

2023/24 Performance Report Quarter Two

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	14 December 2023
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Jeff Brooks
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	7 November 2023
Report Author:	Jenny Legge/Catalin Bogos
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4351

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide assurance that the priority areas in the [Council Strategy 2023-2027](#) are being managed effectively, and where performance has fallen below the expected level, present information on the remedial action taken and the impact of that action. To ensure effective oversight to Councillors, staff and residents regarding progress made towards the achievement of the outcomes detailed in the Council Strategy Delivery Plan.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 To note the progress made in delivering the Council Strategy Delivery Plan 2023-2027, maintaining a strong outcome for the majority of the measures, and remedial actions taken where performance is below target.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	To be highlighted and managed by individual services.
Human Resource:	To be highlighted and managed by individual services.
Legal:	To be highlighted and managed by individual services.
Risk Management:	To be highlighted and managed by individual services.
Property:	To be highlighted and managed by individual services.
Policy:	To be highlighted and managed by individual services.

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		
Environmental Impact:		X		
Health Impact:		X		
ICT Impact:		X		
Digital Services Impact:		X		
Council Strategy Priorities:	x			Supports all priorities areas of the Council Strategy 2023-27.
Core Business:	x			
Data Impact:		X		
Consultation and Engagement:	The information provided for this report, has been signed off by the relevant Heads of Service/Service Directors, Executive Directors and Portfolio Holders.			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 At the meeting on 5 October 2023, the Council unanimously approved the new Council Strategy 2023-2027, which includes the Council Strategy Delivery Plan.
- 4.2 This paper provides updates for each component of the Council Strategy Delivery Plan 2023-2027:

- Non-targeted influencer measures for context.
- Targeted measures for each priority area.
- Corporate health measures for internal context.

4.3 The **Influencer measures** indicated that the district's economy continued to fare well overall, but the latest data (Mar 23) shows the start of a slightly increasing trend (similar to regional and national positions) in the unemployment rate. The high demand on our services remained elevated due external pressures, e.g. the cost of living crisis, but for children's social care services the reduction in demand is being monitored to ascertain if this is due to a more systematic change or only to an in-year cyclical trend. Whilst the average house prices reduced by £10k, compared to the previous quarter, there was increased pressure on demand for the Hosing Services.

4.4 The delivery of the outcomes grouped under each **Council Strategy Priority Area** continued to progress well. Overall, four priority areas achieved and exceeded targets (rated Green): (i) *Services We Are Proud of*; (ii) *A Fairer West Berkshire with Opportunities for All*; (iii) *Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency*; and (iv) *Thriving Communities with a Strong Local Voice*. The *Prosperous and resilient West Berkshire* priority was rated Amber overall, as the majority of the measures were exactly on target, and three measures were below targets.

4.5 Areas of achievement to note include: good performance for children's social care measures, timeliness of decisions for planning applications, 'Good' or better Ofsted rating of our schools, progression in the digitisation of council services, our young care leavers successfully supported into employment, works on phase one of the Newbury Wharf commenced, an opposition Councillor appointed to the chair of the Scrutiny Commission, the chairing of the Town Centre Masterplan steering group offered to Town Councils, the Council Strategy Delivery Plan adopted, installation of vehicle charging points in our car parks, waste recycling, creation of a Sustainability Hub for residents and businesses, opening of the refurbished Newbury Lido.

4.6 Of the measures rated Amber or Red, a number of areas to highlight include:

- Active fostering households - Local performance mirrors the national picture, however the service is working on several initiatives in its endeavours to recruit.
- Timeliness of decisions on new claims for Housing Benefit – increased demand and team vacancy impacts to be addressed by improving online functionality for claimants.
- EV on-street charging points – there had been a delay in the provider signing the contract, but civil works commenced in September and electrical connections were due to commence during quarter three.
- Demand Responsive bus service – there was a delay in the supplier signing the contract, but implementation work was due to progress in quarter three.

- Partnership fund with Greenham Common Trust – the fund to support mental health initiatives was delayed due to internal governance prioritisation and will be reconsidered in future quarters.

- 4.7 The council's **corporate health indicators** highlight focus on resource management and a controlled financial approach to manage service demand. Additional arrangements have been made to further strengthen budgetary control, and the quarter two financial forecast is an overspend of £3.3m, representing 2.1% of the net revenue budget and significantly improved from the quarter one forecast overspend.
- 4.8 Staff turnover (12.5%) was below pre-Covid levels and the WBC average of 13%.
- 4.9 Absence levels for quarter two were not available in time for this report, however the rate for quarter one was the lowest since June 2021.
- 4.10 For a few measures the data was not available in time for reporting due to arrangements having to be finalised to collect, quality assure and report the data, when the Council Strategy Delivery Plan had been only recently approved.

5 Supporting Information

Influencer measures

Detailed information on the measures in this report can be found online in the Performance Portal via this link: <https://westberksperformance.inphase.com/>

- 5.2 Non-targeted measures of influence were monitored to provide context to the work being carried out across council services.
- 5.3 The major focus for the district remained responding to several international and national challenges, e.g. supporting displaced people due to conflict, and economic challenges which impact at local level too.
- 5.4 Overall, the local **economy remained strong**. Empty business rated industrial properties remained at a consistent level and the number of empty non-industrial units continued to reduce. The sale of parking tickets in WBC managed car parks was encouragingly higher than the same period last year. The number of planning applications was lower than expected, however the planning permissions approval rate held at around 90%.
- 5.5 Within the local **social care indicators**, children's social care referral and enquiry numbers, children in need, children subject to a child protection plan and children in care started to decrease, which is being monitored to understand if this trend is due to seasonal in-year variations or it is a more significant change in the social care context. However the number of children in need and children in care was still high compared to one and a half years ago.
- 5.6 Although the data reported was provisional, the number of Adult Safeguarding S42s enquiries opened (when an adult may be at risk of abuse or neglect) had decreased and was more in-line with previous quarters.

- 5.7 The number of Adult Social Care clients requiring Long Term support had steadily increased since September 2020, and continues to be monitored by the service, the increase since year end is currently 0.5% (10 clients).
- 5.8 The number of active households on the Housing Register continued to be higher than desired, as was the number of households in temporary accommodation. There was an increase in demand for Housing Service as more people meet the threshold for accommodation, some needing urgent accommodation. The threshold was based on vulnerability, e.g. vulnerable children, mental health issues, physical disabilities. In particular, there was an increase in cases presenting with mental health issues. Alongside this increasing demand, the service was successful in preventing and relieving homelessness for a record 97 cases this quarter, compared to the previous three and a half years. This was achieved through keeping more people in their homes through support, such as negotiations with landlords and family members.
- 5.9 Within the **Environment** category, the number of library issues rose by 10% compared to the same period last year. 3,261 children visited a library to take part in the 2023 Summer Reading Challenge, with a further 200 joining in online. 435 pre-school children also took part in a Mini Challenge, and 873 people took part in the West Berkshire Book Challenge for over 12 year olds. Volunteer levels in the Culture and Library Service returned to pre-pandemic levels.
- 5.10 The Environment service identified a discrepancy in the data provided for the number of pothole/edge of road repairs and are querying it with the provider.

5.11 **Priority Area Measures Performance**

Detailed information on the measures in this report can be found online in the Performance Portal via this link: <https://westberksperformance.inphase.com/>

Note the meaning of the following in the Performance Portal:

- Red, Amber, Green ratings are based on a 5% tolerance (variance) from target.
- Planned – refers to tasks/milestones in progress
- Completed with a green star – refers to measures/tasks which are completed and on or ahead of schedule
- Completed with a red triangle – refers to measures/tasks which are completed later than scheduled
- ? - means no actual value for the current period has been recorded
- n/r - means an actual value for the current period is not expected e.g. annual measure
- >> - means that data is not due to be reported

- 5.12 **Council Strategy Priority Areas** - Results at the end of quarter two showed that four of the five priority areas were RAG rated as Green (on schedule or delivered) and one as Amber.



Chart 1. Overall RAG Ration of Priorities (inner circle) and associated Goals (outer circle)

5.13 Priority Area 1: Services we are proud of

5.14 Overall good progress was made with delivering this priority. Most of the performance measures exceeded their targets and the key milestones were reported as ‘on schedule’.

5.15 Digitisation of Council’s functions continued as planned, aiming to enable residents to access services online, and more residents subscribed to our e-newsletters to get updates and have information emailed to them directly.

5.16 Work continued to deliver 5 housing units for displaced persons. The initial works were completed and a main contractor appointed.

5.17 The amount of Council Tax collected was slightly below target, with residents’ ability to pay being affected by the rise in the cost of living. However, the amount of non-domestic rates collected was above the usual for this period.

5.18 Our efforts to keep our public spaces clean, tidy and welcoming mean that we have maintained the level of litter, detritus and graffiti as Keep Britain Tidy: satisfactory.

5.19 Our plans to review the Community Infrastructure Levy customer journey and the pilot to re-introduce Neighbourhood Notification Letters were on schedule.

5.20 Activities to make WBC an employer of choice led to a reduction in staff turnover, and an increase in staff taking up opportunities to enrol in apprenticeship levy funded training, and young people being involved in work experience and project work opportunities.

5.21 The Council Strategy Delivery Plan was developed and adopted by the Council. It provides details about performance measures and targets used to monitor progress with the delivery of the priorities and goals of the Council Strategy 2023-27.

5.22 Opposition Councillors were appointed as the Scrutiny Commission Chairperson (Green Party) and Deputy Chairperson (Conservative Party) in order to strengthen the Council's scrutiny function.

5.23 Priority Area 2: A fairer West Berkshire with opportunities for all

5.24 There was an overall good performance for the majority of the adult social care and children social care measures.

5.25 Strong results were secured regarding adult social care safeguarding enquires, with 71% of safeguarding outcomes being fully achieved, and where a risk was identified, it was reduced in 95% of cases.

5.26 Supporting more vulnerable young adults into employment resulted in 65% of our care leavers aged 19 to 21 benefiting from employment, education or training, compared to the national figure of 52%, and better than our target of 60%.

5.27 The Fostering Network estimates that fostering services across the UK need to recruit at least a further 7,200 foster families in the next 12 months due to record numbers of children in care and around 12 per cent of the foster carer workforce retiring or leaving every year. This situation was echoed locally, and although the service worked hard to recruit more people to provide safe and secure family environments for vulnerable children, it has proven difficult to achieve the target. There was extensive promotion of fostering in West Berkshire resulting in seven households taking part in the fostering preparation group, a precursor to the assessment process for foster carers. West Berkshire Council was also successful in a bid to be part of a regional foster care recruitment initiative across the South-East region, and sought to become a foster friendly employer, enabling staff to consider fostering children.

5.28 All verified rough sleepers in West Berkshire were offered accommodation when first identified, and 60% of households were in secure accommodation within 6 months of relief duty ending.

5.29 An increase in demand for Housing Benefit, due to the national increase in the cost of living, and a vacancy within the Benefits Team meant it took longer to get a decision for new claimants than was desirable. The service plans to improve performance by digitising parts of the claimant process.

5.30 Priority Area 3: Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency

5.31 Moving towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2030, as set out in our Environment Strategy, 36% of suitable WBC public car parks now have EV charging available, 17% of Car Club vehicles are electric, and 48% of our light vehicle fleet is ultra-low emission. There was a delay in signing the contract with Ubitricity and therefore the installation of on-street EV charging points, however work to install 22 charge points was scheduled to begin in October.

5.32 The review of kerbside recycling was on schedule, and discussions on how to phase out the green waste collection service and replace the loss of income are ongoing. Provisional data for household waste recycling, composting and reusing was better than targeted at 56%.

5.33 The [Green Hub page](#) was launched to provide information and guidance focussed on helping people in West Berkshire make sustainable choices and assist us collectively along our journey to Net Zero.

5.34 **Priority Area 4: A prosperous and resilient West Berkshire**

5.35 Overall, this priority area was rated as Amber. This was because although most of the performance measures were exactly on target, three areas were RAG rated as Red.

5.36 Supporting routes to employment, a “Return to work” careers fair held at Shaw House offered businesses in West Berkshire the opportunity to exhibit and promote available jobs for residents.

5.37 Work began on a pilot to support landowners to develop an Estate Plan that delivers clear community benefits in terms of employment and environmental and biodiversity gains as well as affordable housing for key workers.

5.38 The delivery of the flood prevention and drainage improvement schemes was on target.

5.39 Work to develop and adopt a Pothole Strategy and Plan had commenced.

5.40 The service identified a discrepancy in the data being provided by the contractor for the percentage of permanent pothole and edge of road repairs (RAG rated red) and are investigating it.

5.41 The first phase of works on Newbury Wharf began, however a change to the programme for the Bond Riverside Regeneration Programme due to works on the Faraday Road football pitch, led to a delay in the delivery of the agreed 2023/24 phase of the programme. The programme will now be reviewed and updated, including a Place-making Strategy.

5.42 Implementation work for a demand responsive bus service can begin following a delay in signing of a call-off agreement. The launch of the service is now planned for December 2023.

5.43 **Priority Area 5: Thriving communities with a strong local voice**

5.44 Several refurbishment projects for our Leisure Centre facilities were underway in Hungerford, Newbury and Thatcham. There were some delays due to access agreements and planning permissions, but the projects were progressing well.

5.45 The new Pump Track at Goldwell Park was completed in September and has wheelchair functionality. The grass pitch at Faraday Road was prepared and it was expected to be usable by football teams by the end of December.

5.46 Discussions began with the Greenham Common Trust to set up a fund to support physical activities initiatives. However, a similar arrangement for mental health support

initiatives was delayed and will not be progressed in 2023/24 given the financial pressures managed through the internal Governance processes.

Corporate Health

5.47 The quarter two financial forecast was an overspend of £3.3m, representing 2.1% of the net revenue budget. This was after use of £0.6m of specific earmarked reserves, £1.6m service mitigations that are being worked on, and £2.3m of flexible use of capital receipts for transformational activity. Further details are reported in the quarterly financial reports.

5.48 Staff turnover decreased to pre-Covid levels and below the WBC average rate (12.5%).

5.49 Absence levels for quarter two were not available in time for this report, however the rate for quarter one was the lowest since June 2021.

Proposals

5.50 To note the progress made in delivering the [Council Strategy Delivery Plan 2023-2027](#), maintaining a strong outcome for the majority of the measures, and remedial actions taken where performance is below target.

6 Other options considered

None considered.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Quarter two results show that good progress had been made towards the delivery of all five prioritise of the Council Strategy. Strong performance levels have been achieved for most of the performance measures, some of the initiatives listed in the Delivery Plan completed and key services delivered to our district.

7.2 Action plans are in place to address performance for a small number of measures rated “Amber” and “Red” and the Executive is asked to note these actions and the overall performance reported.

8 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – Q1 and Q2 Performance Infographics

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council

-
- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Item is Urgent Key Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Report is to note only | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

Wards affected: All wards

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