

**Questions raised by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at meeting
held on 10 September 2019**

Questions raised by Overview and Scrutiny	Response from officers
Performance Tracker - Priority: Finance and Resources	
<p>Objective 1 – Action a) Deliver the Council's transformation programme to deliver a balanced budget – A Member noted that the commentary stated that these projects had their individual milestones and target dates and were progressing well, and he sought clarification as to whether this applied to all projects.</p>	<p>The Deputy Chief Executive explained that all projects were part of the Programme Board agenda and every Council project was subject to that process to ensure they were properly resourced and supported. The milestones and target dates would all be reported to the Programme Board so Members could be made aware of the timescales for specific projects at any point. He confirmed that the majority were progressing well and there were no areas of concern to bring to the Committee's attention.</p>
Performance Tracker – Priority: Promoting and Supporting Economic Growth	
<p>Objective 1 – Action c) Work with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and other partners to contribute to the Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) – A Member noted that the target date was December 2019; however, from a presentation he had attended he believed the publication date was March 2020 and he sought some clarification around this.</p>	<p>The Economic and Community Development Manager indicated that the dates were correct as at the time of writing the report but he would check to see if there had been any changes and would report back to Members following the meeting.</p>

Objective 3 – Action b) Work with partners to secure transport infrastructure improvements around the borough, including the all-ways Junction 10, Junction 9 and A46 improvements – A Member noted that it was intended to host an A46 session for MPs in the autumn and he questioned whether this was realistic given the current suspension of Parliament.

The Deputy Chief Executive provided assurance that the project was on track and it was still intended to hold a meeting in London before the end of the calendar year to promote the work being undertaken to the relevant Ministers; there was no reason at this stage to suggest this would not happen.

In response to a query regarding the Local Transport Plan, the Deputy Chief Executive undertook to ask the Gloucestershire County Council representative to provide an update to the Committee. Clarification was provided that a bid for funding for the all-ways Junction 10 had passed the first stage and was progressing. This was being led by Highways England and Gloucestershire County Council so the Deputy Chief Executive was not in a position to provide a more detailed update at this stage. The Chair indicated that he had received a presentation at a public meeting of the County Council which may be of interest to Members and he undertook to circulate this to the Committee following the meeting.

Key Performance Indicators for Priority: Promoting and Supporting Economic Growth

<p>Objective 5 – Action a) Explore with partners – including the Battlefield Society – the potential to increase the heritage offer at the Battlefield site – A Member noted that the revised target date was March 2021 and he raised concern that this would not be achieved in time for the commemoration of the 550th anniversary of the Battle of Tewkesbury bearing in mind that Tewkesbury Abbey would be starting its celebrations in January 2021.</p>	<p>The Economic and Community Development Manager explained that the action to increase the heritage offer of the Battlefield area had arisen as a result of a petition to Council regarding the potential sale of the Gaston’s field and it had subsequently been agreed that the Council work with the Battlefield Society to make more of the site as a whole. Investigations had been ongoing to understand what could be done and he had been involved in some positive meetings over the last few weeks around utilising the Gupshill Manor so the March 2021 target was a launch date for that. In response to a query regarding what the plans involved, the Economic and Community Development Manager stressed that nothing had been firmed up at this stage but recent discussions had focused on three areas: year round events e.g. medieval banquets; some gateway interpretation, potentially hosted at the Gupshill; and routes into Tewkesbury i.e. using the battle trail as a walking route into the town centre as was promoted during the Tewkesbury Medieval Festival – it was noted that discussions were ongoing with the relevant landowner as any proposals would need to be ratified and endorsed by them. The Chair recognised that the date for this project had slipped on five occasions but this was because the Council had no direct control and he suggested that Officers update the Committee when there was some progress to report. A Member indicated that he would prefer to see a report in 12 months’ time and this was agreed as a way forward.</p>
<p>Performance Tracker – Priority: Growing and Supporting Communities</p>	
<p>Objective 1 – Action e) With partners, explore options for the provision of modular and innovative housing to meet housing needs – A Member queried how many sites had been identified and where they were located.</p>	<p>The Head of Community Services indicated that he did not have the information to hand and would report back outside of the meeting.</p>

<p>Objective 3 – Action d) Deliver short-term access improvements to the infrastructure around the Ashchurch Housing Zone – A Member sought clarification as to the amount of funding awarded.</p>	<p>The Deputy Chief Executive advised that £8.1million project funding had been awarded and the overall end date was March 2022. The legal conditions of the grant contract were currently being discussed with Homes England with a view to agreeing the contract by the end of September; whilst this was on track, Members should be mindful that it was a Homes England contract, therefore the Council’s influence was limited.</p>
<p>Objective 4 – Action d) Develop a programme to work with landlords to ensure residents have a supply of rented properties to meet their needs – A Member indicated that the wording in the commentary was confusing and he sought an explanation of what was being done.</p>	<p>The Head of Community Services advised that a report had recently been taken to the Executive Committee regarding a successful bid to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to look at how to encourage landlords to accept individuals on lower incomes using a variety of incentives or mechanisms. Funding of £360,000 had been awarded between all of the Gloucestershire authorities and West Oxfordshire District Council and Tewkesbury Borough Council had originally been leading on the project; unfortunately, as a result of Officer sickness and a key Officer leaving the authority, the lead had now been passed to Forest of Dean District Council. This had resulted in some unexpected delays to the project but he was hopeful he would have an update within the next month or two so a report would be brought back to Members in due course.</p>

Performance Tracker – Priority: Customer-focused services	
Objective 1 - Action b) To continue to proactively enforce against enviro-crimes including fly-tipping and dog fouling in accordance with the action plan – A Member expressed the view that Officers were doing an excellent job and he had received very positive feedback from Parish Councils.	The Chair extended his thanks to the Environmental Health team, on behalf of the Committee, and congratulated them on an excellent strategy that was starting to pay dividends.
Objective 3 – Action b) Introduce the option for paperless billing for council tax and business rates – A Member questioned what was being done to progress the digital strategy and move towards paperless meetings following the roll-out of Members' new ICT equipment	The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that paperless billing for council tax and business rates would be ready to roll out by the end of the month. He clarified that the main driver behind the new Members' ICT equipment was to ensure that IT could offer the same level of support to all Members; however, there may be a natural reduction in paper if some Members chose to stop receiving hard copies now they were able to access papers electronically through their tablets. The Deputy Chief Executive agreed that it was for individual Members to decide whether they wished to continue to receive hard copies of papers and there was no reason that could not be championed informally through a pilot group of Members and Officers. Notwithstanding this, there would be a number of implications of moving towards paperless meetings - both positive and negative - so it would be necessary to put together a business case and bring it back to the relevant Committee for consideration.
Objective 3 – Action e) Review our corporate website – A Member raised concern that the Wi-Fi in certain parts of the Public Services Centre was still very slow and he questioned whether this was being addressed.	The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that IT was looking into this and hoped to have a solution in place by the end of the financial year.

Key Performance Indicators for Priority: Customer Focused Services	
<p>KPI 21 – Average number of days to process new benefits claims – A Member noted that performance had improved considerably due to new ways of working.</p>	<p>The Chair extended his thanks to the Benefits team for its hard work on behalf of the Committee which was very impressed with their achievements.</p>
<p>KPI 27 – Average number of sick days per full time equivalent – A Member noted that the financial figures at Page No. 40, Paragraph 4.1 of the report showed substantial savings against employees and he felt there could be a link with the increase in staff sickness due to the amount of pressure on employees.</p>	<p>The Deputy Chief Executive stressed the Council’s workforce was extremely valued and the organisation did everything it could to minimise long and short term absence - for instance, running ‘Nibblets’ sessions for staff on a regular basis which covered issues such as mental health and stress awareness - and Officers were constantly looking for measures to support staff returning from sickness. Notwithstanding this, it was not a clear picture and there were currently some long term absences that had an impact on the overall figures. With regard to the deficit balance on employees, Members were advised that the reviews of the Community Services and Tourism sections had not yet been completed so some of this money would be for staff in those areas. He explained that there were also opportunities for Heads of Service to look at restructuring in order to do things in a different way to better serve the needs of their communities and the business so there could be delays in recruiting to vacant posts. He indicated that the Corporate Management Team was very supportive of requests to fill posts when they were put forward by the Heads of Service. In response to a query as to the present number of vacancies, the Deputy Chief Executive advised that, as a small authority, the Council could not afford to have numerous vacancies so there were very few currently.</p>

KPI 29 – Residual household waste collected per property in kilograms – A Member noted that residual waste was slightly higher than it had been in previous years and questioned what steps were being taken to address this.

The Head of Community Services explained that there had been an issue with the quality of recyclate at the end of 2018/19 and during quarter one of 2019/20 and, combined with a change in the processes at the Materials Recovery Facility in Avonmouth, this had resulted in more waste being rejected which had impacted on residual waste levels. He advised that Ubico had been instructed to be more stringent when checking bins and it was intended to launch an educational campaign later in the year. In response to a query regarding repeat offenders, Members were informed that these bins would be stickered to explain why they had not been emptied which tended to resolve the problem; however, if this did continue following written communication, their bins would not be collected.