

**Cheltenham Borough Council**  
**Cabinet – 5<sup>th</sup> April 2022**  
**Publica Group (Support) Ltd Business Plan 2022-25**

<b>Accountable member</b>	<b>Cllr Rowena Hay, Leader of the Council</b>
<b>Accountable officer</b>	<b>Gareth Edmundson, Chief Executive</b>
<b>Ward(s) affected</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>Key/Significant Decision</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	To consider the Publica Business Plan 2022-25 and any comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the draft Business Plan and to recommend that the Leader (as Shareholder Representative) approves the plan, subject to any comments the Cabinet wishes to make and those made by other Shareholder Councils.
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>1. That – subject to any comments it makes – Cabinet recommends the Publica Business Plan 2022-25 be approved by the Leader, as the Council’s Shareholder Representative for Publica Group (Support) Ltd and subject to any minor amendments that might arise from the final stages of consultation with the Shareholder Councils and/or general editing.</b>

<b>Financial implications</b>	<p>There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.</p> <p>The business case approved by the Shareholder Councils in September/October 2016 set a target of a cumulative reduction in the Councils' base revenue budgets of £2.1m by the end of 2022/23. Publica is on track to deliver a baseline budget saving of £2.7m by the end of 2022/23 – some £0.6m ahead of target. In addition, c.£1.8m of one-off savings have also been made and returned to the Councils for reinvestment in their service priorities.</p> <p>The new business plan acknowledges the financial challenge that all the Shareholder Councils are facing over the next few years and sets out Publica's role in supporting the Councils to address this challenge.</p> <p><b>Contact officer: Paul Jones, Executive Director Finance and Assets, <a href="mailto:Paul.Jones@cheltenham.gov.uk">Paul.Jones@cheltenham.gov.uk</a>, 01242 264365</b></p>
<b>Legal implications</b>	<p>The Publica Business Plan has to be approved on an annual basis by the Council's Shareholder Representative (the Leader) in accordance with the Articles of Association and Members' Agreement for Publica Group (Support) Limited.</p> <p><b>Contact officer: Howard Norris, Interim Monitoring Officer, <a href="mailto:Howard.Norris@cheltenham.gov.uk">Howard.Norris@cheltenham.gov.uk</a>, 01242 264109</b></p>
<b>HR implications (including learning and organisational development)</b>	<p>No direct HR implications. The People theme within the new business plan encompasses how Publica will lead, support and develop its employees, celebrating diversity and challenging inequality.</p> <p><b>Contact officer: Clare Jones, HR Business Partner, <a href="mailto:Clare.Jones@publicagroup.uk">Clare.Jones@publicagroup.uk</a>, 01242 264364</b></p>
<b>Key risks</b>	<p>As set out in Appendix 1.</p>
<b>Corporate and community plan Implications</b>	<p>Delivery of the Publica Business Plan 2022-25 will support the Council in achieving its corporate objectives.</p>
<b>Environmental and climate change implications</b>	<p>Tackling the climate and ecological (biodiversity) emergencies is a key theme within the new business plan, setting out how Publica will work to embed this into all its work.</p>
<b>Property/Asset Implications</b>	<p>None.</p> <p><b>Contact officer: Paul Jones, Executive Director Finance and Assets, <a href="mailto:Paul.Jones@cheltenham.gov.uk">Paul.Jones@cheltenham.gov.uk</a>, 01242 264365</b></p>

## **1. Background**

- 1.1 As part of the establishment of Publica Group (Support) Ltd. (Publica), twelve items were identified as Reserved Matters for Shareholder approval to ensure that Shareholder Councils retained the necessary control over their Teckal company. The Reserved Matters were approved by the Council in October 2016 as part of the governance principles underpinning the establishment of Publica as set out in Schedule 1 of the company's Members' Agreement, signed by the Council in May 2017.
- 1.2 The Reserved Matters decisions fall to the Shareholder Representatives to determine. For each shareholder Council the Shareholder Representative is designated as the Leader of the Council.
- 1.3 "Adopting or amending the Business Plan in respect of each Financial Year" is one of the Reserved Matters.

## **2. Reasons for recommendation**

- 2.1 To assist the Leader in reaching her decision the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the draft business plan for 2022-25 at its meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022 and their views are set out in section 5 below.
- 2.2 The Publica Board agreed the final draft plan at its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> March and this is attached as Appendix 2.
- 2.3 The Cabinet is invited to consider the points raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and provide any additional comments they wish to make before the plan is approved by the Leader in consultation with the other Shareholder Representatives.
- 2.4 The plan will be reviewed and approved by the Leader on an annual basis, in accordance with Publica's company governance.

## **3. Alternative options considered**

- 3.1 None.

## **4. How this initiative contributes to the corporate plan**

- 4.1 The Publica business plan sets out the high level, strategic objectives and ambition for Publica over the next three years and how it will deliver both day-to-day services and the key priorities for each Shareholder Council. The three year plan enables a medium term financial position to be taken as the increasingly challenging financial circumstances of the Councils will be a major driver for the focus of Publica's work. The three year horizon of the plan will also enable a sustained focus on delivering Council priorities and improving service delivery.
- 4.2 Each shareholder Council has its own delivery plans and this business plan is designed to show how Publica will operate to deliver these, complementing them by providing the flexibility to deliver different priorities in an individual way for each Council but also making the most of shared services and ambitions.
- 4.3 Three key themes are addressed in this business plan flow from the shareholder Councils' priorities and will underpin everything Publica does over the lifespan of this business plan. These are:

- **Planet** - Tackling the climate and ecological emergency. This is the challenge of our generation and a priority for all of the Shareholder Councils and Publica.
- **People** - People are at the heart of Publica as a company, so it needs to employ and retain the right people and be a 'best in class' employer in order to deliver successfully for the Shareholder Councils.
- **Place** - Delivering great services and local priorities for the Councils' communities, residents, and businesses.

**4.4** Detailed actions emanating from the business plan will be incorporated into individual service plans and/or addressed through Publica's project management framework to ensure delivery is closely aligned to Council priorities and reported appropriately.

## **5. Consultation and feedback**

**5.1** The consultation process for the production of the new plan is quite extensive. Early discussions were held with the Chief Executives/Heads of Paid Service from the four Shareholder Councils to check that the plan was evolving in line with expectations. The initial draft was also discussed with the Publica Board in mid-January 2022.

**5.2** The Publica Shareholder Forum (comprising the Leader and Chief Executive/Head of Paid Service from each of the four shareholder Councils, together with the Publica Board Chair and Managing Director) met in late January to review the draft plan and the feedback received from the Publica Board and the Chief Executives/Heads of Paid Service.

**5.3** Comments and additional feedback from the Shareholder Forum were incorporated in the draft plan which was then considered by the relevant scrutiny committee at each of the four shareholder Councils in February/March/April 2022.

**5.4** The Publica Board agreed the final draft plan at its meeting on 11th March 2022.

**5.5** The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 28<sup>th</sup> February reviewed the draft business plan and made the following observations:

- The committee liked the three themes (Planet / People / Place) and asked the Publica Managing Director a number of questions in relationship to the business plan relating to the plant and people themes which he answered.
- The committee supported the proposed data driven decision making but wanted assurance about ethical use of data. The Publica Managing Director outlined that this related to business information and not personal data.
- The Committee supported the continued approach to digital transactions but also wanted assurance that residents who could not access digital services could still access services. The Publica Managing Director outlined that the Shareholder Councils that Publica provided customer services for would continue to provide face to face and telephony services.
- The committee were pleased to see Publica is applying for Investor in People accreditation, they inquired if Publica had thought of applying to be a Disability Confident Employer. The Publica Managing Director said that they were very focused on Investor in People Accreditation and were already a Disability Confident Employer.
- The Committee thought that the business plan was aspirational and clear although it seems to be written with greater regard to the three other shareholder councils. The Publica Managing Director said that the Business Plan reflected the fact that Publica provided most

services to the other three Shareholder Councils and only business support services (Finance,HR, and ICT) to Cheltenham Borough Council.

- 5.6** Cabinet is now asked to consider the feedback from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, add any comments it wishes to make and recommend to the Council Leader that the plan be approved.
- 5.7** The business plan will be published on the internet and shared with the Shareholder Councils once it has been approved by all the Council Leaders.

Performance management – monitoring and review

- 5.8** The new Publica business plan is a three year plan. However, there will be an annual review and approval process put in place for each of the following two years, in line with Publica's governance.

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<b>Appendices</b>	1. Risk Register 2. Publica Business Plan 2022-25
<b>Background information</b>	N/A

The risk				Original risk score (impact x likelihood)			Managing risk				
Risk ref.	Risk description	Risk Owner	Date raised	Impact 1-5	Likelihood 1-6	Score	Control	Action	Deadline	Responsible officer	Transferred to risk register
	If the Publica Business Plan does not meet the Council's expectations and needs then the Council will not derive its desired benefits from its company.	Gareth Edmundson	November 2021	2	3	6	Reduce	Early consultation took place with the Council's Chief Executive and Leader to reduce this risk.	30.04.2022	Jan Britton	
	If the Leader (as Shareholder Representative) does not approve the plan then Publica may be unable to commence or continue with activities that are necessary for supporting the Council's service delivery.	Gareth Edmundson	November 2021	2	2	4	Reduce	Once the Publica Business Plan has been addressed by the Cabinets at each of the four shareholding Councils, a sign-off process for the Leader to give her formal approval will be put in place	30.04.2022	Jan Britton	