

Questions raised by Overview and Scrutiny Committee
at meeting held on 16 June 2015

Questions raised by Overview and Scrutiny	Response from officers
Performance Tracker	
<p>Use resources effectively and efficiently. Objective 2 – Action a) Rationalise office accommodation through new ways of working and to increase rental income – A Member queried whether any progress had been made in respect of the second floor office accommodation?</p>	<p>The Finance and Asset Management Group Manager explained that the top floor of the Council Offices building had been vacant since last autumn and a decision had been taken to hold the election count in that space in May 2015. Discussions were ongoing with a number of partners including Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucestershire Care Services and Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue about their requirements in respect of office space and potential future use of the Council Offices building. Members would be kept informed of progress as and when there was something to report.</p>
<p>Use resources effectively and efficiently. Objective 2 – Action c) To review the asset portfolio and develop a strategy to maximise potential from the portfolio – A Member indicated that the Hat Shop had been omitted from the asset portfolio.</p>	<p>The Finance and Asset Management Group Manager confirmed that not all of the Council's assets were listed under this action. Nothing had been done in respect of the Hat. Nothing had been done in respect of the Hat Shop during 2014/15 due to a review of services and therefore there was nothing to report at this stage.</p>
<p>Promote economic development. Objective 1 – Action a) Create a property search database on the Council website for external users – A Member queried whether this had now gone live.</p>	<p>The Economic and Community Development Manager advised that the commercial property search database would be live by the end of June.</p>
<p>Promote economic development. Objective 2 – Action b) Organise events to strengthen relationships with key employers in the Borough – A Member sought more information in respect of the LEADER funding bid.</p>	<p>The Economic and Community Development Manager advised that this was a Defra funded scheme focusing on encouraging growth in rural areas. Tewkesbury Borough Council was working with the Forest of Dean District Council to look at how best this could be achieved. A local action group had been created to identify potential projects that would deliver growth and provide more jobs. £1.4M had been awarded over five years and a Programme Manager, Neil Batt, had been appointed to work across the Tewkesbury Borough and Forest of Dean areas. He encouraged Members to contact the Programme Manager if they were aware of any businesses or organisations that might benefit from the funding.</p>

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<p>Provide customer focused community support. Objective 3 – Action a) Agree approach and programme of work for Community Infrastructure Levy – A Member noted that the governance arrangements with JCS partners were being reviewed and questioned when this would be brought to Members.</p>	<p>The Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) process was a long one and the preliminary draft charging schedule was currently being consulted upon. Whilst the Borough Council would adopt its own charging schedule, officers had been working with Cheltenham Borough and Gloucester City Councils to ensure that the schedules aligned as there would be a need to ensure that money was available to deliver the infrastructure for sites within the Joint Core Strategy (JCS). Information would initially be provided to the Community Infrastructure Levy Member Working Group with recommendations being taken to the Executive Committee where appropriate.</p>
<p>Provide customer focused community support. Objective 3 – Action c) Provide appropriate support for neighbourhood planning and community led planning – A Member noted that 11 Neighbourhood Plans had been designated across 15 Parishes and he questioned whether the Neighbourhood Plans would carry any weight in planning terms.</p>	<p>The Chief Executive explained that, once formally approved and adopted via a referendum, Neighbourhood Plans would form part of the Tewkesbury Borough Local Plan and therefore would hold considerable weight in the planning process. The 11 designated Neighbourhood Plans were all at different stages and, in his experience, one of the main issues was the amount of time it took to compile the Plans given that the work was carried out by volunteers within the Parishes. It was extremely frustrating for Parishes as, if they did not have an adopted Neighbourhood Plan in place, they could be vulnerable to speculative planning applications. Officers were supporting Parishes through the process as much as possible and help was also being provided via the Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC). A Member queried who paid for the referendums and the Democratic Services Group Manager advised that the Government provided grants towards the costs but they would be administered by the Council.</p>
<p>Provide customer focused community support. Objective 4 – Action a) Support the delivery of projects agreed by the Community Safety Partnership – A Member questioned whether signs were being displayed in relation to fly-tipping and dog fouling.</p>	<p>The Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager explained that Environmental Health had recently gone through a service review and it had been necessary to recruit to some posts. The service would soon be fully staffed which would allow more community work to be undertaken in respect of enviro-crimes. The Council had recently bought some surveillance cameras which would be used to try to catch people committing such crimes and Officers were working with Parish Councils and landowners to see what else could be done. Brockworth Parish Council had purchased glow in the dark signs which were intended to remind dog owners that they were being watched. Representatives from the Parish Council would be invited to share this practice with others at a future Town and Parish Council Seminar. The Communications Team Leader advised that her team had produced posters highlighting the dangers of dog fouling, which had been displayed in Shurdington, and a Member had requested that similar signs be displayed around the Vineyards in Tewkesbury.</p>

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<p>Provide customer focused community support. Objective 4 – b) Work with statutory and voluntary agencies to address the issues of anti-social behaviour and environmental crime in our communities – A Member noted that 26 young people had been helped with the assistance of the ASB Youth Diversion Worker and he queried whether this provided value for money in terms of the anti-social behaviour incidents which had been prevented.</p>	<p>The Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager advised that the ASB Youth Diversion Worker worked with a range of young people and their families and 26 young people had been deterred from committing anti-social behaviour during the year. She had worked with the Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue service in relation to an arson case involving a group of young people and it was noted that the cost of an arson incident would far outweigh the cost of employing the ASB Youth Diversion Worker for the year. On that basis it was considered that the post provided considerable value for money.</p>
<p>Local Performance Indicators – review of quarter 4 outturns</p>	
<p>KPI No. 6 – Total number of homeless applications presented – A Member questioned whether applications were from local people or from people wanting to move into the area.</p>	<p>The Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager explained that there were several points which needed to be taken into account when dealing with homeless applications: whether the person was actually homeless i.e. if they had nowhere to stay that night; whether the person was eligible for assistance in terms of immigration status; whether they had a priority need e.g. pregnant women, people made homeless by fire, flood or other emergency; whether the person was intentionally homeless; and whether they had a local connection i.e. if they had lived in the Borough for six of the last 12 months or three of the last five years, or if they had a family connection with someone who had lived in the Borough for five years. Applications would not be accepted from anyone who could not demonstrate a local connection unless they were fleeing violence and it was not safe for them to be in their own area. She confirmed that the 31 applications which had been received in quarter 4 were new applications. The Chief Executive understood that it was tempting to view Tewkesbury Borough as an affluent area which was unaffected by problems such as homelessness; however, that was clearly not the case as the homeless figures had remained consistent at approximately 30 applications per quarter throughout 2014/15. Officers always looked to take preventative action to see if there was another way to deal with issues before accepting a duty to rehouse. The Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager reminded Members that, whilst still a significant number, only 20 of the 31 applications had been accepted during quarter 4.</p>

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<p>KPI No. 11 – Average number of sick days per full time equivalent – A Member noted that there was a problem in relation to sickness absence which linked to the increased use of agency staff. He questioned how this related to the closing of vacant posts as he felt it might be better to fill those posts in order to relieve pressure on other members of staff.</p>	<p>The Deputy Chief Executive explained that Tewkesbury Borough Council was quite a small organisation and it was unfortunate that there had been a number of long term sickness absences due to serious health problems. Some posts did need to be covered on a short term basis using agency staff, however, she provided assurance that the recruitment to posts had to be signed off by the Corporate Leadership Team which gave careful consideration as to whether there was a need for that position to be filled or whether things could be done differently within the service. She reiterated that it had been an unusual year in respect of long term sickness and this had impacted on the budget.</p>
<p>KPI No. 12 – Percentage of major planning applications determined within 13 weeks; KPI No. 14 – Percentage of minor planning applications determined within 8 weeks - A Member noted that the quarter 4 outturns for these KPIs were 53.85% and 59.19% respectively, which was below target, and yet income targets were being exceeded in planning. He questioned how the two collated.</p>	<p>The Deputy Chief Executive clarified that the KPIs related to the time it took to determine the planning applications which were received whereas the information contained within the financial position statement related to the income received from planning applications. She acknowledged that the performance of the Planning Team had been of concern for some time but it was pleasing to note that there was now a trajectory of improvement alongside a considerable increase in the number of applications being received. A Member welcomed this ongoing look at planning performance as he felt that this was an area where public perception could be improved. The Deputy Chief Executive agreed that there was mixed customer feedback in relation to planning but she felt that it should be borne in mind that the applications being received were numerous and varied. It was an area where processes could be improved and the model which had been used to conduct the Revenues and Benefits review was being replicated in the Planning department with a review commencing that week focusing on the customer experience. The Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee reiterated that the Planning department had to deal with a number of very large and complex applications which could take a long time to determine. It was hoped that the new Scheme of Delegation, which had been approved by the Council in April, would help to improve the situation with more applications being determined under delegated powers.</p>

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<p>KPI No. 32 – Food establishments in area broadly compliant with food hygiene regulations (%) – A Member questioned why premises were not being inspected.</p>	<p>The Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager explained that it was compulsory for food establishments to be inspected and new premises were required to contact the Council to arrange an inspection. Establishments were inspected at different rates depending on the activity which they would be carrying out, for example, a bakery serving food on a high demand basis would be a higher risk than a child-minder and would therefore be inspected as a priority. Rather than visit every premises, it was proposed that those which were classed as low risk be asked to attend a seminar at the Council to be assessed through a question and answer session. The Member sought further explanation as to the difference between high, medium and low risk and the Environmental and Housing Services Group Manager undertook to circulate this information to Members following the meeting.</p>
Financial Summary Review	
<p>A Member queried whether anything could be done to claw back some of the £600,000 which had been lost as a result of the business rates revaluation.</p>	<p>The Deputy Chief Executive considered that it was very unfair that Tewkesbury Borough Council was taking a hit for the revaluation of a business under a national scheme which was not in the Council's control at that time. All of the local authorities within Gloucestershire had written to the Secretary of State to complain about this inequity and to request a response from the Government in recognition of this unfairness. Whilst the initial reaction from the civil servants had not been very hopeful, the Councils were united in their approach. The Finance and Asset Management Group Manager went on to explain that money had been set aside in 2014/15 to ensure that the Council was able to cover the cost of revaluations during the year. This meant that, whilst revaluation had not left a black hole in the budget, it would be necessary to replenish reserves in order to protect the Council from risk in future years.</p>