

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Executive Committee
Date of Meeting:	6 July 2022
Subject:	Council Plan Performance Tracker and COVID-19 Recovery Plan Tracker 2021/22 (Qtr4)
Report of:	Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Corporate Lead:	Chief Executive
Lead Members:	Leader of the Council
Number of Appendices:	One

Executive Summary:

At Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 7 June 2022, consideration was given to 2021/22, quarter four performance management and COVID-19 Recovery Plan information. The observations made by the Committee can be found below in section 2.1. The supporting documents presented at the Committee can be found in Appendix 1.

Recommendation:

To receive and respond to the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review of the quarter four performance management and recovery information.

Reasons for Recommendation:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference require it to review and scrutinise the decisions and performance of the Council and its Committees. The outcome of each quarterly review is then reported to Executive Committee.

Resource Implications:

None directly associated with this report other than to note that a number of actions have been impacted by the Council's response to COVID-19.

Legal Implications:

None directly associated with this report.

Risk Management Implications:

If delivery of the Council's priorities is not effectively monitored, then the Council cannot identify where it is performing strongly or where improvement in performance is necessary. The impact of COVID-19 has been commented upon in relation to a number of Council Plan actions. A separate corporate Recovery Plan has been developed to assist in risk identification and risk management in relation to COVID-19 and the Council's responsibilities in relation to recovery.

Performance Management Follow-up:

Performance management information is reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a quarterly basis. The outcome of each quarterly review is then reported to Executive Committee.

Environmental Implications:

None directly associated with this report.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** The Council Plan (2020-24) was approved by Council on 28 January 2020. The approved plan included four existing priorities i.e., finance and resources, economic growth, housing and communities and customer first plus the approval of two new priorities i.e., garden communities and sustainable environment. Supporting the priorities is a set of objectives and actions. Progress in delivering the objectives and actions is reported through a Council Plan Performance Tracker. The tracker is a combined document which also includes a set of key performance indicators. As in previous years, to ensure the plan remains a 'live' document, all actions are reviewed annually and, where appropriate, they are refreshed. The refreshed plan was approved by Council on 20 October 2021.
- 1.2** Since the approval of the Council Plan, the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that resources have been prioritised and deployed to support staff, residents, businesses and communities whilst maintaining core service delivery. Whilst COVID-19 continues to present the Council with significant challenges, a corporate COVID-19 Recovery Plan has been established to address those challenges. The plan has been designed around the six priorities of the Council Plan. Despite COVID-19 the strategic priorities of the Council remain the same. Similar to the Council Plan, the Recovery Plan has a number of objectives and actions. The Recovery Plan was approved by Executive Committee on 5 August 2020. A Recovery Plan tracker has been created to monitor progress in delivering those objectives and actions. Similar to the Council Plan, the Recovery Plan actions have also been refreshed.
- 1.3** Given the synergies of the two tracker documents, they are reported together. For example, given that resources have been deployed in response to the pandemic, this will inevitably mean that some of the actions within the Council Plan will not have progressed as intended. It could also mean that those actions remain undeliverable as prioritisation is given to actions within the Recovery Plan.
- 1.4** Key financial information is usually reported alongside the tracker documents but given the complexities of year end closedown this information is not yet available. The outturn reports will be presented as a separate agenda item to Executive in July 2022.

2.0 Observations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2.1 At Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 June 2022, consideration was given to quarter four performance management and recovery information for the 2021/22 financial year.

A summary of the questions raised at its meeting can be found below:

Questions raised by Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Response from officers
Performance tracker- priority: Finance and Resources	
<p>P57 – Objective 2 – Action a) Ensure our Council Tax remains in the lowest quartile nationally – A Member noted that Tewkesbury Borough Council now had the eighth lowest Council Tax in the country having previously had the fourth lowest and he asked what the reason was for this.</p>	<p>The Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that the Council had increased its Council Tax by the maximum possible amount for the last six years, i.e. by £5 each time, whereas others had not increased by the maximum possible.</p>
<p>P57 – Objective 3 – Action a) Update the Council's Asset Management Plan – A Member asked why an additional nine months was needed to deliver this action with the target date having been changed from June 2022 to March 2023.</p>	<p>The Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that extra resources had been put into the Council's carbon reduction plan with a lot of the work being undertaken by the Asset Manager until recently. Combined with the pandemic, this action had slipped down the asset management work plan as it was not critical to deliver in-year. Nevertheless, Officers were keen to have it in place as it was an important document and he was confident it could be delivered during the next financial year. He confirmed the delay would have no impact on the Property team, or the asset management aspect, as a sound plan was in place currently.</p>
<p>P58 – Objective 3 – Action c) Ensure that voids within our commercial property portfolio are re-let at the earliest opportunity – A Member asked if there had been any movement in relation to the vacant unit.</p>	<p>The Head of Finance and Asset Management advised a tenancy agreement should be in place by the end of the month. Once occupied, this would bring an income of approximately £170,000 to support the Council's budget for next year.</p>
<p>P59 – Objective 4 – Action a) Deliver the approved trade waste business case to make the service commercially viable - A Member noted that the original target date was April 2017 but this had since changed several times so he asked whether the new target date of July 2023 was realistic.</p>	<p>The Waste Contracts Manager advised that, at this point, he was confident the new date could be achieved. Whilst he could not comment on what had happened prior to him joining the authority less than a year ago, he explained that the Principal Trade Waste Officer was leading on the project and the trial of food and recycling collections was due to start next month – this would shed a lot of light on customer expectations, any gaps in the service and how it could be rolled out across the borough.</p>

Performance tracker- priority: Economic Growth

P60 – Objective 1 – Action c)
Work with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and other partners to deliver the Local Industrial Strategy – A Member noted that an update was awaited from the LEP on how Build Back Better would be rolled-out and he asked if there was any indication as to when that would be.

The Head of Development Services indicated that the update had been anticipated for some time and, unfortunately, there was still no indication as to when it could be expected. She explained that funding had been secured for the current financial year but there was uncertainty as to how things would move forward beyond that.

In response to a query as to whether this was something which could be challenged at the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee, the Chief Executive explained that it was within the Government's gift so there was currently no clarity for the LEP just as there was none for the Borough Council. He reiterated that funding for the LEP was secure for this financial year but it was difficult to identify long-term funding for the LEP when it had no idea what the Government funding would be beyond 2023. There was a lack of information from the Government about the expected future role of the LEP; however, the Levelling-Up Bill, which was currently before Parliament, proposed it be integrated with the local authority i.e. the County Council, if a level two devolution deal was agreed. Discussions were taking place across the county at a Leader level in terms of the issues around devolution for Gloucestershire; however, regardless of what was decided, he did not think the Government would be looking at a deal for Gloucestershire within the next year as it would be focusing on the nine bids it had already received which was proving to be more difficult than anticipated. On that basis, he would guess that devolution for the county was 18-24 months away, therefore, it could be predicted it would be business as usual for the LEP during that time, although this was by no means certain. In terms of other funding opportunities for the LEP, there was the Strategic Economic Development Fund (SEDF) which was provided by business rates and held collectively in the county. In addition, each district had been allocated £1M of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, some of which could potentially be provided to the LEP to retain services such as the Growth Hub and Invest in Gloucestershire – those projects currently received European funding which would stop at the end of the calendar year. Bids for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund had to be submitted by the end of July and a report on this was being taken to the Executive Committee meeting on 6 July 2022.

A Member asked what would happen in terms of future reporting on the LEP given that the Chief Executive was retiring at the end of the week. In response, the Chief Executive indicated that he trusted his successor would continue to provide

	<p>information as requested as he was particularly interested in economic development and the success of the borough and the various partnerships which assisted with that. The Head of Corporate Services clarified that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund was a new action in the Council Plan refresh so Members would receive updates on that going forward.</p>
<p>Performance tracker KPI's priority: Economic Growth</p>	
<p>P67 – KPI 7 – Number of visitors entering the Growth Hub – A Member noted that there had been no visitors during 2020/21 and the first quarter of 2021//22 and the commentary suggested that guidance to work from home had continued to impact on visitor numbers during quarter three. Given that ways of working had changed since the pandemic and more people worked from home as standard, he asked if this KPI should be reconsidered to better measure the success of the Growth Hub. He also raised concern about the future of the Growth Hub and whether it could be subsidised by the Council in the event it could not be funded by the LEP.</p>	<p>The Chief Executive agreed this KPI may be worth looking at as there was certainly more contact with people online than in person.</p> <p>In terms of the continued operation of the Growth Hub in the absence of LEP funding, he indicated that the LEP currently supported all six of the Growth Hubs in each district within the county; however, these had all been set up at different times with slightly different funding structures, so those issues were currently being worked through. From his discussions with other Chief Executives, it seemed there was support for the continuation of the Growth Hubs but more information was needed. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund would replace European funding, which would no longer be available, but if the Growth Hub did not get that support then the LEP could not run it and it would be a question for the Council as to whether it wished to continue to run a Growth Hub service – bearing in mind what it did to support the growth of businesses and the economy of the borough - and would need to look carefully at mechanisms for that.</p>
<p>Performance tracker priority: Housing and Communities</p>	
<p>P68 – Objective 1 – Action a) Work with partners to undertake the required review of the Joint Strategic Plan – A Member asked for clarification on the end date for the review of the Joint Core Strategy/Joint Strategic Plan and whether one option arising from that review could be to abandon it as he personally felt it was undermining the Council's ability to achieve its minimum building requirements and was instead helping to meet the needs of other authorities.</p>	<p>The Head of Development Services explained that any housing within Tewkesbury Borough which was meeting the needs of Cheltenham Borough and Gloucester City Councils had already been allocated in the existing Joint Core Strategy which had been through due process and was an adopted plan covering the period to 2031. The review process would look at further housing allocations within the borough up to 2041 and it was proposed that the preferred options, due for consultation in spring 2023, would identify new locations for housing and employment going forward. Although plans were adopted to cover a particular period, they were kept under continual review.</p> <p>The Member went on to query whether other authorities contributed to the ongoing costs associated with new housing development within the borough where this was to meet their needs and the Head of Development Services advised that the Joint Core Strategy/Joint Strategic Plan was a partnership between Cheltenham Borough, Gloucester City and</p>

	<p>Tewkesbury Borough Councils - and, this year, Gloucestershire County Council – and each made an equal financial contribution towards its delivery. This was one of the most expensive strategies the Council had to take forward and a number of technical studies had to be undertaken to provide the evidence base. She clarified that the Tewkesbury Borough Plan was entirely funded by Tewkesbury Borough Council.</p> <p>A Member questioned whether Tewkesbury Borough Council was responsible for the costs associated with administering planning applications for allocations that would provide housing to meet the needs of other local authority areas and confirmation was provided that was the case.</p>
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Performance tracker KPI's priority: Housing and Communities

<p>P79 – KPI 17 – Percentage of minor applications determined within eight weeks or alternative period agreed with the applicant – A Member noted that the outturn for quarter four was 48.57%, which was a reduction on previous quarters and significantly below the 80% target, and he raised concern that there should be an improvement because of the review process as opposed to a downturn. He pointed out that, for the average homeowner, applying for planning permission to extend or modify their home was likely to be one of the most significant events in their life and that needed to be taken seriously.</p>	<p>The Head of Development Services recognised this was disappointing and not what had been hoped for. She indicated that the improvement plan had been approved by the Executive Committee in November 2021 and great strides had been made since that time in terms of looking at the various processes and dealing with the backlog of applications against a backdrop of staffing issues due to a countywide shortage of Planning Officers. She gave assurance that Officers were doing all they could to improve upon the position going forward and, whilst the quarter four outturn was not ideal, it should be recognised that Planning Officers had been working extremely hard to clear the backlog in difficult circumstances and their workloads were being monitored on a fortnightly basis. It was likely that this period of inconsistency in terms of performance would continue for the next 4-5 months before levelling out.</p> <p>The Member accepted this explanation and understood there was a backlog to work through; however, from his experience, there was a lack of communication with applicants who expected their applications to be determined within eight weeks and found it difficult to contact Planning Officers to establish the position. He felt that a lot of their frustrations could be resolved by improving communication and keeping them informed on progress. The Head of Development Services took this on board and undertook to update the website to give a clearer indication as to current timescales for determining applications. Moving forward, the application tracker system which was being developed as a pilot scheme would be a useful tool for customers in terms of monitoring the progress of their applications.</p>
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<p>P80 – KPI 20 – Investigate category B cases within five working days – A Member asked when improvement was likely to be seen in terms of planning enforcement.</p>	<p>The Head of Development Services clarified that only one case had not been investigated within the timeframe. The Enforcement team was now fully staffed and, based on the figures from the first few weeks of quarter one 2022/23, 100% of cases had been investigated on time, as such, she expected to see a continued improvement throughout the course of the year.</p> <p>In response to a query as to whether enforcement cases were divided on a north/south basis, the Head of Development Services advised that it was currently done that way; however, if an Officer was unavailable to deal with a case in their area, for instance, due to annual leave or sickness absence, there was flexibility within the team so this could be picked up by another Officer, particularly in relation to Category A cases which required prompt action.</p>
<p>Performance tracker priority: Customer First</p>	
<p>P84 – Objective 1 – Action b) Continue to build on the early success of our new bulky waste service – A Member questioned how the success of the social media marketing campaign would be measured.</p>	<p>The Waste Contracts Manager advised that it would be difficult to measure this accurately, but it was hoped to see an overall increase in online booking numbers and a corresponding reduction in the burden on the Customer Services team.</p>
<p>Performance tracker KPI'S- priority: Customer First</p>	
<p>P91 – KPI 34 – Average number of sick days per full-time equivalent – A Member questioned how much sickness absence could be attributed to just one or two members of staff.</p>	<p>The Head of Corporate Services advised that, as a general rule of thumb, six or seven employees were absent due to long term sickness at any one time.</p>
<p>P92 – KPI 36 – Percentage of Freedom of Information requests answered on time – A Member noted that 93% of FOIs had been answered on time but indicated that he would like to know the number of requests that had been made.</p>	<p>The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that 572 requests had been made during the financial year as set out in the commentary for this KPI.</p>
<p>COVID-19 Recovery Tracker Priority: Economic Growth</p>	
<p>P107 – Refocus a) Develop a new Economic Development and Tourism Strategy that includes a focus on the economic recovery of the borough – A Member noted this action originally had a target date of June 2021, which had now changed to December 2022, and</p>	<p>The Head of Development Services advised that the action had originally been delayed due to COVID-19. It had been intended to work with Gloucester City Council to commission a contractor to carry out the work to establish an economic baseline; however, Gloucester City had subsequently decided to do this alone so Tewkesbury Borough Council was now tendering for the economic assessment work and it</p>

<p>he asked how likely it was that would actually be achieved.</p>	<p>was intended to have a strategy in place by the end of the year.</p> <p>A Member indicated that he would have thought it would be quicker for the Council to commission its own assessment, so he expected the target date to be earlier now it was no longer a joint venture. In response, the Head of Development Services explained that the delay had been due to Gloucester City pulling out of the joint tender process and Tewkesbury Borough Council having to commission that work itself – things should move forward now the authority was in control of its own destiny.</p>
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COVID-19 Recovery Tracker Priority: Sustainable Environment

<p>P121 – Refocus a) Commence planning and scoping study for implications of, and opportunities for, borough wide decarbonisation – A Member noted this was due to commence in spring 2022 and he asked if work had started.</p>	<p>The Head of Development Services explained that it had not yet commenced. The work involved had been greater than anticipated and it had not been possible to take this forward during year two of the carbon reduction programme; however, this action had been rolled over into the year three action plan which was due to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July.</p> <p>The Member asked whether the rising cost of living was impacting on the Council services and projects. In response, the Head of Finance and Asset Management advised that the Council’s utilities were a fixed price so those costs would not have an impact during this financial year. The biggest cost to the authority was employees and the pay award in April had required a lot of negotiations with the Trade Unions. A very substantial request had been put in for this year and the outcome would have an impact on the Council’s financial position. Supplies and services were increasing in general with the most substantial change being to the cost of the installation of the solar canopy – this project had been scoped at £300,000 but had risen to £650,000 on delivery due to the cost of steel and solar panels etc. It was something to be mindful of moving through the year and probably into the following year as well.</p>
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3.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

3.1 None.

4.0 CONSULTATION

4.1 None.

5.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

5.1 Council Plan 2020-24.
COVID-19 Corporate Recovery Plan 2020.

6.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

6.1 None directly.

7.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

7.1 None directly.

8.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

8.1 Linked to individual Council Plan and COVID-19 Corporate Recovery Plan actions.

9.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

9.1 Linked to individual Council Plan and COVID-19 Corporate Recovery Plan actions.

10.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

10.1 Council Plan 2020-24 approved by Council 28 January 2020.
COVID-19 Corporate Recovery Plan 2020 approved by Executive Committee 8 August 2020.

Background Papers: None.

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Appendices: 1 – Overview and Scrutiny Committee report of Q4 2021/2022 Council Plan re: Council Plan and COVID-19 Recovery Plan.