

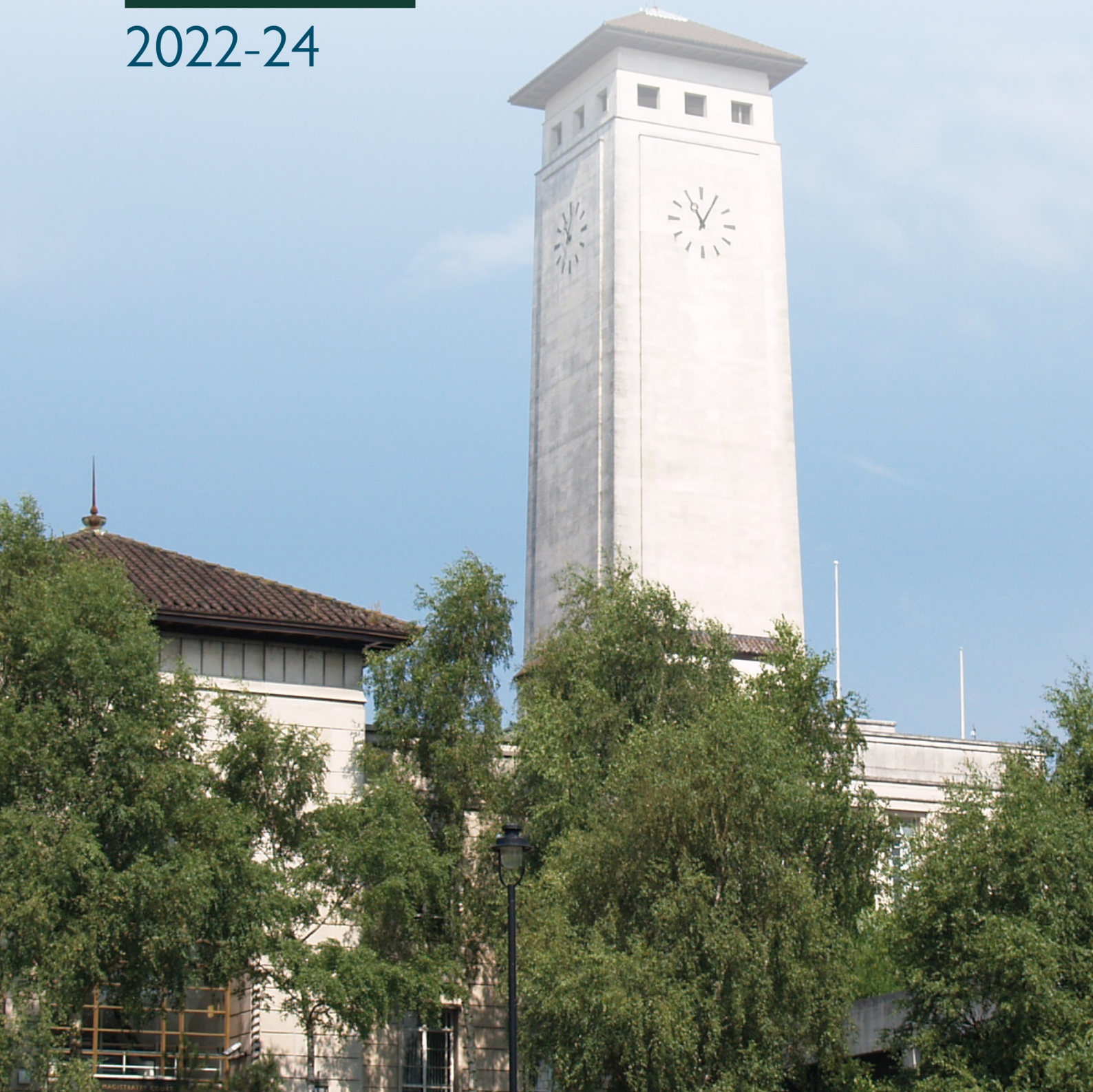


NEWPORT
CITY COUNCIL
CYNGOR DINAS
CASNEWYDD

MID-YEAR REVIEW

LAW & STANDARDS

2022-24



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Introduction

Newport City Council's Corporate Plan 2022-27 has four Well-being Objectives to support its mission to deliver an Ambitious, Fairer and Greener Newport for everyone and contribute towards Wales' Well-being Goals set in the Well-being of Future Generations Act. To support the delivery of these objectives, strategic priorities, and deliver continuous improvement each service area has developed their service plan. This report provides the Mid-Year progress against the Law & Standards Service Plan 2022-24 (23/24).

Law and Standards is part of the Council's Transformation & Corporate Directorate and is responsible for delivering wide range of statutory and professional support services for internal clients, Councillors and members of the public.

- Legal services, Insurances and Local Land charges.
- Democratic Services, including Overview and Scrutiny and the Mayoralty
- Elections and Electoral Registration
- Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages
- Gwent Coroner's service.

The roles of the Monitoring Officer/Deputy Monitoring Officer, the Head of Democratic Services and the "Proper Officer" are prescribed by legislation and the functions of the Registration and Coroner's Service, Electoral Registration, Scrutiny, and Local Land charges are all statutory requirements. Professional services such as Legal and Democratic Services directly support the Council's corporate governance arrangements and the delivery of other statutory and regulatory services throughout the Council. The service area has a gross operating budget of £4.5m and employs 131 staff.

Service Area Objectives

Objective 1 - To improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of statutory and professional services and optimise the use of available resources.

Objective 2 - To improve the constitutional and corporate governance arrangements.

Objective 3 - To extend and improve the use of technology and modernise working practices in order to underpin and drive service delivery changes.

Head of Service Executive Summary

Continued progress has been made towards meeting the Service Plan objectives for the first six months of 23/34. The Assistant Head of Legal Services has settled in well during his first 6 months and has been able to review the structure of the legal team. Recruitment remains challenging, however this is being well managed through implementing wider reaching recruitment campaigns. Further workforce planning strategies have been embedded within the team with the creation of another trainee solicitor post and some additional apprenticeships in legal support roles. The Democratic and Electoral Services manager has made significant progress with implementing statutory electoral reforms. This progress has been assisted by the recruitment of some additional staffing to support with electoral administration and to provide some resilience to the team. Despite challenges around recruitment, the Service has managed to remain resilient and has continued to deliver against the Service Plan objectives and perform well against KPIs, in most cases exceeding the required performance targets.

The Registration Service continues to meet national targets set by the General Registrar's Office for the registration of births and deaths. Despite a decrease in staffing levels at the start of the year performance against KPIs has improved and has been assisted by the introduction of the electronic diary system which has enabled streamlining of the way in which appointments are allocated. The diary system is in the early phases of introduction but is progressing well towards being fully operational, with links to the new Newport City Council website being explored. There is an ongoing review of the need to rely on casual staff. The Registration Service Manager continues to progress the modernisation the Registration Service to support with the continued delivery of service plan objectives for the next quarter of 23/24.

The Democratic and Elections services KPIs have been set for the first time during this municipal year, therefore benchmarking against previous years has not been possible. This is however reflective of the fact that there have been a number of firsts for this team, as a result of the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 coming into force in April 2022. The restructure of the Democratic and Elections Service team has now been completed, which some much needed additional resources being focused on managing forthcoming elections and ensuring that the Council is full compliant with the requirements of the Elections Act. A comprehensive programme of member training has been delivered throughout the year to date, and further training sessions are scheduled for the forthcoming months. The team continues to monitor member engagement and to assess the training needs of members in consultation with them. An elected member survey has recently been devised and is due to be completed in the coming months. This will provide a greater understanding of member's training needs and other support requirements.

The Legal Service has continued to successfully support the delivery of key corporate projects, in particular some large-scale regeneration and investment projects which have continued to require significant support during the early months of municipal year 23/24. This work will be greater supported by the recent recruitment of a specialist Contracts and Procurement lawyer which will enable greater flexibility for the allocation of workloads within the team. The legal team continues to work hard to mitigate the impacts of staff reduction and to ensure that a quality legal service continues to be delivered. The use of case management system introduced in September 2022 continues to be embedded into the working practices of the team, ensuring that it is being utilised to its full potential, enabling workstreams to be created, with a view to reducing the burden of admin-based tasks for the team. The Assistant Head of Legal Services is to be commended for the considerable efforts he has made towards progressing the restructure and creation of a highly professional and resilient legal team.

Finally, further progress has been made towards the restructure of the Coroner Service. The review of accommodation requirements in 22/23 has resulted in an alternative court building having been identified for the service and work is ongoing to ensure that a court move can be completed in 24/25. The restructure of the Coroner Service staff continues and it is hoped that this work will be completed during the final quarter of 23/24.

Overall, despite experiencing a continued period change over the later quarter of last year and the early part of 23/24, the Law and Standards staff have met the challenges experienced and have successfully adapted to new ways of working to ensure that quality of service has not been detrimentally affected. The team continue to develop and learn from new experiences which will undoubtedly add to the resilience of the service areas of future years. During the next six months it is anticipated that all recruitment campaigns will have been completed and that the staffing structures of each team will begin settle and develop further.

Law & Standards 2023/24 Overview

Service Plan Objectives

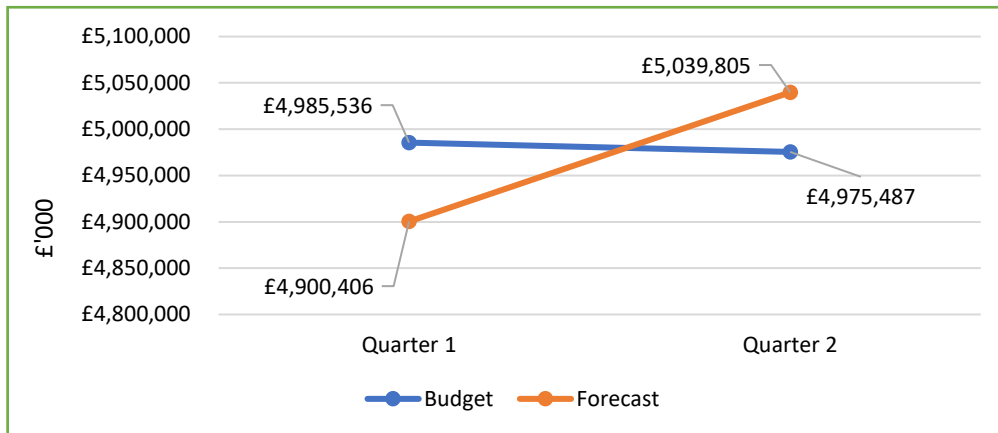
Objective	Mid-Year Status (Red / Amber / Green)
Objective 1 - To improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of statutory and professional services and optimise the use of available resources.	
Objective 2 - To improve the constitutional and corporate governance arrangements.	
Objective 3 - To extend and improve the use of technology and modernise working practices in order to underpin and drive service delivery changes	

Service Area Risks

Risk	Corporate / Service Risk	Inherent Risk Score	Target Risk Score	Quarterly Risk Scores (Q3 2022/23 to Q2 23/24)			
				Quarter 3 22/23	Quarter 4 22/23	Quarter 1 23/24	Quarter 2 23/24
Failure to meet Local Elections Act requirements	Service	12	4	12	8	12	12
Budgetary pressures on Service Demands	Service	16	4	9	9	9	9

Service Area Finance Forecast (End of Quarter 2)

Revenue Forecast



Programmes and Projects

Law & Standards does not have any programmes and projects identified in the service plan.

Workforce Development

To support workforce development across Law & Standards the following actions have been identified as priority between 2022-24.

Action	Outcome(s) of Action Delivery	Action Start Date	Expected Completion Date	Q2 RAG Assessment / % Completion	Commentary
Undertake further succession planning activities to provide opportunities for staff to develop and improve resilience of the service area.	Service Managers provide opportunities for staff to develop, provide career progression and job shadowing. This will support formalising succession plans and create the foundations for a regular reviewing cycle.	1 st April 2022	31 st March 2024	60%	Loss of staff due to internal promotion has required further recruitment, and training has had to begin again as duties have been redistributed. Training Plan ongoing. Deputy Democratic and Electoral Services Manager has been recruited and joined the team in September. Induction and training has commenced.
Explore options for trainee posts for legal executives and solicitors and training programmes for other staff to develop local talent management framework.	Opportunities provided for new and existing staff to improve the capability and capacity of the service area.	1 st April 2022	31 st March 2024	50%	A Trainee Solicitor post has been created; this post will have a focus on childcare law but the incumbent will also experience other areas of local government legal practice. It is expected that this role will be advertised shortly with recruitment to be finalised in early 2024. A Trainee Legal Support Officer is now in post and will be supported to gain the skills necessary to develop in the role. Interviews for an Apprentice in the Legal Support team will take place shortly and the successful candidate will be similarly supported. Other members of the team, both lawyers and non-lawyers are supported to develop their skills in new areas of work and are encouraged to seek out opportunities for training.
Undertake a further review of current Job Descriptions and current workforce capability to future skills and knowledge gaps.	This work will enable the service area to identify training opportunities and updating of Job Descriptions to bridge the knowledge and skills gaps identified.	1 st April 2022	31 st March 2024	C	Job descriptions are reviewed on a rolling basis as positions become vacant. As a result, job descriptions are continuously reviewed and updated as necessary before recruitment is carried out, in order to ensure that the roles of incoming staff are defined to meet the needs of the organisation.

Objectives and Action Plan Update

Objective 1 - To improve the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of statutory and professional services and optimise the use of available resources.							Objective 1 Mid-Year Assessment
Ref	Action	Action Outcome(s)	Well-being Objective Supported	Start Date	Expected Completion Date	Q2 RAG Assessment / % Completion	Commentary
1	To contribute towards the delivery of key corporate projects and cross-cutting transformational change projects, including alternative service delivery models.	Key milestones for the legal work associated with key corporate regeneration and transformational projects will continue to be met and advice will be provided in a timely manner.	Not Applicable	1 st October 2022	31 st March 2024	60%	Good progress continues to be made with this action. This will always be an ongoing project to meet the changing demands of key corporate projects. However, considerable progress has been made with securing resources to support the requirements to support key projects, including additional internal resources arising from a restructure of the legal team.
2	Undertake a review of staffing structures within the Legal Section and explore options for the creation of trainee posts for Legal executives and Solicitors.	Improved capability and capacity to deliver legal services within available budget. Development of local talent and succession planning to meet workforce planning objectives.	Not Applicable	1 st October 2022	31 st March 2024	C	As per the above (Workforce Development), a trainee solicitor vacancy will be advertised shortly and it is expected that the post will be filled by February/March 2024.
3	Undertake a review of staffing structures within Democratic Services and Elections.	Improved integration of the Elections and Governance Teams, with improved management structures and increased resilience. Improved capability and capacity to deliver democratic and elections services within available budget.	Not Applicable	1 st October 2022	31 st March 2024	C	Deputy Democratic and Electoral Services Manager has been recruited and started in post in September. This concludes the restructure.

Ref	Action	Action Outcome(s)	Well-being Objective Supported	Start Date	Expected Completion Date	Q2 RAG Assessment / % Completion	Commentary
4	Undertake a review of accommodation and court premises, supplies and services budgets and commissioning arrangements, to improve the Coroner service and deliver efficiencies.	Identify most viable option for the relocation or refurbishment of the Coroner's court and office accommodation, to meet disability access requirements and improve public service. To meet the requirements of the Transformation Plan and property asset rationalisation objectives. Re-commissioning of supplies and services and longer-term agreements for postmortem and other coroner services will deliver efficiency savings and service improvements.	Not Applicable	1 st October 2022	31 st March 2024	75%	Project Team/Board created for court premises.
5	To develop and extend customer satisfaction surveys for the Registration Service to cover registrations, in addition to ceremonies.	See Objective 1.	Not Applicable	1 st April 2020	31 st March 2024	95%	Looking at ways to link with new NCC website project. Registration web pages scheduled for 2024 and will allow online bookings and automatic surveys via Stopford.

Objective 2 - To improve the constitutional and corporate governance arrangements.

Objective 2 Mid-Year Assessment

Ref	Action	Action Outcome(s)	Well-being Objective Supported	Start Date	Expected Completion Date	Q2 RAG Assessment / % Completion	Commentary
1	Embed the Public Participation and Engagement Strategy into business as usual practice.	<p>Members and Officers will be aware of and understand the role they play in engaging with residents.</p> <p>Key Actions within the Public Participation and Engagement Strategy will be implemented and the effectiveness of the measures will be reviewed by Democratic Services Committee.</p> <p>Hybrid meetings will be operated in accordance with the Council's multi-location meetings policy to allow Councillors and the public to attend and participate in meetings either in person or remotely.</p> <p>The Participation Strategy and Petitions scheme will ensure that the views of the public are brought to the attention of Scrutiny Committees.</p>	WBO 4 / Strategic Priority 5	1 st October 2022	31 st March 2024	30%	An update was shared with Democratic Services Committee and the committees feedback helped to shape a survey that will be conducted in Q3.

Ref	Action	Action Outcome(s)	Well-being Objective Supported	Start Date	Expected Completion Date	Q2 RAG Assessment / % Completion	Commentary
2	To continue to improve Scrutiny arrangements and the composite work programme.	<p>Training and development for Scrutiny Members and Chairs. Scrutiny is understood and members are supported to continually develop knowledge and skills.</p> <p>Training and development for Scrutiny Officers. Scrutiny is understood and Officers are able to support and advise scrutiny through reports and presentations.</p>	WBO 3 – Strategic Priority 1	1 st October 2022	31 st March 2024	70%	<p>There have been challenges around changes to officers in the team during this period, and re-training is required as duties have been moved within the team to accommodate changes.</p> <p>Scrutiny Chairs were supported to meet during this time, and there was discussion around further training, which will be organised for the next Quarter.</p>
3	Implement the legislative requirements of the Elections Act 2022 in accordance with prescribed timescales and in readiness for the May 2024 parliamentary elections.	<p>Legislative requirements successfully implemented in accordance with prescribed timescales.</p> <p>Measures introduced to reduce the potential for voter fraud in elections, including a new requirement for voters to show photographic identification at polling stations.</p> <p>A broad range of commonly used photographic identifications will be accepted in polling stations and, in addition, Electoral Returning Officers will be required to provide an ‘electoral identity’ document’ –a Voter Card – to electors who apply for one.</p> <p>Changes will be implemented to polling stations to support voter ID legislation. Permanent and temporary staff working on elections will be fully trained to implement the new legislation.</p>	WBO 4 / Strategic Priority 5	1 st October 2022	31 st March 2024	22%	<p>Following comms and updates from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities during this period, in preparation for the anticipated change to postal votes in October 2023. Attending meetings with local Association of Electoral Administrators and peer support group with other LA's. There are anticipated challenges with the new processes, but more updates and information are expected before the next Go/No Go decision by the Minister in October 2023.</p>

Ref	Action	Action Outcome(s)	Well-being Objective Supported	Start Date	Expected Completion Date	Q2 RAG Assessment / % Completion	Commentary
4	Undertake a community review of community areas and electoral arrangements in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 and the Local Government & Democracy (Wales) Act 2011.	Any changes to existing community boundaries and electoral arrangements, including membership and warding of community council areas, will be identified prior to the next electoral review by the Local Democracy and Boundary Commission for Wales in 2024/25. Full engagement and consultation will be undertaken with key stakeholders and the public to inform the outcomes of the review.	WBO 4 / Strategic Priority 5	1 st April 2023	31 st March 2024	0%	This will be done in stages, concluding with a community review in 2025. A review of polling places will commence in Q3 2023/24.
5	To complete the review and re-drafting of the Council's Constitution as part of the Local Government & Elections (Wales) Act.	See Objective 2	WBO 4 / Strategic Priority 5	1 st April 2021	31 st March 2024	80%	Review of the constitution is making good progress. Further updates are due to be taken to Democratic Services Committee and thereafter to full Council to bring the constitution further in line with the model for Wales
6	Continue roll-out of carbon and eco literacy training for elected members.	Elected members are encouraged and supported to complete carbon and eco-literacy training. Will improve scrutiny and assessment of Council carbon reduction work to become net zero carbon by 2030.	WBO 4 / Strategic Priority 3 Climate Change Plan	1 st April 2023	31 st March 2024	58%	100% of elected members have been offered the opportunity to attend training and achieve accreditation. 58% of elected members have attended the training. 35% of elected members have completed the post-training work and achieved accreditation. Consideration to be given to alternative formats for training, e.g. All Members Seminar, e-learning module.
7	Review democratic report templates and amend to incorporate climate change and decarbonisation.	Improve the scrutiny and assessment of Council carbon reduction work to become net zero carbon by 2030.	WBO 4 / Strategic Priority 3 Climate Change Plan	1 st April 2023	31 st December 2023	0%	This will be addressed in Q3.

Objective 3 - To extend and improve the use of technology and modernise working practices in order to underpin and drive service delivery changes.

Objective 3 Mid-Year Assessment

Ref	Action	Action Outcome(s)	Well-being Objective Supported	Start Date	Expected Completion Date	Q2 RAG Assessment / % Completion	Commentary
1	Introduce Stopford electronic diary system for Registration Service.	Stopford electronic diary system successfully implemented, and staff are fully trained to operate system. Customers will be able to order birth and death registration certificates and book registration appointments on-line. Improved customer access and service delivery and more efficient use of resources.	WBO 4 / Strategic Priority 4	1 st October 2022	31 st March 2024	80%	Continuing work to develop use of Stopford. Timeline changed slightly due to NCC website project with resources focused on the new website meaning reduced opportunity to change existing. Online booking link will be developed for new registration web pages scheduled for 2024.
2	Fully implement Legal Civica case-management system.	Civica Case management system successfully implemented and Legal staff are fully trained to operate the system. Time recording, document management and case management modules will provide staff with a more efficient and flexible working platform and will provide timely management information to ensure that resources are being used effectively.	WBO 4 / Strategic Priority 4	1 st October 2022	31 st March 2024	75%	The implementation of the Civica system continues to progress, with staff now using the system as their main means of case management. Staff are continuing to explore the additional functionality of the system and full utilisation is expected to be achieved within the indicated timescale. The Civica superuser team (a group of representatives of each of the legal teams) is continuing to liaise with Civica and SRS to resolve minor issues relating to the interaction of the system with other parts of the Council's IT network, such as MS Outlook.

Ref	Action	Action Outcome(s)	Well-being Objective Supported	Start Date	Expected Completion Date	Q2 RAG Assessment / % Completion	Commentary
3	Migration of Local Land Charges register and property information databases to the HM Land Registry (HMLR) central database and on-line web portal.	All existing Land Charges registers will be updated and transferred onto the new system, together with all planning, highways, development control and other spatial Geographical Information System (GIS) property data. This will provide up-to-date and accurate property search information which can be accessed on-line as part of any property transaction.	WBO 4 / Strategic Priority 4	1 st April 2021	31 st March 2024	25%	Initial discussions have been held with representatives of HMLR and its project managers. A team from HMLR is visiting the Civic Centre on 6 th December 2023 in order to carry out an initial assessment and meet with Land Charges staff etc. It is expected that timescales will be confirmed after that date. The project has been delayed by issues with certain software, including IDOX, however, it is understood that we are now in a position to move forward with this project with the new system going live in mid-late 2024.

Performance Measures

Annual performance measures are not included in the Mid-Year review and will be reported as part of 23/24 End of Year Review.

Note: Performance measures with no target will be assessed in comparison to previous year's performance.

Performance Measure / Description	End of Year Performance (21/22 to 22/23)			Mid-Year Performance 23/24		
	Actual 2021/22	Actual 2022/23	Actual Q2 2022/23	Actual Q2 2023/24	Target 2023/24	Commentary
Percentage of standard land charge searches issued within 5 working days.	79.3%	93.9%	92.6% (236 / 255)	96.4% (159 / 165)	85%	At the end of quarter 2 the performance measure is exceeding the target for 2023/24 and has significantly improved in comparison to previous years.
Percentage of customers seen within 10 minutes.	No Data	95.3%	No Data	95.7% (1,993 / 2,082)	90%	The performance is exceeding the target for 2023/24 and is performing similar to the March 2023 position (2022/23).
Percentage of single justice procedure notices drafted within timescales	100%	98%	100% (10 / 10)	100% (110 / 110)	98%	The service has successfully achieved 100% for the first 6 months of the financial year.
(New) No. of views of Scrutiny meetings including live and You Tube.	No Data	593	No Data	433	No Target (Comparator Measure)	In comparison to the 2022/23 end of year position the number of views is fallen in the 6 month period.
(New) Percentage of births registered with Newport City Council within 42 days.*	No Data	91.3%	93.5% (29 / 31)	100% (17 / 17)	98%	The service has successfully registered all births within 42 days in the first 6 months of this financial year.

* Newport City Council has a partnership arrangement with Torfaen Registration District to register births on their behalf. Births recorded in Newport reflect home births in the city.

Glossary

Service Area Project / Action Assessment

RAG Status	Description
X%	Project / Action is not on track to deliver with major issues preventing the action being completed by the agreed ' <i>Target Date</i> '. Immediate management interventions is required to improve performance and escalation to Directorate Management Team and/or relevant Board.
X%	Project / Action is mainly on track with some minor issues which could prevent the Project / Action being completed by the agreed ' <i>Target Date</i> '. Management intervention(s) required to improve performance and close monitoring by the Head of Service / Service Management Team.
X%	Project / Action is on track to be completed by the Agreed ' <i>Target Date</i> '.
C	Project / Action has been successfully delivered

Performance Measure Monitoring / Tolerance Assessment

Newport City Council has agreed a 15% tolerance against targets set in service plans.

RAG Status	Description
=>15%	Performance is under achieving against Target or previous year's performance. Immediate management intervention and escalation to Directorate Management Board is required.
<15%	Performance is off target or Previous Year's Performance but within a variance of 15%. Management intervention and close monitoring by the Head of Service / Service Management Team is required.
	Performance is achieving / succeeding against its agreed Target or Previous Year's Performance.

Risk Assessment Matrix

Probability	5	5 - Moderate	10 - Major	15 - Severe	20 - Severe	25 - Severe
	4	4 - Moderate	8 - Moderate	12 - Major	16 - Severe	20 - Severe
	3	3 - Low	6 - Moderate	9 - Major	12 - Major	15 - Severe
	2	2 - Low	4 - Moderate	6 - Moderate	8 - Moderate	10 - Major
	1	1 - Very Low	2 - Low	3 - Low	4 - Moderate	5 - Moderate
		1	2	3	4	5
		Impact				

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Description
GIS	Geographical Information System