

Report to: *Other (please specify)*

If other: *Overview & Scrutiny Committee*

Date of meeting: *13 March 2024*

Report author: *Associate Director of Customer and Corporate Services, Delivery Support Lead, Intelligence, Performance and Improvement Lead*

Report sponsor: *Director of Partnerships*

Portfolio holder: *Councillor Mark Watkin*

Report title: *Performance and Progress Report – Q3 2023/24*

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 Following the Mayoral election in June 2022 Watford Borough Council launched its new Council Plan which set out an ambitious agenda for the town and the council. The Council Plan forms part of the organisation's strategic framework, which aims to ensure that the council delivers on its commitments. Underpinning the Council Plan is a two-year Delivery Plan and our key corporate strategies, which are supported by a suite of key performance indicators (KPIs). This allows the council to ensure that both projects, strategies and high-quality services continue to be delivered, and for action to be taken if areas of concern are identified. A critical part of this approach is regular reporting of the key elements of the council's strategic framework and day to day performance. This report, therefore, contains updates comprising:

- the Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022-24;
- the external key performance indicators for Q3 of 2023/24.
- Key corporate strategies

1.2 The updates reflect the positive outcomes that have been achieved over the third quarter of 2023/24. The progress achieved since the last update to Cabinet is shown in the documents appended to this report (Appendices A, B and C).

1.3 The successful delivery of the commitments in the Council Plan 2022-26 is critical to ensuring we remain focused on what is important to Watford and we are recognised as an organisation that delivers on its promises. As such, the council has committed to reporting on progress against our key plans on a quarterly basis. This report forms the seventh of these updates since the approval of the new Council Plan.

2.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee note:

2.1 The progress updates within this report relating to:

- the Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022 -24 (Appendix A)
- the external key performance indicator results for Quarter 3 of 2023/24 (Appendix B)
- the council's key corporate strategies (Appendix C)

3.0 Report pathway

3.1 Next review body: *Not applicable:*

3.1.1 Indicative date: *Not applicable*

4.0 Contact Officer:

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Reviewed and signed off by: Alan Gough, Director of Partnerships and Performance

5.0 Detailed proposal

5.1 The council has an ambitious agenda for Watford and recognises that a focused, and aligned, strategic framework is fundamental to the successful delivery of its plans for the town.

5.2 Following the Mayoral election in May 2022, the council reviewed and refreshed its strategic framework to better reflect these ambitions as well as the Mayor's Manifesto, local intelligence, community feedback and best practice. The renewed framework, comprising the council's key strategies and plans, confirms our focus on what is important to the town and its residents and that resources are allocated to its priority commitments.

5.3 A critical part of the successful delivery of the renewed framework is robust, and regular, monitoring and reporting of the associated plans including:

- the Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022-24;
- Key performance indicators.
- Key corporate strategies

This report presents a progress update of the plans outlined in 5.3 and in associated Appendices (A, B and C).

5.4 A significant amount of progress has been achieved across all delivery areas. The direction set by the strategic framework has ensured services have clarity on where they need to concentrate, focus their energies and support the council's reputation as a council that gets things done and that delivers on what is important to the town.

5.5 Running throughout the council's progress is the strengthening of our organisational approach, governance and structure. This means the council has the essential building blocks in place to support all of our activities and commitments not just across these plans but also across all of our corporate work and effort. This has particularly focused on:

- making sure we have the right capacity to deliver on our priorities in the context of a challenging financial climate;
- a renewed emphasis on integrating how we work strategically;
- making sure the way we make our decisions is transparent, timely and supported by the relevant information; and
- our organisational culture, underpinned by our values and behaviours, is directed to our 'one team' approach, shared ownership of our corporate priorities and commitment to deliver

5.6 All of our plans and strategies are supported by a suite of key performance indicators, which have recently been reviewed and ensure that, as an organisation, we continue to provide high quality services to our residents, businesses and community.

5.7 The approach taken by the council in relation to the Council Plan and reporting was noted by the recent Local Government Association Peer Challenge as strong, providing a clear link between the Mayoral Manifesto and the Council Plan and ensuring that staff had a clear sense of purpose to delivery for the community.

6.0 Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022-24

6.1 The new Council Plan 2022-26 was approved by Council in June 2022 as was the associated Delivery Plan 2022-24.

6.2 The Council Plan is designed to be strategic, high level and outward-facing, with an emphasis on outcome focused commitments based around four key themes:

- A greener, brighter future
- An inspiring, thriving and creative town

- A diverse happy and healthy town
- A council working for our community and serving our residents

Each theme has a number of areas of commitment under which specific projects and areas of work have been identified and articulated through the Delivery Plan 2022-24.

- 6.3 Whilst the Council Plan has a four-year perspective, the Delivery Plan has been developed to focus on key priorities to mid-2024. The 18-month perspective means that the Council can remain flexible and agile to respond to emerging and future challenges and opportunities over the life of the Council Plan. Over the next period, the council will develop the next iteration of its Delivery Plan to cover the period 2024-2026, up to the next scheduled Mayoral Election.
- 6.4 By reporting regularly to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the progress made by the organisation against the Council Plan and, particularly the Delivery Plan, we can ensure we are continuing to focus our resources on what is important to our town and community. It also provides transparency and clear accountability to our community.
- 6.5 The full report can be seen an Appendix A but some key highlights, by Council Plan theme, are included below:

A greener brighter future

- The planned works at Cassiobury Wetlands were completed in December 2023 and closure signs have been displayed to allow the wetlands to recover this winter. When the site is re-opened, visitors will be encouraged to visit, explore and engage with the nature reserve, whilst managing access to protect biodiversity. There will also be opportunities for community engagement with schools undertaking educational visits and volunteers maintaining habitats.
- All planned trees (200+) for 2023/24 have been planted ahead of schedule including 121 trees funded by £75k Treescape funding. A successful tree giveaway event, a joint initiative with HCC, was held at Woodside in December 2023 with over 9,000 trees collected and the ambition to plant an additional 20,000 by 2026 already met.
- £35k Garfield Weston funding has been successfully secured for the ongoing delivery of the Rediscovering River Colne Programme
- Stage 2 of the options and feasibility study for the Watford to Croxley Link is now complete and the report finalised. Stakeholder engagement will be undertaken and the findings published in the new year.

- The proposal for the Green Investment Bond Scheme which would have addressed the activity to ‘explore opportunities that will contribute financially to our green commitments and goals’ has been identified previously within these reports as challenging because of the economic climate. It has therefore been removed from the Delivery Plan for reporting purposes.

An inspiring, thriving and creative town

- Following a successful bid, £16m was provisionally awarded from the third round of the Levelling Up Fund from central government towards the delivery of the Innovation & Incubation Hub and the Colosseum refurbishment.
- The Watford Skills and Employment Plan has been drafted and is going through the approvals process. Once approved, West Herts College will coordinate the associated Action Plan and will bring together relevant skills and education providers to form the Watford Skills and Employment Group.
- A Business Feedback Group was convened for the first time in November 2023 to help with thoughts and comments on the new Place Brand. The group will also help with feedback on other council initiatives over the coming months.
- Construction of the Gateway at Watford Business Park is complete and a partial possession certificate has been issued for the buildings. There is already a good level of interest in the new facility. Heads of Terms (HoTs) for two units have been agreed and two further HoTs are currently underway. A café operator for the facility has been agreed. Practical Completion is expected in the next quarter.

A diverse, happy and healthy town

- Demand at the new crematorium continues to exceed all expectations and by mid-December, 223 funerals had been held for families to say farewell to their loved ones. Feedback from users (funeral directors and the bereaved) continue to be overwhelmingly positive. The new facility has been shortlisted for a Civic Trust award reflecting the council’s commitment to high quality design for the facility.
- The new Voluntary Sector Commissioning Framework (VSCF), developed through extensive engagement with commissioned organisations, was approved by Cabinet in October 2023 alongside the proposed changes to funding from 2024/25. Service Level Agreements are being drafted for commissioned organisations.

- The council's Community Asset Strategy and Community Lettings Policy were approved by Cabinet in November 2023.
- Continuing engagement with health partners and representing the health and wellbeing needs of Watford residents, including attendance at flu and covid booster clinics and women's wellness session.
- Marked White Ribbon Day in November 2023 by delivering activities including training for council staff.
- The Community Engagement and Participation Strategy, which provides strategic direction and action planning on a council-wide approach to how we engage with our community, was approved.
- The council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) policy and Delivery Plan, which covers the council's role as an employer as well as a service provider and convener of place, were approved.

A council working for our community and serving our residents

- We are leading by example in the delivery of the council's Environmental Strategy with 23 colleagues attending the Climate Literacy training and receiving Carbon Literacy certification.
- The council's Continuous Improvement Framework, which formalises the process for continual improvement of our processes and service delivery, was approved by Cabinet in November 2023 and will contribute to the ongoing delivery of high quality services for residents, businesses and our community.
- The council's four-year ICT Strategy has been approved and ready for delivery. The Strategy will ensure we continue to deliver and keep pace with the rapidly changing landscape both within technology developments and across the cyber security threats, enabling the council to continue delivering digital but secure services to our residents.
- As part of our commitment to support the health and wellbeing of employees, Lunch and Learn sessions are planned for the next few months with the first session 'Winter Wellness' in January 2024.
- Successful 'Living the Values' event was held to further embed the council's six corporate values: Agile, Bold, Integrity, Respect, Trust and Working Together.

7.0 Key Performance Indicators

- 7.1 Our key performance indicators underpin our Council Plan by ensuring that the organisation continues to perform against a range of measures

relating to the services we provide to our residents, businesses and community.

7.2 The measures highlighted within this report have supported the delivery of good quality services by highlighting areas of good performance and, more importantly, under performance. This allows the council to ensure that services continue to offer a high-quality service to our residents and businesses, and for action to be taken if areas of concern are identified.

7.3 The attached report (Appendix B), therefore, shows the results for the current set of key performance indicators during the first quarter of the 2023/24 financial year. In summary, out of the 49 indicators, 48 results were received for Q3 with face to face satisfaction in the customer service centre to recommence in the refurbished Town Hall once complete. Of those 48 results, 44 have targets set. 25 KPIs exceeded targets and 16 were outside of the target. Three indicators were outside of the target but within tolerance. Some key highlights, by Council Plan theme, are included below:

A greener brighter future

- Both indicators related to fly-tipping exceeded the targets set.
- Net Zero Carbon footprint for Watford Leisure Centre has achieved a reduction of 3% this year to date. The target set for this KPI was a 3% reduction by the end of 2023/24, and this was achieved in Q2, primarily due to the installation of a pool cover. Both leisure centres have had pool covers installed as well as LED lighting. Customer service response times for both leisure centres remained high, with 100% of customer comments responded to within 48 hours.
- Levels of detritus were within target, and much improved compared with Q3 last year. Levels of graffiti were just outside of the target, however improved on this time last year. Levels of litter and fly-posting were outside of target and showed a small increase on Q3 the previous year. Fly posting levels remain low overall, with a significant reduction within Main Road areas. Issues involving estate agent boards and yellow developer signs contributed to the result.
- There were 27,953 journeys made on Beryl Bikes, contributing to a total of 93,186 journeys made since April 2023 - on track for the yearly target of 115,000.
- Both recycled and composted waste and residual household waste indicators were outside of the targets but within tolerance.

An inspiring, thriving and creative town

- Good results were recorded for the planning service in Q3, with all indicators related to the processing of planning applications exceeding

targets. See table below for detail on number of applications and processing time.

	Total number received	Processed within timescale	Required an extension of time	Processed outside of timescale
Major	4	2	2	0
Minor	38	32	6	0
Other	89	84	5	1

- The number of parking penalty charge notices (PCN) issued in Q3 was 9,892, a decrease compared with Q2. Hertfordshire County Council took over the management of the bus gate from the 1 November 2023, which has reduced the number of PCNs issued. There was one tribunal appeal in Q3 which was not contested.
- Watford Market occupancy rate continues to be above target at 93.50%.

A diverse, happy and healthy town

- There were five verified rough sleepers at the end of December, increased from three at the end of June. The number of rough sleepers in the town is currently low due to the Winter Shelter running at New Hope's The Haven until 31 March 2024. There are three rough sleepers who have not engaged with support offered. On average there are 11 people being housed at the winter night shelter, seven of whom have restricted eligibility.
- The number of households in temporary accommodation (TA) continues to increase with the most frequent reason for the loss of the last settled home being the end of a private rented tenancy. This has increased by 140% compared with April to December 2022. Settled housing move-on options are challenging. It is incredibly difficult to find affordable private rented accommodation. For example, only one private rented home was let to a homeless household in 2023-24 Q3 compared with six in the same period last year. During the quarter there were 98 lettings of housing association homes, which is a higher number of lettings than usual and included the Yeatman Court development. This development enabled a small reduction in the number of households in temporary accommodation for a few weeks. However, going forward there are delays in the expected completion of new affordable home developments which compounds the challenge for the Housing service.
- The number of households placed in temporary accommodation out of area has increased significantly since Q2. There are a number of reasons for this including: the number of households presenting as homeless has increased; all local authorities are facing the same homelessness pressures and are competing for a limited pool of temporary accommodation units, comprising of self-contained homes and shared rooms, which results in the service having to take TA units wherever they are available.

- The percentage of homeless relief cases closed with a successful outcome was 67%, exceeding the 60% target and improving on Q2. This KPI measures the outcomes for those clients whose relief duty has been closed this quarter. Relief cases include households the council has provided temporary accommodation for because they are homeless. The service has continued to exceed the target of 60% despite the dwindling supply of homes from housing associations and little availability of affordable private rented accommodation available locally for these households to move on.
- The percentage of successful homeless preventions also showed improvement since Q2 and exceeded the 60% target at 74%. Prevention cases involve households who are not yet homeless, so the council works with them to source alternative homes before they become actually homeless.
- There were 2 new homes for social rent handed over in Q3. The 2 properties were Local Authority Housing Fund (LAHF) social rent lettings. LAHF properties are second hand purchases, not new developments. The ambition is 120 new homes by 2026. This year, 27 properties in total have been handed over for social rent. A full report on progress on this KPI will be provided in Q4.
- Q3 results were on track for both Central and Woodside Leisure centre usage. There was a small dip in throughput, membership and swimming lesson take up, causing these indicators to be outside the quarterly target, however this an expected trend over the Christmas period. Swimming lesson take up was slightly lower than expected but not of concern.
- Customer satisfaction with sports and leisure centres remained high with 95% of customers rating the service at 7 or above (out of 10). Contract Managers continue to promote an open-door policy for any queries and have customer forums at least twice a year.

A council working for our community and serving our residents

- Looking at customer experience measures, self-service levels were above target at 79%, the highest result achieved this year. The number of telephone calls answered has improved since Q2 and is now exceeding the target. Telephone waiting time to the CSC has seen a significant jump since Q2, going from below target due to staffing challenges over the summer period, to well within target in Q3.
- The FOI response within timescales was 92%. Much improved on Q2 (78%) but still outside the 100% target.
- The result for the indicator relating to staff sickness was within target. Numbers of long and short-term sickness remained similar to Q2.
- Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates collection are both on track to be within target at the end of the year, and similar to results this time last year. Percentage of Housing benefit classified as 'LA error' is 0.29% higher than

this time last year due to one large LA error paid in Q1, however it has been reducing steadily throughout the year as expected and is currently below the target threshold.

- The number of customers signed up to digital/email as preferred contact channel improved in Q3 to 77%. Complaints response time showed slight improvement at 68% compared with Q1 (65%). New functionality in the Firmstep complaints module was implemented in November that will ask officers to add a reason why a complaint has been answered late. It is hoped this will enable better insight as to how this result can be improved. A breakdown reasons for late responses will be provided in the Q4 reporting.
- Several new KPI's related to Customer satisfaction by contact channel were added as part of the KPI review, and the metrics are based around the percentage of customers who have given a positive rating of the service received. The contact channels assessed in Q3 were website, telephone and digital. Customer satisfaction for digital channels has dropped slightly since Q2, and is now just outside of target, with 86% of customers giving the service a positive rating. Telephone satisfaction also has dropped in Q3 (79%) when compared with Q2 (97%). The CSC went live with a new SMS feedback channel in October. This means *all* customers that called via a mobile phone were given the opportunity to leave feedback. It has been noted, however, that feedback received since going live with SMS has been more constructive, and this is shared with all services during regular monthly meetings, enabling improvements where needed. Website satisfaction remained steady at 43% - the lowest rating of all channels measured. Most poor ratings related to customers using the website to pay a Penalty Charge Notice. A review of all parking content of the website took place during Q3, and changes will be implemented in Q4, which will hopefully result in improvement in this area.
- The result for speed of processing Housing Benefit (HB) Claims is an average of 6 days, 1 day within target and an improvement on Q2. The service receives very few HB claims, so it only takes a couple of claims to take the maximum amount of time given to process (30 days) for it to impact on processing times. The service continues to closely monitor each new Housing Benefit claim received and actively chase customers several times a week to encourage them to supply the documentation required to process their claim.
- The result for the average time to process a change of circumstances was 6 days. An improvement on Q2 and within target.

8.0 Key Council Strategies

- 8.1 Aligned to the Council Plan are a number of key strategies which guide the organisation's delivery of services in a number of specific areas. These strategies have each been approved individually by Cabinet and, in line with our ambition to strengthen delivery across the council, updates on these

strategies are included as part of this quarterly Performance and Progress report.

- 8.2 These are attached at Appendix C and are intended to give an overview of progress over the past period, highlight the key activities for the next period and provide key pieces of information about the particular area of delivery.

9.0 Implications

9.1 Financial

9.1.1 When setting the budget for 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to 2026/27, Portfolio Holders agreed a set of budget principles to help guide the identification of savings. The first of these principles was to ‘prioritise our Council Plan commitments when we make financial and budget decisions.’ The Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy is therefore aligned with the Council Plan.

9.1.2 The Council’s budget underpins the whole of the Council Plan and Delivery Plan, ensuring that appropriate financial resources are available to meet the commitments.

9.1.3 The Chief Finance Officer comments that there are no further financial implications arising from the contents of this report.

9.2 Legal issues (Monitoring Officer)

9.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the Council Plan is one of the policy framework documents listed in the constitution that has to be approved by Council. The plan was approved by Council on 13 June 2022.

10.0 Risks

Nature of risk	Consequence	Suggested control measure	Response (treat, tolerate, terminate, transfer)	Risk rating (combination of severity and likelihood)
Slippage on delivery of the Council Plan	Failure to deliver our commitments resulting in poorer outcomes for	Regular monitoring and reporting to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny	Treat	3 (severity) x 2 (likelihood) = 6

	our town and residents. Potential impact on the reputation of the Council.	Robust project and programme management		
Failure to recognise milestones / completion of commitments	Lost opportunity to celebrate success internally and externally	Regular monitoring and reporting to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Robust project and programme management Clear communication of milestones / achievements	Treat	3 (severity) x 2 (likelihood) = 6
Failure to promote and recognise the Council's strategic approach and culture that is focused on delivery and outcomes	Lost opportunity to embed a renewed strategic approach and culture that ensures Watford BC remains a high performing, innovative and agile organisation	Regular, robust and accurate reports for Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny that is owned across service areas Linking delivery to staff and team objectives	Treat	3 (severity) x 1 (likelihood) = 3
Slippage on delivery of the key strategies	Failure to deliver our commitments to staff potentially resulting in failure to deliver our Council Plan.	Regular monitoring and reporting to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny	Treat	3 (severity) x 2 (likelihood) = 6

		Robust project and programme management.		
Failure to scrutinise organisational performance	Potential for performance to slip with consequences for quality of service delivery	Robust scrutiny and challenge	Treat	3 (severity) x 2 (likelihood) = 6
Failure to respond to issues with organisational performance	Potential for issues with performance not to be addressed, and for poor performance to continue	Response to issues identified monitored by Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Leadership Board and Portfolio Holders.	Treat	3 (severity) x 2 (likelihood) = 6
Failure to provide transparency over organisational performance	Lack of understanding and trust related to organisational performance, particularly where performance is below the standard expected.	Ensure KPIs have sufficient commentary explaining the context around the quarterly results. Ensure portfolio holders have regular opportunities to review and discuss organisation performance.	Treat	3 (severity) x 2 (likelihood) = 6

11.0 Equalities and Human Rights

11.1 An Equality Impact Analysis (EIA) was developed for the Council Plan 2022-2026. This is consistently reviewed based on up-to-date information and data the council receives to ensure the council meets its public sector equalities under the s149 (1) of the Equality Act 2010.

12.0 Data Protection Impact Assessment

12.1 Having had regard to the council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not

required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

13.0 Sustainability

13.1 The council's commitment to sustainability runs through the Council Plan and a range of actions to deliver our climate change commitments are identified within the Delivery Plan. These range from pushing forward with delivering greener ways to travel in Watford to promoting Watford's transition to a low-carbon economy. Indeed, an entire theme is devoted to delivering 'a brighter, greener future' with a whole range of activities planned to meet our sustainability commitments.

14.0 People Implications

14.1 The Council Plan sets the Council's strategic direction, and is, therefore, a key document for staff, enabling them to understand our commitments and priorities and allowing them to contribute fully to our success and achievements. As the overarching plan for the Council, it provides the framework for all our strategies and policies and links, through the Delivery Plan, to service business plans and individual staff objectives and outcomes. The principles demonstrate how we go about our work and are an important guide for staff on the Council's expectations recognising it is not just what we deliver but how we deliver that is a measure of our organisational culture.

15.0 Community Safety/Crime and Disorder

15.1 Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires the Council to give due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of its functions on crime and disorder in its area and to do all it reasonably can to prevent these. Our theme: A diverse, happy and healthy town, underpins our commitment to 'promote our welcoming and respectful town' and the associated action to 'ensure everyone feels welcome, included and safe in Watford' and to 'establish our commitment to the wellbeing of women and girls' by working with partners and using our statutory powers.

16.0 Next steps

16.1 In order to improve transparency of our corporate performance, a designated web page has been created providing a single location for the Council Plan 2022-26, Delivery Plan 2022-24 and key strategies to be publicly accessible. Alongside these strategies, the Performance and Progress reports will also be available.

17.0 Appendices

- Appendix A –Delivery Plan 2022-24 progress update
- Appendix B –Key Performance Indicators update Q3 2023-24
- Appendix C1 – Economic Growth Strategy 2022-26
- Appendix C2 – Customer Experience Strategy 2022-26
- Appendix C3 – Sustainability Strategy 2023-30
- Appendix C4 – Transforming Travel in Watford Strategy
- Appendix C5 – Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-26
- Appendix C6 - Cultural Strategy 2018-25

18.0 Background papers

- Watford Borough Council: Council Plan 2022-26
- Watford Borough Council: Delivery Plan 2024-26
- Economic Growth Strategy 2022-26
- Customer Experience Strategy 2022-26
- Sustainability Strategy 2023-30
- Transforming Travel in Watford Strategy
- Community Engagement and Participation Strategy 2023-26
- Cultural Strategy 2018-25