



Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET – 12 SEPTEMBER 2023
Subject	COUNCIL PRIORITY AND SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT – 2023-24 QUARTER ONE
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council Email: <a href="mailto:joe.harris@cotswold.gov.uk">joe.harris@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 - Corporate Plan Action Tracker Annex B - Council Priorities report Annex C - Performance indicator report
Recommendation(s)	<i>That Cabinet resolves to:</i>  <i>1. Note overall progress on the Council priorities and service performance for 2023-24 Q1.</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



## **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 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. In essence, Publica as contracting agent for the Council must ensure that the Council has sufficient information to challenge the performance of services provided by Publica and others. A similar approach is taken in relation to financial performance data, which will be presented to the Head of Paid Service and the Chief Finance Officer; and where it will be for the Chief Finance Officer to advise in terms of assurance.
- 1.2 The Council's Chief Executive is responsible for reviewing and approving the information provided in this report prior to its publication.

## **2. COUNCIL PRIORITY REPORT**

- 2.1 The Council adopted the Corporate Plan 2020-24 ('the Plan') in September 2020, 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).
- 2.2 Progress on actions in the Corporate Plan for Q1 include:
  - A welcome letter & newsletter has been emailed to new and returning Town & Parish councillors. Virtual social media training is booked for August with the next face to face forums to be held in September.
  - The main works are finished on the new footpath cycle link to Neigh Bridge in the Cotswold Water Park and discussions are underway to deliver cycle stands in Fairford, Lechlade and South Cerney. A new section of bridleway has been commissioned under Wildmoor Lane and Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) have requested Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding for the Spine Road crossing.
  - Meetings are scheduled with West Oxfordshire Council and Thames Water to discuss flood mitigation strategies. A new Lead Flood Officer has been recruited by Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) and they will start in July. GRCC have organised two Countywide Flood Forums to be held in Q2.
  - Following budget allocation for engagement support for the public engagement plan surrounding carbon reduction and climate change, the exact nature of the role is being finalised with senior officers and members before going out to recruit.
  - A proposal for Solar PV on Trinity Road Council offices went to Cabinet on 17 July and then on to Full Council for approval of funding.
  - Works have started on creating the community and wildlife sanctuary at Chesterton Cemetery.



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- The Collaboration Agreement entered into by the Council and Bromford Housing to deliver the Down Ampney housing development has been delayed due to drainage concerns, but progress is now underway with a planning application due to be submitted in September.
- Meetings have been arranged with social housing partners Oxplace and Cottsway in July to understand different models for the provision of affordable housing.
- A meeting held in June has resulted in a Sewage Summit Event being arranged in Q2 to discuss minimising the risks associated with flooding.
- Community Building projects including rural crime talks and Community Growing Schemes have taken place across the district along with Group Visits to various societies and clubs.
- The Cotswold Community Network membership has increased, and positive feedback has been received.
- Shortlisting of Safer Streets Cotswolds proposals has been completed. The next stage will be to visit the shortlisted areas. After the visits and more local engagement, the decision will be taken on which areas will receive the improvements to make them safer.
- Further events and classes have been well received as part of the Active Cotswold Action Plan. The partnership agreement with Mr Motivator will start in July.
- The Holiday Activity Food programme continues to be a success and GCC have suggested (not confirmed yet) that the Council has reached the highest percentage of Free School Meals (FSMs) children, then any other district
- Cotswold Chat Mental Health Support Programme will benefit from a £50k investment from the Strengthening Local Communities (SLC) funding secured last quarter following work with the Integrated Locality Partnership (ILP). The remaining funding (£99k) will be used to support families and young people.
- The Dementia Friendly Bourton Group has branched out successfully and is now known as Dementia Friendly North Cotswolds.
- The Changing Places Toilet Facilities are complete at Cotswold Farm Park. Abbey Grounds, Cirencester is almost complete. Birdland and Cotswold Country Park and Beach are in the planning and procurement stages and will be delivered early in 2024.
- Additional promotion for mental health activities and initiatives continued in Q1 through the Cotswold Community Network.
- The Council has taken the lead for the Rural Domestic Abuse Champions Network. The contract has been completed and started in June. Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS) have started recruitment and the advert is now live. It is hoped that the new postholder will start in September 2023.



2.3 Off target actions of the Corporate Plan behind schedule at Q1 include:

- **Develop and implement an Asset Management Strategy.**  
**Update:** Discussions are underway with the Procurement Team to appoint a consultant to prepare the Asset Management Strategy
- **Develop support to owner-occupiers to invest in energy efficiency, retrofit and decarbonisation works.**  
**Update:** A report was presented and approved at Cabinet on 17 July for decision to set up district wide owner occupier rooftop PV scheme.
- **Install EV charging points across the District and Provide electric vehicle charging points at all Council premises.**  
**Update:** There have been significant delays due to the previous supplier and more recently the Distribution Network Operator SSE. Final installations under phase one should be installed in the coming weeks at Rissington Road Bourton on the Water and at Trinity Road Cirencester.
- **Complete an options appraisal of community energy generation, Support community-led and community-owned renewable energy projects, and Support neighbourhood-wide climate action.**  
**Update:** Options to support this being considered as part of work to refine priorities over the next four-year term
- **Adopt and implement the ecological emergency action plan.**  
**Update:** There has been some progress with the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) with a mitigation strategy for North Meadow in place so planning applications can be determined. A briefing note for HRA issues is being drafted and should be completed in August. The Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) project is moving forward but the main issues arise from lack of government guidance and secondary legislation.
- **Deliver a sustainable transport strategy.**  
**Update:** Recruitment to replace the Sustainable Transport Lead has not been successful. Following feedback from applicants that declined to further their application, options are being considered on how to move forward. These options will be costed and presented to the Chief Executive and Portfolio Holder by the end of August.
- **Develop an updated Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) to inform planning and investment in pitch-based facilities.**  
**Update:** The final version of the updated PPS has been received and signed off by Sport England. The intent is to bring this to September Cabinet for approval and adoption.
- **Work with our partners to ensure our young people have the skills they need to secure employment in the district.**



**Update:** Cirencester College T level building now completed. Discussions being held with Cirencester College about linking with sustainable aviation businesses in the district in terms of skills and training. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) funding includes provision in Year 3 (2024/25) to support those furthest from the labour market.

- **Develop and implement an action plan to improve digital inclusion.**

**Update:** Work is progressing through partnership activity, although there is limited collective capacity to make headway. A headline report outlines eight recommendations to help tackle the digital divide and frames a range of questions revolving around next steps. This is supported by digital exclusion risk mapping, community asset mapping (what's out there already) and a 'what we know about closing the digital divide report. Focus on competing priorities, such as UKSPF and the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) has slowed progress on this.

- 2.4** 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** Service performance above target:

- Percentage of Council Tax Collected (33.93% against a target of 23%)
- Percentage of Non-Domestic Rates collected (29.81% against a target of 25%)
- Processing times for Council Tax Support Change Events (3.85 days against a target of 5 days)
- Percentage of Housing Benefit overpayment due to LA error/admin delay (0.26% against a target of 0.35%)
- Customer Satisfaction (98% against a target of 90%)
- Building Control Satisfaction (100% against a target of 90%)
- Percentage of minor planning applications determined within agreed timescales (90.1% against a target of 65%)
- Percentage of major planning applications determined within agreed timescales (100% against a target of 70%)
- Percentage of other planning applications determined within agreed timescales (84.21% against a target of 80%)
- Number of visits to the three leisure centres & (Snapshot) Number of gym memberships (3090 memberships against a target of 2838 memberships and 128512 visits against a target of 125000)

#### **3.2** Service Performance below target:

**Processing times for Council Tax Support New Claims (29.63 days against a target of 20 days) and Housing Benefit Change of Circumstances (12.02 days against a target of 4 days)**



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Q1 started with a backlog of work for new claims and change of circumstances cases. The team have worked hard to get this backlog more under control. However, a large number of applications from residents as a result of the Cost-of-Living Crisis continues to be received.

(Processing times for Council Tax Support Change Events however remains well within the target of 5 days.)

**The Resolution:** To improve performance, investigations were made into the automation capability. On speaking with other councils, who were able to achieve 70% of processing automation as opposed to the 40-45% that the service was achieving, it became apparent that the same capability was possible, but processes had to change to maximise on the capabilities of the system. Improved automation means that the team will have more capacity to both clear any backlogs and prevent their recurrence.

This way of working will continue to be tested and monitored but week-by-week, the processing stats are reducing. By being up to date, the service will be able to stay on top of the processing stats and keep reducing them.

July's figures show that Council Tax New Claims are being processed in 19.68 days against the target of 20 days and Housing Benefit Changes of Circumstance are being processed in 7.59 days against a target of 4 days.

At the time of writing, there are 34 outstanding cases for Housing Benefit Changes of Circumstance, the oldest of which is 3 days old. There is one Council Tax New Claim that is one day old (10 August 2023).

Publica remains committed to further improving its performance and service delivery and is actively investing in the development and implementation of automation and self-serve options for customers. By providing accessible and efficient self-help tools, customers can address their queries and concerns independently, leading to a decrease in the need for repeated interactions with services. Publica will continue to monitor, assess, and report on the impact of improvement programs in reducing customer contact and enhancing operational efficiency.

**Missed Bins per 100,000 (88 against a target of 80)**

The number of missed bins per 100,000 increased from 75 in Q4 to 88 in Q1. This is above target and higher than both last quarter and this time last year. This has been attributed to issues with one of the crews not completing their rounds for garden waste. This has now been rectified.

**The Resolution:** Additional training with crews and supervisors to bring the misses down. Performance will be continuously under review by the Contract Monitoring Team.

**Percentage of official Land Charges searches completed within 10 days (86% against a target of 90%)**

The Council's performance has improved since last quarter and dramatically since last year. Although it is still below target.



**The Resolution:** A monthly performance meeting has now been set up with the Assistant Director responsible for most of the answering teams, where issues will be discussed to ensure the process runs efficiently and teams where delays are occurring can be identified and action taken to ensure targets are met going forward. Tweaks to the current escalation process, has improved responses times so reducing delays and sessions lead by the Land Charges Team Leader has raised the awareness of the importance of responding to requests within the timescales set.

The service would benefit from all searchable records being digitised and standard procedures being in place for system use. This would in turn streamline searches. Further training and discussions with internal consultees are planned to ensure good practice.

#### **Number of Affordable Homes Delivered (11 against a target of 25)**

Eleven affordable rent properties have been delivered in Cotswold at Upper Rissington and South Cerney against a forecast of 68. Having contacted one of the Registered Providers (RPs), the service report that 17 of the forecast properties for Q1, should have been forecast for Q1 2024-25.

**The Resolution:** Following changes within the team, the Project Specialist for Strategic Housing is contacting the Registered Providers (RPs) to develop relationships and to assess why those properties forecast have not been completed. Ultimately the Developers are responsible for delivering completed properties and the Strategic Housing Project Specialist will contact the RPs about the schemes that are currently off track to find out when they will be delivered in addition to the properties forecast for the rest of the year.

The service reports that completions fluctuate over the year. A housing development period is at least 12 months, with some schemes phased over several years.

- 3.3 A full report is attached at Annex C and should be looked at in conjunction with this report.
- 3.4 As previously agreed, where possible, broader benchmarking has been included in the full performance report to gain a more robust and insightful evaluation of performance. Where benchmarking data is not currently available or outdated, this is noted, and further investigations will be undertaken to look at options.

#### **4. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

- 4.1 This report will be reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 26 September 2023; and any comments from the Committee will be recorded and shared with relevant Cabinet Members.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 There are no direct financial implications from this report.

#### **6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**



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

**7. RISK ASSESSMENT**

**7.1** Contained in this report.

**8. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

**8.1** None.

**9. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

**9.1** Contained in this report.

**10. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**10.1** None.

(END)