

Council Plan Performance Tracker - Quarter Two 2023/24

Findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's review

1. This is the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's third report to the Executive Committee on the performance of the Council under the new administration. Performance is judged according to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) set out when the Council Plan was approved in January 2020.
2. The Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) Committee reviewed the Council's Q2 (July-September) 2023 performance at their meeting on 5 December 2023.
3. This report is published in advance of the formal O&S Committee minutes being available.
4. The **summary** of the O&S Committee's findings was:
 - a. The Council continues to perform well on a wide number of fronts.
 - b. The Committee was particularly taken with the improvements against the "Customer First" priority, the positive refocusing of the "Garden Communities" initiatives and some excellent work under the "Sustainable Environment" heading.
 - c. The Committee remains concerned about the performance under the heading "Housing and Communities" and especially the progress of the Development Management Improvement Programme in its ability to adequately reverse some of the worrying trends in Council Planning Service performance. The Committee is keen to play an active part in supporting the Improvement Programme.
 - d. Whilst the Council finances currently look robust, the Committee acknowledges the medium and long-term risks associated with Local Government finance; it will be taking immediate steps to improve its competence at assessing the Councils financial position.
 - e. The Committee's review of the Council Plan continues to be hampered by poor quality KPIs. The Committee urges the Executive Committee to pay particular attention to meaningful KPIs when drawing up the next four-year Council Plan. These need to genuinely articulate Council performance and outcomes as well as aid the scrutiny process.

Details

4. The O&S Committee continues to be impressed with the breadth and depth of the Council's work. Notable achievements during the second quarter included the launch of the new Borough web site, the projects to improve customer contact and council webcasting both moving to the procurement phase, 100% of Freedom of Information requests answered on time, the soft-launch of the Ubico in-cab technology, the refocusing of the Garden Communities initiatives to be more community and stakeholder friendly; all with more robust governance, the work to stand up the Strategic and Local Plan initiative, the signing of the contract to install air-sourced heating for the Public Services Centre, extra funding agreed for an additional Climate Change Officer, excellent use of the council's Community and Wellbeing fund, the progression of the Tewkesbury High Street Action Zone initiative and the improvement in waste recycling rates.
5. The story is less rosy when it comes to the Council's performance with respect to Housing and Communities work. We are still seeing worrying figures when it comes to major planning applications being overturned on appeal. Whilst it is recognised that legacy land-supply

definitions have a part to play, concerted attention is needed by the Planning Committee and relevant officers to rectify this worrying trend and to achieve acceptable levels of consistency. Planning Enforcement figures took a dip this quarter. We note the relative improvement in Planning Applications meeting their statutory timescales, but 'Major' applications are still not meeting their outturn targets. The Press had recently reported that Tewkesbury Borough Council was 310th out of 324 authorities across England in terms of determining major planning applications and 267th in determining non-major planning applications. The Committee has asked for further information on how the Council intends to actively tackle the shortfall in land supply both in the short and medium term.

6. The Committee was notified that all Members were to be updated on the Development Management Continuous Improvement Programme early in the New Year. This Programme is cited as a major investment to improve the Councils performance when it comes to its Planning Service responsibilities. The O&S Committee reserves the right to call in those involved with the Programme later in 2024 if sufficient improvements are not being demonstrated.
7. The performance of Housing Services continues to be difficult to evaluate given the KPIs chosen in the current Council Plan (KPIs 9-16). Targets are unavailable and the figures provided are difficult to contextualise.
8. These are not the only KPIs that make scrutiny difficult. KPIs 25-29 are similarly input measures and not outcomes. We recognise that input measures can be appropriate, especially where improvements are not being sought. However, we believe increases in effectiveness and efficiency must be sought across the full waterfront of Borough Services and we look to the Executive Committee to ensure that appropriate KPIs are in place when formulating the 2024/25 four-year Borough Plan. The O&S Committee are keen to review the Plan before it is published to test its ability to be scrutinised throughout its lifetime.
9. The Committee was grateful to receive a comprehensive package of Council financial data to scrutinise. We recognise the vital role this Committee has in scrutinising these figures, especially in the current climate of Local Government underfunding by Central Government. The Committee has requested additional training to help improve its understanding of the financial picture for both the short term but the longer term too. That training will start early in the New Year.

Matt Dimond-Brown

Chair, Overview & Scrutiny Committee