

Report to: *Other (please specify)*

If other: *Overview and Scrutiny Committee*

Date of meeting: *20 September 2023*

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 – Q1 2023/24*

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 Following the Mayoral election last year, in June 2022 Watford Borough Council launched its new Council Plan which sets 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 both 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 key performance indicators for Q1 of 2023/24.
- Key corporate strategies

1.2 The updates reflect the positive outcomes that have been achieved over the first quarter of 2023/24. The progress achieved since the last update to Cabinet is shown in the updates 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 seen by our community 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 fifth of these updates since the approval of the new Council Plan.

1.4 As part of our drive for continuous improvement, a review of the council's key performance indicators across the organisation was undertaken in first part of

2023 with the support of both Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Appendix B reports against the newly agreed key performance indicators.

2.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny note:

2.1 The progress updates within this report relating to:

- the Council Plan 2022-26 and Delivery Plan 2022 -24 (Appendix A)
- the key performance indicator results for Quarter 1 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*

3.2 Final review body: *Cabinet*

3.2.1 Indicative date: *4 September 2023*

- **Contact Officer:**

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Reviewed and signed off by: Kathryn Robson, Director of Performance

4.0 Detailed proposal

4.1 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.

4.2 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.

4.3 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 5.5 and in associated Appendices (A, B and C).

4.4 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.

4.5 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, particularly at the senior level of the organisation and following the recent realignment of Tier 4 management of the council;
- 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 recently approved values and behaviours, is directed to our 'one team' approach, shared ownership of our corporate priorities and commitment to deliver

4.6 All of our plans and strategies are underpinned 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.

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

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

5.2 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.

- 5.3 Whilst the Council Plan has a four-year perspective, the Delivery Plan has been developed to focus on key priorities to 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.
- 5.4 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.
- 5.5 The full report can be seen an Appendix A but some key highlights, by Council Plan theme, are included below:

A greener brighter future

- In line with our commitment to invest in sustainable transport, a new Watford Car Club, in partnership with Enterprise Car Club, will be launching in the autumn 2023. The scheme, which will consist of six electric or hybrid vehicles for hire, will provide an affordable, convenient and environmentally friendly option for residents wishing to hire a car.
- Our Cassiobury Wetland project is now progressing with re-baselined key milestones and an agreed concept design which will see this area of biodiversity returned to life. £25k has also be awarded by the Landfill Communities Fund in order to help us realise this vision.
- Groundwork, our contractor on the River Colne programme, have obtained £100k funding from the Environment Agency to continue supporting our ambitions for the River Colne.
- Delivery of the council's Environmental Strategy 2023-30 has commenced. Through the Strategy we will work towards our ambition to achieve net zero carbon emissions for the borough by 2030.

An inspiring, thriving and creative town

- Watford's Place Brand, Narrative and Strategy was approved by Cabinet in July 2023 and will be launched in late summer 2023. The Strategy will be a key tool in promoting Watford as a great location for businesses, attract more visitors and support the local economy.
- We were a winner in the East of England Awards for Planning Excellence, winning in the category of 'Best Plan' for the 'Watford Local Plan 2021-2038: A Sustainable Town'.
- The decarbonisation and fabric repairs work to the Town Hall and Colosseum are now complete. The decarbonisation works were funded by a £3m Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme grant. Through this scheme the council has installed state of the art photovoltaic (PV) panels on the roof of the Town Hall and Colosseum, reducing the reliance on traditional power sources. The PVs are expected to save 24 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year. In addition a 30% saving in both gas bills and carbon emissions is expected due to the new cavity wall insulation.
- We are progressing the Colosseum refurbishment works and are meeting regularly with the new venue operator, AEG, to agree and finalise the design changes to the building.
- Local projects funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) are progressing well with good participation from the SME community. We have submitted the year 1 UKSPF return to DLUHC and have received confirmation for year 2 funding.

A diverse, happy and healthy town

- Practical completion for the New Crematorium was achieved in June 2023. The new facility, which is located in Hemel Hempstead, will serve residents in Watford, Dacorum, Hertsmere, Three Rivers and St Albans and will be opening in Q2.
- The Conservation Areas Management Plan was approved by Cabinet in June 2023. The action plans will ensure that we take the necessary steps to enhance and protect the historical features, and character, of different areas of the borough.
- The Easter 2023 holiday programme was successfully delivered and a scheme offering sessions to families via a local voluntary organisation was piloted with a good uptake by Watford residents.
- The Watford Community Lottery was launched and the first inaugural draw was held in June 2023. 60% of all ticket sales will go towards supporting our local community and good causes.
- To date 2,600 trees have been claimed via the county-wide tree giveaway, which will go towards increasing our green canopy.

- Following closures over Covid, the Healthy Hub at the Town Hall is open on Wednesdays for face-to-face drop-in appointments and once a month on a Friday for the HCC Health Improvement team to provide bookable appointments for Watford residents to have NHS health checks.

A council working for our community and serving our residents

- Through our Customer Experience Strategy we have launched the Customer Care Service Standards, which sets out what our customers can expect from us and how we will deliver our services by adopting best practice in line with the council's values.
- We participated in the 'South West Herts Great Big Green Week', a national campaign which aims to draw attention to climate change. A number of fun and educational events were held across Watford and Three Rivers including a Palace Family screening of Lorax, Watford Green Gym and Watford Green Market.
- We successfully delivered the May 2023 Local Elections in compliance the Electoral Commission Guidance and some aspects of the Elections Act 2022, such as the Voter Photo ID, which is now a requirement.
- The Information & Insight Strategy (formally the Business Intelligence Strategy) and Delivery Plan were approved in June 2023. The Strategy sets out how we will achieve our vision of an organisation driven by intelligence to meet the demands of our customers and continue to provide high quality services.
- We showcased the implementation of our agile working approach at the Local Government Association Conference. This included a video message from our staff and members on the benefits of agile working and how this has improved their work life balance.

6.0 Key Performance Indicators

- 6.1 Our key performance indicators underpin our Council Plan by ensuring that the organisation continues to perform against a range of measures.
- 6.2 The measures highlighted within this report have supported the delivery of good quality services (both internal and external) 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.
- 6.3 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 45 indicators measured in Q1, 42 of those had targets set. Out of the 42 indicators with new, more challenging

targets, 23 exceeded targets, 4 were outside of the target but within tolerance and 15 were outside of the target. Some key highlights, by Council Plan theme, are included below:

- Average time to process housing benefit claims was 1 day outside of target, but within tolerance. This is the first dip in results after 15 months of being within target. Fewer Housing Benefit claims coming in means that a small number of claims taking the full term to process has impacted the figures. The recent addition of new automation should improve this figure during the next quarter. Average time to process a change of circumstances was also outside of target, but within tolerance. Due to a third-party error, the service needed to manually process several hundred rent increases which would have normally been automated. This took a significant amount of resource, and impacted processing times.
- Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates collection are both on track to be within target at the end of the year, and up on results this time last year. During Q1 the online Discounts and Exemptions form was launched, which is increasing automation and resulting in faster awards of Discounts and Exemptions. % of Housing benefit classified as 'LA error' was outside of the target, and above this time last year. This result is primarily due to an overpayment in one case which occurred in April. Whilst this result is over the threshold and therefore won't attract a subsidy, it is early in the year, and more expenditure throughout the year will reduce the LA Error overpayment figure over time.
- Processing of Major and Other planning application types was well within target. Processing of Minor planning application types was just outside of target by 1%.
- Looking at customer experience measures, Self service levels and telephone calls answered both exceeded targets. Customer call-backs are now being offered on all calls coming into the CSC, and as a result less calls should be abandoned.
- Telephone waiting time to the CSC was just outside of target by 1%, but within tolerance. This was due to increased demand face to face for the Housing service. In addition, system faults affected phonelines for over 2 hours in total during April and June. In May the service exceeded the target by 5%.
- FOI response time remained strong at 91%, but still below target of 100%, reflecting the complexity of some of the requests the council receives.
- Several new KPIs 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 Q1 were website, telephone and digital. All three contact channels were below target, although telephone was just under target, with 97% of customers giving

a positive rating. Digital was below this at 85%, and the website was the lowest at 42%. It is worth noting that, of the website feedback received, 68% relates to Parking, and comments tended to relate to dissatisfaction at being issued a PCN rather than the website itself. Face to face customer satisfaction is not currently being measured and will be introduced in line with the new Town Hall opening.

- The other 2 new KPIs related to customer experience were customers signed up to digital/email as preferred contact channel and complaints response time. Both were outside of the target for Q1, although not by a significant amount. Further promotion of online services, via the delivery of our Customer Experience Strategy, should help to improve this figure over the next quarter.
- Leisure Centre usage, swimming lesson sign-up and membership increased for most indicators for both Central and Woodside centres. There was a slight reduction in swimming lessons take up at Woodside, however this is expected to level out in the coming months. There was a free 'gym and swim' offer running from the 3rd to the 14th April, plus a sales promotion offering a £1 joining fee during April. A Personal Trainer Launch day in May generated £2,000 of income.
- The number of parking penalty charge notices issued in Q1 was 8,632.
- There were 11 verified rough sleepers at the end of June, and of those, four were new. Five of the verified rough sleepers currently in Watford have no recourse to public funds so cannot be assisted under the homelessness legislation or through private rented accommodation as they cannot have access to welfare benefits. The service are continuing to explore options for how these rough sleepers can be supported.
- The numbers of households living in temporary accommodation has been over 100 since November 2022, and rose in Q1 to 148. All local authorities are experiencing increased levels of homelessness as a result of the economic climate. The reasons for homeless include private landlords selling their homes in greater numbers than before or wanting to relet at higher rents (perhaps linked to increased mortgage interest rates); more family and friends unable to accommodate (likely to be linked to cost of living increases). In addition to increased numbers of people requiring TA, there is increasing difficulty in finding settled accommodation to help people move on from TA. Affordability of homes is a significant issue, with the LHA and wages not increasing, meaning most private rental costs are unsustainable, and even social housing costs are unaffordable for some residents. In addition, there have been delays in completions of large new social housing due to development stalling or going into liquidation.
- There are 4 new KPIs relating to Housing. The number of homeless relief cases closed with a successful outcome was well below the 60% target at 36%. The number of successful homeless preventions exceeding the 60% target at 63%.

- The number of Homeless households in Temporary Accommodation out of area was 18, over the target of 3 or less. This is linked to the delays in handovers of new homes, and an increase in the number of homeless applications during the quarter. This resulted in the council having to source additional units from the market, which is usually situated outside the borough. There is stiff competition for hotel and nightly let accommodation arising from other local authorities also dealing with increased homelessness applications. London Boroughs are routinely placing their clients within Watford hotels, and also providing significant incentives to private sector landlords.
- Number of new homes for social rent handed over in Q1 was 13, on track for the yearly target for 40. The ambition is 120 new homes by 2026.
- The result for the indicator relating to staff sickness was well within target as usual, and the lowest figure reported since Q2 2022. Long term sickness remained low in Q1 and an improvement on levels recorded last year. Short-term sickness was the lowest recorded since Q1 2022, and was almost half the level recorded in Q1 last year.
- Beryl Bike usage is a new KPI for Q1 and results are similar to last year with 30,393 journeys made in Q1. Beryl Bike usage is seasonal, with Q1 and Q2 expected to be higher than Q3 and Q4 when the weather is colder. Usage is on track to achieve the target of 115,000 journeys this year.
- There are new KPIs included for Community Protection, relating to pest control and fly-tipping. Pest control response time exceeded the target set, with 99.50% of initial treatments carried out within 10 working days. Fly tip response for both standard and urgent requests also exceeded targets with 97.67% and 100% respectively of fly-tip cases responded to within timescales.
- Residual household waste was just outside of the new, more challenging target agreed as part of the KPI review, but within tolerance. Q1 is an estimated result as June's data isn't yet available from HCC. The annual target should still be achievable. Waste recycled and composted was within target.
- The Watford Market occupancy rate is a new KPI for Q1, which measures the number of market units which are occupied with rent paying traders. A good result was achieved, with 93.50% of the market units occupied.
- Levels of litter and graffiti were both within target, with litter slightly increasing compared with Q1 last year, and graffiti decreasing. The fly-posting score outside of target, with the main issue caused by non-compliant posters advertising an event in Cassiobury Park (accounting for a 1% loss in performance). The detritus score has significantly increased from 6.46% last year to 9.71% this year. This is a result of an agreed service change to reduce the frequency of overnight cleansing of high-speed roads, in order to make a cost saving.

7.0 Key Council Strategies

- 7.1 Aligned to the Council Plan are a number of key strategies which guide the organisations' 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 will be included within the quarterly Performance and Progress reports reviewed by Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 7.2 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.

8.0 Implications

8.1 Financial

8.1.1 The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy is aligned with the Council Plan to ensure that the commitments within the Plan are resourced. The Council's budget underpins the whole of the Council Plan and Delivery Plan. The importance of the budget is recognised under the theme 'A Council working for our community and serving our residents' with the related commitment being 'Focus and challenge how we manage our budget so it is concentrated on delivering our commitments and securing greater investment for Watford'.

8.1.2 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no further financial implications arising from the contents of this report.

8.2 Legal issues (Monitoring Officer)

8.2.1 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.

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

	to staff potentially resulting in failure to deliver our Council Plan.	Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny 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

8.4 Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection

8.4.1 Equalities

8.4.1.1 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.

8.4.2 Data Protection Impact Assessment

8.4.2.1 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.

8.5 Sustainability

8.5.1 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.

8.6 People Implications

8.6.1 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.

8.7 Community Safety/Crime and Disorder

8.7.1 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.

9.0 Next steps should recommendations be approved

9.1 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.

10.0 Appendices

- Appendix A –Delivery Plan 2022-24 progress update
- Appendix B –Key Performance Indicators update Q1 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

11.0 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