

Questions raised by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at meeting held on 27 November 2018

Questions raised by Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Response from Officers
Performance Tracker – Priority: Finance and Resources	
<p>Objective 4 – Action b) Explore options for the regeneration of Spring Gardens – A Member noted that Mace Group Ltd had been appointed to “explore the options for redevelopment and future of the Spring Gardens and wider Tewkesbury area” and she questioned how the wider Tewkesbury area was defined.</p>	<p>The Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that Mace Group Ltd was focusing primarily on the site within the Council’s ownership; however, the Spring Gardens and Oldbury Road Regeneration Member Reference Group felt it would be appropriate to also look at neighbouring sites to consider whether there was an opportunity for a single project to reinvigorate the whole town. He confirmed there was a fixed cost for the activity Mace Group Ltd was undertaking and a report was expected in the summer detailing the options.</p>
Performance Tracker – Priority: Promoting and Supporting Economic Growth	
<p>Objective 1 – Action b) Launch a business growth hub in the Public Services Centre – A Member pointed out that the car parks at the Public Services Centre were already very busy and he was concerned this would be exacerbated by the launch of the Growth Hub. He questioned what strategy was in place to address this, aside from the additional parking at Lower Lode Depot which he did not feel would be adequate.</p>	<p>The Head of Finance and Asset Management confirmed that the works to Lower Lode Depot would create an additional 40-45 car parking spaces which would relieve some of the pressure. Once that had been delivered, it would be reviewed to see whether any additional parking could be provided on the Council Offices site. Various other measures could be considered alongside this, for example, promoting home working, encouraging staff to leave cars at home, limiting the amount of parking available etc. but it was prudent to wait until the work at the depot had been completed to ensure staff were able to park there and free up parking spaces for visitors at the Public Services Centre.</p>
<p>Objective 5 – Action a) Explore with partners – including the Battlefield Society – the potential to increase the heritage offer at the Battlefield site – Concern was raised that local Members had not received any updates on this action.</p>	<p>The Chief Executive explained that a meeting was being set-up with the Battlefield Society to discuss the options which would then be brought to Members. It was important to recognise that the issues associated with the project went beyond a single Ward as it was inextricably linked to the economic success of Tewkesbury Town and the borough as a whole.</p>

Objective 5 – Action c) Review the tourism resources to maximise the tourist provisions in the borough – A Member raised concern that this action had an implementation date of April 2019 and progress was denoted with a smiley face; however, there was no detail in terms of what was being done to demonstrate that it was on target for completion within the timescale set out – he felt this was a problem with many of the actions in the tracker this quarter.

The Head of Development Services provided assurance that the tourism service was being reviewed but there were a whole host of issues linked to Cotswold Tourism and how this impacted on the Council's ability to support tourism in the borough. A lot of options had been put forward in terms of how to deliver the Tourist Information Centre in Tewkesbury and, whilst nothing had been finalised, she provided assurance that Officers were evaluating those options with a view to implementing a new way of working in the spring. It was noted that some of the options had human resources and legal implications and therefore needed to be formally assessed before taking forward.

Performance Tracker – Priority: Growing and Supporting Communities

Objective 1 – Action e) With partners, explore options for the provision of modular and innovative housing to meet housing needs – A Member questioned what was happening with modular housing given that this had been a popular concept with Officers and Members earlier in the year.

The Head of Community Services explained that several potential sites for modular housing had been discussed with a number of registered providers, but it was important to get the right partner and agreement in place and, unfortunately, this required several meetings which were not always in quick succession. The Chief Executive reiterated that modular housing was not straightforward, and Officers were talking with several organisations. He had recently met with Officers from the West Midlands Combined Authority, which had a framework to achieve its target of 25% of all housing development in West Midlands to be modular construction by 2025 – this was very ambitious but Tewkesbury Borough Council may be able to use certain elements of the framework.

Objective 3 – Action b) Work with partners, infrastructure providers and developers to progress the delivery of key sites – With regard to Brockworth, a Member noted that planning permission had been granted several years ago and she sought clarification as to whether there had been any progress in terms of getting “a spade in the ground”.

The Head of Development Services explained that a number of reserved matters applications were now moving forward and there was a time limit for those which related to outline planning permissions so they would need to come forward quickly. In terms of the Brockworth application, various discussions were taking place around development in the area, notably in relation to sports facilities, and Officers were trying to remove any barriers which were preventing the developer from progressing the application.

<p>Objective 3 – Action c) Produce a business case for improvements to the A40 at Longford, including improvements to Longford roundabout – A Member raised concern that a drop-in event was not being held in Innsworth and expressed the view that most affected communities needed to be kept informed. Another Member supported this view.</p>	<p>The Chief Executive noted these comments and undertook to discuss them with the Head of Development Services and the team as part of the analysis of the information gathered from the drop-in sessions and the comments being received via the online consultation.</p>
<p>Objective 3 – Action e) To produce a Place Development Strategy – A Member indicated that the comments section stated a workshop would be held in November 2018, which was clearly not realistic, and he asked when this would be taking place.</p>	<p>The Head of Development Services explained that Officers had been working with relevant Members to set a date for the workshop. She was pleased to report that this had now been agreed as 17 January 2019 and an invitation would be sent out to all Members shortly.</p>
<p>Performance Tracker – Priority: Customer-focused services</p>	
<p>Objective 2 – Action c) Develop a programme to create partnerships within the Public Services Centre – A Member raised concern that there was no detail to support the fact that action had been given a smiley face to show it was on target.</p>	<p>Members were advised that the Council was effectively already working in partnership with various agencies that were co-located in the building; this objective related to working with particular partners to see how this could be developed further and those discussions were ongoing. It was noted that part of the action had been integrating the Growth Hub into the building and the official launch had taken place the previous week. Colleagues from the Department for Work and Pensions would be brought back into the main reception area before the end of the year and the Deputy Chief Executive was exploring ways in which the Council could work more closely with other partners. The Member recognised that there were discussions taking place but his concern was how this was reported to the Committee to allow Members to properly scrutinise whether the action was likely to be delivered on target - he would like to see more detail in the comments section as opposed to generic statements.</p>

Key Performance Indicators for Priority: Customer Focused Services

KPI 22 – Average number of days to process change in circumstances – A Member raised concern that the difference between the target of four days and the quarter two outturn of six days was significant in terms of the percentage increase and he sought assurance that action was being taken to alleviate this.

Members were advised that resources in Revenues and Benefits had been reduced based on the introduction of Universal Credit and a reduction in the number of claims; however, there was still residual work to be done e.g. Council Tax reduction, change of circumstances. The team had been under new management for the last 12 months and there had been a few legacy issues to address in terms of policies and staffing. The Head of Corporate Services was pleased to report that there had been an improvement over the last two months and a better performance culture was being developed within the team. There was now monthly reporting to help identify any trends and he expected to see this reflected in the figures for the remainder of the year.

KPI 27 – Average number of sick days per full time equivalent – A Member raised concern that this had dramatically exceeded the target and equated to almost a week per full time member of staff.

The Head of Corporate Services explained that four or five years earlier, the Council had a particularly low sickness absence rate and the target had been lowered as a result. He felt that it may be time to consider putting in place a more realistic target. There were several staff with significant illnesses throughout the Council - at one point there had been 10 members of staff on long term sick leave which had impacted on the figures but he was pleased to report that seven of those staff were now back at work so he would expect the figures to improve over the second half of the year.