

Questions raised by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at meeting held on 1 December 2015

Questions raised by Overview and Scrutiny	Response from Officers
Performance Tracker	
<p>Use Resources Efficiently and Effectively</p> <p>Objective 1 – Action b. i) £ saved in accordance with corporate savings programme target – A Member noted that there had been an increase in the overpayment of housing benefit and he questioned how frequently that happened.</p>	<p>The Finance and Asset Management Group Manager advised that overpayments were made to claimants every year, mainly due to claimant error e.g. failure to notify of change of circumstances. As a result of the systems review of the service and the introduction of real-time information from the Department of Work and Pensions, these instances were being picked up more quickly than they had been in previous years which would lead to an improvement in the longer term.</p> <p>The Member questioned whether it was difficult to get the money paid back and he was informed that, whilst the majority of money was recovered, the main problem was the length of time it took. The people who tended to be affected did not necessarily have a great deal of money in the first place and there were rules about the amount which could be taken each week in terms of benefit recovery. Whilst the Council was doing more to recover greater amounts, and very little was written off, it did tend to come in over a longer period. It was easier to recover smaller amounts than one which had been allowed to grow so it was hoped that this would continue to improve over time.</p>
<p>Objective 2 – Action a) Rationalise office accommodation through new ways of working and to increase rental income – A Member raised concern that the top floor of the Council Offices building remained vacant and he felt that it would be preferable to rent it out to generate some income.</p>	<p>The Chief Executive highlighted the importance of finding the right client which would add to the public sector service centre being created at the Council Offices site. Discussions were ongoing with a number of agencies and the outcomes would be reported back to Members in due course. Officers were currently working with Gloucestershire County Council with a view to sharing a legal service, subject to the business case which was currently being worked up. If it was successful, the One Legal department would triple in size and it would be necessary to find appropriate accommodation for the additional staff which would be based at the Council Offices in accordance with the business case; the top floor and the ground floor of the Council Offices building were both potential options. He understood Members concerns regarding loss of income and provided assurance that provisions were being made in the budget for next year.</p>

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<p>Objective 3 – Action b) Improve complaints handling, including learning from complaints received to improve service delivery – It was noted that Members had received an email the previous week which the Deputy Chief Executive had advised Members she would be responding to on their behalf and he sought clarification on the situation.</p>	<p>The Deputy Chief Executive advised that a Freedom of Information request had been emailed to all Councillors and Members had been advised that they did not need to respond as Officers would be responding on behalf of the Council. The Chief Executive highlighted the importance of providing a coordinated response but assured Members that they would be advised if there were any particular issues that needed to be brought to their attention in such circumstances. In response to a query, the Chief Executive confirmed that Members would be advised if Officers were intending to issue a response on behalf of the Council as a whole. Members would be copied into responses when appropriate.</p>
<p>Improve Recycling and Care for the Environment</p> <p>Objective 2 – Action a) Promote waste minimisation and aspire to increase our recycling rate through working with our residents and communities on promotional campaigns – A Member noted that waste to landfill had increased and he questioned how this was being tackled.</p>	<p>The Deputy Chief Executive explained that recyclate was becoming increasingly contaminated which could cause problems when it reached the MRF; some material had not been able to be recycled due to the level of contamination. Needles were a particular problem and Officers were working with a number of partners, including registered social landlords and Turning Point, an alcohol and drug misuse service, to identify problem areas and to make improvements. She confirmed that all recyclate was currently going into the MRF as normal.</p> <p>In terms of trying to encourage people to recycle, stickers had been used on residual waste bins where people were not putting out a food waste caddy for collection and there had been a 20% increase in food waste recycling as a result. The Joint Waste Team would be discussing further initiatives as its next meeting, including some of the methods featured on the recent BBC programme presented by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall. A Member indicated that he had done some research into the recycling rates of neighbouring local authorities and he felt that Tewkesbury Borough Council was performing well in comparison.</p>

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<p>Provide Customer Focused Community Support</p> <p>Objective 3 – Action a) Agree approach and programme of work for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – A Member sought an update on the progress of the CIL.</p>	<p>The Deputy Chief Executive explained that Council had been working on a Community Infrastructure Levy with its Joint Core Strategy partners as there would be implications for cross-boundary sites. A Preliminary Draft Charging Schedule had been out to consultation in the summer to ask for comments on the suggested charges. It was very important to get the balance right otherwise CIL would become unviable; if the charges were set too high, developers would not be able to afford to build, and if charges were too low, development would become unsustainable. Members were informed that 30 responses had been received from developers and the next big step would be to decide whether to charge for strategic allocations; there was now a question mark over whether CIL was the best mechanism for obtaining contributions for strategic sites and the infrastructure which would be required within them. In terms of delivery, until the outcome of the JCS Examination was known it was very difficult to make any decisions in relation to CIL charges. The Deputy Chief Executive was hopeful that the report in December would give a clear direction for Officers to move on to the next stage of consultation in respect of the CIL.</p>
<p>Objective 5 – Action b) Progress the work streams for a new leisure facility – A Member noted that an open day had been held for members of the public and he asked if Members would have the opportunity to visit the new leisure centre.</p>	<p>The Finance and Asset Management Group Manager indicated that the leisure centre was progressing all the time and he undertook to arrange a Member tour for the New Year to which Parish Councils could also be invited.</p>
<p>Develop Housing Relevant To Local Housing Needs</p> <p>Objective 2 – Action b) to deliver a programme of affordable homes in partnership with Parish Councils, developers and registered providers to meet the needs of clients in rural communities – A Member indicated that his local Parish Council was very upset as the work which had been done on the Shurdington site had been brought to a standstill.</p>	<p>The Deputy Chief Executive recognised that a lot of good work had been done on the Shurdington garage sites which had been temporarily suspended in order to carry out a review of assets to see if there was a potential to combine certain sites in order to direct development more efficiently. It was anticipated that the work on the garage sites would restart quite quickly.</p>

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Local Performance Indicators – Review of Quarter Two outturns	
<p>KPI No. 7 – Total number of homeless applications accepted – A Member felt that the hard work which had been done in this area should be noted.</p>	<p>The Housing Services Manager indicated that the team had worked really hard to increase homeless prevention activities.</p>
<p>KPI No. 11 – Average number of sick days per full time equivalent – A Member was delighted to note the improvement in relation to sickness absence.</p>	<p>The Chief Executive indicated that he was also very pleased to see that the sickness absence levels had reduced. This was an area which was carefully monitored and the Corporate Leadership Team did try to address any issues which could give rise to stress such as increased workloads. It was noted that the Agenda for the Council meeting on 8 December included an item on the review of the Development Management Team staffing structure which it was hoped would address the problems with resources in that area. The Chairman indicated that Planning was an area which the Committee may wish to look at, in light of the concerns which had been raised by Members in recent months. However, he felt that it would be inappropriate to do so before the actions arising from the review had been implemented.</p>
Financial Summary Review	
<p>A Member queried the £50,163 overspend on supplies and services.</p>	<p>The Finance and Asset Management Group Manager advised that this related to disbursements which was additional work undertaken by One Legal in the first six months of the year. These additional costs were being recovered through income as costs were recharged to the various clients.</p>
<p>There was a query regarding the Virgin Media revaluation.</p>	<p>Members were informed that valuations were carried out by the Valuation Office Agency; the Council had no input into valuation and no right of appeal, although it did have a financial interest under the new scheme introduced in 2013. A Member questioned whether an assessment had been made as to how many other companies were likely to appeal and the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager indicated that an assessment was carried out on a monthly basis and an estimate was made on the basis of business type, success rate etc. It was worth noting that a 21% provision had been estimated in relation to Virgin Media, however, it had actually been over 40%. The Chief Executive reminded Members that a decision had been taken not to enter into the Gloucestershire business rates pool next year due to the outstanding risk of the Virgin Media account. By not being included, the Government would pick up the safety net payment as opposed to the members of the pool.</p>