

2023/24 Performance Report Quarter Four

Committee considering report:	Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission
Date of Committee:	17 July 2024
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Jeff Brooks
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	20 June 2024
Report Author:	Jenny Legge/Catalin Bogos
Forward Plan Ref:	Ex. 4352

1 Purpose of the Report

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(s)

- 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 appropriate, where performance is below target.
- 2.2 In line with the performance management policy, to approve remedial actions, including requests to update/reprofile measures and targets agreed by the Council, to help assess performance, pending the Council’s approval of the annual refresh of the Delivery Plan.

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 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.

4.2 This report highlights the key updates on performance for the quarter rather than duplicating analysis and progress already reported as part of previous quarterly reports. However, full details for all the results to date (including for previous quarters are available for each performance measure from the Citizen's Portal online (<https://westberks.gov.uk/strategy-performance>)).

4.3 The **Influencer measures** indicated that the district's economy continued to be robust overall (increased economic activity and stable employment rates, decreasing unemployment rate). However, the number of planning applications received continues the downwards trend. The demand on our social services has decreased but remains higher than pre-Covid levels. Pressure increased on long term adult social care case, first time entrants into the Youth Justice System and housing. Library lending, both physical and electronic items, continued to build on the success of our Summer Reading Challenges.

4.4 The delivery of the outcomes grouped under each **Council Strategy Priority Area** continued to progress well. Overall, two priority areas achieved and exceeded targets and were rated as Green: (ii) *A Fairer West Berkshire with Opportunities for All* and (v) *Thriving Communities with a Strong Local Voice*. The remaining three areas were more than 5% below target and were rated as Red: (i) *Services We Are Proud of*, (iii) *Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency* and (iv) *The Prosperous and resilient West Berkshire*.

4.5 Areas of achievement to highlight include:

- Peer Review successfully completed highlighting the strengths of the Council and eleven key recommendations for further improvement.
 - Non-domestic rates collection target achieved.
 - Pilot for re-introducing neighbourhood notification letters – completed on time.
 - Number of school holiday sessions (including lunch) - over target
 - Schemes to help residents get cheaper solar panels and/or greener energy were implemented.
 - Funding for community recovery and rural businesses were implemented.
 - Reduced the number of posts filled by agency staff
 - Strong performance for our children social services, both prevention and statutory intervention
 - Improved cycle route completed (Stockcross village - B4000/A4/A34 roundabout)
 - Achieved targets relating to flood prevention schemes, the potholes repairs and quality of our road network.
 - Introduced a demand responsive service – formally launched the Downlands demand response service on 15/01/2024.
 - Returned Faraday Road Football Ground to a bookable grass pitch.
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4.6 Of the measures rated Amber or Red, a number of areas to note include:

- Total revenue spend variation compared to net budget set was estimated at £3.5m showing that the additional financial control measures have prevented further increases from the previous quarters.
- Number of verified rough sleepers – increase in line with national trends.
- Education attainment – some results for the Academic Year 2022/23 were below target, but in several areas maintained a similar level as for the previous year, are better than the national average, and mirrored the national trend.
- Newbury Wharf first phase delayed.
- Bond Riverside Regeneration 2023/24 phase ceased.

4.7 The council's **corporate health indicators** highlight focus on resource management and a controlled financial approach to manage service demand. The Quarter Four provisional outturn was an overspend of £3.1m, representing 1.9% of the net revenue budget. The outturn is after use £2.5m of flexible use of capital receipts for transformational activity.

4.8 Staff turnover data for quarters three and four was not available due to staff redeployment to implement a new HR system.

4.9 Sickness absence data for Q4 was not available at the time of publication of this report.

5 Supporting Information

Influencer measures

5.1 Detailed information on the measures in this report can be found online in the Performance Portal via this link: (<https://westberks.gov.uk/strategy-performance>).

5.2 Non-targeted measures of influence (Appendix C) were monitored to provide context to the work being carried out across council services.

5.3 Overall, the local **economy remained strong**. Empty business rated industrial properties remained at a consistent level and the number of empty non-industrial units stabilised, however overall the trend is starting to rise slightly. The sale of parking tickets in WBC managed car parks was 6% higher than the same period last year. The average house price for continued to increase. The number of planning applications has consistently reduced over the last four quarters, however the planning permissions approval rate held at around 90%. Overall, the number of crimes, domestic abuse, and anti-social behaviour incidents reported to Thames Valley Police have been reducing.

5.4 Within the local **social care indicators**, following significant increases in children's social care referral and enquiry numbers, children in need, children subject to a child protection plan and children in care over the past two years, the volume of referrals has decreased, but remains at a much higher level that it was pre COVID.

- 5.5 The level of first-time entrants into the Youth Justice System has been increasing since the beginning of the year, Thames Valley Youth Offending Teams are analysing the data to try to understand the causes.
- 5.6 The number of Adult Social Care clients requiring Long Term support, rose again this quarter. The service continues to monitor the position.
- 5.7 Within the **Environment** indicators, following the huge success of our Summer Reading Challenges library lending continued at an elevated level with a steady increase in both physical and electronic issues. Notably, e-library issues had increased by 27% on 2022/23 figures (online magazines by 71%, newspapers by 21%, audio books by 20% and eBooks by 12%). This was most likely due to a combination of staff engagement with schools, increased messaging about the online services on social media, e.g. message of the month, posters, newsletters, and word of mouth.
- 5.8 Due to the continued high level of rainfall during the spring, the number of highway related third party claims remained high, but the number of claims settled (paid) was very low (1).

5.9 **Priority Area Measures Performance**

Detailed information on the measures in this report can be found online in the Performance Portal via this link <https://westberks.gov.uk/strategy-performance>

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
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5.14 Challenging areas of work were in the amount of Council Tax collected, where there was an expected slight decrease this year (0.3%), due to the pressure on household finances. By comparison, government relief schemes for retail and hospitality sectors meant we were able to achieve the challenging target (98%) for non-domestic rates collection.

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

5.16 Overall, this priority area was rated as green. The three goals were rated as one each of Green, Amber, Red.

5.17 Achievements to note in the quarter were:

- The delivery of 5 housing units for displaced people at West Point was on schedule.
- The number of school holiday sessions (including lunch) being provided is much higher than target (63 v 52 YTD).
- 16 fostering household carers have been recruited since April 2023; however 14 households have ceased fostering as they have applied for Special Guardianship Orders, Child Arrangement Orders or Staying Put arrangements. The service continues to be proactive in its recruitment of foster carers, and there are a further eight families in the assessment and training process and we anticipate that they will be presented to the fostering panel in the coming months.

5.18 Challenging areas of work were around the number of rough sleepers, which increased in line with national trends. Verified rough sleeper numbers include cases who are transient rough sleepers and those who sleep in vehicles on regular basis, as opposed to more traditional entrenched rough sleepers. Although the number of people affected has increased, 100% were offered accommodation when first identified.

5.19 The education attainment results for the end of primary school stage (Key Stage 2) were below targets (including for the disadvantaged cohort), impacting primarily by the results in Writing. For the end of secondary school (Key Stage 4) West Berkshire's results remained in the top quartile nationally, even if below an ambitious target, impacted by a decline of results nationally.

5.20 Summary of requests to amend measures/targets (Appendix B):

- Refresh and adopt the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy (31/12/23) – change target date to 30/09/2024.
- Develop a strategy to bring back empty homes into use (31/03/24) – change target date to 31/03/2025.
- Adopt a plan to close the attainment gap focussing on early years and deprivation (31/03/2024) – change target date to 31/03/2025.
- Review the structure of WBC education provision to maintained schools (31/10/23) – change target date to 31/03/2025.

5.21 Priority Area 3: Tackling the Climate and Ecological Emergency

5.22 Overall, this priority area was rated as Red. Two out of the three goals were rated as Red, and one as Green. The ones rated Red are impacted by eight measures missing their targets (charging points in the Council's car parks and on streets without off-street parking, electric car club vehicles, delays regarding the adoption of local transport plan, trialling extended pedestrianisation in Newbury, finalise the green waste plans, standard for energy rating of council's properties and amount of renewable energy generated).

5.23 Achievements to note in the quarter were that:

- Two schemes to help residents to install solar panels and/or switch to greener energy providers at a lower cost were successfully implemented.
- A Sustainability Assessment Tool for project development and decision making was successfully piloted.
- Our popular soil giveaway returned for a fourth time. Working with Veolia, we provided residents with free soil conditioner, made using food and garden waste collected from households across the district.
- State of the art thermal sensors installed across West Berkshire highway network. Real-time data gained during the winter season will help inform winter gritting routes in the future.

5.24 Challenging areas of work were around the number of EV charging points installed on streets without off-road parking. Less than anticipated put in place, due to the availability of Ubitricity and their contractor, and some issues with selected sites, the installation of the next batch of charge points (approx. 25) has slipped slightly with an anticipated installation starting in June 2024.

5.25 **Summary of requests to amend measures/targets (Appendix B):**

- No. of additional kWp installed for generating renewable energy - change target to 350 kWp by 31/03/2025.
- Commence trial of extended pedestrianisation hours Newbury Town Centre (31/03/24) – change target date once plans have been reconsidered
- Adopt a Local Transport Plan (31/03/24) – change target date to 31/03/2025.
- Confirm plan to phase out the charge on garden waste collection (secure the financial resource) (31/03/24) – change date to 30/06/2024.

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

5.27 Overall, this priority area was rated as Red. Out of the four goals, two were rated as Green, one Amber and one Red. The overall red rating was impacted by four measures (completion of the first phase of works on Newbury Wharf, meetings with rural clusters' businesses, internships for young people with education, health and care plans, progress the Bond Riverside Regeneration).

5.28 Achievements to note in the quarter were that:

- After intervention by the Secretary of State, the Local Plan Examination in public is now continuing to progress, with Hearings expected to take place through Spring/Summer 2024, exact dates yet to be confirmed.
- Our [open digital planning service](#) was launched which provides advice to make it easier to understand some of the regulations around planning for anyone who thinks they might need planning permission.
- A [Community Recovery Grant](#) was launched to help eligible households whose houses were flooded by Storm Henk.
- The [Rural England Prosperity Fund grant](#) scheme for rural businesses by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs was implemented for West Berkshire. The funding could help with farm diversification e.g. glamping sites, and pet and equine businesses e.g. kennels and livery.

5.29 Challenging areas of work were around the completion of the first phase of the Newbury Wharf transformation and the delivery of the Bond Riverside Regeneration Programme which have been delayed.

5.30 **Summary of requests to amend measures/targets (Appendix B):**

- Complete the first phase of works on Newbury Wharf (31/03/24) – Change target date to 31/12/2024.

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

5.32 Overall, this priority area was rated as Green. Out of the four goals, two reported Green and two reported Red. The outcomes rated red were impacted by 10 measures (two less Community forums than target, issues with data about visits to sports and leisure centres, and some delays about adopting a plan to tackle social isolation, refresh the Playing pitch strategy and parking strategy, refurbishments of Hungerford and Northcroft leisure centres).

5.33 Achievements to note in the quarter were that:

- The [Let's Get Active Fund](#) was launched, and made £40,000 available to improve access to physical activities in West Berkshire
- A [new fitness and social area](#) opened at the Cotswold recreation ground in Tilehurst. Following a young people survey, West Berkshire and Tilehurst Parish Councils worked together to repurpose a tarmacked area to install a multi-use games area (MUGA), including a space for children's cycling.
- [The Northcroft Lido in Newbury](#) re-opened its doors to the public for the spring/summer season. For full accessibility, a hoist has been installed in the pool area and the facility is complete with an accessible changing room.

5.34 Challenging areas of work were around the production of strategies and plans e.g. a plan to tackle social isolation in rural areas, and the Parking Strategy, which were delayed due to operational resource issues and have been rescheduled. Ambitious

projects to refurbish leisure facilities in Hungerford and Northcroft centres were delayed and have also been rescheduled.

5.35 **Summary of requests to amend measures/targets (Appendix B):**

- Refresh the Playing Pitch Strategy (31/12/2023) - change target date to 30/06/2025.
- Refurbish Hungerford Leisure Centre (31/03/24) – change target date 30/12/2024.
- Refurbish Northcroft Leisure Centre (31/12/24) – change target date 30/06/2025.
- Set up a new fund with Greenham Common Trust for mental health support initiatives (31/03/24) – change target date 30/06/2024.

Corporate Health

5.36 The quarter four provisional outturn is an overspend of £3.1m, representing 1.9% of the net revenue budget. The outturn is after use £2.5m of flexible use of capital receipts for transformational activity.

5.37 Data was not available in time for the submission of this report for sickness absence or turnover.

Proposals

5.38 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.

5.39 To note request to be made for the Executive to approve remedial actions, including requests to update/reprofile measures and targets agreed by the Council, to help assess performance, pending the Council's approval of the annual refresh of the Delivery Plan, in line with the performance management policy (see details in Appendix B: Department/service requests to amend measures/targets).

6 Other options considered

None considered.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Quarter four results show that good progress had been made towards the delivery of the majority of measures under all five Council Strategy priorities. Strong performance levels have been achieved as 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”. The Executive will be asked to note these actions, approve the requests to amend measures/targets (as set out in Appendix B), and note the overall performance reported.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A: Performance in pictures.
- 8.2 Appendix B: Department/service requests to amend measures/targets.
- 8.3 Appendix C: Influencer measures dashboard.
- 8.4 Appendix D: Purpose and background.

Background Papers:

None

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
- Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

Wards affected: All wards

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