

Appendix 1

Questions raised by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at meeting held on 6 September 2016

Questions Raised by Overview and Scrutiny	Response from Officers
Performance Tracker:	
<p>Finance and Resources: (objective 3, action c) Undertake a review of the discretionary trade waste service to ensure it is operating on a viable commercial level – A Member questioned when the review would take place.</p>	<p>The Corporate Services Group Manager advised that the review was part of the commercial programme and a date would be brought forward once that was operational. The Member went on to raise concern that a number of the actions did not include target dates and felt that this would be beneficial. The Corporate Services Group Manager agreed that target dates would make the Performance Tracker a more robust document and it was agreed that they should be included for all actions where possible.</p>
<p>Finance and Resources: (KPI 2) – Outstanding sundry debt in excess of 12 months old – A Member sought clarification as to the amount of old debt.</p>	<p>The Chief Executive indicated that he did not have any further detail on this performance indicator but he would arrange for a response to be circulated to Members following the meeting.</p>
<p>Economic Development: (objective 1 – Action b) Produce, deliver and launch a new Economic Development and Tourism Strategy – A Member raised concern that the Overview and Scrutiny Working Group conducting the review of the Strategy had been ongoing for some time and he questioned whether it was realistic for the strategy to be in place by the end of the year.</p>	<p>The Corporate Services Group Manager indicated that the target was for the Working Group report to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee by the end of the year and to the Executive Committee in January. The Member felt that, if a review went on beyond six months, the Committee should receive a progress report explaining when it would be completed. The Member was advised that the Economic and Community Development Manager had been asked to circulate a Member Update when this issue had been raised at the Committee meeting in June and Officers would check that this had been actioned.</p>

<p>Economic Development: (Objective 3 – Action a) Produce a vision for the J9 area.</p>	<p>The Chief Executive indicated that a successful bid had been made to the Large Sites Infrastructure Fund (LSIF) for £130,000 to kick start work on the vision for Junction 9 and work was now ongoing. In addition, £200,000 had been secured from the Homes and Communities Agency for a road study at Junction 9; clarification was provided that this was a Tewkesbury Borough Council bid but the money had been passed to the County Council to commission the study. The County Council had contributed a further £70,000 resulting in a total of £400,000 for work to support improvement and development around Junction 9.</p>
<p>Economic Development: (Objective 4 – Action b) Work with Tewkesbury Regeneration Partnership to progress projects that regenerate Tewkesbury Town – A Member raised concern that the Partnership was meeting frequently but it seemed that little was being achieved.</p>	<p>The Chief Executive advised that the major scheme was on hold awaiting feedback from partners; the details could not be made public at the moment but he provided assurance that work was ongoing.</p>
<p>Economic Development: (KPI 3) – A Member questioned whether 64 should still be used as the retirement age given that people were often working much beyond that.</p>	<p>The Revenues and Benefits Group Manager advised that government statistics looked at employment rates amongst working age people and he believed that 64 was the national figure which organisations worked to. This would be checked following the meeting and, if that was not the case, it would be amended accordingly.</p>
<p>Housing (Objective 1 – Action b) Develop the Tewkesbury Borough Plan – A Member sought clarification as to whether the Plan was still progressing at a reasonable rate.</p>	<p>The Chief Executive explained that, unfortunately, a lot of work on the Tewkesbury Borough Plan had stopped due to resources within the strategic planning team where the focus had been on the Joint Core Strategy amendments. Although there were a number of elements of the Borough Plan which were reliant upon the completion of the Joint Core Strategy, there were some areas where work had been able to continue when resources had allowed and, whilst it was not on target, it was still moving.</p>

Housing (Objective 4 – Action b) Deliver 150 affordable homes each year – A Member noted that 43% of affordable homes were being built to Sustainable Homes Code Level 4 and 39% of homes to Lifetime Home standard. He questioned what standard the remaining 18% were being built to and why they were not all built to the same, higher, standard.

The Development Manager advised that the Sustainable Homes Code had been abolished so these figures referred to those homes where it had been possible to agree the same criteria via Section 106 Agreement. Lifetime Homes standard could not be insisted upon but Officers did negotiate within the Section 106 Agreement and, from what he understood, the figures showed a very positive outcome. In terms of the percentages, he explained that they were not intended to add up to 100%; some of the homes would have been built to both Sustainable Homes Code Level 4 and Lifetime Homes standard.

Housing (KPIs 14-15) – Planning processing times – A Member noted that there had been staffing issues within the Planning department and he questioned whether this was the main barrier to achieving these targets.

Another Member questioned how morale was among the Planning team given the challenges currently being faced.

A Member also raised concern that Phase 2 of the Planning Services Review had commenced before Phase 1 had been fully completed.

The Development Manager clarified that these were targets which Officers always aspired to achieve, however, there were various challenges each year which impacted upon performance. Staffing had been a particular problem in recent months and, although new appointments had been made, there were still a number of posts to fill. It was noted that some staff had changed departments, for example from Planning to Planning Policy, and, whilst this did add to the challenges, the Development Manager advised that his priority was to have a happy team. In that particular instance, he felt that retaining the Planning Officer's local knowledge of the area would benefit the Planning Policy Team and, as a lot of his work would be related to the Tewkesbury Borough Plan, he would have experience of applying the policy to real life scenarios.

In terms of major applications, where performance had fallen during the quarter, he explained that this was based on a relatively small number of applications and he was confident that the target would be met by the end of the year. The targets in respect of the other two indicators, relating to minor applications and 'other' applications, were achievable but, to a certain extent, would be dependent on the success of the next round of recruitment.

In response to a Member query as to the main reason for the turnover of staff, the Development Manager advised that Officers often wanted to move into the private sector and the non-monetary perks that had previously been associated with working for local government i.e. job security, no longer existed making it very difficult to compete; however, Tewkesbury Borough Council was reasonably successful at attracting people and the market supplements for new and existing roles which had been approved by Council were helping with retention and recruitment. In terms of morale, the Development Manager indicated that it was surprisingly good and the new recruits had brought a new energy to the relatively young team. There was a good ethos and everyone was working well together.

The Chief Executive reminded Members that Phase 2 of the Planning Services review was underway and consideration was always being given as to how things could be improved to make the service as good as it could be. Recruitment in planning was a problem for every local authority in the country and it may be necessary to consider different business models which would improve performance whilst also ensuring that the service could compete in a more commercial environment, particularly given the Government's Planning reform proposals. He made reference to One Legal which had earned £300,000 of income in 2015/16 and indicated that this model may be possible for other services such as Planning. A Member questioned when this work would start and was advised that the commercial programme would commence before the end of the year and a report would be taken to the Transform Working Group setting out what was planned. All senior managers were being trained in commercial approaches and the programme was being developed with the support of the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE).

	<p>With regard to Phase 2 of the Planning Services Review, Members were reminded that this had been scaled back and was achievable within the timescales. The first workstream was to review Phase 1 and it was recognised that some of the changes had had a positive effect in terms of the minor and 'other' applications but there were other changes which had not benefited the customer or Officers. Assurance was provided that the team constantly reviewed procedures and if something was not working they would stop doing it.</p>
<p>Customer Focused Services: (Objective 2 – Action b) Roll out a programme of customer services training for staff across the Council – A Member questioned whether there had been any particular issues which had prompted the need for training and whether this could be provided in-house.</p>	<p>Confirmation was provided that there had been no problems; however, it was important to ensure that staff were delivering the best customer service possible. Customer service training across all services was something that the Corporate Services Group Manager was keen to implement as part of the Customer Care Strategy which was centred on the Customer Care Standards. It was thought that an external provider would deliver the training and this would be rolled out in early 2017.</p>
<p>Customer Focused Services: (Objective 3 – Action a) Work with partners to investigate the potential for a reception refurbishment and integrated customer services team – A Member queried whether this was linked to the letting of the top floor of the Public Services Centre.</p>	<p>The Chief Executive confirmed that this was the case and undertook to ensure that this was made clear in future.</p>
<p>Customer Focused Services (Objective 3 – Action b) To let out the top floor of the Public Services Centre – A Member sought an explanation as to why it was taking so long to let out the office space.</p>	<p>The Chief Executive explained that the Public Services Centre was unique in Gloucestershire and was at the cutting edge of Local Government service provision. This was a concept which Officers had been keen to build on for some time and, whilst the space could be let to the private sector, this would not necessarily do justice to the potential for enhancing the Public Services Centre. He provided assurance that work was ongoing with Gloucestershire County Council partners on a potential way forward for the building and a number of options were being considered. A business case was expected to come forward by the end of September and, provided it was a positive outcome, this would be presented to the Executive</p>

	<p>Committee and Council in November/December. If the business case was unviable then it would be necessary to look at an alternative solution based on monetary return. He explained that there were a number of challenges when looking at the future use of the whole building and a range of potential issues in terms of the relocation of services for both staff and members of the public. Members would appreciate that there was an element of confidentiality to the discussions; however, he was able to advise that one element was a bid to the Local Enterprise Partnership to host a growth hub centre which would be a very positive provision for businesses within the Borough.</p>
<p>Corporate Performance Indicator (KPI 23-24) Benefits processing times – A Member questioned why there had been a reduction in performance.</p>	<p>The Revenues and Benefits Group Manager advised that there had been some sickness absence within the team but those staff members had now returned to work. There had been a small increase in the number of housing benefit claims, however, processing of new claims was now back on track and there had been an outturn of 15 days during July 2016. Change in circumstances claims were also holding steady and council tax was in line with the previous year. Business rates were more volatile and, during the early months, firms had been slow to pay but had now caught up. There had been a significant increase in rateable values which was positive.</p>
<p>Corporate Performance Indicator (KPI 29) – Average number of sick days per full time equivalent – A Member noted that this was significantly higher than the same quarter in 2015/16 and queried what was being done to mitigate this.</p>	<p>The Chief Executive explained that there were a number of long term physical illnesses which were impacting on the statistics. There were also some issues in certain services which were subject to change and assurance was provided that they were being closely monitored by service managers and the Corporate Leadership Team. The overall position remained quite positive.</p>

Corporate Performance Indicator (KPI 31) – Residual household waste collected per property in kilograms – A Member questioned why there was no mention of commercial waste within the performance indicators.

Members were advised that this was one of the old Best Value Performance Indicators and the Council's performance was benchmarked nationally alongside all other local authorities. There was currently no indicator for commercial waste and that was something which would be considered as part of the trade waste review.