

**Questions raised by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at meeting held on
13 October 2020**

Council Plan	
Questions raised by Overview and Scrutiny	Response from officers
Performance tracker- priority: Finance and Resources	
<p>P81 - Objective 3 - Action c) Review property portfolio to ensure ongoing benefits to our communities - a Member questioned whether the pandemic had created any problems for the Council's business tenants in terms of being able to meet their financial liabilities and whether there had been any indication of future problems.</p>	<p>The Head of Finance and Asset Management indicated that so far, the Council's commercial portfolio was holding up well and none of the tenants had reported any problems. A partial deferment of rent had been agreed with one tenant, but this had now ended, and full rent was being paid. Everything seemed to be going well for the businesses with some experiencing a business boom; one business specialising in homebrew, gin and other alcohol products had seen a significant increase in demand.</p>
Performance Tracker – Priority: Housing and Communities	
<p>P92 – Objective 1 – Action d) Carry out housing needs assessments to deliver affordable housing in rural areas - a Member asked what the significance was of moving the date three years, from March 2020 to March 2023, as opposed to a one or two year slippage. He queried whether the work involved was so significant that a three-year delay could be justified.</p>	<p>The Head of Community Services explained that a realistic view had been taken as there was quite a lot of work to be done across the Borough and particularly in the smaller Parishes. The Gloucestershire Rural Partnership was used to assist with this work and therefore he was assuming that the estimated timescale had been provided by that organisation. However, he indicated that he would clarify this and advise the Member accordingly outside of the meeting. The Chair asked that the information be provided to Democratic Services so that all Members of the Committee could receive it.</p>
<p>P92 – Objective 2 – Action a) Ensure adequate land is allocated within the JCS and Tewkesbury Borough Plan to meet housing need - a Member referred to the Government White Paper on Planning reforms which could result in a total change to the current system. He reminded Members that currently the JCS was looking to allocate and cover the needs of Cheltenham and Gloucester. However, the</p>	<p>The Head of Development Services indicated that, as the Member had pointed out, the JCS review and the inter-relationship with the White Paper was fundamental to the Council. As Members were also aware, the JCS was a key planning document for the Council as it would shape the growth of the Borough in terms of spatial housing and employment distribution. She explained that currently there was a slight delay to the timetable for</p>

White Paper basically abolished the duty to co-operate and as a result of the Council having more land it would get a higher allocation. He questioned if the proposals started to progress through Parliament, whether it would be possible to delay the JCS without any further implications on the Council. Alternatively, he asked whether there was any way to change the allocations to be included as part of Tewkesbury's quota rather than that of Cheltenham and Gloucester as Tewkesbury would still need to find land for increased amounts of housing.

the JCS as there were a number of technical studies that needed to be undertaken to ensure there was a robust evidence base and it was also necessary to review some of the existing evidence in view of COVID-19 particularly relating to employment and how to progress an economic strategy. Work on the JCS would not be stopped because of the White Paper as the evidence work still needed to be undertaken; whatever the eventual outcome on the reforms, this work was still necessary to inform the Council going forward. The Head of Development Services stressed that, even if the duty to co-operate was abolished as proposed by the Government, it did not mean that the Council could stop working with its neighbours as this was actively encouraged to assess the spatial distribution of housing and employment. The message was still very much that Councils must work together and look at wider geographical areas and cross-boundary. Obviously it was necessary to await the outcome of the consultation on the White Paper so Officers would be twin tracking the work undertaken so the Council would be in a position to move forward under the new system, whatever that maybe, should that prove to be appropriate dependant on timescales. However, for the time being it was felt that the work being undertaken would be beneficial under both systems with reviews being undertaken at certain key milestones to assess the best way to move forward. The response given prompted the Member to request that the Council, as part of the review, did not agree to meet the housing allocations of other Authorities as the White Paper proposed reducing the numbers where authorities had no land to build on and increased the housing numbers for areas like Tewkesbury that had land available for development. He agreed that the evidence-based work needed to be done but was keen to ensure the Council controlled the allocation of housing and particularly to which authorities it was being allocated whilst the White Paper progressed. He was of the view that, if this was not possible, the review should be delayed. The Head of Development Services indicated that the Council's response to the White Paper, along with many other authorities, strongly objected to the proposed algorithm to be

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	<p>used to determine housing numbers as it resulted in a disproportionate amount of housing being allocated to rural authorities like Tewkesbury and it was hoped in the light of the strong representations being made across the country that the Government would revise the algorithm accordingly. In terms of when the distribution of housing was assessed as part of the JCS review, the Head of Development Services indicated that this was not something that needed to be done now it would be part of the process once the housing numbers that the Council needed to deliver were known. The Chief Executive stressed that this was only a consultation document and the Government was already indicating that changes may be made particularly in relation to the algorithm and whilst the duty to co-operate may be abolished he was of the view that something would be put in its place as all of the messages currently coming from Government were that authorities should work in partnership in relation to planning and other services.</p>
<p>P94 - Objective 2 – Action c) Annually monitor the delivery of homes within the Borough - a Member referred to the commentary which indicated that the Council was in the process of updating its five-year housing land supply calculation and it was the intention to publish this document on the Council's website by the end of October. She questioned whether Members would be informed when the document was ready to be published and if the content would be self-explanatory.</p>	<p>The Head of Development Services indicated that she was unaware of what the Council's previous policy was on this but she stated that, as soon as the document was published, she would ensure all Members received an email advising of publication with a link to the document on the Council's website. In terms of ensuring that the information in the document was clear, she indicated that she hoped that this would be the case but would review it prior to publication to be absolutely sure.</p>
<p>Performance Tracker – Priority: Customer first</p>	
<p>P107 – KPI 26 – Percentage of Council tax collected - a Member referred to the fact that Council Tax collection performance had been significantly affected by COVID-19 and, as a consequence, a reduced figure of only 29.5% had been collected during the first quarter. He maintained that it would have been useful if the percentage figure that was normally collected had been included for comparison purposes and he requested to be provided with this figure.</p>	<p>The Head of Corporate Services indicated that the collection rate was 0.5% below the target which was in line with what was normally collected.</p>

<p>P.107 – KPI 28 – Average No. of sick days per full-time equivalent - a Member stated that, whilst obviously it was good news that there had been a dramatic reduction in the number of sick days compared with last year, he wondered what the reasons for this were.</p>	<p>In terms of the reduction in sickness, the Head of Corporate Services stated that whilst there had been a reduction in long term sickness the reduction in short term sickness had been quite significant which it was felt could be partly attributed to working from home. With many officers not working in the office they were less susceptible to minor ailments such as colds and stomach bugs. Also it could be that officers who were feeling unwell felt that they could continue to work within the comfort of their own home which may not have been the case if they had to come into the Council Offices. Clearly this would need to be closely monitored as, if they were really unwell, they should be refraining from work and concentrating on recovery and wellbeing which was very important to the management team. He indicated that HR had done a lot of work around health and wellbeing during the pandemic and that could also have contributed to the reduction in sick days. The HR Manager indicated that this was a pattern being seen across other organisations as well where sickness levels had dropped. Whilst this was good news for the Council, work had been ongoing to ensure that staff kept well, and the levels of sickness could be maintained once the pandemic was over. She advised Members of the work that HR had been undertaking which included training on effective remote working, managing difficult telephone calls, mental health training and wellbeing sessions covering issues such as sleep and managing finances. In addition, the Council was paying people to have flu jabs by reimbursing the cost and the sickness process was being proactively managed to ensure good practice was being followed. A Member commented that these figures provided a good argument for some level of home working to continue once the pandemic was over.</p>
<p>Performance Tracker – Priority: Sustainable environment</p>	
<p>P.115- KPI 33 – Percentage of Waste Recycled or composted and P116 – KPI 34 – Residual Household Waste collected per property in KGs – a Member drew attention to the fact that the percentage of recycled waste had gone down and the residual waste had increased. He maintained that the residents of Tewkesbury Borough were normally very</p>	<p>The Head of Community Services explained that the Borough residents were normally very good at recycling but during lockdown there was a massive increase in waste and, by the nature of people storing more waste, they had simply disposed of it in the nearest receptacle without thought as to whether that was the appropriate disposal method. There was also an increase in contamination of</p>

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diligent when it came to recycling yet it appeared that during the first part of the pandemic they wasted more and recycled less. He enquired whether there was any known reason for this to have occurred.

recycled waste as Members may recall that initially during lockdown there was a tendency for people to start clearing out garages, lofts etc. and this led to some rather unusual items appearing in the recycling receptacles which people may have thought could be recycled but obviously could not; going forward extra education campaigns would be put in place. In addition, there was a lot of stockpiling of food when the pandemic first started which then ended up in the food waste bin or the normal bin. Another factor to be considered was the closure of the household recycling centres. Taking all this together, the Head of Community Services did not think it was surprising that the overall result was an increase in waste and an increase in contamination of recycled waste. The other side of this matter was the reduction in the recycling market which resulted in the need for quality recycling in areas such as paper and this had resulted in loads being rejected which then counted towards the Council's waste figure and not its recycling figure. A Member enquired whether it was possible to process waste more efficiently to ensure that it was not contaminated rather than having it refused at the Materials Recycling Facility (MRF). The Head of Community Services indicated that a number of checks were carried out to identify contamination both at the point at which the recycled waste was collected and when it was stored prior to transit to the MRF; any obvious contamination was removed provided it was practical and safe to do so. Nevertheless, when 20 tonnes of waste was being transported it was inevitable that things would slip through the net on occasions. The crews were very good at putting stickers on bins and not collecting recycled material that was obviously contaminated and, as he had previously indicated, education campaigns were taking place but with everyone producing more waste, and the market for recycled goods currently in decline, there was little more that could be done.