



Business Plan 2022 to 2025

Delivering more locally by working together

PUBLICA





The Publica partnership: Delivering more locally by working together

PUBLICA

Publica Business Plan 2022 to 2025

PUBLICICA

We are proud to present to the shareholder councils the Publica Business Plan for 2022 to 2025.



Sally Walker
Chair of the Board



Jan Britton
Managing Director

Over the past year Publica has consolidated some of the changes that have been made since we were set up and we have demonstrated the benefits of our approach. We are very proud of our staff and their achievements, and that more than 80% of residents are happy with the customer service they receive. As we emerge from the pandemic we have an opportunity to be more ambitious and radical; to capitalise on our unique partnership model to deliver even better services for local communities, residents, and businesses. This business plan sets out the strategic approach for Publica over the next three years and how we will deliver great services every day alongside the key priorities for each shareholder council.

Each council has its own delivery plans and this business plan is designed to show how Publica will operate to deliver these council plans, 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.

We have identified three key themes for this business plan that flow from our partner councils' priorities and will underpin everything we will do over the lifespan of this plan. These are:

Planet: Tackling the climate and ecological emergency. It's the challenge of our generation and a priority for all of the shareholder councils and Publica.

People: People are at the heart of what we are as an organisation, so we need to employ and retain the right people and be a 'best in class' employer.

Place: Delivering great services and local priorities for communities, residents, and businesses.

The importance of our work will be heightened by the significant financial challenges facing local government over the period of this plan. Our model provides us with a unique way to respond to these challenges and build on our success since Publica was formed. In this business plan you can read about our customer-focussed operating model using a digital platform, which enables us to deliver better services in a more efficient way. It is an exciting time for Publica and the shareholder councils as we look to innovate and push boundaries with the potential for growth and scaling over the life of this plan and the potential benefits this will bring to existing partners and new ones who want to become part of a new way of delivering public services.

We will continue to learn and improve, taking what we have delivered over the past four years and building on it to make Publica a leading public sector delivery company, known for its innovation, effectiveness and results delivered on behalf of public sector providers.

The Publica partnership: Delivering more locally by working together

Publica is a not-for-profit Teckal company owned by Cotswold, Forest of Dean, and West Oxfordshire District Councils and Cheltenham Borough Council. The four shareholder councils and Publica work together to share skills and resources which enables us to deliver more for local communities, residents, and businesses.

Publica is a young organisation and in the first four years we have transformed the way services are delivered by the councils through our unique partnership approach.

Each of the shareholder councils and our client organisations retain their independence and identity, and by collaborating and sharing resources, we seek to maximise mutual benefit for all. We are ambitious and on a journey of continuous improvement, always looking for new ways to effectively deliver local services.

You can read about our progress and what we have delivered in the Annual Report on our website

www.publicagroup.uk

Staying true to the Publica Values

The values developed at the company's inception hold strong today and will help guide us to achieve our purpose.

Authentic

We act genuinely and transparently. We do the right thing for our customers, our organisation and each other.

Modern

We are not set in our ways. We are constantly looking to find ways to innovate and do things smarter.

Flexible

We are agile and we adapt how and what we do to meet the demands of our customers, our colleagues, our local communities and the needs of the modern world.

Thoughtful

We take pride in delivering a great service, taking the time to understand and care about the planet and the environment, as well as our customers and their needs.

PUBLICA

Meeting the future financial challenge

A decade of austerity, continuing local government funding uncertainty, rapidly increasing delivery costs, increased cost of living and income shortfalls during the pandemic is putting council finances under great strain. Government support during the pandemic has masked the financial problems but the budget setting over the life of this business plan is likely to be the most challenging in many years for our shareholder councils.



The scale of the challenge is very significant with the latest forecasts suggesting that our shareholder councils collectively will need to fill an emerging funding gap of £1.5m by 2026, this represents some 30% of their net revenue budget. To meet this challenge all four shareholder councils have set ambitious targets for making savings, improving efficiency and increasing income in the future to balance their budgets. These are articulated in their Medium Term Financial Strategies and Investment Strategies.

Publica has already delivered £2.5m of recurring annual savings for shareholder councils since 2017 and most major services have been reviewed and modernised; but we recognise that we must seek continuous improvement across the whole range of services we deliver so that we can offer the best possible services to residents and businesses at the best possible value for the shareholder councils. In doing this we need to recognise that we must support the shareholder councils to maintain services. To support the councils in their financial challenges, Publica will play a key role in:

Enhancing council income streams, identifying investment opportunities and maximising available revenues

- Exploring and delivering opportunities to invest in green technology such as solar power and electric vehicle charging infrastructure which could provide a commercial return and deliver against the councils' climate action objectives
- Maximising opportunities for commercial return

through good asset management, investment in and development of land, property and appropriate services, where these can deliver against priorities

Identifying and securing sources of funding to help shareholder councils deliver against priorities

- Bidding for funds to deliver decarbonisation projects across the councils' asset bases to enable council resources to go further and extend our ambitions. Business cases will be brought forward as new funding rounds are announced
- Raising the profile about the challenges facing rural communities and making the case for levelling up funding from the government

Support service transformation with the councils' other service delivery partners such as waste and leisure providers

- Working closely with Ubico and Biffa to deliver new, more efficient and modern waste, recycling, and grounds maintenance and street cleansing services as part of the Environmental Services Innovation Programme (ESIP) as well as exploring opportunities to scale the partnership
- Working in partnership with the shareholder councils' leisure providers (GLL, SLM, and Freedom Leisure) to meet the needs of local residents and support the local health and wellbeing agenda
- Examining whether there are services that the shareholder councils currently provide through external contracts that could be provided equally well or in a way that better meets the councils' priorities by Publica

Delivering services the Publica way

We don't want to be just a standard public service provider, we want to be so much more. Publica is not about cuts; we are about delivering modern efficient public sector services that cost less. Through harnessing the power of our partnership and our unique approach we can be more than the sum of our parts, delivering much more for residents and businesses than would otherwise be possible if the councils and other public sector service providers worked alone.

Innovating to deliver services more efficiently and effectively, sharing knowledge and experience, and providing creative modern solutions to tackling priorities for our shareholder councils and their communities, residents, and businesses.

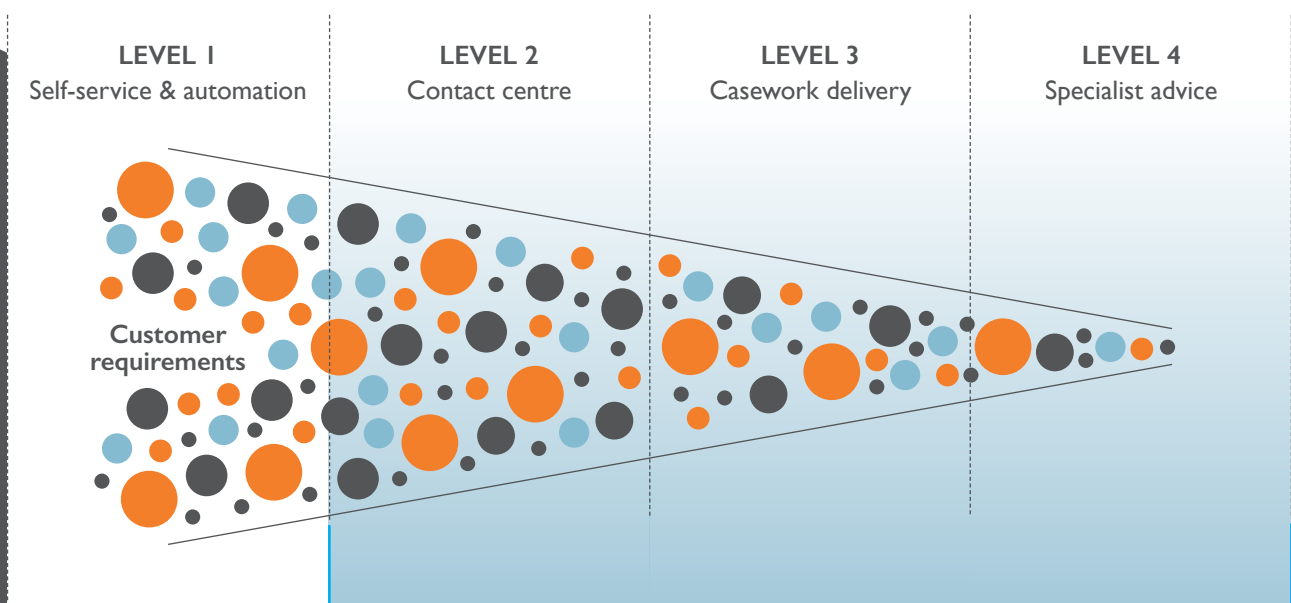
Publica's operating model

To ensure we deliver great modern services for our shareholder councils we will continue to evolve our operating model over the course of this plan. Our customer first model uses automation and technology to deliver high-quality services that residents and businesses use every day.

We know that if we provide good quality digital products and services 24/7 this will provide not only a better customer experience but also minimise the need for customers to contact the councils to obtain information, report something, or make an application. We also know that 10% of UK residents do not use the internet and that some residents

and businesses will need to contact their council by telephone or face to face. We will continue to meet their needs through local contact centres.

The diagram below illustrates our operating model. Customer requirements for services will be met first by designing services in such a way that they are accessed by customers online where they can self-serve (Level 1). Customers that require further assistance can obtain this through our contact centres and council receptions (Level 2). This approach provides better service for customers and is more efficient for the shareholder councils. Only those enquiries or transactions that are the most complex or require professional knowledge or expertise should need to be transferred to our casework and specialist teams (Level 3/4). The benefit of this is that the shareholder councils will continue to have very high customer satisfaction and further development of the model will ensure this continues.



We have already improved the content on the shareholder councils' websites and introduced some new digital products like the Open Portal to enable residents and businesses to complete council tax and business rates transactions 24/7 and more than 2,000 people have already signed up. We have introduced a new online process for residents to report missed waste collections and 30% of reports are now made via our website. We issue more than 80,000 garden waste licences a year and residents can now purchase and pay for these online 24/7. Each of the shareholder councils has made improvements to their reception areas enabling our staff to meet residents and businesses face to face. We have made some improvements to a number of planning service processes including reducing the validation time by almost 70%, this has improved the customer journey and experience.

Using technology to drive service improvements across the partnership

Over the next three years, by implementing the right systems in the right areas, we can continue to make improvements to the services we deliver for shareholder councils. They include:

- Delivering more digital transactional services to support 'channel choice' for residents and businesses and reduce the volume of avoidable telephone calls including environmental services, revenues and benefits (council tax, business rates), and regulatory services
- Implementing technology to modernise our approach to recruitment, human resource management, democratic services, consultation and engagement, and planning
- Upgrading our office based systems to Microsoft 365 to support more agile and collaborative working
- Improving our cyber security. Our systems are already good but we plan to do more and will need to invest in this area. Due to the nature of cyber security we will keep it under constant review during the period of this business plan

Options for future development and growth of the partnership

We need to look at ways the Publica business could develop over the coming years, as the national landscape for local government changes, to benefit our shareholder councils and clients in meeting the financial challenges and delivering improved services. Over the course of this business plan we will look to explore opportunities including:

- Reviewing the potential for further in-sourcing of services to deliver additional control and value to partner councils when these opportunities present themselves

- Keep open and explore opportunities for new councils to join and benefit from the partnership
- Reviewing the business model to see if different approaches might complement the opportunities that are available to grow and scale the partnership
- Collaborating further with Ubico and Biffa and their shareholder councils to exploit opportunities to grow and innovate through the Environmental Services Innovation Programme

How we will monitor progress

The partnership has a comprehensive framework to monitor performance of the councils' plans and priorities, the Publica Business Plan and service performance, and these will be used to provide assurance and include:

- The Publica Shareholder Forum to discuss strategic issues
- The Publica Board where performance against shareholder council performance targets is monitored
- Meetings between the Publica Board and Cabinets of each Shareholder Council to discuss local priorities and performance
- Quarterly council scrutiny and Cabinet meetings at each shareholder council where council performance targets are monitored
- Audit and Scrutiny Committees at each shareholder council
- The publication of the Publica annual report
- Regular all councillor updates and briefings at each shareholder council
- Information on the councillor portals at Cotswold, Forest of Dean, and West Oxfordshire District Councils
- Reporting against agreed SLAs
- Live management information
- In the first year of this plan we will adopt specific improvement plans for development management services, human resources and democratic services

80,000

We issue more than 80,000 garden waste licences a year and residents can now purchase and pay for these online 24/7

Planet: how we will tackle climate change

Tackling climate change is the challenge of our generation, and with each shareholder council declaring a climate emergency as well as an ecological/biodiversity emergency, we must make our response central to all we do. Tackling the climate emergency will become a key focus through all our activity at Publica and we will put it front and centre so it has the urgent attention it requires.

As a start we have signed up to the national "Race to Zero" climate commitment for businesses, to achieve net zero carbon by 2030 and that will be a key target for us. To achieve our commitment we will work with the shareholder councils and our clients to make fundamental and rapid changes across all services to innovate, support, challenge, propose solutions, and aid decision making for a low carbon future.

We will support our shareholder councils to demonstrate leadership in delivering their climate

ambitions, set out in their Corporate Plans and detailed in adopted climate action and ecological targets. This will be achieved by seeking external funding and exploring opportunities to engage with and support residents and businesses to reduce their carbon footprint, and using council powers and influence to instigate changes in behaviour, work practises and development. We will also look for community financing and investment opportunities in carbon reduction assets such as renewable energy generation and storage.

Working together to
reach a target of net-zero carbon by

2030

Supporting our councils' net zero ambitions for their areas will also mean we will encourage an innovative approach to planning policy, supporting the trajectory to net zero carbon in development management and look to bring forward flagship environmental design schemes for housing and development.

Moving Publica to net zero carbon by 2030

Publica's carbon footprint is intricately linked with that of our shareholding councils so it is vital that we play our full part in the push to net zero carbon. We will demonstrate our commitment to net zero carbon by putting the climate emergency at the heart of all that we do, ensuring all staff understand and consider

climate and ecological impacts in the services they provide and the decisions that they advise on. We will do this by:

- Rolling out formal Carbon Literacy Training to our employees, aiming to be recognised as a gold level Carbon Literate Organisation over the term of this plan.
- Securing advanced climate emergency training for planning officers and other employees whose professional roles require that they have a greater understanding of issues around energy use, low emission building and transport technologies



- Promoting opportunities to use the two volunteering days that we encourage all employees to take as part of their role with Publica, to support biodiversity and carbon reduction activities - potentially providing up to 1,000 days per year
- Embedding climate, ecological and social value considerations in procurement processes to maximise the use of sustainable suppliers and support local businesses
- Making climate implications a core consideration in decision making, alongside finance, legal and risk
- Implementing our Agile Working Strategy that will reduce unnecessary business miles and staff commuting journeys as well as heating and lighting in under occupied offices
- Making use of our video-link technology as the default option for internal meetings and events,

which is already reducing business mileage dramatically. By halving our business mileage we can save the equivalent of 98 tonnes of carbon dioxide each year

- Changing vehicles to ultra low emission and electric vehicles and reviewing Publica's lease car offer to incentivise our employees to choose electric vehicles for their personal and work journeys
- Encouraging cycling and car-sharing for any essential business trips
- Encouraging our employees to follow the waste hierarchy at work and home with the aim of reducing energy use, purchasing sustainable products and minimising the use of single-use plastics
- Reporting our progress towards net zero carbon in our annual reports



People

We will only accomplish our aims and deliver our shareholder council priorities if the very best in class people work for Publica. We need to use the advantages we have as a Teckal company to bring in people who are enthusiastic about change and are committed to delivering great public services.

In a challenging employment market, we will need to be innovative and adaptable to attract great candidates. We will increasingly do this by developing our own in class people locally, through apprenticeship schemes and great working relations with local training providers. We will also continue to recruit nationally, to attract the best talent from across the country, when we need to get the right person for a particular role.

We need to continue building our reputation as a great employer, a great place to work and somewhere people can be ambitious and fulfil their full potential. Our employees need to feel well-led, supported, rewarded and empowered within a healthy workplace culture.

Our key areas for development of our people over the course of this business plan are linked with the

Investors in People framework (IIP) which will assist us in continuing to develop the right conditions for improving services and delivering services and key projects for our shareholding councils.

Focussing on our people and modernisation

To bring leadership and focus to modernisation and improvement we will be recruiting a senior manager responsible for organisational effectiveness. This investment will enable us to make the most of our new digital technology and to genuinely modernise and evolve our operating model.

Leading: Develop great leaders at all levels in Publica

For Publica, 'leadership at all levels' means empowering all our employees, whatever their role, to take ownership for making positive changes and inspiring their colleagues. Having great leaders at all levels is crucial for us to be able to support the councils to set

clear, achievable objectives we can deliver. To develop our current and future leaders we will:

- Provide an ongoing leadership programme that allows all employees to develop their knowledge, skills and behaviours to better deliver council priorities and services
- Drive a noticeable culture change, especially around increasing trust, recognition, collaborative working and building confidence at all levels
- Embed a coaching culture to support the development of others, and engage in peer coaching to support each other and problem solve
- Strengthen staff engagement, for example through holding a regular informal staff forum

Supporting: Enhance the wellbeing of our employees, ensuring that they are supported to deliver to their full potential and that they are recognised for their achievements.

To be a truly great place to work our people need to feel well supported to deliver their role, both in their team and also at a Publica-wide level. To achieve this we will:

- Achieve Investors in People (IIP) accreditation, to validate our progress towards becoming a great place to work
- Implement our agile working approach and ensure our people processes and policies are fit for a modern, flexible workforce, promoting good work/ life balance and support for staff at all stages of their life
- Celebrate diversity, encourage and promote positive relationships, and challenge inequality

Improving: Deliver a comprehensive improvement programme to support the recruitment, retention, training and development of staff

Recruiting good people and then developing them is key to Publica's ongoing success in delivering great services for our shareholder councils and our clients. We want to improve our approach to organisational development so staff can stay with Publica, improve and grow their careers, enabling us to keep good employees and deliver better services. To do this we will:

- Grow our talent from within the organisation, identifying and developing our high performers and future leaders alongside structured succession planning and more career graded posts
- Drive improvements in our human resources service, particularly to strengthen recruitment and retention, including implementation of a new Applicant Tracking System
- Provide all our people with training and development opportunities that support the ambitions and strategic priorities of the Publica partnership
- Maximise the use of our apprenticeship levy by offering employees professional qualifications to develop their careers within Publica and promote their achievements
- Aim to have 10% of our employees engaged in leadership and/or professional development training programmes
- Enhance our benefits package for employees to strengthen recruitment and retention



Place

We are committed to providing great services to local communities, residents and businesses and delivering key projects with the shareholder councils, being flexible where we need to be and sharing resources and ideas.

Our shareholder councils share some ambitions but they also each have local needs and priorities that will deliver against their own corporate plans. During the life of this business plan we will deliver against these priorities and corporate plans for each of the councils. We will respect their individual identities, while also making the most of delivery through the partnership, achieving more together and collaborating and pushing the boundaries of what we do to showcase the very best in place-based delivery. During the life of this business plan we will support the shareholder councils develop their approach to

the government's levelling-up missions and in particular the challenges facing rural communities.

Our approach to programme and project management will continue to evolve and enable us to deliver large scale and complex work and agreed outcomes and benefits for shareholder councils and partners. We have established a portfolio board and recruited new project managers who are part of a central resource and this will help us deliver an ambitious programme of work during the life of this plan.



Growing local economies and driving renewal and recovery

Through understanding the needs of local businesses and opportunities, we will provide support to local economies by encouraging resilience and growth and actively driving regeneration. To do this we will:

- Progress regeneration projects at key locations such as Five Acres, Coleford; Hensington Road, Woodstock; and Town Centre strategic sites in Cirencester
- Help economies grow and evolve by supporting new and existing local businesses to thrive by creating a positive business environment; supporting investment, providing business support, encouraging the transition to digital and low carbon where appropriate, and delivering effective licensing and regulatory services that support them in providing compliant and safe services and premises
- Support town centres to evolve in the face of changing shopping habits and encouraging residents to support local businesses

Encouraging and facilitating the delivery of affordable housing

All the shareholder councils want to deliver affordable housing where the market is not delivering sufficiently to meet the needs of local people and we want to be ambitious in our delivery for the shareholder councils:

- We will continue to deliver affordable housing in partnership with developers and housing providers, seeking additional affordable units and sustainability enhancements in innovative ways
- We will push the boundaries with exemplar design to maximise the delivery of development schemes that are sustainable and align with net-zero carbon ambitions

Helping to develop future plans for our areas that deliver for communities and protect the environment

Through the development of Local Plans for the shareholder councils,



we will help shape the future of each area. They will be focussed on local priorities such as bringing about even more affordable homes, promoting net-zero carbon homes, growing local economies and planning for sympathetic development. This will be achieved by:

- Delivery of refreshed Local Plans and updates, exploring new ways to engage communities around the key priorities for those plans and the future of each area
- Effective engagement with town and parish councils to shape development and meet local needs
- Managing and monitoring the delivery of sustainable development in the right place at the right time to meet identified needs by raising awareness and expectations for good design and sustainable development

Helping to build and support strong, healthy and resilient communities

Through direct engagement with residents we will look to understand community needs and then help them provide solutions that work at a local level. We want local communities to buy into solutions and work alongside their councils and other public services, charities and partners. This will be achieved by:

- Developing and strengthening relationships with county and district councils, the NHS and the police, leisure providers, and town and parish councils, supporting funding bids and promoting funding opportunities
- Supporting the voluntary community sector (VCS) and commissioned services (e.g. social prescribing)
- Supporting communities to provide assistance at a local level for key local issues such as independent

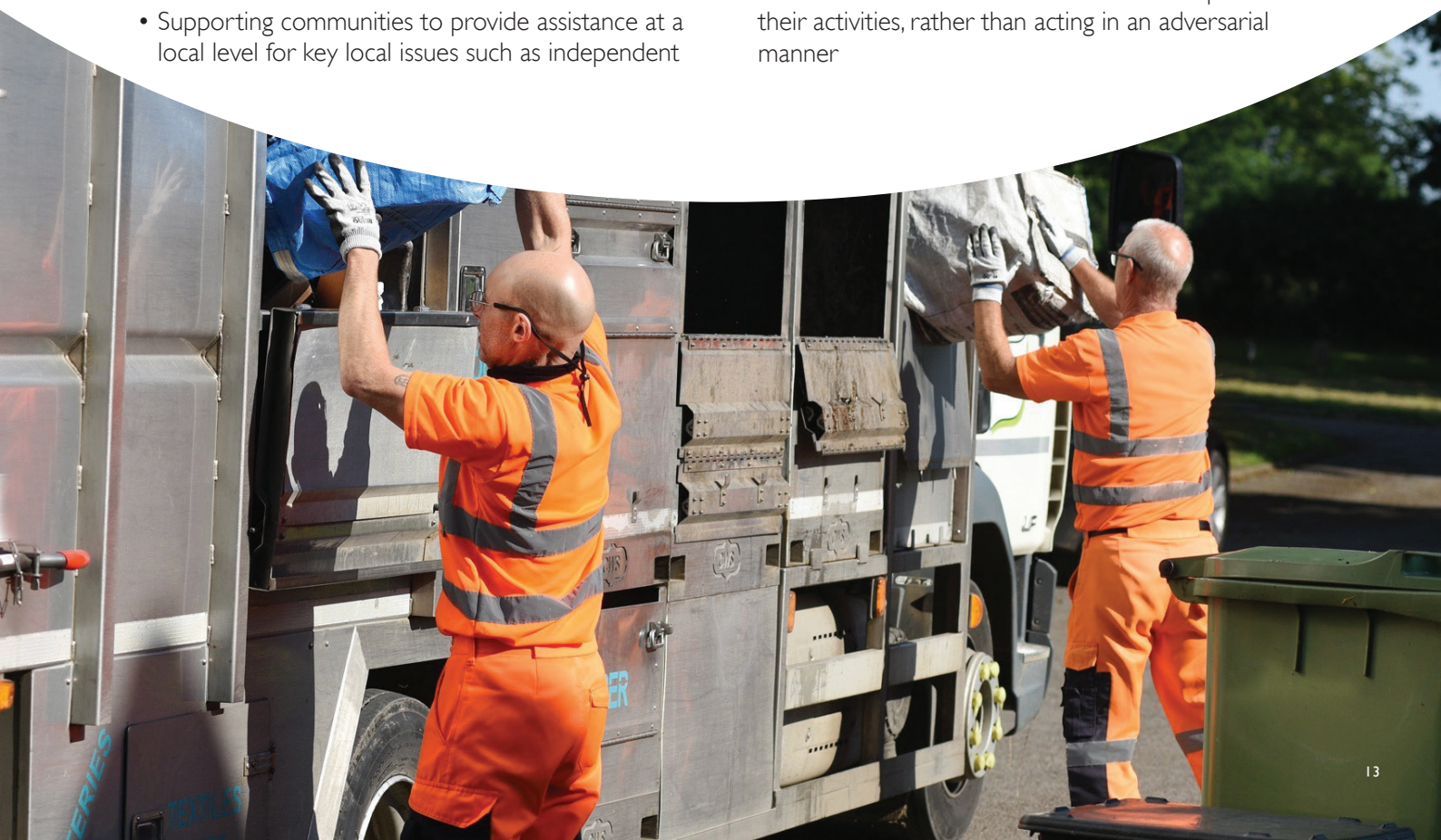
living, good mental health and isolation

- Developing our approach to digital engagement with communities, particularly those that are hard to reach, using digital engagement platforms
- Work in partnership to provide effective response, prevention and preparation for flood events and other major incidents that impact on communities, residents and businesses in the Cotswolds, Forest of Dean, and West Oxfordshire
- Working closely with partners, including the shareholder councils' leisure providers, to develop healthy communities, enabling inclusive sustainable leisure, sports and recreation facilities, green infrastructure and access to places to walk, run and cycle

Looking after our local environment

Each of the shareholder councils covers landscapes nationally regarded for their outstanding beauty and heritage. Maintaining these areas so they are clean and well kept is important across the partnership. We will deliver high quality services in the areas we are responsible for, as well as work in partnership, and to achieve this we will:

- Continue to work with our partners Ubico and Biffa to operate great waste collection and recycling services as well as tackling fly-tipping and environmental crime
- Operate our regulatory services such as development management, environmental health and licensing in a way that supports businesses to succeed and reduces the environmental impact of their activities, rather than acting in an adversarial manner



Continued improvement of our Development Management Service

Development Management is one of the key services Publica provides to the shareholder councils and plays an important role in shaping local areas. Nationally the sector is facing challenges including increased demand and greater expectations to deliver against local and national policies and priorities and we have not escaped that.

Our aim is to provide 'best in class' planning services for our shareholder councils and we are committed to this. A review of the service was initiated in 2021, focussing on three key areas: resources, processes, and communication with customers, stakeholders, and councillors. We have already turned the corner and the service has improved, however, we recognise that more work needs to be done.

Below is a set of ambitious priorities that we are committed to delivering over the period of this business plan:

- Ensure we determine 80% of planning applications within 8 weeks
- Introduction of a modern pre-application service
- All senior managers responsible for planning will be part of a leadership development programme
- Introduction of all Member updates and a data dashboard
- Improving our user research approach to inform future service development

- Engaging the services of the Planning Advisory Service to provide some objective advice to assist us in moving to the next level
- Development of customer service standards. We will be publishing our standards so that customers have clarity on what levels of service to expect
- A review of the planning enforcement service. This will incorporate a review of the current caseload but also how we triage cases and whether a more collaborative approach to investigation would benefit the shareholder councils and local communities
- A review of the other services impacted by the increased demand in Development Management. Priority areas being the 'Heritage, Design and Sustainability Service' and the 'Flooding and Drainage Service'

80%

Further performance and service design development work ensuring we determine 80% of planning application within 8 weeks



Our Financial landscape

As a 'Teckal' company Publica has a special relationship with its shareholding councils. Given the financial challenges they face, it is imperative that Publica delivers the services they have commissioned within the agreed budget envelope.

THREE YEAR BUDGET PLAN	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
SALES	£'000	£'000	£'000
Contract income	29,094	29,133	29,635
DIRECT COSTS:			
Salaries (Inc. on-costs)	(24,855)	(24,835)	(25,262)
Agency costs	(30)	(31)	(31)
Contractor costs	(65)	(67)	(68)
Employee transport and travel	(300)	(300)	(300)
Other staff costs	(511)	(524)	(534)
Gross surplus	3,333	3,376	3,439
Administration expenses	(1,930)	(1,988)	(2,028)
Other operating expenses	(4)	(4)	(4)
Operating surplus	1,399	1,384	1,407
Net interest (payable)/ receivable	2	3	4
Surplus	1,401	1,387	1,411
Tax	0	0	0
Contract fee refund	(1,385)	(1,371)	(1,395)
Retained surplus	16	16	16

Given the short term funding streams the councils are receiving, there are an increasing number of roles that are funded on a fixed term basis. This makes longer term forecasting difficult and adds to the challenge of recruitment and retention.

Notwithstanding this, the table above sets out the projected three year business plan financial estimates. The plan assumes that current short term funded posts are discontinued from April 2023 and at this stage additional savings targets are based around the original business case. This will need to be reviewed over the next year as we plan to meet the additional pressures facing the shareholding councils.

Over the last decade downward national public sector pay pressures have exacerbated recruitment and retention issues for Publica and the wider public sector in general. We find ourselves struggling to compete for some roles, particularly where they are either highly local government specialised or in sectors with extremely high commercial demand. To try to counter this challenge the three year business

plan includes additional resources to:

- Accelerate our drive for equal pay within our pay and grading structure, resolving legacy pay issues
- We want to develop a 'grow your own' culture so staff, and in particular apprentices, can stay with Publica, improve and grow their careers, enabling us to keep good employees and deliver better services
- Offer enhancements to our pension scheme to improve the reward package we offer and seek pension quality mark accreditation (www.pensionqualitymark.org.uk)
- Provide funding to support cost pressures in the non-pay benefits of staff across the partnership

We want to develop a 'grow your own' culture so staff, and in particular apprentices, can stay with Publica, improve and grow their careers

Our Priorities for 2022 to 2023

This Business Plan has set out our strategic priorities for a three year period up to 2025. We will be working on all of the activity outlined in this plan from the outset, however, there are a number of areas in the plan we will be focused on delivering over the first year.

During the first year of the business plan our priorities will be to:

- Make our response to climate change central to all we do
- Support our shareholder councils to deliver their medium term financial strategies and investment strategies to fill the emerging funding gaps they have of £15m by 2026
- Continue to evolve and develop the Publica operating model and channel choice to improve services for residents and businesses
 - Achieve Investors in People (IIP) accreditation
- Modernisation of our development management service and our shareholder councils waste services in partnership with Ubico



PUBLICA

Publica Business Plan 2022 to 2025