



Council name	<b>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>CABINET – 7 MARCH 2024</b>
Subject	<b>COUNCIL PRIORITY AND SERVICE PERFORMANCE REPORT – 2023-24 QUARTER THREE</b>
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)	That Cabinet resolves to:  I. Note overall progress on the Council priorities and service performance for 2023-24 Q3.
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	Cotswold District Council retained senior managers, 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 Chief Executive 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 'refresh' of the Plan was completed and subsequently approved by Council at its meeting in May 2022.
- 2.2 Progress on key actions identified in the Corporate Plan for Q3 include:
- Rollout of phase two in the Cotswold Water Park Strategy for cycle stand installations, with 27 out of the 46 stands now deployed across water park locations within Fairford, Lechlade, and South Cerney.
  - The Digitalisation of Planning Enforcement focuses on developing an ICT-enabled proactive approach to the service. New online forms for reporting suspected breaches of planning control have completed user testing and are scheduled for launch in February. These forms aim to improve case triage, expedite responses to high-priority reports, and enhance the overall customer experience by clearly outlining service standards and communication timelines.
  - Installation of Solar PV on the roof at Trinity Road Council offices is on track, the installation is set to commence in the coming months.
  - The sixth round of Crowdfund Cotswold concluded on September 13<sup>th</sup>, with four projects selected in November. Among these, 'Moreton Cinemarsh' successfully reached its funding target shortly before Christmas. Projects in Bourton on the Water and Ampney Crucis have achieved over 90% of their funds, and another project in Kemble has garnered significant support. The Council has awarded a total of £24,000 towards these projects, which have a collective value of over £215,000.
  - The Community Wellbeing initiated a free "Grow Your Own" education course at Roots & Seeds in Cirencester. Scheduled to run for 10 weeks starting in January, this



collaborative effort with Cirencester College, Roots & Seeds and Down to Earth Stroud seeks to equip participants with skills for cultivating their own food. The course aims to address various challenges, including the Cost of Living, reducing isolation, and enhancing mental health.

- The Safer Streets Round 5 Funding of £50,000 has been allocated to Cirencester and Moreton in Marsh, with the majority of the funding to be administered and actions taken forward by the local Council.
- The Holiday Activity Food programme continues to be a success, with 703 children booking a total of 782 activities during the holiday season.
- In collaboration with Kingsley House Care Home, a Dementia Café has been established in Tetbury, featuring bi-weekly visits from Mind Song.
- The Changing Places Toilet Facilities are complete at Cotswold Farm Park, Abbey Grounds, Cirencester and Birdland, Bourton-on-the-Water. The design for Cotswold Country Park & Beach has now been approved and will be delivered early in 2024.
- Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Service (GDASS) have successfully recruited a Rural Domestic Abuse Champions Network Co-Ordinator with training workshops organised for new champions in February.

### 2.3 Off target actions of the Corporate Plan behind schedule at Q3 include:

- **Develop and implement an Asset Management Strategy (SS17).**

**Update:** As previously reported, consultants were commissioned in November, with data gathering and interviews with key staff taking place in December. A strategy is now being prepared. There was a slight delay in the appointment and, therefore, the completion of work as there were some negotiations around the scope of work and costs. An Asset Management strategy will be presented to April Cabinet.

- **Install EV charging points across the District and provide electric vehicle charging points at all Council premises (CC6 and CC12).**

**Update:** As previously reported, there have been considerable delays initially tied to the previous supplier and more recently associated with the Distribution Network Operator (DNO) SSE. The installation at Trinity Road, Cirencester, and Rissington Road, Bourton on the Water, began in late December, with a connection date currently awaited from the DNO. It is anticipated connections will be made by the end of April. Applications are currently being prepared for government funding to contribute towards the cost of installing more charging points across other Council owned car parks. Priority will be given to locations that would provide a good geographical spread of EVCP infrastructure district-wide; however, electrical grid capacity and other external factors may limit the ability to install chargers in some locations.

- **Adopt and implement the ecological emergency action plan (CC19)**

**Update:** The Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) system is currently operational, and functioning; however, additional efforts are needed for the delivery of mitigation and



monitoring components. Concurrently, a brief document addressing the enhanced biodiversity duty and its reporting requirements has been prepared.

Defra has confirmed that mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) will be in effect on 12 February. Starting from this date, BNG will be applicable to all major applications, and it will extend to small sites from 2 April.

The implementation of (BNG) involves the acquisition of Mycelia software to streamline the process, with ongoing assessment by officers of supplementary guidance released by the government in late November.

- **Deliver a Council led, carbon neutral social housing scheme on the Down Ampney site (SHI).**

**Update:** There have been a number of delays to the project with new drainage designs received by Bromford Housing Association in late November. Upon review, it was determined that the design was not adoptable. Consequently, revised designs have been produced and agreed by the project team and lead Members and a Planning application is due to be submitted in early February.

- **Develop and implement an action plan to improve digital inclusion (VE21).**

**Update:** Work is progressing through the partnership with a headline report produced outlining eight recommendations to help tackle the digital divide and framing 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.

- 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 (Tracking Well Toward Achieving the 99% Year-End Target. 94% collected by end of Q3)
- Processing times for Council Tax Support Change Events (4 days against a target of 5 days)
- Customer Satisfaction (98% against a target of 90%)
- Percentage of major planning applications determined within agreed timescales (93% against a target of 70%)
- Percentage of minor planning applications determined within agreed timescales (88% against a target of 65%)
- Percentage of other planning applications determined within agreed timescales (86% against a target of 80%)
- Percentage of Planning Appeals Allowed (cumulative) (19% against a target of 30%)



- Percentage of official land charge searches completed within 10 days (92% against a target of 90%)
- Percentage of high risk food premises inspected within target timescales (100% against a target of 95%)
- Missed Bins per 100,00 (47 against a target of 80)

### 3.2 Service Performance below target:

#### **Percentage of Non-domestic rates collected (Currently 81% against a target of 87% for the end of Q3 – 99% Year-End Target)**

During Q3, the collection rate has slightly increased by 0.88% compared to this time last year, with collection rates c. 2% lower than pre-pandemic levels. The service indicates that many businesses since the pandemic have opted to extend the payment of Business Rates over 12 months instead of the usual 10 months to evenly distribute the cost over the year.

**The Resolution:** In accordance with previous years' data, there has been a notable uptick in the collection rate during the fourth quarter, particularly when individuals opt for a 12-month payment plan. Consequently, this is not a concern at present.

The service recently completed a thorough improvement programme designed to enhance operational processes. As a result, successful dashboards were implemented, providing detailed insights into individual performance and establishing smart targets for objective measurement of success. Process mapping was conducted to identify areas for optimisation and efficiency, leading to the implementation of weekly work programmes and increased automation. This has facilitated a more streamlined approach to service delivery, leading to a considerable reduction in the backlog of work. The improvements have enabled the service to stay up to date with reminders, which should prove beneficial during Q4 when striving to meet the 99% collection target for the year.

#### **Processing times for Council Tax Support New Claims (21 days against a target of 20 days) and Housing Benefit Change of Circumstances (8 days against a target of 4 days)**

Q3's standalone figures show that Council Tax New Claims are being processed in 16 days, against the target of 20 days and Housing Benefit Changes of Circumstance are being processed in 5 days against a target of 4 days, however, as the targets are cumulative the rolling statistics are above target for average processing days.

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

**The Resolution:** Automation of the work received directly from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and customers remains at a level of 60-70%, allowing for a heightened focus on applications and other reported changes. The Universal Credit (UC) section of DWP is actively investigating improvements to the data sent to local authorities via a Working



Group. Once implemented, there is potential, in collaboration with our software supplier, to automate additional DWP work items.

The automation of processing applications for the DWP and the trial for reduced phone line opening hours have released capacity for officers to process claims, contributing to the reduction in the outstanding workload and processing times.

During Q3, the service effectively reduced the outstanding workload to clear the backlog by December. However, partly due to the Christmas break, there has been a natural increase in the number of outstanding applications.

It's important to emphasise that the processing times commence from the moment the service receives an application, irrespective of its completion status. Therefore, even incomplete applications are included in the count from receipt, potentially exaggerating the figures.

#### **Number of Affordable Homes Delivered (45 against a target of 75)**

Fifteen properties including 8 for affordable rent and 6 for shared ownership have been delivered in Cotswold at Cirencester, Evenlode and Siddington. A total of 45 affordable homes have been delivered year to date, against a target of 75.

**The Resolution:** Delays were encountered at one housing development site due to the insolvency of the main contractor, leading to the site remaining inaccessible for several months before a replacement contractor could be legally engaged. The legal issues have since been resolved, a new contractor has been engaged, and construction has recommenced. Although completions were initially expected this quarter, further delays have occurred, pushing them back to the next quarter or early next financial 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.

#### **Number of visits to the leisure centres (103,149 visits against a target of 109,003) & (Snapshot) number of gym memberships (2,941 against a target of 3,035)**

During Q3 visits to the leisure facilities dropped by just over 25,000 in comparison to last quarter and just over 14,000 in comparison to Q3 2022-23. Gym memberships saw a modest decline of approximately 5% compared to the previous quarter and around 1% compared to the same period last year.

**The Resolution:** The leisure facilities' management transitioned to Freedom Leisure at the beginning of August, and some of the declines can be linked to this change. Furthermore, adverse weather conditions during recent storms led to a leak at Cirencester Leisure Centre, causing damage to an electrical control panel for the swimming pool. Consequently, the pool was temporarily closed during the repair work. However, despite these challenges, the service reports that contractors Freedom Leisure continue to actively promote the leisure centres, resulting in an uptick in memberships and visits month on month.

### **3.3 A full performance report is attached at Annex C.**



**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 27 February 2024. Any comments provided by the Committee will be documented and integrated into this report prior to its publication for Cabinet Members.

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

**5.1** There are no direct financial implications from this report.

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

**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)