



Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET – 17 JULY 2023
Subject	COUNCIL PRIORITY AND SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT – 2022-23 QUARTER FOUR
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	All relevant Cabinet Members
Accountable officer	Robert Weaver, Chief Executive Email: <a href="mailto:robert.weaver@cotswold.gov.uk">robert.weaver@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
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Summary/Purpose	To provide an update on progress on the Council's priorities and service performance
Annexes	Annex A – Post Reporting Period Events Annex B – Corporate Plan Action Tracker Annex C - Council Priorities report Annex D - Performance indicator report
Recommendation(s)	<i>That Cabinet resolves to:</i>  <i>1. Note overall progress on the Council priorities and service performance for 2022-23 Q4 and the post reporting period events.</i>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Deliver the highest standard of service</li><li>● Respond to the climate crisis</li><li>● Provide socially rented homes</li><li>● Make our local plan green to the core</li><li>● Support health and wellbeing</li><li>● Enable a vibrant economy</li></ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Publica Directors, Assistant Directors, Business Managers, Service Managers and Service Leads



## **I. BACKGROUND**

- I.1** The Council adopted the Corporate Plan 2020-24 ('the Plan') in September 2020, and included recovery work in response to the impact of Covid-19. A spring 2022 'refresh' of the Plan was completed and approved by Council at its meeting in May 2022. The refresh sought to reflect key achievements since the introduction of the Plan, and clarify the priorities over the remaining period of the Plan (to April 2024).
- I.2** 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.
- I.3** The Council's Chief Executive has received a report on progress towards achieving the Council's priorities and service performance. Having assessed performance in line with the high level commissioning statement, the Chief Executive has drawn particular attention to the following:
- The Council has appointed a contractor for the Trinity Road office refurbishments. The revised layouts will create space in the West wing to be let to tenants. The refurbishment to a number of side offices off the West Atrium is nearly complete as is the work to the WCs by the bistro. Tenders have been received for the roof repairs;
  - The rising energy prices and higher cost of living is affecting householders, in particular those on low incomes. Both Cabinet and Council received a report on how the Council is responding to the Cost of Living and Warm Places Motions. Funding allocations for specific initiatives were approved including match funding of £20,000 for the Council Tax Hardship Fund which could be used to provide one-off support in specific financial circumstances, and £40,000 from the Council Priorities Fund towards establishing a food network. Existing external funding of £75,000 which the Council receives for community based activity has been ringfenced to the 'Cotswold Connected Community and Food Programme';
  - The collection rates at the end of the year for the Council sits at 98.02% which is higher than the collection rate for last year. The improved collection rates will have been helped by recovery action beginning to take effect with those households in arrears now on repayment schedules, and potentially the roll out of the £150 council tax rebate (generally paid back to the householder's bank account but some will have had their accounts credited), which has now ended. The rising cost of living has affected the annual in-year collection rates. The service reports that overall customer contact with the service has increased and the number of applications for reductions in council tax in



special circumstance (Section 13A) is rising. The Council will be introducing a hardship fund from April 2023. The Council Tax Support schemes have been revised in line with inflation to support more households and will be introduced in 2023-24. As expected, workloads did increase during Q4 as both the Revenues and Benefits teams implemented the additional £25 payment to all working age and pension age individuals in receipt of Council Tax Support; as well as the alternative energy payments. The payments were administered well but customer contact can impede the speed of payment.

- The business rates collection rate is continuing to improve since emerging from the pandemic and was over five and a half percentage points higher than the previous year, although still lower than historical levels. Recovery is expected to take longer due to the impact of the cost of living crisis. Extended retail relief continued through Q4 at a relief of 50%, and will increase to 75% in 2023-24 for leisure and retail businesses. However, the criteria for eligibility is more stringent than during covid times so some businesses will miss out. The service will be writing to those businesses affected. In addition, some businesses will see their rates increase as a result of the business rates revaluation 2023-24. 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. All in year recovery processes are up to date, and plans are in place to redesign the recovery process in the first part of 2023-24;
- The Council is continuing to support the 'Homes for Ukraine' scheme in which people in the UK are sponsoring/hosting a Ukrainian individual or family. As at 31 March 2023 there were 73 active hosts/households with 197 guests. Some guests are being re-matched with new sponsors as relationships break down or the sponsor does not wish to continue in the scheme;
- Earlier this year, the Council was awarded £1m from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for the period 2022-23 to 2024-25. The Council's Local Investment Plan, which sets out how the Council proposes to use the funding, was approved by government in December 2022. A further £764,292 was indicatively allocated to the Council from the Rural England Prosperity Fund for financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25. An addendum to the Local Investment Plan was submitted to the government at the end of November 2022 and it was approved in early April;
- The £380,000 replacement of fitness equipment across the Council's leisure centres has been delivered by SLM Everyone Active (SLM). Gym memberships are up by nearly 20% compared to last year. Rising energy costs continue to be a key issue for leisure operators. The government has announced that the scheme to protect high energy usage companies will not include leisure centres. The risk of high prices will also impact on the Council where a risk share for higher than usual utility tariffs is included in the leisure contract. SLM will continue to raise its concerns with the relevant bodies.



## 2. COUNCIL PRIORITY REPORT

### 2.1 Progress on actions in the Corporate Plan include:

- Cabinet approved funding for the Growth Hub in March 2023. The legal agreement with them requires them to focus on start-ups and provide an outreach service across the District and includes a target for the number of new businesses created.
- Rissington Road car park, Bourton on the Water opened to the public in March 2023 following the improvement works. There are few small areas to finish off, but all bays are accessible.
- Crowdfund Cotswold continues to attract wide interest across the District. The last project from the autumn round, Fairford Skatepark, successfully hit its target in March. This is the largest project so far, with a campaign target of almost £100,000. The Spring round launched with an online workshop on 1 March, with a deadline of 26 April.
- The Holiday Activity and Food programme will run activities again during the Easter Holidays and offer families Co-op food boxes in addition to the supermarket vouchers that they will receive from GCC. Cotswold Connected Community and Food programme is already supporting several community food and learning initiatives for families that will take place in 2023 throughout the district.
- Work is progressing on the Changing Places Toilets project (£162,500 award from government). Cotswold Farm Park now completed. Abbey Grounds, Cirencester has works underway. The remaining two (Birdland and Cotswold Country Park and Beach) are less well-advanced but will be delivered during 2023-2024.
- The procurement process for Leisure and Culture Management Contractors is now complete and contracts have been signed with Freedom Leisure.
- The Council and Bromford Housing have entered into a Collaboration Agreement to deliver the Down Ampney housing development. The second public consultation has completed. Planning submission expected in the coming weeks. The planned programme of consultation continues through this year and will help to shape the initial scheme designs for a net carbon zero housing development.
- The A417 Missing Link scheme was approved in November 2022; and Kier Highways has been appointed as the main contractor. The £460m project 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. Kier have started on site with various preparatory works and are presenting to the next meeting of the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group in April.
- A Town and Parish Council Forum was held on 7 March as a hybrid event in the Council Chamber and on-line. Headline topics were the Council's budget and the Flood Warden scheme.
- Cabinet approved framework decarbonisation targets on 13 March 2023 for the Sustainable Transport Strategy. Work is now underway on the final (Phase 3)



decarbonisation report. A Final Strategy Summary document will then be produced for general distribution in Q1

- Community Safety Partnership secured £50k of the Government's Safer Streets funding and launched a community consultation in March to ascertain which areas of the district residents may feel unsafe in and why.

**2.2** An overview of progress against all actions in the Corporate Plan is attached at Annex A and the Council Priority highlight report is attached at Annex B.

### **3. SERVICE PERFORMANCE**

**3.1** Overall, performance appears to be mixed. No indicators progressed to 'Red' from last quarter's status.

**3.2** Over the last year, a number of services have highlighted the potential impact of the cost of living crisis on households, businesses and the Council's services in particular Revenues and Benefits, Planning, Housing Support and Leisure. Some services such as Revenues and Benefits have reported increased customer contact and workloads while Planning has reported a slow-down in applications and potentially fewer applications for large developments due to a loss of confidence in the housing market. The business rates collection rate has been depressed over the last couple of years due to Covid and may now take longer to recover.

**3.3** There were three 'Amber' indicators this quarter where performance was close to target. Some targets have been set to be challenging and are exceptionally difficult to meet when numbers are low and then converted into percentages. There will be a review of targets at the beginning of the new financial year.

**3.4** There are a number of improvement programmes in progress across services focussed on improving the way services communicate with customers, increasing automation and self-serve options for customers (OpenPortal in Revenues and Benefits and the Channel Choice project), and improving the monitoring of workflows using case management tools to help services to actively manage resources (Enterprise in Planning).

**3.5** Some of the performance indicators that were short of their targets or showing a downward trend are considered below together with rectifying actions:

- % of Non-domestic rates collected

Extended retail relief continued through Q4 at a relief of 50%, and will increase to 75% in 2023-24 for leisure and retail businesses. However, the criteria for eligibility is more stringent than during covid times so some businesses will miss out. The service will be writing to those businesses affected. Some businesses will see their rates increase as a result of the business rates revaluation 2023-24. A higher level of uncollected business rate income is likely to result in a reduction in the amount of business rate income retained by the Council, putting further pressures on the Council's finances.



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**The Resolution:** 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. All in year recovery processes are up to date, and plans are in place to redesign the recovery process in the first part of 2023-24

- Processing time for new CTS claims and CTS change events

The service is heavily reliant on customers providing the correct information and the cost of living crisis has had an impact on overall customer contact and workloads in the service .

**The Resolution:** A report has been developed around defective claims that will indicate where to focus website improvements etc. System improvements and automation are helping reduce repeat contact.

- Planning determination times for all types of applications has improved over the last 12 months, with both 'Major' and 'Minor' applications exceeding their targets. Planning determination times for 'Other' applications (mainly householder applications) has also continued to improve but at a slower rate, partly due to being unable to secure extensions of times. This outturn is reported cumulatively from the beginning of the year which means that fluctuations and improvements are flattened. (SEE ANNEX A)

**Resolution:** Performance is expected to continue to improve, although there is an acknowledged backlog of applications which is being worked through so it is possible that there will be some fluctuations. Workloads are more manageable as the number of applications continues to slow in line with the national trend. Better capacity in the DM team means that there is more scope for upskilling but a shortage of ecologists is still delaying response times for some planning applications.

As a result of the PAS (Planning Advisory Service) report, further improvements and revisions have been compiled in a report which is due to go to cabinet in Q1 of 2023-24

The validation checklist was launched in February as part of the improvement roadmap. It has largely been well received and a better quality of applications is being received. The sections around Biodiversity and Sustainability have had more significant changes and, following feedback from agents, these sections will be reviewed.

- Total Income achieved in Planning and Pre-application advice income

At the end of Q4, total planning income for the Council was short of the target. Due to the cost of living crisis and the slow down in the economy, we may be seeing a slow down in larger developments in particular. Pre-application income target has also not been met, partly due to smaller scale pre-applications which attract a lower fee. In addition, the focus over the last few quarters has been on delivering other aspects of the service, especially the determination of applications.



**The Resolution:** The pre-app process and charges will be reviewed in Q1 of 2023-24. It is likely that we will continue to see fewer larger developments due to loss of confidence in the housing market coupled with the fact that Cotswold has a 5 year land supply so gets fewer speculative applications which tend to attract large fees.

- % of official searches completed within 10 days

There has been improvement in performance but it is still below target

**The Resolution:** Internal consultation turnaround times are now easier to monitor with a useful dashboard and relationships with other services are being built upon. The Land Charges Service Lead has met with all services to ensure they understand the requirements for timely responses and any late responders have been highlighted to Service Leads in line with the new process.

**3.6** In spite of the challenges, there have been a number of areas where indicators have improved or are noteworthy:

- At the end of Q4, the average time taken to process Housing Benefit changes decreased to 7.14 days;
- In Q4, eleven enforcement actions were issued at Cotswold for fly tipping offences. The surveillance cameras have delivered results by identifying potential perpetrators and PACE interviews have followed on the strength of the footage. There has been a reduction in fly tipping at the camera points;
- The number of missed bins per 100,000 decreased in Q4 . The number of missed bins for Q4 was 75 per 100,000, well within the target;
- Services delivered face to face and telephone are indicating high satisfaction for services, and the number of survey responses has increased. Q4 saw significant impetus to get advisors to push the survey to residents;
- Following the refurbishments at Cirencester Leisure and Bourton Leisure visits continued to increase and the number of gym memberships were over target;
- The Food Safety team completed 15 out of 16 high risk food inspections despite issues with access and availability of senior officers who complete these inspections. The remaining inspection has since been completed;
- Three customer satisfaction surveys for the Building Control service were completed in the quarter, of which all customers were fully satisfied.

**3.7** A full report is attached at Annex C.

**3.8** From Quarter One 2023-24, where possible, broader benchmarking will be included in the report in order to gain a more robust and insightful evaluation of performance.



**4. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

- 4.1 This summary performance report will be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 11 July 2023; and any comments from the Committee will be reported to the Cabinet.

**5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications from this report. The 2022/23 finance performance report will be presented to July Cabinet as a separate agenda item.

**6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

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

**7. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 Contained in this report.

**8. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 8.1 None

**9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Contained in this report

**10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 10.1 None

(END)