

# ***Information/Discussion Paper***

## **Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 27 July 2020**

### **Annual Review of Publica**

This note contains the information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Committee, but where no decisions from Members are needed

#### **1. Why has this come to scrutiny?**

1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertake an annual review of Publica.

#### **2. Summary of the Issue**

2.1 The purpose of the paper is to enable the committee to consider where Publica are in terms of performance, what are they doing well, where are the priorities for improvement and how do they measure the quality of service to their clients (including Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC)), and to consider the financial and business plan 2020-22.

#### **3. Summary of evidence/information**

3.1 Members of the Committee asked the following issues to be covered in the paper:

- Where are Publica in terms of performance?
- What are Publica doing well?
- What are Publica prioritising for improvement?
- How do Publica measure the level and quality of service being provided to Cheltenham Borough Council?
- How Publica has been affected by COVID-19, what effect this has had on the services provided to Cheltenham Borough Council?

3.2 Publica is a local authority company that was established in 2017 and is owned equally by the shareholder councils who are:

- Cheltenham Borough Council
- Cotswold District Council
- Forest of Dean District Council
- West Oxfordshire District Council

3.3 Publica delivers a range of services on behalf of the shareholder councils' and Finance, HR, and ICT services to Cheltenham Borough Council.

3.4 The company has a Board consisting of four Executive Directors, four Independent Non-Executive Directors, and one Non-Executive Director appointed by Cheltenham Borough Council who is Councillor Paul McCloskey.

3.5 The company has annual operating costs of £25M and circa 650fte employees

(including IT, finance, and HR staff based at Cheltenham Borough Council)

## **Performance**

3.6 In relation to services provided by Publica to Cheltenham Borough Council, all of the targets are on-track as follows:

- ICT provision with an average of 99.981% uptime availability against a 99% target
- A 97.49% average of invoices paid within 30 days against a 90% target
- A 99.97% average payroll accuracy rate against a 98% target

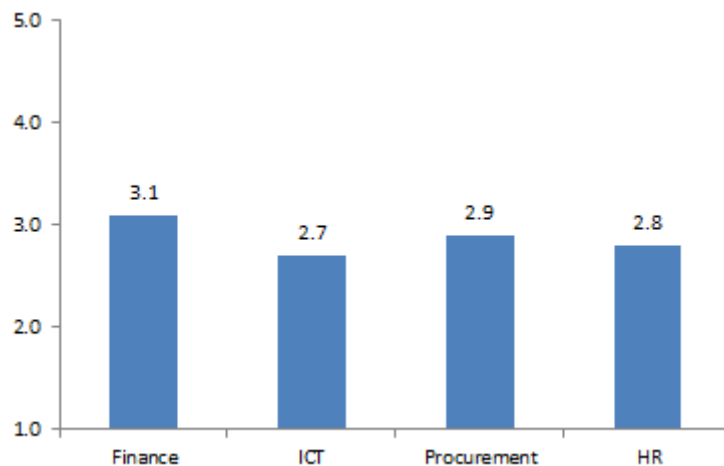
3.7 In addition, when an ICT incident or service request has been raised, on average, Publica has responded within one hour against a two hour target.

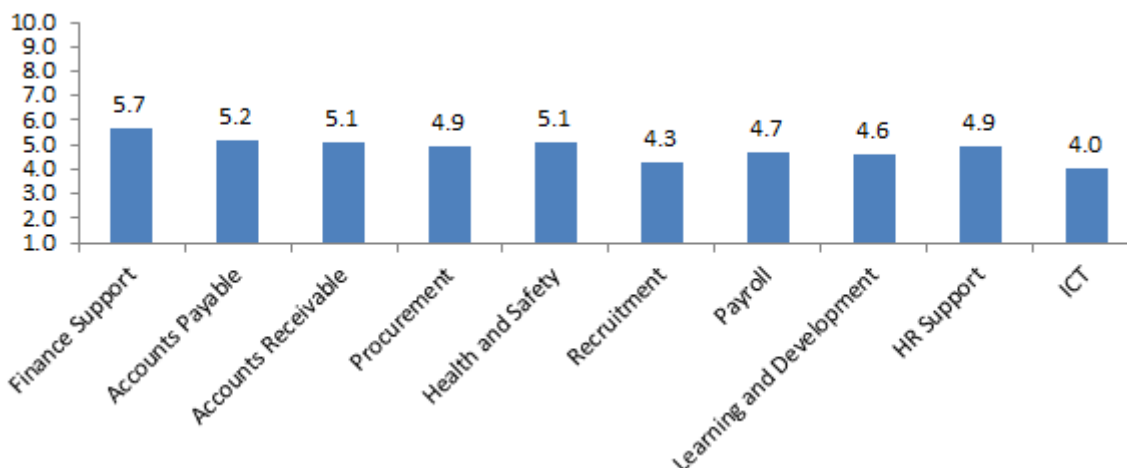
3.8 A detailed breakdown of each quarter is contained in the table below.

KPIs	Q4 18/19	Q1 19/20	Q2 19/20	Q3 19/20	Target
% of uptime	99.993 %	99.996 %	99.948 %	99.987 %	99%
Number of invoices paid within 30 days	97.07%	97.62%	96.84%	98.44%	90%
% Payroll Accuracy Levels	99.88%	100.00 %	100.00 %	100.00 %	98%

## **Quality of service**

3.9 In May 2019 Publica asked Cheltenham Borough Council staff how satisfied they were with their services. There was a 90% overall response rate. We asked people to score each of the Publica departments that support them out of 5, where 5 is extremely satisfied and 1 extremely dissatisfied. We also asked people to score the different areas within each department out of ten. The average score across all departments was 2.9. They were most satisfied with Finance services and Health and Safety. The charts below illustrate the outcome of this survey.





3.10 Since completing the survey Publica have attended team meetings for direct feedback. As a result of this we have introduced a new Learning Management System, Procurement Self-service Toolkit, and are currently reviewing the recruitment process.

### **What are Publica doing well?**

3.11 Based on the data in 3.8 Publica is delivering high performing services for Cheltenham Borough Council. In addition, Publica has supported the council with the following work during the last 12 months:

- Develop and deliver the council's new people strategy
- Support delivery of the council's medium term financial strategy (MTFS)
- Support the delivery of a digital strategy for the council
- Delivery of £28K of efficiency savings

3.12 Since the formation of Publica it has now delivered in excess of £500k in savings in cumulative terms.

### **Service Improvement**

3.13 The incoming Managing Director presented an assessment of 'the state of Publica' to the Board in December 2019 with a number of high-level recommendations for moving the organisation forward. The report is attached to this paper as **Appendix A**.

3.14 As part of the establishment of Publica a number of items were identified as reserved matters for shareholder approval to ensure that the councils retained an element of control over their company and this includes approval of the business plan. The business plan provides the 'vehicle' to carry forward and address the issues identified in the Incoming Managing Director's report to the Publica Board over the next two years. The focus of the new business plan is on supporting the partner councils to deliver their priorities, improve Publica's approach to commissioning, continue to improve services and customer experience using digital technology, deliver efficiency savings, and invest in its employee's development. Collectively, the fourteen strategic actions that support the business plan priorities form a cohesive programme achieving sustainable and embedded change over the business plan period. The business plan is attached to this paper as an **Appendix B**.

3.15 The Business Plan priorities are:

- Support our member councils to deliver their ambitions
- Get commissioning right
- Be a great service provider
- Be a great place to work

3.16 Specifically in relation to service improvement, Publica has been building organisational wide foundations. During the last year the company has delivered new terms and conditions (including a new pay and grading framework) for all employees, a new digital platform (Salesforce) to manage service demand for three of the shareholder councils (CDC/FODDC/WODDC) and built three new council websites for these authorities. In addition, Publica has delivered efficiency savings in line with the agreed business case for each of the shareholder councils’.

#### **4. COVID-19 Pandemic**

4.1 From the start of the lockdown, Publica played, and continues to play, an active role in Cheltenham Borough Council’s business continuity and emergency planning teams.

4.2 The initial requirement when the lockdown was announced was for CBC to mobilise quickly and move from a predominantly office based model to one where a significant number of staff were able to work from home. Whilst CBC already had the capability for a number of staff to work from home, the ICT team worked rapidly to increase remote access capacity and supply additional equipment, enabling every CBC employee to work from home simultaneously, including Customer Services.

4.3 Working at home capability was further extended by ensuring all CBC staff were able to make and receive phone calls from their laptops and this was also extended to Cheltenham Borough Homes. Webex was also brought forward in a very short timescale to enable video conferencing both internally and with external partners and was used, with support from the Publica ICT Team, to run virtual council meetings.

4.4 In addition to the technology, effective people management and support was acknowledged to be essential and Publica have provided operational HR support to managers across the Council during the pandemic. The team has provided essential health and safety advice and management, supported redeployment and wellbeing activities and taken on the role of ‘critical friend’, enabling CBC to make key strategic and operational decisions. The Learning Management System was rolled out quickly to support online redeployment training, deliver a staff wellbeing programme and provide digital inductions, ensuring the delivery of essential mandatory and statutory training.

4.5 The Publica Finance Team has supported the Council’s revenues and benefits team with the payment of business relief grants and has supported the council’s Section 151 Officer and Executive Leadership Team with understanding the impact of the coronavirus on the council’s financial position.

4.6 Publica have also been supporting the council during the recovery phase by:

- Ensuring capacity within the information technology systems and networks continues to meet the Council’s needs going forward
- Working closely with the property teams to ensure the buildings can be used by partner organisations, thus unlocking potential value & income
- Continuing to provide high levels of support, both on-site and virtually, to all staff thus reducing the need to return to office based working and reduce the Council’s carbon footprint

- Build on the video conferencing capabilities, so that the Council is able to collaborate with other Gloucestershire authorities and partners who use different systems (e.g. Microsoft Teams, Zoom etc).

4.7 In regards to support for Cheltenham Borough Council staff during this phase, Publica are:

- Actively involved in the 'New Normal' workstream
- Supporting the objectives of the CBC Recovery Strategy from a people/HR perspective at a strategic & operational level
- Ensuring that well-being is a priority strategic objective & work closely with CBC to ensure that an integrated approach is achieved
- Supporting agile & home-working
- Ensuring the cemetery & crematorium team continue to have the support & guidance so that it has the resilience to cope with any future peaks in demand
- Reviewing CBC People Strategy & Action Plan to ensure it reflects key priorities during the recovery phase & beyond

## 5. Publica Board Review

5.1 The shareholder councils have commissioned a review of the Publica Board now that it has been operating for three years. The contractor, Campbell Tickell, has started their review and has been meeting with Board members, Leaders and Heads of Paid Service at each Shareholder Council over the last two months and will be attending the Board meeting on the 17 July to observe. The findings of the review will be reported to the shareholder councils in the autumn.

## 6. Next Steps

6.1 The Chairman of Publica, Dave Brooks, and the Managing Director, Jan Britton, will attend the meeting and answer any questions.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Incoming Managing Directors Report</li> </ul>
<b>Appendices</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Draft Publica Business Plan 2020-22</li> </ul>
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