 Vision/Transformation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SUP026 Chief Executive	83,247	0	20,424	0	20,381	0	(43)	0
Total	83,247	0	20,424	0	20,381	0	(43)	0

Comments - Variance

Revenues and Housing Support

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre		Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget	
		Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income
HBP001	Rent Allowances	13,495,334	(13,183,091)	123,289	(52,141)	130,424	(59,314)	7,136	(7,173)
HBP005	Benefit Fraud Investigation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Benefits total		13,495,334	(13,183,091)	123,289	(52,141)	130,424	(59,314)	7,136	(7,173)
HOM001	Homelessness	126,663	(76,266)	31,657	(19,067)	63,326	(129,097)	31,669	(110,031)
HOM005	Homelessness Hostel Accommodation	4,000	(35,500)	1,000	(8,875)	2,403	(5,445)	1,403	3,430
HOM406	Temporary Emergency Accommodation	87,825	(77,519)	21,706	(19,380)	25,722	(16,041)	4,016	3,339
PSH001	Private Sector Housing Grants	28,013	0	7,003	0	7,032	0	29	0
Housing Management total		246,501	(189,285)	61,366	(47,321)	98,483	(150,583)	37,117	(103,261)
LTC001	Council Tax Collection	207,854	(143,808)	49,760	0	52,662	(0)	2,902	(0)
LTC002	Council Tax Support Administration	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
LTC011	NNDR Collection	52,017	(198,555)	12,296	(1,000)	14,304	0	2,008	1,000
PUT001	Concessionary Travel	15,499	0	3,686	0	2,892	0	(794)	0
SUP014	Cashiers	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SUP028	Security Carriers	0	0	0	0	198	0	198	0
Revenues total		275,370	(342,363)	65,742	(1,000)	70,056	0	4,314	1,000
Total		14,017,205	(13,714,739)	250,397	(100,462)	298,964	(209,896)	48,567	(109,434)

Comments - Variance

£93k of "one off" grant income - £60k Additional funding for Rough Sleepers & £33k FHSG for Q1 (whole year allocation £133k) HB received for clients in B&B accommodation offsetting against expenditure (£34k). £14k expenditure for Aspire Support worker funded by our one off grant income

Revenues - Covid Grants

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre		Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget	
		Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income
COV022	Business Lockdown Grants	0	0	0	0	2,243,521	(2,229,976)	2,243,521	(2,229,976)
COV024	Restart Grants	0	0	0	0	10,291,413	(10,291,413)	10,291,413	(10,291,413)
	Total	0	0	0	0	12,534,934	(12,521,389)	12,534,934	(12,521,389)

Comments - Variance
<p>Covid grants to local businesses administered by Council funded from government grant. Net nil overall impact. Includes admin and finance resource costs of £13.5k these expenses will be funded from additional new burdens funding expected later in the year.</p> <p>Covid Restart grants to local businesses administered by Council funded from government grant. Net nil overall impact.</p>

Environmental Services

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre	Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget	
	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income
CPK401 Car Parks	1,025,989	(2,989,797)	417,055	(747,449)	408,552	(436,150)	(8,503)	311,299
CPK402 Car Parks - Maintenance	35,725	0	8,931	0	12,465	0	3,534	0
CPK413 Car Parks - Tetbury The Chippings	39,075	(54,000)	9,769	(13,500)	(627)	(5,364)	(10,396)	8,136
CPK414 Car Parks - Chipping Campden	0	0	0	0	4,989	(4,989)	4,989	(4,989)
Car Parking total	1,100,789	(3,043,797)	435,755	(760,949)	425,380	(446,503)	(10,376)	314,446
CCC001 Climate Change	94,563	0	23,632	0	21,343	0	(2,289)	0
Climate change total	94,563	0	23,632	0	21,343	0	(2,289)	0

Comments - Q4 Variance

The pandemic has continued to reduce car park income received during Q1. £268k less than budgeted received in parking fees, £28k less in parking permits and £19k less in excess parking fees.

Environmental Services (continued)

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre		Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget	
		Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income
CCM001	Cemetery, Crematorium and Churchyards	167,684	(63,830)	51,892	(15,958)	53,538	(13,617)	1,646	2,341
CCM402	Cemeteries - Maintenance	16,275	0	4,069	0	2,940	0	(1,128)	0
HLD410	Waste - Cleansing	84	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HLD411	Waste - Cemeteries	2,092	0	352	0	334	(1,103)	(17)	(1,103)
REG003	Animal Control	59,828	(32,505)	14,785	(7,101)	14,784	(3,673)	(1)	3,429
REG019	Public Conveniences	270,632	(84,030)	58,946	(21,008)	66,844	(13,823)	7,898	7,184
RYC001	Recycling	2,734,062	(882,964)	841,280	(158,244)	805,070	(169,297)	(36,210)	(11,053)
RYC002	Green Waste	1,008,377	(835,000)	333,194	(808,750)	338,943	(911,557)	5,749	(102,807)
RYC003	Refuse / Recycling Organic & Food Waste	805,818	0	268,606	0	294,037	(29,289)	25,431	(29,289)
STC001	Street Cleaning	1,352,383	0	447,642	0	445,196	0	(2,446)	0
WST001	Household Waste	1,589,267	(143,662)	505,098	(35,916)	468,203	(4,775)	(36,895)	31,140
WST004	Bulky Household Waste	41,930	(56,000)	10,483	(14,000)	23,609	(23,856)	13,126	(9,856)
WST401	Refuse-Stow Fair	11,227	0	3,824	0	4,194	0	371	0
WST402	South Cerney Depot, Packers Lease	31,768	(173,500)	2,500	(43,375)	1,588	(44,287)	(912)	(912)
Environmental Services Client		8,091,427	(2,271,491)	2,542,669	(1,104,351)	2,519,281	(1,215,277)	(23,388)	(110,926)
FLD401	Land Drainage	97,274	(20,000)	23,933	(5,000)	23,183	(11,045)	(751)	(6,045)
Flooding total		97,274	(20,000)	23,933	(5,000)	23,183	(11,045)	(751)	(6,045)
REG023	Environmental Strategy	100,655	0	25,000	0	12,492	0	(12,508)	0
Waste and Recycling Policy		100,655	0	25,000	0	12,492	0	(12,508)	0
Total		9,484,708	(5,335,288)	3,050,990	(1,870,300)	3,001,679	(1,672,825)	(49,311)	197,475

Comments - Variance

Business Rates still being charged on PCs, no budget as exemption announced in 2018, still awaiting date this will be actioned. £7k underachieved on income due to continuing impact of Covid-19.

£23k underspend on contractors recycling fees. There is a £3k underspend on marketing and £11k has been overachieved on recycling credits in Q.1

£110k overachieved on annual garden waste bin licences
The costs of the transfer of food waste flow through this cost centre. Thamesdown Recycling invoice the Council for transfer of Food Waste to Andigestion Ltd, this charge is then charged onto Gloucestershire County Council.

Net variance of £5.8k. Income of £5k for delivery of reciprals lower than budgeted offset by lower expenditure. £19k underspend in employee costs netted off by £19k underachieved income due to no recharge from Publica.

Income in excess of budget received for bulky waste collection resulting in corresponding increased costs.

Budget for Civic Pride, no expenditure to date.

Leisure & Communities

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre	Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget		Comments - Variance
	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	
COM401 Health Policy	25,847	0	5,526	0	5,522	0	(4)	0	
COM402 Community Liaison	95,926	0	23,723	0	22,958	0	(765)	0	
COM403 Youth Participation	92,916	0	30,927	0	30,426	0	(501)	0	
COM405 Health Development	41,774	0	10,281	0	9,937	0	(344)	0	
GBD001 Community Welfare Grants	165,830	0	69,646	0	69,587	0	(58)	0	
Community Liaison	422,293	0	140,102	0	138,431	0	(1,671)	0	
CCR001 Community Safety (Crime Reduction)	48,335	0	11,908	0	11,905	0	(3)	0	
SUP002 Consultation, Policy & Research	87,473	0	23,773	0	22,243	0	(1,530)	0	
Community Safety	135,808	0	35,681	0	34,148	0	(1,533)	0	

Leisure & Communities (continued)

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre	Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget		
	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	
CUL410	Corinium Museum	101,084	0	0	0	0	0	0	
CUL412	Collection Management	4,961	0	0	0	0	0	0	
CUL413	Northleach Resouce Centre	8,850	0	2,213	0	0	(2,213)	0	
CUL415	Corinium Museum - HLF Project	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
REC410	Cirencester Leisure Centre and SLM contract costs	687,063	(105,269)	17,601	(26,317)	167,287	(104,298)	149,686	(77,981)
REC413	Ciren - Dryside	0	0	0	0	0	(2,239)	0	(2,239)
REC419	Cirencester Leisure - Maintenance	32,850	0	8,213	0	4,480	0	(3,733)	0
REC430	C Campden - Centre Management	125,878	0	61,511	0	57,273	0	(4,238)	0
REC450	Bourton - Centre Management	150,951	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
REC459	Bourton - Maintenance	28,019	0	7,005	0	95	0	(6,910)	0
	Leisure Management	1,139,656	(105,269)	96,542	(26,317)	229,135	(106,537)	132,593	(80,220)
TOU001	Tourism Strategy and Promotion	39,401	0	3,600	0	3,598	0	(2)	0
TOU402	Partnership Grants	54,000	0	27,000	0	27,000	0	0	0
TOU403	Cotswold Tourism Partnership	42,222	0	10,556	0	24,813	(14,258)	14,258	(14,258)
TOU404	Discover England Fund - Project	0	0	0	0	23,161	(23,161)	23,161	(23,161)
	Tourism Policy	135,623	0	41,156	0	78,572	(37,419)	37,416	(37,419)
	Total	1,833,380	(105,269)	313,481	(26,317)	480,286	(143,957)	166,805	(117,639)

Comments - Variance

£152k support provided to SLM through open book and funding agreements. Additional leisure grant funding received through National Leisure Recovery Fund. National Leisure Recovery Fund Grant of £104k received offsets losses of £26k from waiving of SLM management fee in Q1. Net overspend to be funded from underspend in relation to SLM set aside from 2020/21.

Net nil variance.

Net nil variance, Visit England project funded from grant.

Planning & Strategic Housing

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre		Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget	
		Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income
DEV001	Development Management - Applications	851,375	(999,877)	209,720	(249,969)	200,634	(255,966)	(9,087)	(5,997)
DEV002	Development Management - Appeals	128,712	0	31,884	0	10,627	0	(21,257)	0
DEV003	Development Management - Enforcement	185,843	0	45,672	0	45,643	0	(29)	0
DEV004	Development Advice	330,666	0	81,457	0	81,405	0	(52)	0
DEV401	Planning Advice For Land Charges	11,321	0	2,751	0	2,749	0	(2)	0
DEV488	Planning - Section 106 Agreements	0	0	0	0	50,575	(50,575)	50,575	(50,575)
Development Management		1,507,917	(999,877)	371,484	(249,969)	391,632	(306,542)	20,148	(56,573)
PLP005	Heritage & Design	210,966	0	45,410	0	43,204	0	(2,206)	0
Heritage & Conservation		210,966	0	45,410	0	43,204	0	(2,206)	0
CIL001	Community Infrastructure Levy	10,000	(10,000)	0	(2,500)	0	(8,903)	0	(6,403)
PLP002	Local Development Framework	339,953	(100)	92,398	(25)	91,867	0	(531)	25
PLP401	Fwd Plan work for Development Management	16,508	0	4,044	0	4,041	0	(3)	0
PLM001	Planning - Service Mgt. and Support Services	16,035	(11,510)	4,009	(2,878)	3,491	(97)	(518)	2,780
Planning Policy		382,496	(21,610)	100,451	(5,402)	99,399	(9,000)	(1,052)	(3,597)
HAD001	Housing Advice	274,132	0	67,945	0	64,379	0	(3,566)	0
HOS001	Housing Strategy	138,534	0	32,681	0	37,662	(100)	4,981	(100)
HOS002	Housing Partnerships	24,436	0	5,969	0	5,965	0	(4)	0
HOS005	Community Led Housing	30,475	0	7,619	0	7,619	0	(0)	0
Strategic Housing		467,577	0	114,213	0	115,625	(100)	1,411	(100)
Total		2,568,956	(1,021,487)	631,558	(255,372)	649,859	(315,641)	18,302	(60,270)

Comments - Variance

£9k underspend in supplies and services, £16k overachieved planning app income, £10k underachieved on Pre-App Advice. New Pre-App advice charging schedule not yet implemented.

No costs associated to appeals in Q.1

Net nil variance, payments made for community facilities, matched by S106 contributions held.

5% of CiL received is retained for Admin costs. This income will be used to cover staff costs [Publica] of those administering CiL.

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Democratic and Committee Services

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre	Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget		Comments - Variance
	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	
DRM005 Committee Services	88,568	0	15,516	0	14,699	0	(818)	0	Election costs to be covered by income due from Electoral Claims Unit.
DRM008 Corporate Subscriptions	18,980	0	18,980	0	24,798	0	5,818	0	
Committee Services total	107,548	0	34,496	0	39,497	0	5,001	0	
ELE* Elections	139,662	(3,880)	29,130	(470)	280,671	(248,894)	251,541	(248,424)	
Elections total	139,662	(3,880)	29,130	(470)	280,671	(248,894)	251,541	(248,424)	
SUP018 Press & PR/Communications	56,087	0	13,770	0	11,381	0	(2,389)	0	
SUP024 Postal Services	40,011	0	9,772	0	10,238	0	466	0	
Communications	96,098	0	23,542	0	21,619	0	(1,923)	0	
DRM001 Democratic Representation and Management	115,690	0	28,914	0	28,934	0	21	0	
DRM003 Councillors Allowances	304,890	0	76,223	0	77,298	0	1,076	0	
DRM004 Servicing Council	4,016	0	1,004	0	927	0	(77)	0	
Member Support total	424,596	0	106,140	0	107,159	0	1,019	0	
SUP022 Print & Design	230,310	(22,025)	51,044	(5,506)	52,140	(8,728)	1,096	(3,222)	
Print & Design total	230,310	(22,025)	51,044	(5,506)	52,140	(8,728)	1,096	(3,222)	
Total	998,214	(25,905)	244,353	(5,976)	501,087	(257,622)	256,734	(251,646)	

Corporate - Covid

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre		Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget	
		Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income
COV019	Corona Virus	0	0	0	0	128,758	(12,500)	128,758	(12,500)
COV020	High Street Re-Opening	0	0	0	0	37,979	(37,979)	37,979	(37,979)
COV023	Contain Outbreak Management Fund	0	0	57,000	0	57,469	(147,403)	469	(147,403)
	Total	0	0	57,000	0	224,206	(197,882)	167,206	(197,882)

Comments - Variance

25 test and trace grants were awarded in Q1 totalling £12,500, matched by £12,500 of grant income. £111k of additional Covid-19 Ubico charges.

Expenditure matched by funding from the Government 'Welcome Back Fund' Income includes £50k contribution from Gloucestershire County Council and £97k from DHSC. Plans to spend remaining COMF grant allocation and County Council contributions to be finalised in Q2. Earmarked Contain Outbreak Management Fund of £140k remains available to fund compliance and enforcement and wider contain outbreak during 2021/22.

Retained Services - Corporate Income & Expenditure, Investments, Corporate Management

Budget Monitoring 2021/22 - 1st April to 30th June 2021/22

Cost Centre	Original Budget		Budget Q1		Actual position		(Under) / Over Budget	
	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income	Expenditure	Income
FIE030 Interest and Investment Income	0	(504,668)	0	(126,167)	8,200	(128,773)	8,200	(2,606)
FIE010 Interest payable and Similar Charges	19,290	0	4,823	0	0	0	(4,823)	0
FIE410 Commercial Properties - General	10,630	4,705	2,605	(28)	513	(318)	(2,092)	(290)
FIE* Commercial Properties - summary	95,697	(579,801)	16,008	(141,147)	18,234	(141,006)	2,226	140
HAV001 Housing Advances	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OOE100 Gains and losses on disposals	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Corporate Income & Expenditure total	125,617	(1,079,764)	23,435	(267,341)	26,947	(270,097)	3,512	(2,756)
NDC401 Discretionary Pension Payments	1,881,916	0	59,146	0	34,238	0	(24,908)	0
SUP032 Strategic Directors	503,669	0	125,178	0	118,293	0	(6,885)	0
COR005 Corporate Finance	98,677	0	81,280	0	82,133	0	853	0
COR007 External Audit Fees	70,830	0	17,708	0	14,327	0	(3,381)	0
COR008 Bank Charges	61,065	0	15,266	0	23,919	0	8,653	0
COR400 Savings and Growth Items	911,555	0	249,265	0	23,735	0	(225,530)	0
COR401 Publica Group	445,958	(445,958)	111,490	(111,490)	111,226	(111,828)	(264)	(338)
Corporate Management and Directors total	3,973,670	(445,958)	659,333	(111,490)	407,871	(111,827)	(251,462)	(338)
Total	4,099,287	(1,525,722)	682,768	(378,831)	434,818	(381,924)	(247,950)	(3,094)

Comments
£8k Arlingclose Treasury Mgmt Advice. No interest payable as no borrowing undertaken in Q1.
Discretionary pension payments lower than budgeted
Contingency for additional expenditure and income losses in relation to Covid income and expenditure. Covers Ubico costs in COV019 of £111k and car park losses not covered by sales, fees and charges compensation.


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2021/22 Capital budgets and expenditure Q1					
Project	Budget for the year £	Expenditure £	Variance £	Other Committed Expenditure [2021/22] £	Comments
Disabled Facilities Grants [Better Care Fund]	700,000	179,053	(520,947)	193,584	19 grants totalling £179,053 were awarded in Q1 There are currently 58 live DFG cases, 19 of which have had funding approved of £193,584. The remaining 39 cases are expected to complete this financial year with a budget allocation of £250,000. It is anticipated that a further 90 referrals will be received in the next nine months. The frequency of Occupational Therapist referrals are beginning to return to normal following delays due to Covid-19 restrictions. Some delays with contractors are continuing as they manage work backlogs and difficulties in sourcing materials.
ICT Infrastructure	200,000	1,499	(198,501)	120,000	Committed expenditure relates to the following planned infrastructure projects for 2021/22: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase storage to allow enhanced immutable storage. (E.g., protection to ensure our data cannot be deleted in a Cyber Attack). • Additional logging capacity to help investigate Cyber incidents. • Additional Wifi coverage at Council locations, particularly with an increase in officers returning to the office and implementation of agile working policy, this will also address the need to replace older Wifi kit. • Ongoing Laptop Replacement. • Core Network Upgrade at Trinity Road (existing kit is at end of life).
Replacement of Idox/Uniform Software [ICT]	150,000	0	(150,000)	0	Project will take place in 2022/23
Planning document digitisation [ICT]	200,000	0	(200,000)	0	Project under review. Update will be provided later in the financial year.
Crowdfund Cotswold [Spacehive]	98,000	46,596	(51,404)	51,404	A number of 'legacy' projects from the Community Projects Fund have been able to progress this quarter, following Covid-19 related delays. The first round of Crowdfund Cotswold launched, with pledges offered to 14 projects – of which 9 involved capital expenditure. The remaining budget is committed to the next round of projects put forward on the Crowdfund Cotswold platform, which will take place in the Autumn.

Project	Budget for the year	Expenditure	Variance	Other Committed Expenditure [2021/22]	Comments
	£	£	£	£	
Car Park Improvements	245,000	0	(245,000)	245,000	Finalising specification and supporting documents for a tender process in August 2021. The provisional start date for the works at Rissington Road Car Park is November 2021.
Waste Receptacles	55,000	0	(55,000)	0	This is a rolling fund for the purchase of Waste Receptacles due to growth in properties or replacements. It is anticipated that the budget will be spent in full by the end of the year.
Electric vehicle charging points [EVCPs]	719,000	0	(719,000)	0	Contractor appointed in June. Site-specific surveys will take place during August. A report is expected to be submitted to Cabinet in November to request approval to allocate funds. Works are planned to commence at the end of Q3 or start of Q4.
Replacement Leisure Equipment	380,000	0	(380,000)	0	Working with SLM to identify project scope and confirm design and installation proposals with Members. Project likely to take place before the end of this financial year.
Investment in Cirencester Leisure Centre	1,200,000	0	(1,200,000)	0	Project will be considered as part of the Leisure Contract renewal. A Leisure Management options appraisal is due to take place in September this year. It is unlikely that this budget will be used this financial year.
Cirencester Leisure Centre Pool Hall Works	110,000	0	(110,000)	0	The Property and Estates team are working with consultants and contractors to finalise details for these works. It is anticipated that works are likely to take place before the end of the financial year.
Roller Brake Testing [Ubico]	52,000	43,900	(8,100)	0	Equipment has now been installed at Packers Leaze depot, South Cerney.
Packers Leaze Depot – Flood Prevention Works	135,000	5,048	(129,952)	129,952	The tender process is complete and the contract has been awarded. A pre-contact site meeting will take place week commencing 2 nd August with an estimated project start date of mid to late September this year. The estimated timeline for the duration of works is 8 – 10 weeks.
Rural Broadband	500,000	0	(500,000)	0	This scheme is dependent on a bigger scheme being agreed with the County Council.
Recovery Investment Strategy	15,200,000	0	(15,200,000)	0	Opportunities and options are being explored by officers, and detailed reports seeking approval will be presented to Cabinet and Council as appropriate.
BEIS Decarbonisation Project	1,237,000	0	(1,237,000)	0	A contractor has been appointed. Work is likely to commence in Q3 with the aim to complete in Q4.

Project	Budget for the year	Expenditure	Variance	Other Committed Expenditure [2021/22]	Comments
	£	£	£	£	
Investment in Strategic Property Acquisition [Council 27 th June 2019]	4,360,000	0	(4,360,000)	0	Discussions remain on-going with landowner.
TOTAL	26,060,000	276,096	(25,783,904)	1,133,940	

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 <p>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	<p>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p>CABINET- 6 SEPTEMBER 2021</p>
<p>Report Number</p>	<p>AGENDA ITEM 6</p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p>Ombudsman Decision – Reference 20 008 553 & Council Tax Section 13A Policy</p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>ALL</p>
<p>Accountable member(s)</p>	<p>Cllr Joe Harris - Leader of the Council Email: joe.harris@cotswold.gov.uk Cllr Mike Evemy – Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance Email: mike.evemy@cotswold.gov.uk</p>
<p>Accountable officer(s)</p>	<p>Angela Claridge – Monitoring Officer (interim) Tel: 01285 623219 Email: angela.claridge@cotswold.gov.uk Jon Dearing – Group Manager for Resident Services Tel: 01993 861221 Email: jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk Mandy Fathers – Business Manager for Operational Support and Enabling Tel: 01993 861232 Email: mandy.fathers@pubicagroup.uk</p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>To:</p> <p>i) update Cabinet of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) report in compliance with the Council’s statutory duties under Section 31(2) of the Local Government Act 1974; and,</p> <p>ii) outline proposals to introduce a Council Tax Section 13A Policy to support the Council in making decisions when considering such applications from Council Tax payers in the District.</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Annex A – Report of the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman: Decision – Reference 20 008 553 Report Annex B – Section 13A Policy</p>
<p>Recommendation/s</p>	<p>The Council:</p> <p>I. Notes and acknowledges the important role of the Ombudsman in scrutinising and reviewing the actions of local authorities, together with the legally binding nature of the findings made against the Council;</p>

	<p>2. Endorses the actions already taken, namely:</p> <p>a) a written apology to the complainant sent on 23 August 2021 with payment on 26 August 2021 as recompense of £300 for “distress and uncertainty”;</p> <p>b) reconsideration of the complainant’s request to write-off his arrears in line with the Council’s Revenues and Housing Support Services Recovery Policy (2019);</p> <p>c) training and guidance provided to the relevant Revenues & Benefits staff ensuring they provide residents of any opportunities to apply for benefits, discounts or relief in line with the relevant policies; and;</p> <p>d) guidance to staff reiterating the need to provide clear information to Council Tax payers regarding payment plans from the outset, including how or when they will end, details of any review and warning of any further recovery action.</p> <p>3. Approve the Draft Council Tax Section 13A Policy</p> <p>4. Endorses a written invitation to the complainant to apply for discretionary relief, subject to approval of the Section 13A Policy at annex B.</p> <p>5. The recommendations in paragraphs 2 a) to d), 3 and 4 form the Council’s formal response to the Ombudsman’s recommendations under section 31 of the Local Government Act 1974, and that the ombudsman be notified of the actions that the Council has taken.</p>
Corporate priorities	<p>Deliver Services to the highest standards</p> <p>Helping residents and communities access the support they need for good health and wellbeing</p>
Key Decision	No
Exempt	No
Consultees/ Consultation	The Leader of the Council, The Deputy Leader of the Council, The Chief Executive Officer, The Deputy Chief Executive Officer, The Monitoring Officer, Legal Services Manager.

BACKGROUND

1. This report evaluates and sets before Cabinet the position following the issue of a report on 5 August 2021 by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO) – the report is included at Annex A. This report was issued after an investigation into the handling of a Council Tax arrears case which was initiated during the first phase of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.
2. The Council’s Audit Committee, as part of its responsibilities, reviews the Council’s arrangements for handling complaints and the LGO’s annual letter issued to each authority. However, as background for Cabinet members in considering this report, the 2020/21 annual letter details eight complaints Cotswold District Council received

in 2020/21, an increase from six the previous year. This ranks Cotswold District Council as number five of all local authority district Councils in the south west for the least number of complaints. This case will be included in the 2021/22 annual letter as it relates to the timeframe when the decision is made as opposed to when the complaint is submitted. During 2020/21, none of the eight complaints against Cotswold District Council were upheld by the LGO.

3. In 2018 the LGO set out the standards they expect from public bodies in their guidance document “Principles of Good Administrative Practice”. In May 2020, an addendum was issued in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, stating that Councils are expected to meet similar standards whilst working in this unprecedented environment.
4. In discussion with the LGO, the LGO does not think we’ve met our normal standards in relation to this complaint during the pandemic which has contributed to the finding against us. This is regrettable, however Cabinet can be reassured that this is the only complaint of this nature reported through the Council’s Complaint’s Procedure or the LGO.

MAIN POINTS

5. In carrying out its duty to collect Council Tax payments, the Council, through its partner, Publica, adopted a course of action. Following a complaint by a Council Tax payer “Mr X”, the LGO has reviewed those actions and concluded, that injustice has occurred to Mr X.
6. In summary Mr X’s complaint was the Council:
 - was wrong to send him reminders to pay his council tax bills, as he was making payments as agreed;
 - did not properly consider his request to write off arrears; and
 - did not promptly action his request to apply for council tax support.
7. As a result, Mr X says the Council’s actions have caused financial hardship, distress and poor health.

COUNCIL AND PUBLICA’S RESPONSE TO THE COMPLAINT.

8. Mr X’s complaints coincided with the commencement of the first lockdown and the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. In light of this, the Council had decided to halt recovery action and work with Council Tax payers sympathetically. As recovery action recommenced it was gentle, sending “soft” reminders to Council Tax payers who had fallen into arrears, acknowledging individual financial circumstances may have changed and stating that “we were there to help”. Largely these reminders were well received, and the team embraced talking to Council Tax payers regarding their own situations, and tailoring instalment plans appropriately.
9. There are some of the points raised in the LGO’s report that don’t acknowledge that the Council were trying to assist a Council Tax payer during these unprecedented

times, whilst managing a priority debt. In addition, the Council refutes that the Council didn't "engage" as stated by the LGO.

10. The most significant issue identified by the LGO is (Paragraph 52 of the report):

"The Council does not publish any information about a discretionary relief policy and it does not appear to have any set criteria for considering a request for discretionary relief. This is significant fault". To remedy this finding, this report proposes implementing such a report referred to as a Section 13A Policy and recommends a draft policy at Appendix B

11. The LGO has a wide amount of discretionary power when making decisions and reporting their findings. The only basis on which the LGO findings can be challenged would be by way of a Judicial Review.

12. Irrespective of the fact that the Council holds a different view on the handling of some aspects of Mr X's case to that of the LGO, the matter has now been concluded. It is important that the Council recognises the prerogative of the LGO to undertake an investigation and reach their own conclusions on this matter. In addition, it is consistent with the Council's approach to good governance.

13. The LGO's report makes a number of recommendations – the recommendation and corresponding action to date is in the table below. Cabinet will note that the only outstanding action relates to the Council Tax 13A Policy and associated staff training.

Recommendation	Action to date.
Provide Mr X with a written apology	Written apology sent 23 August 2021
Pay Mr X £300 for distress and uncertainty	Payment made 26 August 2021
Reconsider Mr X's request to write off his arrears and write to him with reasons for its decision with reference to its Recovery Policy;	Application to write-off arrears has been considered in accordance with the Council's policy.
Invite Mr X to apply for discretionary relief, making clear any evidence he should provide to support an application and informing him of the criteria against which it will consider his application;	Invitation included in written apology of 23 August 2021.
Publish a council tax discretionary relief policy on the Council's website. This should include the process for considering a request, criteria for assessing a request and notice of the right to appeal the Council's decision to the Valuation Tribunal;	Council Tax Discretionary Policy (Section 13A) being considered as part of this report. Subject to Cabinet approval will be included on the website.

<p>Provide training or guidance to relevant staff to ensure they inform customers of any opportunities to apply for benefits, discounts or relief and they consider such requests in line with relevant policies; and</p>	<p>Training completed, however refresher training will be undertaken once, and if, the Section 13A Policy is approved.</p> <p>Training will also be undertaken with Customer Service Officers.</p>
<p>Remind staff of the need to provide clear information to customers about any payment plans at the outset, including how or when they will end, details of any review and warning of any further recovery action.</p>	<p>Reminders and guidance updated.</p>

COUNCIL TAX SECTION 13A POLICY

14. Section 76 of the Local Government Act 2003 introduced Section 13A (Billing Authority's Power to Reduce Amount of Tax Payable) into the local Government Finance Act 1992. This provides the Council with discretionary powers to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable to such an extent as it thinks fit; including reducing the amount to zero, where other discounts, exemptions and reliefs cannot be applied.
15. The Local Government Finance Act 2012 (LGA 2012) inserted a new Section 13A(1)(a), (b) and (c); in the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA 1992), creating two discounts:-
- a. Local Council Tax Support schemes under Section 13A(1) (a) and (b); and
 - b. Section 13A(1)(c) effectively the original Section 13A discount, now including the provision to further reduce the amount of any relief provided by S13A (1)(a) and (b).
16. In accordance with Section 13(A)(1)(a) of the LGFA 1992, as amended, the Council has a Local Council Tax Support Scheme which provides assistance to those deemed to be within financial need. The scheme has been designed to take into account the financial and specific circumstances of individuals with maximum relief of 100% of Council Tax liability, available to working age applicants.
17. Council Tax legislation also provides for a wide range of discounts, exemptions and reliefs that have the effect of reducing the level of council tax due. The Policy under Section 13A (1) (c), as shown within Annex B, will require the applicant to have exhausted all other options before making an application under the Policy.
18. When applying this Policy, the Council will consider whether alternative actions could be undertaken before applying this Policy. As such, this Policy will only consider exceptional circumstances, due to financial need or crisis, where it is appropriate and fair to provide a discretionary discount.
19. Any relief awarded under Section 13A (1) (c) would be intended only as short term assistance and not a means to reduce Council Tax liability indefinitely. Having a Policy

in place ensures that the Council has a fair approach to dealing with applications for discretionary discount in Council Tax, and the criteria which will be applied. The Council will treat all application on their individual merits and the criteria which should be met is listed at 2.1 in Annex B.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

20. In terms of the LGO's findings, the cost of £300 has been met from existing budgets.
21. In relation to a Section 13A Policy, the full cost resulting from the granting of a local discretionary discount is met by this Council as the billing authority for the District and there is no statutory right to pass on the cost to other precepting authorities.
22. Based on the average band D property for 2021/2022 the full cost associated with a discount would be £1,902.36 for the full financial year. The Policy specifies a maximum award period of six months. The maximum cost of applying this Policy, for a Band D property, would be £951.18. Discounts will be awarded after the application of discounts, exemptions and reliefs. It is highly likely that any award given would be less than the example given.
23. All costs associated with Council Tax discounts, exemptions and reliefs are examined as part of the Council's annual budget setting process. Any costs in the current financial year, which cannot be funded within the Council's revenue budget, will be funded from the Council Priorities Fund revenue reserve. Ongoing revenue provision for costs associated with this Policy will be considered as part of the budget setting process for the 2022/23 budget.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

24. In relation to this complaint, the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) has found that there has been injustice on the part of the Council to Mr X. This is a finding of the LGO and findings of the LGO are legally binding.
25. Following on from the LGO's findings, the LGO has made a number of recommendations to the Council. The status of these recommendations is different to the status of findings of the LGO. Unlike a finding, which is binding, the Council is not bound to accept a recommendations of the LGO.
26. Section 31(2) of the Local Government Act 1974 requires the Ombudsman's report to be laid before Cabinet for consideration of the report and notify the LGO of the action taken or proposed to be taken.
27. The timescale for complying with the requirements in Section 31(2) of the Local Government Act 1974 are within three months of receipt of the report from the LGO (5 August 2021). This Council is well within that timescale.

28. Section 5A of the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 requires the Council's Monitoring Officer to prepare a report to the Cabinet of the authority following the issues of a report by the LGO which makes a finding following an Ombudsman's investigation – this is that report.
29. Section 76 of the Local Government Act 2003 introduced Section 13A (Billing Authority's Power to Reduce Amount of Tax Payable) into the local Government Finance Act 1992. This provides the Council with discretionary powers to reduce the amount of Council Tax payable to such an extent as it thinks fit; including reducing the amount to zero, where other discounts, exemptions and reliefs cannot be applied.
30. The authority to determine individual applications under Section 13A may be delegated to an officer of the authority under section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972; however, for this purpose it is proposed that the decision making process for individual applications be determined by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance in consultation with the Deputy Chief Executive in her role as Chief Finance Officer.

31. RISK ASSESSMENT

The adoption of this Policy would provide clarity on the Council's approach to the award of discretionary relief to Council Tax Payers and reduce the risk of any future challenge to the Council over the determination of applications for discretionary Council Tax relief.

EQUALITIES IMPACT

32. This policy is accessible to all Council Taxpayers in the event of financial crisis or event causing exceptional hardship and where other statutory reductions cannot be claimed.

ECOLOGICAL AND CLIMATE EMERGENCY IMPLICATIONS

33. This policy is accessible to all Council Taxpayers in the event of financial crisis or event causing exceptional hardship and where other statutory reductions cannot be claimed.

CONSULTATION & COMMUNICATION

34. In line with the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's requirements, public notices have been placed in the local media informing people of the outcome and where the report can be viewed.
35. A press release was issued to the local media following the distribution of a press release by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman on 26 August 2021.

BACKGROUND PAPERS - None.

**Report by the Local Government and Social Care
Ombudsman**

**Investigation into a complaint against
Cotswold District Council
(reference number: 20 008 553)**

5 August 2021

The Ombudsman's role

For more than 40 years the Ombudsman has independently and impartially investigated complaints. We effectively resolve disputes about councils and other bodies in our jurisdiction by recommending redress which is proportionate, appropriate and reasonable based on all the facts of the complaint. Our service is free of charge.

Each case which comes to the Ombudsman is different and we take the individual needs and circumstances of the person complaining to us into account when we make recommendations to remedy injustice caused by fault.

We have no legal power to force councils to follow our recommendations, but they almost always do. Some of the things we might ask a council to do are:

- > apologise
- > pay a financial remedy
- > improve its procedures so similar problems don't happen again.

Section 30 of the 1974 Local Government Act says that a report should not normally name or identify any person. The people involved in this complaint are referred to by a letter or job role.

Key to names used

Mr X The complainant

Report summary

Council tax

Mr X complained the Council:

- was wrong to send him reminders to pay his council tax bills, as he was making payments as agreed;
- did not properly consider his request to write off arrears; and
- did not promptly action his request to apply for council tax support.

Finding

We find fault in the Council's handling of Mr X's council tax account and its decision making on council tax relief, causing Mr X injustice. We have made recommendations.

Recommendations

The Council must consider the report and confirm within three months the action it has taken or proposes to take. The Council should consider the report at its full Council, Cabinet or other appropriately delegated committee of elected members and we will require evidence of this. (*Local Government Act 1974, section 31(2), as amended*)

To remedy the injustice identified we recommend the Council carry out the following actions:

- provide Mr X with a written apology;
- pay Mr X £300 for distress and uncertainty;
- reconsider Mr X's request to write off his arrears and write to him with reasons for its decision with reference to its Recovery Policy;
- invite Mr X to apply for discretionary relief, making clear any evidence he should provide to support an application and informing him of the criteria against which it will consider his application;
- publish a council tax discretionary relief policy on the Council's website. This should include the process for considering a request, criteria for assessing a request and notice of the right to appeal the Council's decision to the Valuation Tribunal;
- provide training or guidance to relevant staff to ensure they inform customers of any opportunities to apply for benefits, discounts or relief and they consider such requests in line with relevant policies; and
- remind staff of the need to provide clear information to customers about any payment plans at the outset, including how or when they will end, details of any review and warning of any further recovery action.

The complaint

1. Mr X complained the Council:
 - was wrong to send him reminders to pay his council tax bills, as he was making payments as agreed;
 - did not properly consider his request to write off arrears; and
 - did not promptly action his request to apply for council tax support.
2. Mr X says the Council's actions have caused financial hardship, distress and poor health.

Legal and administrative background

The Ombudsman's role

3. We investigate complaints about 'maladministration' and 'service failure'. In this report, we have used the word 'fault' to refer to these. We must also consider whether any fault has had an adverse impact on the person making the complaint. We refer to this as 'injustice'. If there has been fault which has caused an injustice, we may suggest a remedy. (*Local Government Act 1974, sections 26(1) and 26A(1), as amended*)
4. We cannot question whether a council's decision is right or wrong simply because the complainant disagrees with it. We must consider whether there was fault in the way the decision was reached. (*Local Government Act 1974, section 34(3), as amended*)
5. This complaint involves events that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government introduced a range of new and frequently updated rules and guidance during this time. We can consider whether the Council followed the relevant legislation, guidance and our published ["Good Administrative Practice during the response to Covid 19"](#).

Council tax recovery

6. If a person does not pay their council tax bill when due a council will issue a reminder. A council must issue at least one reminder before issuing a summons for a liability order hearing at the magistrates' court.
7. The Council's website says it will send a reminder notice if someone misses an instalment, requesting full payment of the missed instalment within seven days. If only part of the outstanding amount is paid it will take further recovery action.
8. The Council's Recovery Policy (2019) says the Council's actions will be proportionate, consistent, and transparent. Additionally it will be firm and fair, and its manner will be courteous.
9. Where the potential for a statutory benefit or discount exists in relation to the debt, efforts will be made to make the customer aware of such opportunities and they will be assisted and encouraged to apply for these.
10. Debts will normally only be considered for write off where the account is closed and there is no recurring debt. Only in exceptional circumstances will amounts on live or on-going accruing debt accounts be considered. Such cases must demonstrate that further recovery action will not achieve collection of the debt.
11. It cannot list every scenario which could make a debt suitable for write off; but it sets out the main reasons why debts become irrecoverable and where approval

for write off should be sought. We note one reason is hardship, with each case decided on its own merits.

Discretionary council tax relief

12. Councils have discretion to apply a discount to reduce any person's council tax liability to any extent they see fit under section 13A(1)(c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 ("LGFA 1992").
13. We expect councils to have a process for considering any request and established criteria. If a person is unhappy with a council's decision, they can appeal to the Valuation Tribunal.
14. In response to enquiries the Council said it did not have any formal process in place for considering discretionary council tax relief. If someone did want to apply, the process would be to write to the Council explaining the reasons why they should be considered for the relief, giving details of their finances. A member of the Senior Management Team would then take a report to Council Members to decide whether any reduction should be given. There was no policy for this as the Council simply followed legislation laid down by the Government under s13 (as amended) of the LGFA 1992.

Council tax hardship fund

15. In March 2020 the Government gave councils additional funding to support those facing hardship during the COVID-19 pandemic. It published guidance to councils on how to apply this relief.
16. The Government expected councils to use the funding to reduce council tax liability for those already receiving council tax support. However, councils could establish their own approach in using any remaining funds. This could include, but was not restricted to:
 - council tax relief using existing discretionary discount/hardship policies (adapted where necessary to capture those most likely to be affected by COVID-19);
 - additional support outside the council tax system through Local Welfare or similar schemes;
 - a higher level of council tax reduction for those working age Council Tax Support ("CTS") recipients whose annual liability exceeds £150.
17. In response to enquiries the Council referred to Cabinet meeting papers for 1 March 2021, published online. These included a report for the Cabinet to consider the use of any surplus funds from the hardship fund. The Council proposed to award an additional amount to all working age CTS recipients who had an excess liability of £150. Reasons for this proposal were outlined in the report. The Cabinet agreed the proposal.

Council tax support

18. The Council publishes details of its CTS scheme on its website.
19. A person may be able to get help with their council tax bill if they are on a low income or claim benefits. They can complete an online application form and the Council will make a decision within 14 days.

Principles of Good Administrative Practice

20. In 2018 we published a guidance document setting out the standards we expect from bodies in jurisdiction [“Principles of Good Administrative Practice”](#). This includes:
 - informing service users what they can expect and what the organisation expects of them;
 - being open and clear about policies and procedures and ensuring information, and any advice provided, is clear, accurate and complete; and
 - stating the criteria for decision making and giving reasons for decisions.
21. In May 2020 we issued an addendum in response to the COVID-19 pandemic: [“Good Administrative Practice during the response to Covid 19”](#). Although we recognised councils were working under pressure we still expected similar standards. The guidance says:
 - basic record keeping is vital during crisis working. There should always be a clear audit trail of how and why decisions were made;
 - the basis on which decisions are made and resources allocated, even under emergency conditions, should be open and transparent;
 - decision reasons should be clear, evidence based and where necessary explained in the particular context and circumstances of that decision; and
 - if you use new or revised policies and processes this should not lead to arbitrary decisions and actions. Ensure you have a clear framework for fair and consistent decision making and operational delivery.

How we considered this complaint

22. We produced this report after examining relevant documents and interviewing the complainant.
23. We gave the complainant and the Council a confidential draft of this report and invited their comments. Any comments received were taken into account before the report was finalised.

What we found

What happened

24. We have reviewed all information relevant to this complaint, but have only referred to key points below.
25. Correspondence dating from March 2019 shows Mr X was in regular contact with the Council about council tax payments due to his financial difficulties.
26. In January 2020 Mr X asked the Council if he was entitled to CTS as he received a benefit and he questioned why this had not been offered previously. He asked for further information about availability and eligibility.
27. The Council officer who responded said this was not their department, but he could claim CTS as he was reliant on one income and he should call and speak to an assessor about this.
28. In March 2020 Mr X offered to pay the Council £178 owed for the tax year 2019/20 in early April and then the 2020/21 bill at instalments of £116 a month.

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29. Mr X and the Council exchanged further correspondence. The Council wanted Mr X to pay £178 by 31 March but Mr X said he would not have funds to do so.
 30. On 19 March Mr X explained to the Council that he and his wife were due to shield for the next three months due to the COVID-19 pandemic which may affect their income. They were close to qualifying for CTS and expected to qualify from 6 April 2020. He asked the Council to signpost him to any other financial support.
 31. The Council told Mr X the outstanding £178 had automatically been added to the next billing period. It was waiting to find out more about Government support but it would suppress his payments for one month.
 32. On 31 March Mr X told the Council his wife had been put on furlough. The Council sent him a CTS application form. He asked what else the Council could do to help. The Council told Mr X it could not reduce the sum owed.
 33. On 2 April Mr X offered to pay £100 a month for the next three months or until the Government lifted COVID restrictions. The Council agreed.
 34. On 1 July the Council sent Mr X a letter saying it had not received his regular payment for council tax.
 35. Mr X contacted the Council as he received this letter about non payment, despite paying amounts as agreed.
 36. On 13 July the Council confirmed it had been receiving Mr X's payments of £100 as agreed. It explained the system automatically thought he should have paid more by now as his instalments were slightly higher at £131. The Council officer said they understood the Council was still waiting for his CTS to be sorted and so the officer had suppressed the account to ensure it did not send any further reminders. The officer said he should disregard the letter as the Council was aware of his situation and there were notes on the account to reflect it.
 37. On 20 October Mr X contacted the Council as it had sent him a formal reminder notice. As he had made payments as agreed he found the content inappropriate and wanted to complain. It had now sent two letters and so not administered his account properly.
 38. In response the Council directed Mr X to its complaints process. It explained it had agreed for him to pay £100 a month on the expectation he would apply for CTS but he had not done so. It issued a reminder letter in July as a "soft reminder" to customers behind on payments, to offer them the chance to discuss how best to move forward. Following his contact it withdrew that letter from his account. The official recovery procedure began again when it issued the new reminder letter on 13 October. It had not heard from him since July and could not keep a suppression on the account indefinitely. It was his responsibility to contact it and update on his current situation. As it did not hear from him the next step was to start recovery. It would place one final suppression on his account until November.
 39. Mr X complained further. He said the letters were not polite and caused anxiety. He had asked for and been promised a CTS form in the post three times and each time it did not arrive. In July the Council agreed he would continue to pay £100 monthly with a review in October. He had not missed any payment to justify a reminder letter. Stress triggered his disability and he was now housebound as a consequence of its communications. He asked the Council to remove the reminder notice, waive the arrears, and agree a payment plan.

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40. The Council told Mr X it had agreed for him to pay £100 a month rather than the amount due of £131 a month; this meant a debt was building up. It did not have a record of an agreement to review payments in October and so it issued a reminder letter for payment of the arrears. It understood his concerns about the content of the letter. However, its officers had been understanding of his circumstances and the arrears were long standing. It cannot find any reason why he would not have received CTS application forms. If he could provide details of who he spoke to and when it would investigate further. He could also download the form from its website. It accepted the content of the first reminder was inappropriate and apologised for the distress. It would review the content of these going forward. It could not write off arrears through the complaints process and the reminder remained until he had spoken to the team and agreed a new payment plan.
41. In response Mr X said they most recently discussed and agreed the payment plan on 13 July with the intention to review in October. He had not missed any payments from the agreed plan and so it should not have sent a reminder. It had not adequately dealt with his complaint about the tone and content of the reminder letter. Its comments did not repair the damage caused in terms of anxiety and health issues. He did not have records of staff spoken to about CTS. He wanted to escalate his complaint seeking resolution as set out before.
42. The Council's final response said:
- on 13 July 2020 it was agreed he could remain on reduced payments of £100 and he was urged to make an application for CTS to help him through this period. This was the last contact he made with the Council, and although he was making payments of £100 a month, the arrears on his account were accumulating. It was for this reason that it issued the reminder. It could not find any reference to an agreement to review in October;
 - in July it sent a standard letter to all households in arrears. However, the content did not reflect his specific circumstances and it apologised for this;
 - it acknowledged his concerns about the format of the October reminder letter. Although he had not missed payments arrears were accruing and so it was appropriate to issue a reminder letter. Even where a payer continued to pay their monthly instalments, they will not avoid the issue of a summons or recovery action, as the legislation states they have lost their right to pay by instalments;
 - it could not find a record of his requesting a CTS form but he could download this from the website;
 - it was correct in issuing the reminder notice, but as a gesture of goodwill it would recommend the reminder be rescinded. But this could be reissued at any time and did not mean that it would not start further recovery action while his account remained in arrears;
 - its policy said that debts on live or on-going accruing debt accounts would only be considered for write off in exceptional circumstances. Having reviewed his case the officer was not satisfied that such circumstances existed and was therefore unable to recommend the debt for write off; and
 - he could contact us.
43. Mr X then contacted us.

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44. Following the Council's final response it sent a further CTS form to Mr X in November which he received. Mr X applied for CTS but was not eligible.
 45. In response to enquiries the Council provided a copy of its Recovery Policy, as referred to at paragraphs 8 to 11 above. It said it issued a reminder in October after lockdown had ended and recovery recommenced, in line with its Recovery Policy.
 46. The Council explained it did not keep records of calls unless relevant to a live benefits claim. Therefore, it had none to provide in relation to Mr X's case.
 47. The Council also explained it did not have any formal process in place for considering discretionary council tax relief, as referred to at paragraph 14 above. The Council did not otherwise explain how members of the public would find out about the availability of discretionary council tax relief.

Conclusions

48. In April 2020 the Council and Mr X agreed a payment plan to continue for three months or until COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. We note some level of restrictions remained in place at the time Mr X complained to us. We have not seen any evidence the Council gave Mr X clear information on when the plan would come to an end or warn that he would face recovery action irrespective of keeping to payments. Rather it confirmed in July that it was receiving payments as agreed and would suppress further reminders.
49. The Council accepts it issued a reminder in July in error and it has already apologised for this. We are satisfied with its action in this regard.
50. While we acknowledge the Council issued a reminder in October in line with its Recovery Policy, it had not given Mr X clear information about its policy or ensured he knew what to expect. Further, it acted contrary to the information it did provide to Mr X; that it would suppress further reminders. This is fault. Mr X suffered distress and anxiety due to receiving the reminder notice without warning. We do not consider the Council's action of withdrawing the notice while threatening to reissue it at any time remedies this injustice. The Council should provide an apology and a payment for distress to Mr X. While the Council remains able to take recovery action, it should ensure its communications are clear in future.
51. Mr X made clear to the Council he was struggling to pay his council tax bills and asked what support was available. Yet the Council did not suggest he apply for discretionary relief at any stage. This is fault. We do not know if Mr X would have been eligible for support, but he has suffered further distress having asked for help to no avail.
52. The Council does not publish any information about a discretionary relief policy and it does not appear to have any set criteria for considering a request for discretionary relief. This is significant fault. Members of the public are not made aware such a scheme exists, there is no prompt for them to apply and, if they do apply, they do not know how the Council will consider their application. There is a risk of significant injustice in such circumstances.
53. The Council does have a policy for writing off debts, contained within its Recovery Policy. This says the Council can write off on-going debts in exceptional circumstances. Mr X asked the Council to write off his debt and was told he did not have exceptional circumstances. However, the Council did not provide any reasons for this decision. The Council has not shown it has considered Mr X's

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- circumstances against its policy. We are therefore not satisfied it has followed a proper decision-making process. This is fault, causing Mr X distress and uncertainty. We cannot say the Council should write off Mr X's debt but we can recommend it consider his request again and provide a decision with reasons.
54. Given Mr X asked the Council to write off his debt this was an opportunity for it to consider this as a request for discretionary relief. Yet it did not do so or otherwise allow Mr X access to appeal to the Valuation Tribunal against any decision to refuse such relief. This is further fault, resulting in avoidable distress and uncertainty to Mr X due to the missed opportunity for an earlier resolution.
55. Mr X says the Council agreed to send him CTS forms a number of times yet he did not receive these. Because of a lack of records we cannot say whether the Council did or did not send out the forms. We are also mindful it is possible the Council sent the forms but these were not delivered due to a postal issue. Therefore, on the limited evidence available, we cannot find the Council at fault. We note Mr X has since applied for CTS and found he is not eligible.
56. Mr X was satisfied with a draft of this report.
57. The Council did not provide any comments on this draft report, although we allowed it more time to do so. We are disappointed with its lack of engagement, given the significant issues we have identified.

Recommendations

58. To remedy the injustice set out above we recommend the Council carry out the following actions:
- provide Mr X with a written apology;
 - pay Mr X £300 for distress and uncertainty;
 - reconsider Mr X's request to write off his arrears and write to him with reasons for its decision with reference to its Recovery Policy;
 - invite Mr X to apply for discretionary relief, making clear any evidence he should provide to support an application and informing him of the criteria against which it will consider his application;
 - publish a council tax discretionary relief policy on the Council's website. This should include the process for considering a request, criteria for assessing a request and notice of the right to appeal the Council's decision to the Valuation Tribunal;
 - provide training or guidance to relevant staff to ensure they inform customers of any opportunities to apply for benefits, discounts or relief and they consider such requests in line with relevant policies; and
 - remind staff of the need to provide clear information to customers about any payment plans at the outset, including how or when they will end, details of any review and warning of any further recovery action.
59. The Council must consider the report and confirm within three months the action it has taken or proposes to take. The Council should consider the report at its full Council, Cabinet or other appropriately delegated committee of elected members and we will require evidence of this. (*Local Government Act 1974, section 31(2), as amended*)

Decision

60. We have completed our investigation into this complaint. We find fault by the Council which caused injustice to Mr X. The Council should take the action identified in paragraphs 58 to 59 to remedy that injustice.

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COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Section 13A Policy

**For the determination of applications for a
reduction in Council Tax liability**

Contents:	Para:
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1. Background

- 1.1 This policy outlines the Council's approach to granting discretionary reductions in liability for Council Tax under Section 13A (1) (c) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (LGFA), as amended.
- 1.2 In January 2019 the Council approved a policy to award care leavers, up to the age of 21, Council Tax discounts under Section 13A (1) (c) of the LGFA. This scheme is in partnership with all of the Gloucestershire District and Borough Councils and is supported financially by Gloucester County Council.
- 1.3 In June 2021, the Council approved an Exceptional Hardship Policy, under Section 13A (1) (c) of the LGFA. The Exceptional Hardship Policy is specifically for the provision of support to those residents who find themselves in 'exceptional' circumstances and require short term assistance to meet their Council Tax obligation. Exceptional situations are likely to be things entirely out of the control of the Council Tax Payer, such as flooding to a property or those suffering severe financial hardship as a direct result of the Covid-19 global pandemic, as this is an exceptional and unprecedented situation.
- 1.4 This new Policy is intended to cover circumstances which are not covered by the Care Leavers or Exceptional Hardship Policies.
- 1.5 There are financial implications to awarding any discounts, other than those currently available under the statutory legislation, and the financial burden of Section 13A (1) (c) discounts has to be met by this Council as the billing authority for the District. There is no statutory right to pass on the costs to other precepting authorities.

2. Eligibility Criteria

- 2.1 When determining an application consideration will be made to:
- The applicants personal circumstances
 - The applicant not having access to assets or savings that could be realised to pay the Council Tax
 - The Taxpayer must satisfy the Council that all reasonable steps have been taken to resolve their situation prior to the application
 - Any other eligible discounts, exceptions or reliefs that could be awarded
 - If the Council Tax account is in arrears, the Council must be satisfied that non-payment is not due to wilful refusal or culpable neglect
 - The Council's finances allow for a discount to be made
 - It is reasonable for the Council to award a discount having regard to the interests of other local Council Tax payers who have to meet the cost of any discount awarded

- An award can only be made for the Council Tax element of any charge, any court or enforcement agency costs applied to the account cannot be considered.

2.2 Discount under this policy will not be awarded in the following circumstances:

- Where the full Council Tax liability is being met in full by Local Council Tax Support or other discounts, exceptions or reliefs
- For any other reason, other than to reduce the Council Tax liability
- Where the Council considers that there are unnecessary expenses and debts and that the applicant has not taken reasonable steps to reduce these
- To cover any increase in the Council Tax payable due to the failure by the applicant to notify changes in their circumstances in a timely manner or where the applicant has failed to act correctly or honestly.
- The council will only consider discretionary discounts in respect of the main home occupied by the Council Taxpayer (annexes or second homes will not be eligible for relief)

3. How to apply

3.1 The person(s) liable for Council Tax, their appointee or representative, will be required to complete and submit an application for discretionary discount to the Council using the form provided. The application form is available on the Council's website and paper copies will also be made available on request.

3.2 The application form must be fully completed and submitted with any supporting information or evidence.

3.3 The applicant must provide details of any special circumstances being experienced and provide evidence to support their application. Evidence required may include, but is not limited to:

- Full details of income and expenditure
- Full details of any capital and other assets
- Confirmation of outgoings, including debt repayments, outstanding loans and credit card debt
- Details of personal illness confirmed by a GP.

3.4 Failure to provide any supporting evidence and information that is requested will lead to the discretionary application being refused, unless there are mitigating circumstances which led to that failure. There may be some occasions where discounts can be considered based on information already available to officers in the Revenues and Benefits team.

4. Decision making process

4.1 Individual applications will be determined by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Finance.

5. Period of Award

5.1 A section 13A discount award will not normally be used to provide long term support for individuals. They will be used to provide short term support to allow people the time to resolve their current financial difficulties and to move to a position which is financially sustainable for them in the longer term.

5.2 The length of time over which an award is made is at the discretion of the Council but will not exceed a six-month period.

5.3 The applicant will be notified of the amount and period of the award and any specific end date.

6. Notification of decisions

6.1 The Council will aim to consider the application and notify the customer of the outcome within one calendar month from receipt of the claim and all supporting documentation.

6.2 If the application for a discount is successful, the award will be made directly by way of a discount applied to the Council Tax account. This will be confirmed in writing and the Council's decision letter will include the following:

- The reason for the award
- The amount of the award
- The period of the award
- The applicant's duty to report any changes in circumstances
- Any conditions associated with the award
- Details of the right of review

6.3 If the application is unsuccessful, this will be confirmed in writing and the Council's decision letter will include an explanation of how the decision has been reached and details of the right to request a review.

7. Review of Decision

7.1 Section 13A discretionary discounts are administered in accordance with the LGFA 1992, as amended, and are subject to a statutory appeals process. If the applicant disagrees with a decision they must put this in writing giving their reasons. This should normally be received by the Council within one calendar month of the decision, although more time can be given in exceptional circumstances.

7.2 Where possible the Council will try to resolve the matter by explaining the reasons for the decision to the applicant or their representative, either verbally or in writing. If a decision is formally challenged a reconsideration will be made by the Cabinet. The applicant will then be notified of the reconsideration which will clearly state the reasons for the decision made.

7.3 If the applicant remains dissatisfied with the decision, an appeal may be made to the independent Valuation Tribunal. Further details on this process will be notified to the applicant with the outcome of any previous review of the decision.

8. Equalities

8.1 The Council is committed to equality and the fair application of the policy, ensuring that people receive fair outcomes in the standard of service they received from the Council and equality of access to Council services. This policy is fully inclusive and could support all members of the community, regardless of their race, gender, age, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marital or civil partnership status and/or disability in line with the principles set out in the Equalities Act 2010.

9. Fraud

9.1 The Council takes fraud seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance approach. All allegations of fraud will be investigated; should a person make a false statement or provide incorrect evidence in support of their application they may commit a criminal offence. All such instances will be dealt with in accordance with the law, and any overpaid monies will be recovered together with any outstanding Council Tax.