

How we have transformed the way we design and deliver services to make better use of resources

Like all other district councils, Oadby & Wigston Borough Council (OWBC) has seen its net general fund annual budget reduce over a number of years, from £8.5 million in 2010/11 to £7.7 million in 2024/25 whilst over the same period, actual costs of goods and services including payroll have increased.

In recent years OWBC has balanced the budget by numerous transformational and commercial activities and has also utilised its reserves in order to maintain a balanced budget. In order to balance 2024/25 onwards the Council took the decision not to utilise general fund reserves any longer as it was no longer sustainable to continue to do so and underwent a cost-cutting programme of activity which significantly reduced the organisation's staffing numbers but also resulted in further service changes such as moving from a weekly waste and recycling collection service to an alternate-weekly collection.

OWBC has an enviable track-record of change in recent years. There have been services that have been insourced back into OWBC. There have been shared services created, channel-shift encouraged, and a future-proofed cost-effective full office relocation undertaken. It also seeks further income generation and cost-reduction initiatives as well as reviewing alternative ways of delivery such as sharing resources with other local authorities to reduce costs.

Productivity within OWBC is measured through a number of performance management activities. Holistic Corporate Performance, which includes a combination of Service Performance Standards, Complaint Resolution, Customer Service Statistics, Statutory Performance Indicators and Continuous Improvement Performance Indicators, is reported quarterly to Service Delivery Committee; Strategic and Operational Financial Performance is reported quarterly to the Policy, Finance & Development Committee; performance of Good Governance and Strategic Risk Management is reported to the Audit Committee. All the Council Committees are held in public and recorded and broadcasted for transparency and all have cross-political party representation.

OWBC is very welcoming of external challenge and in 2021 it undertook an LGA Financial Assessment and a Corporate Peer Challenge where an action plan was established and is still being delivered. OWBC also undertakes an annual external assessment to meet the Customer Service Excellence Standard, which covers Customer Insight, Organisational Culture, Information & Access, Service Delivery and Service Quality.

OWBC has a bespoke approach for Service Transformation and service improvements are the norm. Each year Councillor approved Service Improvement PIs are implemented and managed across all Council services. OWBC continues to look at the most advantageous method of service delivery and has a blended approach of out-sourced Leisure, Internal Audit) services, recently in-sourced (ICT) services, internally shared (Revenues & Benefits, Corporate Assets & Clean and Green, Community Safety, Wellbeing, Leisure Contract and Partnerships)

services and externally shared (Health & Wellbeing, Building Control, Local Land Charges, DFG Management +) services, constantly looking to improve value-for-money.

The most significant change in recent years is the move from an antiquated old 'council-house' to a purpose-built multi-functional office space which also provides an annual revenue saving in running costs and has future-proofed the office environment for decades to come. This capital project appraisal demonstrated a positive financial position of @£2M over a ten-year period when compared to staying in the old offices. This move has also enabled the Council to rent out significant floor-space to a local private sector café operator, so also encouraging local business growth whilst providing a new income stream.

There are plans which are being carried out in order to move to an alternate-weekly waste collection regime which will provide in the region of £0.25M p.a. revenue savings. OWBC will continue to look at opportunities for further transformation and these activities will be presented in the Council's new Corporate Strategy (to be approved at July 2024 Council).

There will also inevitably be benefits to be realised from the Commercialisation and Digital Strategies which are planned for development. That said opportunities for significant future savings are realistically limited. Productivity gains for such a small Council as OWBC are restricted as the vast majority of OWBC's expenditure is on statutory services and benchmarking suggests that unit costs are low.

Capital spending plays a crucial role in transforming services and unlocking new opportunities. This can be seen with the earlier office move example and the 'Flexible Use of Capital Receipts' is utilised within the MTFP to help with transformational activities.

Locally led reforms are essential for delivering high-quality public services. OWBC is an active member of the Leicester and Leicestershire Member Advisory Group and collaborate closely with partner Councils around the Strategic Growth Plan.

How we plan to take advantage of technology and make better use of data to improve decision making, service design and use of resources

OWBC uses technology and information to improve service design and therefore increase public value. Decision-making is information driven and evidence-based and all Council Committee Meetings are recorded and digitally broadcasted so that all the decisions taken by Members are available for all to see.

Whilst OWBC will be developing its first Digital Strategy in the near future, its existing Customer Experience Strategy (2023-2026) sets out our vision to achieve the best possible experience for all our customers, acknowledging the pace of digital change is fast and getting faster and research identified that customers increasingly want service that is fast, personalised, proactive and connected.

OWBC has taken bold steps in order to meet that vision and as part of the framework for its success it has organised itself around customer-needs. It uses data and intelligence to improve the customer experience, has developed and continues with a “Customer First” continuous improvement culture and enabling services where possible to be digital by design. Based on analytic research OWBC has introduced virtual customer appointments with residents in order to transcend the traditional physical and web-based customer interaction.

OWBC utilises a sophisticated Customer Relationship Management System across all its services and uses the data and intelligence contained within it to increase analysis of our customer activities, to simplify and improve services and access to services, as well as ensuring that data quality allows us to use that intelligence to target services to the right people.

Our plans to reduce wasteful spend within the organisation and systems

OWBC recognises that there is very limited scope for wasteful spending, with a net revenue budget being very small when compared to the average Borough Council and all spending is aligned to approved budgets. These are now subject to additional Member challenge and scrutiny through Star Chamber procedures, as well as being aligned to the Council’s priorities. The Star Chamber process brings together senior Councillors across both main political groups with the Senior Leadership Team to challenge service expenditure, discuss opportunities for reducing costs as well as becoming more efficient.

OWBC recognises that there will always be a need for consultants, however these are only utilised where it is absolutely necessary. Consultants are mainly utilised in very specific and highly specialised areas. The main requirement is with the Planning Service where it is necessitated in order to fulfil the requirements of the Local Plan development, as mandated by Government. Interims are used only when workforce gaps have occurred through vacancies, in highly professionalised areas such as Planning, Legal and Finance where there are well recorded national shortages in qualified personnel or staff absences for example within the waste collection service and are deemed as essential in order to maintain the delivery of statutory services.

OWBC has very effective processes in place to manage spend with financial regulations and contract procedure rules set out within the constitution. Monthly financial monitoring takes place at a management level and formal reporting to the PFDC Committee takes place on a quarterly basis.

Any costs associated with equality, diversity and inclusion and trade-union time are so negligible that it is uneconomical to record and report.

Whilst OWBC does not share offices with other Councils, it does rent out part of the office premises, as previously mentioned, as well as sharing Officers with other authorities which proves to be a cost-effective way to manage resources and service delivery.

The barriers preventing progress that the Government can help to reduce or remove

Unlike many others, OWBC has not been able to capitalise on the prospect of economic growth within its borough. This is because the area is dense and there is limited opportunity for housing or employment land growth. This has meant OWBC has not seen the tangible increases in Council Tax and New Homes Bonus from housing growth or additional Retained Business Rates achieved through business growth.

Whilst the current funding environment may not be advantageous to many local authorities it is acutely disadvantageous to OWBC and has previously been highlighted to Government officials. The cessation of one-year financial settlements and the eventual conclusion of the 'Fair Funding and Business Rates Reviews' are welcomed. Indeed, some indication of when these will be finalised would be useful.

There are other numerous initiatives which would be helpful such as the ability to set local planning fees, revisiting non-value-adding legislative procedures such as the FOI process, which is a significant burden, as well as a complete review of the external audit regime which is unnecessarily expensive and very resource-hungry.

However more joined-up Government Policy making would also be advantageous, such as NPPF reform, DEFRA (with regard to waste reforms) and DWP policies regarding HB subsidy and costs of temporary/supported accommodation being 'realistically' aligned with Local Government Finance Policies.

How we will our plans be monitored to ensure that improved productivity will be delivered

This Productivity Plan encapsulates the ongoing work that OWBC is undertaking and includes Service Delivery Plans, the Medium-Term Financial Plan, the existing Corporate Plan and emerging Corporate Strategy. These all have existing mechanisms in place for reporting and monitoring corporate performance and improvement, and are all undertaken in public meetings which are also recorded and broadcast live.

The Productivity Plan will be approved at Full Council and, whilst there remains a requirement to produce one, this will be reviewed alongside the OFLOG self-assessment which was undertaken earlier in the year on an annual basis.