

Service Summary Sheet

Directorate	Chief Executive's Directorate		
Year	2023-24	Quarter	Q2 (Jul-Sep)
Benchmarking <i>with local authorities/nearest neighbours</i> <i>Please consider if a Delivering Better Outcomes proforma should be completed also.</i>			
<p>Chief Executives Office</p> <p>CPMO working with 'Local Partnerships' on where we can best utilise fully funded (HM Treasury & LGA) transformation support.</p> <p>Developing links with WMCA to enable the sharing of knowledge and ideas/knowledge regarding Verto, ADKAR/Change Management and your Project Management journey in general. We are also seeking to collaborate and drive efficiencies where possible – particularly around reporting and returns information on projects.</p> <p>Communications and Public Affairs</p> <p>Visit to Barnsley Council as Council of the Year (Municipal Journal and Local Government Chronicle) to learn more about their success story to guide future council planning and borough vision approach.</p> <p>Registration services regional training group developing mental capacity training for registrars.</p> <p>People and Inclusion</p> <p>The people and inclusion team undertook a number of benchmarking exercises during this period with comparisons made against all councils in the West Midlands region including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Benchmarking undertaken for first apprenticeships and care leavers project within Talent & Reward Benchmarking for Job Evaluation Benchmarking for standby/call out rates 			
Overview of service delivery <i>Include any issues / risks</i>			
<p>Chief Executives Office</p> <p>Successfully organised and supported the LGA Peer Challenge week in September including organising the timetable, meetings, resources, SharePoint site and supporting colleagues to in person and hybrid meetings.</p> <p>The CPMO Team continued activities around embedding the new Corporate Project Management Framework and the roll out of the Dudley Project Portal (VERTO365), directing initial efforts towards Regeneration & Enterprise. All directorates have now been approached and steady effort with the uploading of c.49 projects onto the Portal.</p> <p>The CPMO is collaborating with an external consultant to develop and roll out 'back2basics' Project & Change Management training across the wider council with a view to upskill colleagues and build sustainable project management capability across the organisation.</p> <p>Review of the Corporate Performance Management Framework in line with audit recommendations and to support the development of training materials on corporate performance.</p> <p>The team also undertook the review of the quarterly corporate performance report taking on board feedback from members and redeveloped the report to show scorecards and exception commentary by directorate and a summary of PI's and actions by council plan priority. The team also liaised with directorate performance leads to ensure the framework is followed and consistency of reporting to select committees.</p>			

Communications and Public Affairs

Communications strategy through to 2025 finalised, linking to Council Plan priorities and outlining communications approach including channels and key messages. Also feature in-year comms priorities as agreed through directorates and cabinet members. Approach shared and endorsed as part of LGA Peer Review.

People and Inclusion

Leadership/Management development – new cohorts commenced for the year two programmes and proposal for final year of the programme presented to and agreed by SEB. In addition, the discovery phase for the Dudley Manager was completed in readiness for pilot launch.

Learning & Development – completion of the discovery phase and configuration and testing for the Thrive Platform. Launch on track for 01 December 2023.

People Policy Review - The second phase of the people policies review was completed, reported findings to SEB on 25 July 2023. Work is underway on Phase 3 focussing on producing streamlined modern policies.

Health & Wellbeing - The new Occupational Health Provider commenced on 1st June 2023 and transfer of full records in process. Procurement of the new occupational health contract was completed in partnership with Public Health. There are several activities which are being undertaken as part of this contract, pre-employment checks, management referrals, pension appeals, health surveillance etc.

Workforce Planning - Completion of workforce planning workshops to Heads of service that has enabled completion of plans in line with new framework.

Recruitment - Following the confirmation of the preferred supplier via West Midlands Employers (TribePad) work has commenced in preparation for the new applicant tracking system, this will continue to improve the recruitment process and candidate experience. Consulted with procurement and Digital.

Car Parking - Proposals developed in conjunction with Environment, Corporate Landlord and Finance to introduce free car parking to staff working in the central campus.

CCNG – First meeting of the Council's Consultative Negotiating Group meeting for the 2023/24 year.

Service achievements

Report of any external accreditation, awards, positive publicity, during the past quarter

First whole directorate away day held at the end of September which included involvement from all areas of the directorate to plan and take part in the afternoon. Communication with staff will continue through feedback from the session.

Chief Executives Office

Senior officers from Shropshire Council contacted us after hearing about our Corporate Project Management framework and use of the Portal and we organised a show and tell on the Portal and they expressed they are willing to 'buy' our framework to support them on their own journey.

The Corporate Performance Team launched their first four training videos for staff on the performance framework. This includes information on the council plan and golden thread. With the aid of colleagues in People and Inclusion, the team are also exploring the videos being added to the new e-learning platform and inclusion in corporate induction and the Dudley Manager.

Communications and Public Affairs

Registration Services new online forms introduced, and 107 ceremony response forms completed to date.

Forging a Future for All borough vision top-level performance indicators that align the work of Dudley Council to Dudley Borough Vision have been identified. This will propose option to develop performance framework for vision and will be reported to the Forging a Future Executive on November 7.

Successful delivery of national level sporting event in the form of the British Cycling Dudley GP, together with the Musicom Festival at Himley Hall and Park (Saturday event at Himley cancelled due to high winds).

People and Inclusion

Funding secured from Commonwealth Games Legacy Fund (CWGLF) for additional resources to deliver our Grow Your Own Plan and development of our apprenticeships offer. Recruitment in progress.

EVP - Successful procurement exercise completed for external provider to develop our Employer Value Proposition (EVP) and employer branding. Contract started early October 2023.

EDI - Roll out of Equality Impact Assessment training and Menopause Champion training cohort.

Workforce planning - Completion of the workforce planning across the organisation which has embedded the changes identified in the workforce planning Audit and:

1. established a strengthened workforce planning framework and a 3 year planning cycle.
2. identified the corporate themes for focus.

Completion of high-level assessment of the equal pay risk in the wake of the Birmingham position and putting plans in place to strengthen the arrangements to further mitigate this, confirmation of these with external auditors via the Director of finance. Work has commenced to complete desktop review and put a moderation process in place (the latter) by 1st December 2023.

Children's Services Transformation - Successfully delivered the required HR elements of the Childrens services review that enabled the Children's Services director to implement the new family safeguarding model on time and without any significant ER issues (the timetable for this was externally recognised as being extremely challenging).

Opportunities for improvement

Information relating to service complaints / compliments and learning from these

Chief Executives Office

Whilst rolling out the utilisation of the Dudley Project Portal, there have been a number of 'continuous improvement' activities that have been brought to our attention. An action plan (configuration log) has been devised to keep tracked of these in order to maximise the use of the VERTO365.

The performance team have been contacted by peers in Sandwell and Birmingham councils who wish to share learning and experience. Meetings have been arranged for during Q3 and we hope to be able to use learning from the meetings to drive improvements to the performance framework and corporate performance reporting.

Duplication of performance reporting continues to be raised as an issue from directorates. We acknowledge there is some duplication between other reports and service summary sheets and continue to address this on a case-by-case basis.

People and Inclusion

HR Systems – we have identified potential solutions to enable us to provide a centralised database that holds all of the establishment management information. Work has already commenced on this in partnership with finance.

Any additional information relating to performance

Service Summary Sheet

Directorate	Digital, Customer and Commercial Services		
Year	2023/24	Quarter	2
Benchmarking <i>with local authorities/nearest neighbours</i> <i>Please consider if a Delivering Better Outcomes proforma should be completed also.</i>			
Digital & Customer Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No formal benchmarking, but we continue to engage with other Granicus councils to learn best practice process design 			
Technology Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No formal benchmarking but extensive engagement with Councils across the country. Regular meetings with strategic partners e.g., Microsoft, NEC, Virgin, EE to assess where we are on the development roadmap compared to our peers 			
Commercial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Due to commercial sensitivities no formal benchmarking data is available. Attendance & Membership of National Enterprising Council's Group to ensure we are identifying best practice opportunities. Engagement with Durham, East Riding, Shropshire, Wolverhampton, West Sussex and Walsall Councils on a wide range of projects to share best practice, ideas and opportunities. 			
Procurement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal benchmarking will take place at the end of q3/start of q4. 			
Overview of service delivery <i>Include any issues / risks</i>			
Digital & Customer Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer Services include council tax, benefits, switchboard, environmental, housing, and public health services. Other activities managed include managing the Councillor Contact and complaints process, Local Government Ombudsman casework, Tell Us Once, and Blue Badge. Customers use many channels to contact us: telephone, online self-service, email, social media, and in-person. Performance and consistency across customer services is improving. With the launch of MyDudley online services in Q3 we expect the volume & complexity of calls and in-person contact to change and a need to revisit the operating model. Forecasting has taken place and we will measure the impact against this. The Dudley Council Plus team have transferred the management of RMC into DC+ to offer consistency under single management team 			
Technology Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This service manages the deployment, development, monitoring, maintenance, upgrading and supporting of organisational IT systems, keeps the council safe through a cyber security programme, and supports staff and members by advising and managing all incidents, problems, and change/service requests We are on target to deliver the AV Technology for committee rooms 1 and 2. Cllr Technology refresh is in progress (50%+) accounts have been migrated successfully Server upgrade is in progress 100+ (70%) 2012 servers have been upgraded We have put more emphasis on governance and implemented TDA (Technical Design Authority) which is a design and cyber security gateway E5 License adoption is on track. 			

- Internal Firewalls to be replaced in Dec 2023. At the same time, our web filtering solutions will also be moved to the new firewalls.
- A new SAN solution to provide fast and resilient storage space has been procured and implementation is to commence in Nov/Dec 2023.
- A pilot to prove Robotic Process Automation is underway, aiming to deliver the first saving by December by replacing Columbus software.
- Key issues are the recruitment of specialised staff, transformation to the cloud, procurement, and deployment of new solutions, and funding for the transformation.

Commercial

- Connect2Dudley continuing to perform above target and is in profit month on month.
- Connect2TalentSolutions has gone live, first worker has been placed in a school, ahead of schedule.
- School meals transition project is progressing.
 - Impact on finances is within budget
 - Schools are driving forward – 15% have already left the service with a further 21% with a confirmed leave date – gaining traction
 - A full update report will be shared in Q3
- A range of significant projects have now commenced with commercial leading projects on:
 - Leisure Centre Cafes
 - Leisure Centre delivery
 - Brookes Bar & Bistro
- Robust dashboards, data analysis, monthly P&L are now being produced each month for the core commercial areas, these are shared with the Cabinet Member and the service area and enabling data driven commercial decisions.
- Full P&L for education traded services has been shared with the service area and an agreed approach to pricing for all traded services has been published in conjunction with finance.
- Review of proposed 24/25 fees and charges for Regen and Enterprise is almost completed and next phase is to review Environmental Directorate.

Procurement

- The service supports all council areas to maximise both cashable and non-cashable benefits from all third party spend.
- We have completed 9 tenders worth c.£2m this quarter.
- Key issues: continue the improvement programme which includes the development of category plans; retention and recruitment of specialist staff; culture change and rolling out the corporate approach to contract management.
- A key issue is the capacity of the team to carry out the work required.

Service achievements

Report of any external accreditation, awards, positive publicity, during the past quarter

Digital & Customer Services

- A two week roadshow including sixteen MyDudley engagement events resulted in over 3000 residents participating and offering their views and feedback.
- MyDudley is the sponsor for the Dudley Borough Community awards.

Technology Services

- We have successfully delivered AV technology in the council chamber
- Multi-factor authentication/Conditional Access has been rolled out to all staff
- MS Teams telephony migration has been piloted successfully. A full-scale rollout is in progress.

- Use of biometrics (face recognition or pin) to log into devices and self-user password reset has been deployed to all staff. We will focus on the adoption of this service. It will enhance the security of the user accounts to protect against any potential cyber-attacks.
- Decade-old firewalls have been refreshed successfully without any major issues.
- The service desk has achieved its targets i.e., meeting the SLA of 90% this quarter.

Commercial

- Connect2Dudley have submitted a nomination for the Dudley Borough Community Awards “New Business of the Year”

Procurement

- Procured a new e-tendering system that will lead to efficiencies
- Contract management framework developed

Opportunities for improvement

Information relating to service complaints / compliments and learning from these

Digital & Customer Services

- Bringing RMC under the management of DC+ will enable the management team to share best practice, identify opportunities for consolidation and efficiency and consistency of service

Technology Services

- Password reset from the single device to be implemented for all staff in the 3rd quarter of the year 2023-24. It will negate the need for a service desk call or requiring 2nd device for password resets
- Data classifications to be adopted in the 3rd quarter. It will the council to start classifying our data with email and document classification tags.

Commercial

- No formal compliments or complaints during this quarter
- Feedback via the Peer Review about the impact of decision making in service areas being impacted by the data provided by the Commercial team.

Procurement

- No formal compliments or complaints during this quarter
- Ongoing work to ensure council officers understand the consequences of not following the governance procedures.

Any additional information relating to performance

Service Summary Sheet

Directorate	Regeneration and Enterprise		
Year	2023-2024	Quarter	Q2 July to September
Benchmarking <i>with local authorities/nearest neighbours</i> <i>Please consider if a Delivering Better Outcomes proforma should be completed also.</i>			
Planning Nothing for this quarter.			
Economic Growth and Skills The teams across Economic Growth & Skills (EGS) are heavily involved with managing and delivering externally funded projects and programmes aligned to adult education and learning, employment and skills and business support related activity, with the monitoring of milestones, outputs and outcomes overseen by the Local Accountable Body (LAB) team. In addition, the Economic Intelligence Unit provide economic performance reporting on Dudley's economy comparing against sub regional, regional and national data sets. https://theeiu.iceblue-web.co.uk/			
Corporate Landlord Services			
Projects and Placemaking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some of the benchmarking that might provide insight and performance information for Projects and Placemaking is intrinsically linked with those used for other service areas – for example the team contributes significantly to assessment of planning applications and the production of the DLP. As the team is heavily involved with managing and delivering externally funded projects there are milestones, outputs and outcomes attached to each of these which are regularly monitored and reported on. An 'audit' of the Historic Environment Record (HER), by the Historic Environment team in accordance with process and criteria set by Historic England, has been completed and submitted to Historic England this quarter. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill may see HERs gaining statutory status. There are two interims in Regeneration and Enterprise who are working directly with the Projects and Placemaking team in different ways and bringing with them the experiences and comparison of working in other Local Authorities. 			
Culture, Leisure and Bereavement Services Bereavement Services – Annual cremation numbers are reported to the FBCA (Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities) annually.			
Overview of service delivery <i>Include any issues / risks</i>			
Planning Nothing for this quarter.			

Economic Growth and Skills

Employment & Skills

The provision of Post 16-18 within Dudley has remained stable in Q2 with the focus being to ensure there is sufficient and quality post 16 provision to allow young people to make the right choices to be active in the labour market, and this work has continued throughout Q2 23/24. With the ending of the Black Country Impact Programme in December 2023 which has supported 16 to 18 NEET activity (Not in Education Employment or Training) since 2016 there is a potential void in NEET provision given the follow UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) can only support 19+ provision. This is being discussed with Connexions colleagues who have responsibility for NEET activity in Dudley and potential funding via Commonwealth Games Legacy Enhancement Fund (Jobs and Skills pillar) is being earmarked.

Adult and Community Learning teams continued to perform well against all KPI's aligned to AEB funding and however, some of the Corporate PI's have been affected by the delayed UKSPF funding agreement with WMCA which meant that funding contracts were not agreed until early September 23 which delayed the procurement of activity in Dudley.

Black Country Impact programme is now in the final 3 months of delivery however it is intended to fund a scaled down version of Dudley Impact from Q1 2024/25 using UKSPF.

Business Support

Focus in Q2 has been on the development of the tender specification for an Information, Diagnostic, Brokerage and Account Management service using UK Shared Prosperity core business support funding. The tender went live during Q2 and it is anticipated that the appointed provider will be announced and delivery commence in Q3. A Business Start Up tender using UKSPF also went live in Q2 and it is similarly anticipated that the appointed provider will be announced and delivery commence in Q3. Officers also continued the development of UKSPF year 2 Communities & Place activity with tenders going live for Town Centre related activity in Dudley and Stourbridge.

Strategic development

The acquisition of 122 to 126 Colley Gate was completed in Q2 to facilitate the redevelopment of Colley Gate shops. Work also continued on the stalled & derelict sites programme following receipt of the Homes England funded report by Thomas Lister and Freeths in Q1

Corporate Landlord Services

Projects and Placemaking

- Continued training to support roll out of Project Portal with Back2Basics Project and change management training and ongoing engagement with the CPMO. Getting projects on the portal and colleagues familiar and confident with Verto continues to be a pressure due to competing demands but working through it step by step.
- Regen audit, alongside Project Management framework roll out, identified areas for strengthening and improvement. As a result, bitesize procurement refresher training has been delivered in a team meeting by Procurement with further sessions on finance and risk being lined up for the next quarter.
- Working Group taking forward regen audit actions has continued to meet, seeking to implement and embed with and alongside the PM Framework as far as possible. Some still need wider organisation decisions and clarity before they can be completed.
- Continued significant sustained input into DLP evidence base, plans, content and review.
- Changing Places Toilet at Cornbow signed off by MDUK completing the three Round 1 funded toilets. Work towards second round funded toilet at Stourbridge town hall commenced.
- Continued quarterly reporting and monitoring of externally funded projects including VLR/BCIMO, Low Carbon and Future High Streets Fund.

- Public Art – Covid Memorial Rainbow glass completed ready for metal frame, assembly and installation once the fabricator has capacity to do so following pinchpoint identified earlier in the summer. Cllr visits to meet the fabricator and see the Round Oak memorial in production undertaken, including one with ex-Round Oak workers.
- HID/Hippodrome – demolition of the Hippodrome undertaken.
- Portersfield consultation completed with overwhelming support for the proposals expressed in the 459 responses
- Interchange – CPO agreed by Government without requiring the enquiry following the completion of the land assembly programme through negotiation and removal of objections.
- Heritage Open Days organised and delivered in Dudley and Brierley Hill attracted good levels of interest and engagement, particularly in Brierley Hill where the Community Forum arranged a day of activities including that delivered by the team.
- Stourbridge project team continued to progress with the development of projects which are already funded and to scope the public consultation which will seek views an input to help access further funding. This is likely to face some delays due to many of the same staff also being heavily involved in the DLP work which has taken priority.
- Following Government's decision to stop HS2 a headline announcement of funding to the Mayor to complete delivery of Metro to Brierley Hill. Details of the funding, timescales etc yet to emerge. Delivery of Metro in Dudley town centre continues to be working towards being open to passengers Dec 24.
- Announcement of £20m endowment style funding for Dudley Town Centre under Government's new "Long Term Plan for Towns." This will require refresh of the Town Board by spring 2024 and development and agreement of an investment strategy to unlock the funding. Indications are that this is in addition to LUF 3 rather than being instead of it.
- Participated in the LGA Peer Review and awaiting the report to take on board reflections and recommendations.

Culture, Leisure and Bereavement Services

Red House Glass Cone - Work on the £1.5m project to renovate the cone is progressing well. The work is expected to be completed summer 2024.

Himley Play Area – Planning approval has now been granted, the play area installation will start in the new year, expected to open by Summer 2024.

Dudley Market - CLS working with HoS and Tudor Markets to re-configure stalls layout.

Bereavement Services – officers are in the process of designing and costing potential new burial land. A report will be taken to Informal Cabinet early next year. Also, £500k is in the Capital Programme to renovate Gornal Wood Crematorium, this work is scheduled to start later this year.

Halls – A programme of work to upgrade the technical equipment at Dudley Town Hall has started, this will allow for a more diverse range of shows.

Leisure Centres – work is ongoing looking at ways to make the centres more commercially viable.

Culture – Officers are looking to commission a borough-wide cultural strategy to support the borough's regeneration plans.

Service achievements

Report of any external accreditation, awards, positive publicity, during the past quarter

Planning

Nothing for this quarter.

Economic Growth and Skills

The service has seen positive press coverage for Adult and Community Learning teams following a visit by Andy Street as part of WMCA Digital devices project.



Corporate Landlord Services

Projects and Placemaking

- Opening of third of three round 1 funded Changing Places toilets – at Cornbow
- Successful Heritage Open Days at Dudley and Brierley Hill
- The refurbishment of the public toilets in Brierley Hill has now completed and the toilets re-opened on 9th October. The refurbished facilities include toilets with a baby change facility and a new disabled toilet. The works were supported by the Future High Streets Fund programme which is supporting a number of improvements to the High Street.
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Culture, Leisure and Bereavement Services

Leisure Centre memberships are now just under 7,000; this is the highest number of members the borough has ever had. Borough Halls continue to offer a high number of shows.

Opportunities for improvement

Information relating to service complaints / compliments and learning from these

Planning

Working with Local Authority Building Control on review of Dudley's Building Control Service. The review will inform an action plan for the service to aid delivery. The benefit will be to the customers who require building regulation approval.

Economic Growth and Skills

A Regeneration Strategy was commissioned in May 2023 for the delivery of a Dudley Regeneration Strategy and Action Plan. The strategy will seek to develop an understanding of the Borough's positioning in terms of the regional and sub regional economy and tease out what we do well and where are the deficiencies. This baseline will then underpin a review of the opportunities to create a prioritised action plan. The resulting regeneration strategy and action plan will provide a platform to promote the economic strengths of the borough to potential investors / businesses seeking to relocate and/or grow within the borough.

Q2 has seen a series of internal workshops undertaken and Q3 will see the commencement of external workshops with key stakeholders with the final strategy document due to be completed by the end of Q3 23/24 (December 23).

Corporate Landlord Services

Projects and Placemaking

- Actions identified in the Regeneration Audit continue to be implemented alongside the introduction of the Project Management Framework and Project Portal, and updated internal governance and board arrangements.
- The team undertook a quarterly review of the Service Plan. Additional activities identified demonstrating breadth of activity in the pipeline and underway but creating further pressures on resources and priorities. A result of which is a workflow assessment to review priorities and resources.

Culture, Leisure and Bereavement Services

Commissioning a Cultural Strategy will be a positive step for the Authority, ensuring close working with local community groups / artists etc.

Approval is being requested for a commission to consider the possible future use of Crystal Leisure Centre.

Approval is being requested for a strategic site masterplan for Himley.

Any additional information relating to performance

Planning

Performance within the KPIs for planning applications remains excellent, and well above the targets.

Service Summary Sheet

Directorate	Finance and Legal		
Year	2023-24	Quarter	Quarter 2 (1st July – 30th September 2023)

Performance reporting for 4 key Directorate PI's

Service Improvement Priorities for 2023/24

- Develop the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, advising Members and Senior Management on addressing financial sustainability
- Implement the Government's Household Support Fund scheme (HSF 4)
- Implement Business Rates reliefs.
- Implement new Health and Safety management software which is scheduled for implementation in June 2023.
- Identify and implement efficiencies in the Procure to Pay cycle
- Prepare for the requirements of the Elections Act and Elections in May.
- Improve the quality of asset valuations in the Statement of Accounts (working with Corporate Landlord).
- To further embed the council's Risk Management Framework and to identify sources of assurance on the management of risk, so that gaps in assurance can be identified.

Benchmarking *with local authorities/nearest neighbours*

Please consider if a [Delivering Better Outcomes proforma](#) should be completed also.

PI.867 % Council Tax income collected

PI.868 % Business Rates income collected

Directorate Performance Measure (KPIs)			
PI	Actual	Target	SCORE
PI.867 % Council Tax income collected	55.5	56	🟡
PI.868 % Business Rates income collected	57.1	57	🟢

Council Tax collected:

Dudley – 55.5%
Walsall – 49.8%
Sandwell – 53.49%
Warwick – 55.67%
Wolverhampton – 51.06%
Solihull – 56.86%
Birmingham – 51.38%
Telford – 54.11%
Coventry – 54.2%
Rugby – 57.66%

Business Rates collected:

Dudley – 57.1%
Walsall – 53.7%
Sandwell – 57.21%
Warwick – 52.78%
Wolverhampton – 55.59%
Solihull – 57.73%
Birmingham – 53.51%
Telford – 56.7%
Coventry – 59.1%
Rugby – 59.13%

PI 1403 Unqualified External Audit Opinion on Financial Statement of Accounts (Annual PI)

The 2021/2022 Statement of Accounts have now been signed off by External Audit - Grant Thornton.

As per statutory requirements, the 2022/2023 Statement of Accounts were subject to public inspection between 20th September and 31st October 2023 and work is underway with external audit to reach the point of sign off and then submission to Audit & Standards Committee in December 2023.

PI.12 % of audit plan completed at key stages of the year

Corporate Performance Measure (KPIs)			
PI	Actual	Target	SCORE
PI.12 % of audit plan completed at key stages of the year	43	43	★

There is currently no benchmarking data available to measure against other local authorities.

Overview of service delivery

Include any issues / risks

- **Financial Services** support the Council and its directorates in setting the Budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy, monitoring financial performance, preparing and liaising with External Audit on the Statement of Accounts and providing other financial advice and support. They coordinate the Council's cash-flows, loans and investments. They also arrange all insurances on behalf of the Council and maintain the Council's self-insurance fund.
- **Law and Governance** are headed by the Lead for Law and Governance who is the Council's Monitoring Officer. They provide legal advice and undertakes legal proceedings on behalf of all parts of the Council. Democratic Services support the formal decision-making processes of the Council, its Committees and Cabinet Members. The Health and Safety team provide corporate support to all directorates. The Elections team organise council, parliamentary and all other elections in which residents of the borough are eligible to vote.
- **Revenues and Benefits** are responsible for billing and recovery of Business Rates, Council Tax and Sundry Debts. They support low-income households by administering the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Housing Benefits and Discretionary Housing Payments. During the last financial period Revenues and Benefits have had the additional responsibility of administering the Household Support Fund, Council Tax Support Fund, Council Tax Energy Bills Rebate and Alternative Energy Rebate Scheme.
- **Audit and Risk Management Services** provide an assurance function to the whole Council, lead against fraud and coordinate the management of risk.
- **Information Governance** advise all directorates on GDPR and Freedom of Information and coordinate the response to Subject Access and Freedom of Information requests.

Service achievements

Report of any external accreditation, awards, positive publicity, during the past quarter

- Council tax collection regularly achieves upper quartile performance compared to other metropolitan authorities. A pleasing year end performance comparing favourably with our neighbouring authorities.
- The Household Support Fund (4) launched in April 2023 has been assisting Dudley residents who are in financial hardship due to the cost-of-living crisis. A fund of £944,332 has been allocated for the application element and the scheme is being administered in two phases. The first phase – 'Summer' with a total spend of £306,350 was split in 2 parts held in April and July, which helped 1924 residents. The second phase – 'Winter' which is again split in 2 parts in October and in January 2024 with a total budget of £637,982. The October

scheme £376,300 has helped 1860 residents so far. The final phase will be completed in January 2024 with a spend available of £261,682. Work is underway to ensure that the final application scheme in January is widely publicised.

- Successful external audit of Legal Services which took place in April.
- We have successfully transferred all of our direct debit payments and receipts over to Lloyds from HSBC which is part of the wider switching banks project.
- We have had a successful Proceeds of Crime Act hearing following the prosecution of a former Dudley Head Teacher. The Judge awarded the full compensation order of £140,810, as well as ordering the repayment of the Council's costs in full, amounting to £50,422, giving a total repayable to the Council of £191,232.

Opportunities for improvement

Information relating to service complaints / compliments and learning from these

- Central Finance will continue to engage with colleagues in Corporate Landlords to improve the quality of property valuations.
- The service relies on feedback from Councillors, Directorates and other key contacts to ensure that we can continue to provide responsive services and comply with legal obligations on the Council. Any complaints, comments or compliments are recorded on the council's corporate system and forwarded to relevant service managers. We are committed to continuous improvement within the constraints placed on the service and maintain regular contact with service Directorates to ensure that we can implement learning from experience and plan for future workload demands wherever possible
- Most improvements that can be made in Revenues and Benefits rely on new IT applications. We have not been able to assess and possibly take advantage of these in recent years due to continued lack of resources. An unfortunate reality however is that debt collection may prove to be a very challenging area post Covid and now with the Cost of Living crisis.
- Improve use of council facilities such as Digital Mail services.
- Work needs to be undertaken with directorates to identify any assurance received against their key risks and linking performance indicators to risks.

Any additional information relating to performance

The Finance and Legal Directorate has a key role in ensuring that we are a dynamic and sustainable organisation capable of achieving the aims of the Council Plan and ultimately on realising its Future Council vision by 2030. In doing this, we face the particular challenges of our financial position.

Dudley MBC is a low-spending, low-taxing council. Dudley residents benefit from having the lowest rate of Council Tax in the West Midlands and one of the lowest in the country. However, the consequence of this is that we have around £16m per year less to spend on services than we would have if we charged an average level of Council Tax. We have a low level of reserves (enough at the end of March 2022 to cover 19% of a year's expenditure – compared with 55% for the average metropolitan council).

A Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) up to 2025/26 was approved by Full Council on 6th March. Cabinet on 6th July and Council on 10th July reversed saving decisions in relation to libraries and other services and approved additional spending of £1m per year on weed control,

street cleansing, grounds maintenance and clean teams to respond to environmental concerns. The report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance and Legal set out the impact on the MTFS (see below) and recommended that members take account of the Council's financial position when considering these decisions. The external auditors have commented on the decisions in July and stated that they are minded to consider that they represent a significant weakness in financial sustainability and governance.

A Revenue Monitoring 2023/2024 report was approved by Cabinet 25th October. The joint report of the Chief Executive and Director of Finance and Legal set out the forecasted General Fund revenue outturn position for 2023/24 and the effect of General Balances at 31st March 2024 and a number of control measures were agreed as a result of growing pressures on spend and use of limited reserves. Council reserves are set to drop to £6m this year but forecasts show the balance is likely to run dry in the next one to two years if action is not taken to address. Measures agreed include the introduction of a recruitment freeze, ceasing of any new contracts, termination of agency and interim contracts and more.

During the pandemic we had to divert significant resources to business grants and Covid isolation payments. We also saw an increase in numbers of Council Tax Reduction claimants although this is now starting to recover. Going forward, the increase in cost of living will be a significant challenge. Resources have been diverted to administer the Energy Support scheme and the applications element of the Housing Support.

There will be a full review of the Council's Constitution in this municipal year.