



Maximising Council Resources

Thematic Progress Update
November 2021

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 sets out the progress the Council has made in achieving the key actions set out in the 2021/22 thematic delivery plan and I'm pleased that significant progress has already been made across this theme area.

We continue to implement our new, easier to use computer systems and have also connected our phone system to the computer systems meaning that our customers can switch between online and phone seamlessly. We have also made good progress in ensuring that all staff are aware of how they contribute to the success of A Plan for West Devon across the Council with all staff having an Appraisal scheduled as part of our performance management framework.

This is the first performance report aligned to A Plan for West Devon with some of the key achievements being:

- ✓ **New Performance Management Framework implemented with all Senior Managers having had an appraisal which will now be rolled out to their teams**
- ✓ **Our new customer facing computer system (known as Netcall) has gone live and been in use for 12 months**
- ✓ **Contract awarded and implementation underway for a new Human Resources, Payroll and Employee Performance Management system**

7 Activities on Track and within budget	3 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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Over the coming pages, we set out more in-depth update for each action along with the wider benefits to our communities.

While we continue to await details of the Councils final budget settlement for next year, we are pleased to see that we should be provided with a three year settlement, providing us with more certainty about the funding available to us than in many recent years.

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

There are a number of different systems currently being implemented that will improve the way that our customers access our services online or on the phone. This is known as the Future IT Project (or FIT Project for short). Key highlights for this period include:

Systems for applying for (or commenting on) planning permission - The team continue to work towards a go-live date of 23rd November. Dashboards are in place. The public planning search is configured and enables anyone interested in a planning application to download all of the associated documents with just one click. It will also enable separate tabs for letters of representation.

Environmental Health systems – This system will ensure that our environmental health team can track customers’ cases from the point they are received right through to closure of the case. The food inspection mobile solution which enables officers to carry out inspections and complete the assessments directly in the system while on the premises is currently the subject of training for officers. This is due to be completed on 5th November. Feedback from the service has been positive. A recent upgrade to the new system has enabled the automatic production of Food Standards Agency reports from the new system.

Customer Facing systems – ‘Report-It’ The system we use to enable our customers to report issues to the Council has been in use for 12 months now. Process deployment continues with over 50 processes now live with demonstrable financial savings. One example of this was our ability to quickly design computer systems to enable us to process Covid-19 business grants and emergency welfare grants without requiring a significant financial investment.

Our internal Accountancy System. - Work has begun to upgrade our Accountancy systems to provide a better internal customer experience and a more stable platform. This will provide our budget holders with easier access to financial information, enabling them to make effective financial decisions and continue to provide good value for money services.

HR, Payroll and Staff Performance Management – Our current Payroll system is outdated and the supplier intends to no longer provide technical support. As a result, we have awarded a contract to a well-established public sector Payroll and HR system provider, Midland Itrent. Work has commenced to extract existing data from our current system, for the migration into the new one. The new system will enable our staff with better access to employment information and also provide our managers with real time data about their teams.

Key Risks / Issues

Significant risks arise from insufficient resources within the business to support the FIT project whilst simultaneously maintaining acceptable performance levels. Concerns around suppliers’ capacity to rapidly address issues arising from testing, in a timely way.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Planning Go Live – By end of November 2021.
- Environmental Health Go Live of all remaining modules – early 2022
- Introduction of mobile solutions for Planning and EH
- Completion of migration of all documents into the Information @ Work DMS.

What difference will this make?



Implementing new customer friendly computer and telephone systems will mean that our customers get the services they need as simply as possible and means our staff can carry out their work efficiently.

- Users of our Planning Application portal will be able to download all documents related to an application at the single click of a button
- Our Environmental Health Officers will be able to complete food inspection reports while at a premises with the information instantly available in the system
- Our internal staff will have easier, real time information related to finance and staff performance – enabling better business decisions

Overall Rating	AMBER –Risks are being managed but we are at a critical point and significant management is required at this stage
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Action R1.2 – Ensure we manage the Council’s performance effectively

Key Highlights and benefits

Alongside the adoption of ‘A Plan for West Devon’, Councillors also approved the new performance management framework (Pages 36-40 of the [delivery plan](#)). The framework sets out how we will monitor and report on progress against our priorities. We have forward planned ‘Thematic Delivery Updates’ for the next 6 months of Scrutiny meetings to ensure that regular progress updates are provided to Councillors.

Alongside this, the Head of Strategy will support the Senior Leadership Team to maintain oversight of all deliverables within the Plan for West Devon by implementing a monthly reporting process. This will see the lead staff members for each action providing a short, written update by the 10th of each month including a Red /Amber/Green assessment of action progress. These reports will then be provided to each Lead Councillor so that they can hold staff to account for delivery of the actions.

Work continues to develop a suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPI’s) for the Council aligned to the Plan for West Devon. The new KPI’s will mean that we can monitor how responsive we are to our customers’ needs and also allow us to compare our performance to other Councils. The aim is for the KPI’s to be adopted by Hub Committee in December 2021.

Key Risks / Issues

The key risk is around failure to design and adopt new KPI’s meaning that we’re not able to clearly demonstrate to our customers how the Council is performing.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Seek approval from Hub Committee for the revised Key Performance Indicators – Dec 21
- Launch the monthly reporting scheme for Plan for West Devon Action owners – Dec 21

What difference will this make?

Implementing the new performance management system will ensure that we focus on delivering on the right things for West Devon and that our Councillors can clearly see how our plans are making a difference within the Borough.

- Performance against A Plan for West Devon will be scrutinised by Councillors
- We will be able to see how we are performing against other similar Councils

Overall Rating	GREEN – ON TRACK
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Action R1.3 – Carry out reviews of services in order to improve the customer experience

Key Highlights



It is important that the Council keeps its services under review, ensuring that they have the right resources, policies, tools and training to provide a good customer service and value for money. The first review undertaken has been of the Development Management (Planning) Service. This review was supported by specialist advice and input from the Local Government Association Planning Advisory Service. One of the first actions to be implemented is the addition of extra Planning and Legal staff to support the high volumes of planning applications that the Council receives.

A review of the Revenues and Benefits Service is also underway in order to ensure it is maximising the Services' financial recovery whilst ensuring that our customers are being supported in the best possible way. This service has seen a significant increase in work linked to our response to Covid-19 and it is likely that workload will continue to remain high as the impacts of Covid-19 and cost of living pressures increase. It is therefore important that we consider how this team operate in the future to remain as responsive as possible.

Within the last month the Senior Leadership Team have reviewed how we structure other parts of the Council to better meet the needs of our residents. As a result of the review, we have appointed an interim Head of Waste Services to oversee the management of the Waste Contract following the retirement of the previous post holder. The Development Management Service has now moved to within the Governance Directorate, the Finance Team have moved under the Director of Finance and our Head of Housing, Revenues and Benefits will now change to focus solely on supporting our priorities around Housing. Revenues and Benefits will temporarily be managed by the Business Manager (Specialists) until the service review of Revenues and Benefits has been concluded.

Combined, these changes will mean a more even spread of services across the Senior Leadership Team, ensuring enhanced support and management for those teams.

Key Risks / Issues

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.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Scope and commence Contact Centre review
- Agree forward plan of other service reviews

What difference will this make?

Ensuring that our services are reviewed regularly will mean that we are responsive to the needs of that services customers. Following a review of our Development Management (Planning) service, it was identified that additional staff were needed to deliver a quality level of service. These posts will be recruited to in the coming weeks.

Overall Rating

GREEN – ON TRACK

Action R1.4 – Manage and Support our employees to deliver the best possible service

Key Highlights



Ensuring our employees are managed and supported is critical to the success of the Council and the delivery of our priorities as set out in A Plan for West Devon.

While employees have had ongoing management and Personal Continuous Improvement discussion each year, we feel that now is the time to re-implement annual appraisals for all staff.

The new annual appraisal and objective setting process will see every employee having an annual objective setting discussion with their manager (or other logical senior officer) to set clear objectives to support A Plan for West Devon, provide a quality customer experience and deliver on key service objectives. The Chief Executive, Senior and Extended Leadership Teams have all held their annual appraisal and objective setting discussions with the rest of the staff having an appraisal by February 2022.

This is a positive step forward in managing performance across the Council.

To support the staff performance management process in the future, we have purchased a new HR and Payroll system. The current system is outdated and does not offer functionality for central recording of individuals' objectives. The new software, provided by Midland Itrent will be implemented across both West Devon and South Hams for all staff and members to use with staff being able to record their objectives and gain feedback from managers in the system.

Following an incredibly busy 20 months during the Covid pandemic, we will be recognising outstanding performance by staff through a Staff Awards event which will be held in December 2021.

Key Risks / Issues

- The key risk is related to the implementation of the new HR and Payroll system. We will undertake a two month parallel run with our current system in order to ensure that the system operates correctly.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Continue to deliver appraisals for all staff so that everyone has been appraised by February 2022
- Staff awards scheduled for December 2021 to highlight excellent performance

What difference will this make?

Implementing an annual appraisal is an opportunity for us to set out clear and measurable targets for our staff. These will include targets around supporting the delivery of A Plan for West Devon, a focus on responding to customers in a timely manner and individual service improvement activities. It will also be an opportunity for employees to highlight anything that is preventing them from being even better performing.

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 the new '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.

We are currently reviewing the budget position for 2022/23 following the spending review 2021 announcement. A budget workshop for all Members is scheduled for 16th November and will focus on updating Members on the impacts of the spending review announcement, other known pressures and any opportunities. This will enable Members to fully consider the budget for 2022/23 in the coming months. The final budget will be considered in February 2022.

Key Risks / Issues

Car parking income continues to be significantly impacted as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. A full position on this will be presented with the next budget monitoring report in December.

There is a risk that unpredicted events occur that may impact on our budget. We cannot fully understand the potential impacts of a Covid resurgence over the winter months which could impact on Council income particularly in respect of Car Parking. We are however developing plans to promote our highstreets over the winter months and in to the Spring which will hopefully encourage more people to visit and spend time in our towns.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Budget workshop – 16th November
- 2022/23 budget will be considered by Council in February 2022.
- In April, our Finance team will commence closure of accounts and begin work to establish 2021/22 financial outturn

What difference will this make?

In order to deliver core services such as Waste, Revenues and Benefits, Housing etc. the Council must set a balanced budget annually. If we were to find ourselves in a position where we could not set a balanced budget, we would be required to look at making service changes to reduce our costs.

Overall Rating

GREEN – On Track

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

Key Highlights

The intention is for a multi-year Spending Review (SR2021) for three years from 2022/23 to 2024/25.

There were single year Spending Reviews in 2019 and 2020. Spending Review 2021 therefore represents the first return to multi-year settlements since 2015.

For Local Government there will be an average real-terms increase of 3% in core spending power (However core spending power includes Council Tax and New Homes Bonus funding so we will need to see the detail of this with the Finance Settlement announced later)

£4.8billion of grant funding will be available to local government over the next three years, the equivalent of £1.6billion a year.

Key Risks / Issues

While we may be given a multiyear settlement, there are still unknowns that will impact on the budget – for example, the Pay Award for Council staff has tended to be agreed annually. For each 1% pay rise awarded each year, the Council has to find an additional amount of funding.

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

- Chancellor announces Local Government Settlement – December 2021

What difference will this make?



Securing the Council's longer term financial sustainability will mean that we can work with our communities to make West Devon an even better place to live, visit and do business.

We have agreed a three year funding plan to deliver on our aspirations as set out in A Plan for West Devon but we must also look beyond that to ensure we can continue to deliver on our vision.

A multiyear spending review (where the Government give us assurances over the levels of funding available for more than one year) will mean we can plan further ahead than normal (as in recent years we've only been given one year's confirmation of funding).

Overall Rating	Amber – due to longer term uncertainty
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Action R1.7 – Identify Opportunities to Spend More Locally

Key Highlights

We have commenced analysis of current Council spend to identify how much is spent within the Borough, how much is spent within Devon and how much is spent further afield. Alongside this will be a first assessment of areas of spend that we could target to procure locally. This will be considered by the Resources Advisory Group early in 2022.

Key Risks / Issues

There is a risk that we are not able to procure the services 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

- Review business case for a local supplier portal which will enable local suppliers to register and then the Council can purchase goods from them through the portal.
- Schedule a local supplier engagement event for Spring 2022

What difference will this make?

This action could support our economy by actually ensuring that more of the Council's budget is spent in the local area. It could also potentially support our climate ambitions with local deliveries being much better for the environment than goods coming from further away.

Overall Rating	AMBER - uncertainty around how much we can increase local spend until analysis undertaken. We will then be able to set a target.
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Action R1.8 – Work Across Devon to increase efficiency and share services where it means you get a better service

Key Highlights

We are currently having initial discussions to consider exploring options for closer working with other Devon Councils in respect of procurement support services.

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

What difference will this make?

Working with other Councils to buy similar goods and services may save us money by achieving better economies of scale. It would also mean that we can share best practice in buying goods and services and further develop public sector procurement expertise across Devon



Overall Rating	GREEN
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Action R1.9 – Lobbying for fairer funding for rural services

Key Highlights

The Council continue to be members 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

What difference will this make?

Continuing to work with the Rural Services Network means that we can have a much louder voice when lobbying for fairer funding than lobbying by ourselves. We want to ensure that the funding we receive in the future acknowledges the additional cost of delivering services in rural West Devon.

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

Key Highlights

The Council has an annual income from its employment estates of over £330,000 per annum (with the current occupancy rate being 87.3%).

We have just completed two new leases on Tavistock Business Centre (Pitts Cleave) which means that it now has 75% occupancy. The Council’s Investment Property portfolio continues to generate an ancillary net income for the Council in the region of £300,000 per annum.

We also continue to consider the opportunities for maximising use of Kilworthy Park. The Council Chamber at Kilworthy Park requires an upgrade to the IT systems including microphones as the current equipment is reaching end of life and spares can no longer be ordered. A report will be considered by the Hub Committee as part of the 2022/23 Capital Proposals.

Key Risks / Issues

None

Looking ahead to the next 6 months

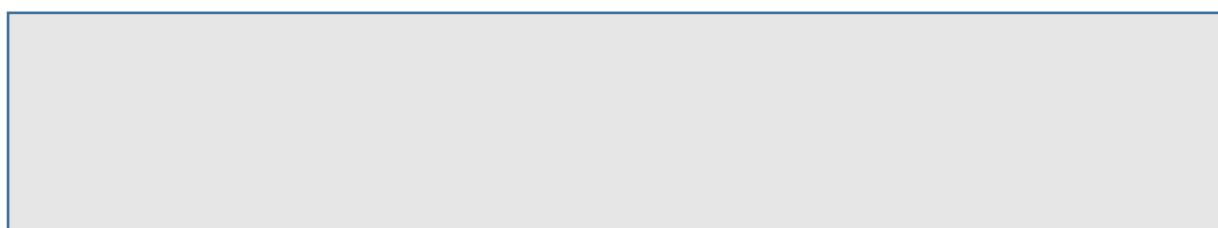
- Obtain quotes and specifications for new microphones and supporting IT equipment

What difference will this make?

Overall, ensuring we make the best use of Council assets will mean that we offer better value for money. Renting out space that would previously have been used by Council staff generates an income which contributes to the cost of our services. We also have a number of business units which offer space to local businesses. In addition to generating income for the Council, this has a benefit of supporting the economy in West Devon.

Updating the IT equipment in the Council Chamber will mean that our decision making meetings can continue to be streamed to the public, enabling everyone to scrutinise the work of the Council and increasing transparency of our decision making process. It will also mean that we can invite other partner agencies to our meetings ‘virtually’.

Overall Rating	GREEN
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This update will be considered by the West Devon Borough Council Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on Tuesday 16th November 2021.

You can view the meeting by visiting our  **YouTube** channel:

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

You can find out more about A Plan for West Devon by visiting

www.westdevon.gov.uk/plan-for-west-devon

