



Maximising Council Resources

Thematic Progress Update
November 2022

A Plan for West Devon



Lead Member Introduction

A key element of A Plan for West Devon is ensuring that the Council makes the best use of the resources available to it and makes effective decisions for the future.



Cllr Chris Edmonds
Lead Member for maximising our resources

This update report is the second update to Overview and Scrutiny on this theme since adoption of our Plan for West Devon in September 2021 and I'm pleased that good progress has been made across all actions within the delivery plan.

In the 12 months since the last update to overview and scrutiny we have:-

- ✓ Seen our new Customer Case Management platform (Liberty Create) 'go live' with over 100 processes – making it easier for our customers to 'do it online'
- ✓ Enhanced our performance management reporting with new, quarterly reports to Hub Committee setting out progress against our plans.
- ✓ Carried out in-depth reviews of some of our key services such as Planning, Revenues & Benefits and Customer contact centre – with the key focus on improving the customer experience
- ✓ Set a balanced budget for 2022/23

8 Activities on Track and within budget	2 Activities requiring additional intervention or have uncertainties that require managing	0 Activities off track with no current clear plan to resolve	0 Not yet due to start
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Of course, it has not been a year without challenges, not least the significant increase in cost of living facing not only residents and businesses, but the Councils own services. We hope to receive clarity over next years Government funding before Christmas.

Over the coming pages, we set out more in-depth update for each action.

Chris Edmonds

Cllr Chris Edmonds

Lead Member for Maximising Resources



Action R1.1 – Implement our new customer focused system to enable our customers to engage with us both online and on the phone

Key Highlights

During the past 12 months we have continued to see the benefits of the Liberty Create platform. This has enabled us to quickly and easily implement new customer facing online forms when needed – such as for the delivery of Government business grants, emergency financial support for individuals and the registering of arrivals under the Homes for Ukraine scheme. Without this system in place it would have been far more difficult to implement these solutions.

Throughout the year we saw an average of around 35% of transactions with the Council being carried out online. To further enhance the online experience for our customers, we have contracted with a new ‘open source’ website provider and will be migrating our existing website to the new platform in the coming months – with the aim of concluding this by May 2023. While the website will not look fundamentally different, the new platform will enable us to make changes much quicker, responding to customer needs when required.

Internally we have also started the roll out of Microsoft Office 365. This online version of the Office software enables enhanced functionality in sharing and collaborating on documents (with multiple people able to work on documents at the same time). Currently this is being trialled by the Leadership Team and will be rolled out to the rest of the council in the next six months.

Key Risks / Issues

We are continuing to progress with the go-live of our new planning system (Northgate Assure) but this has taken longer than anticipated. We continue to work with the contractor to resolve technical issues with the system and aim to conclude this within the next few months.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Resolution of outstanding Assure issues
- Moving more Revenues and Benefits Processes into Liberty Create to drive efficiencies and improve the customer experience (avoiding duplication and resolving issues at first point of contact)
- Creating a Legal Case Management system within Liberty to enable better tracking visibility of cases
- Roll out Office365 across the Council

Overall Rating

AMBER – Off Track due to delays in go-live with Northgate Assure

Action R1.2 – Ensure we manage the Council’s performance effectively

Key Highlights and benefits

Alongside the implementation of A Plan for West Devon, we have continued to make significant enhancements to our performance management processes which include quarterly ‘Integrated Performance Management Reports’ to Hub Committee which set out key operational performance, risks and progress against our thematic delivery plan. Thematic Delivery reports (such as this one) are considered at every meeting of Overview and Scrutiny and individual employees have individual targets set which align to our corporate ambitions.

Key Risks / Issues

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

During the next six months the Lead Member Performance and Resources will be working with Officers to further enhance our performance reporting, developing an enhanced operational performance report which will be considered by Overview and Scrutiny twice a year. It is envisaged that the first of these reports will be considered in January 2023. This reporting will be in addition to the existing quarterly reports to Hub and the thematic reports to O&S.



Overall Rating	GREEN – ON TRACK
Action R1.3 – Carry out reviews of services in order to improve the customer experience	
Key Highlights	
<p>Over the past 12 months we have progressed with plans for service reviews of the Planning Service, Revenues and Benefits, Legal and the Contact Centre. This has seen us make decisions in order to make a positive difference for our customers including:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishing a dedicated Planning Service for West Devon, enabling a greater level of knowledge and understanding of West Devon specific issues. - Recruiting a Head of Revenues and Benefits to deliver on enhancements to the service - Increasing our data and intelligence of the contact centre which is already seeing benefits with reducing ‘wrap times’ for calls meaning more calls can be taken. <p>The Council has continued to flex and adapt its services to meet a range of new Government Schemes including the Household Support Fund, Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme and Homes for Ukraine Scheme.</p> <p>Each Service area of the Council has developed a service plan which includes a number of performance measures. We have implemented a planned programme of service updates to the Senior Leadership Team where performance, service highlights and challenges are scrutinised and this will help inform any further service reviews.</p>	
Key Risks / Issues	
<p>There is a risk that in undertaking service reviews, there is an impact on the ability to maintain business as usual services at the same levels. We will mitigate this as much as possible by identifying resources to support the service reviews and ensure that reviews are planned during periods that will have less of an impact.</p>	
Looking ahead to the next 6 months	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue with SLT service review discussions to inform any future service reviews - Respond to any further challenges such as supporting residents in response to the Cost of Living Increase. 	
Overall Rating	GREEN – ON TRACK

Action R1.4 – Manage and Support our employees to deliver the best possible service	
Key Highlights	
<p>Over the past 12 months we have reopened our office spaces so that employees can work from the office when they choose to do so. We have held a round of face to face staff briefings with more planned for December 2022. During the year we have also implemented our new HR and Payroll system with the core modules now live.</p> <p>It is also important that we recognise employee achievements and so this year we will again hold a staff awards event highlighting the contributions of staff from across the Council.</p> <p>During September we have carried out an employee survey. For the first time we have worked with the Local Government Association to carry out a survey which has been developed to understand the balance of the employee / employer ‘deal’. We hope to receive the results of the survey in November.</p>	
Key Risks / Issues	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We continue to see challenges in recruiting to roles across the Council and it is important that we take steps to address this including targeted recruitment campaigns. 	



Looking ahead to the next 6 months

A priority for the coming 6 months will be the development and implementation of an Organisational Development Strategy. This will set out a clear vision for how we support individuals – and how in turn individual staff contribute to our corporate priorities. It will be largely informed by the responses from the staff survey. There will also be a priority to refresh our approach to recruitment to ensure we attract quality candidates to key posts.

We will also be implementing the performance management modules of the HR and Payroll system – this will mean employees have an online system to record their objectives and personal development discussions.

Overall Rating GREEN – ON TRACK

Action R1.5 – Ensure Annual Budgets meet our service delivery requirements

Key Highlights

We have aligned our financial planning process with ‘A Plan for West Devon’. The plan has a fully costed delivery plan for the next three years which can be reviewed alongside the annual budget setting process.

Overall the latest financial position of the Council remains broadly positive, and certainly compared to the position of other Devon District Councils, West Devon is in a healthy position. As at 31st August 2022, the Council is forecasting a small deficit of £70,000 for 2022/23.

While the cost of living and increased inflation is having an impact on Council budgets, of course this also has a positive impact in that our Investment Income is anticipated to be up by 1340% - equating to approximately an additional income of £335,000 during this current financial year.

A Member budget workshop is scheduled for 8th November 2022 to help inform the coming years budget. This is a good way of helping all Members understand the budget decisions they will be making in the coming months.

Key Risks / Issues

Town Centre Car Parks have not made a full recovery as expected following the Covid-19 pandemic. This means we are currently projecting a loss for this financial year of £130,000 out of a total budgeted car parking income of £1,147,000 – this is an 11% variance.

The Cost of Living impacts are also impacting Council budgets.

There are of course still some unknowns including whether the Chancellor (Jeremy Hunt) will make any changes that will impact us when he makes his medium-term fiscal plan announcement shortly and when the Local Government Finance Settlement is announced just before Christmas.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Local Government Finance Settlement announced – Dec 2022
- Council 2023/24 budget to be agreed – Feb 2023

Overall Rating GREEN – On Track



Action R1.6 – Work to secure the Council’s longer term financial sustainability

Key Highlights

In September 2022, we considered our Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2023/24 and 2025/26. The full report can be seen here:-

<https://mg.swdevon.gov.uk/documents/s28983/West%20Devon%20-%20Medium%20Term%20Financial%20Strategy%20September%202022.pdf>

The Council, along with other local authorities, has faced unprecedented reductions in Government funding. Between 2009/10 and 2020/21, the Council’s Core Government funding has reduced by £3 million. The Council now receives no main Government Grant (Revenue Support Grant) – this has been reduced to zero.

The Council continues to work in partnership with South Hams District Council, sharing the majority of its employees and enabling West Devon to achieve annual savings of £2.2million while protecting statutory front line services.

Key Risks / Issues

The latest inflation figures show prices are rising at their fastest rate for 40 years with the headline CPI (Consumer Price Index) rate at 10.1%. These increases have also impacted the MTFS in terms of the cost pressures. At present, there is no indication from Government of any additional funding. The financial standing of the Council is secure in the immediate future, but there is still much work to do to ensure the long term financial sustainability of the Council.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- It had been expected that a technical consultation paper on the local government finance settlement for 23/24 would happen before Parliament’s summer recess. However the political turmoil has meant that this hasn’t happened. It is now expected that no formal announcement will be made until the Finance Settlement is announced in December 2022.

Overall Rating

Amber – due to longer term uncertainty

Action R1.7 – Identify Opportunities to Spend More Locally

Key Highlights

Based on initial assessments of 2021/22 spend – we’re close to 50% of our supplies and services funds being spent with local suppliers (within West Devon) – this is a very good level of spend within the local economy. We will however be looking at the potential to use a portal known as Supply Devon which would actively promote opportunities to supply the Council to local companies.

Our Procurement Lead attended a Supply Devon event which enabled us to engage with local suppliers and highlight potential opportunities to them.

Key Risks / Issues

There is a risk that we are not able to procure the services we require locally while also achieving best value for money however we can look to work with local suppliers to develop relationships.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Consideration of Social Value through procurements

Overall Rating

GREEN – ON Track



Action R1.8 – Work Across Devon to increase efficiency and share services where it means you get a better service

Key Highlights

In the last report we highlighted that we were currently talking to other Councils about potential opportunities to collaborate more on Procurement – this work continues and where it makes sense to do so, we are joining other Councils for specific procurements.

We are also working closely as part of Team Devon on a range of subjects to share skills and knowledge to ultimately improve the experience for our customers / maximise on benefits.

Key Risks / Issues

- Lack of buy-in to progress with closer work opportunities identified in the business case. We will ensure that if a business case comes forward that WDBC supports, we encourage other Councils to seriously consider the options.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Develop outline business case for procurement support services
- Continue to identify opportunities for wider working

Overall Rating

GREEN

Action R1.9 – Lobbying for fairer funding for rural services

Key Highlights

The Council continues to be a member of the Rural Services Network.

Cllr Kimber attended the Rural Services Network Conference and has reported back that he is pleased that the network are still championing fairer funding for rural services. An introduction to the Rural Services network can be seen here:- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SM9tNYX04Yo>

Key Risks / Issues

None

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Continued engagement with RSN and responding to consultations where possible

Overall Rating

GREEN

Action R1.10 – Assess suitability of all asset base and Council owned property

Key Highlights

We continue to consider the opportunities for maximising the use of Kilworthy Park. We have lost some long-standing tenants but are pleased that we have now been able to let space to a further two organisations who will join us in November.

The Council Chamber at Kilworthy Park requires an upgrade to the IT systems which is now underway.

The reception at Kilworthy Park has been opening two days per week in recent months with a customer access progress report being considered by Hub Committee in December.

Key Risks / Issues

None

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

Continued promotion to maximise occupancy within Council assets

Overall Rating

GREEN



This update will be considered by the West Devon Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on Tuesday 15th November 2022

You can view the meeting by visiting our  YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDZEXV47SxBpXUDR6qbhtIA>

