



Publica Annual Report:

2024/25

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Foreword



Frank Wilson
Managing Director



Christine Gore
Chair of the Publica Board

The financial year to 31st March 2025 has been a year when the Publica Values have never mattered more. Implementing the shareholder council review brought significant change and uncertainty for our teams, and those values have guided us through every step.

These changes in November 2024 and July 2025 demanded sharper transformation skills – from restructuring and cost modelling to employment transfers – as we pivoted towards a more traditional shared service model.

Publica has always been agile, but this year tested that agility like never before. Governance and management structures were reshaped in response to the review, and the Local Partnerships Report recommended further changes to strengthen both our Board and Executive leadership.

Working closely with shareholders, we've designed new Board arrangements – to be implemented in mid-2025/26 – that streamline governance, add council officer representation, and preserve independence through Non-Executive Directors. This balance will build stronger links with councils while retaining robust oversight.

The transition of around one-third of services back to councils has also driven restructuring of the Executive team and the delivery of required overhead savings. The new leadership group will focus on reinforcing Publica's core services, supporting staff to grow, and preparing the organisation for the future – a future that includes the government's recently announced reforms to local government from April 2028, which will inevitably reshape how Publica delivers for its communities.

This significant change has been delivered at the same time as continuing to deliver great services to our councils and their communities, residents and businesses. This annual report sets out what we have done over the last year in more detail – none of which would be possible without the support of our incredibly committed workforce who make us proud every day.

To all our people and partners in service delivery the Board would like to express their thanks for the commitment you have given to delivering on behalf of our councils and communities.

Executive Summary

2024/25 represented the next phase of Publica's evolutionary journey to deliver excellent core services and effective, modern, frontline services. In providing these services, we have strived to deliver the best possible outcomes for local residents and businesses, whilst maintaining excellent value for the shareholder councils. We continue progress on this journey by focussing delivery and improvement activity around our priorities of Place, People, Planet, as set out in the Publica 2024/25 Business Plan.



As services have migrated between Publica and its shareholder Councils, the value proposition of Publica has been strengthened in the areas in which it truly excels at supporting service delivery. The following sections of our Annual Report highlight the huge impact and potential that shared services have made in the delivery of shareholder ambitions over the past financial year. Amongst these are some particularly notable successes, including:

- Office accommodation changes in Cotswold and West Oxfordshire, increasing efficiency, driving down costs and enhancing revenue streams
- Supporting the TUPE transfer of Cheltenham Borough Homes employees into Cheltenham Borough Council together with all the associated ICT Infrastructure changes
- Transformation of waste services across the partnership, including:
 - Procurement and transfer of a new waste management contract in Forest of Dean
- A new street cleansing service and recycling contract in West Oxfordshire, generating savings in **excess of £500k**
- Reorganisation of rounds in the Cotswolds, delivering **£500k** of savings
- Transformation of our contact centres delivering **£250k** of savings to Cotswold and West Oxfordshire, whilst maintaining the lead position in national rankings.
- Maintaining strong, secure IT applications and infrastructure, forming the fundamental building blocks for council services.

These successes are particularly notable against a backdrop of transition, where our teams supported over 250 members of staff to move back into the direct employment of the council. The remainder of this annual report sets out the work we have done with our council partners to ensure we collectively deliver on behalf of our councils, residents, and communities.

Publica Priorities

(Place, People, Planet & Transition)

Supporting councils to deliver their priorities

Shareholder councils have ambitious plans to deliver their key local priorities outlined in their corporate plans. Publica supports shareholder councils by both maximising the potential for sharing expertise across common themes and delivering key projects. In doing so, Publica remains flexible and agile to emerging priorities in order to realise benefits for local communities. The infographic below summarises the main themes across the partnership, which are supported by Publica:



Communities & Economy: Thriving, resilient communities with prosperous, sustainable, and growing economies.



Housing & Wellbeing: Delivering housing, affordable homes and supporting resident wellbeing.



Modern Services: Delivering efficient, modern and value for money services.



Environment: Decarbonisation, nature recovery and creating a better environment for people and wildlife.

Publica staff play a vital role in translating these priorities into reality, whether that be through the delivery of key projects or in the outcomes from frontline services on which residents depend. The following examples, demonstrate the scale of impact that working together has achieved over the past financial year.



Communities and Economy: Supporting thriving, resilient communities with prosperous, sustainable, and growing economies

We are incredibly proud of the amazing work that has been delivered in communities across the partnership, working hand in hand with councillors, council leadership teams, local organisations and our residents. Our work strengthens growth and provides opportunities for a wide range of residents and SMEs to thrive within shareholder council areas.

- Delivery of grant funding to businesses and local groups under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund, allocating a total of **over £3 million**.
- Supported **654 households** to become more energy efficient through the Warm and Well programme.
- 2,100 interventions with residents, expected to generate **£1.46 million** in lifetime energy savings and prevent **7,744 tonnes** of carbon emissions.
- Car Parking improvements including updated infrastructure, usage audit, and a consultation to deliver new strategies at WODC & CDC.
- Securing the lease of the former Biffa Depot in Cinderford to facilitate the transfer of the waste service contract to Ubico.
- Extensive repair and renovation of several key buildings including roofs at Trinity Road and the Old Court House, Witney.
- Asset optimisation, including:
 - 35% reduction in office space occupied by CDC, reducing revenue costs and CO2 emissions by an estimated **41,712 t** per year.
- Watermoor Point collaboration at Trinity Road to provide serviced office accommodation for local SMEs and generate a revenue return for the Council.
- Modernisation of Council Chamber and Committee rooms at Woodgreen with an upgrade of technology to a multimedia facility enabling livestreaming of events and streaming of civic meeting. Relocation of staff to Woodgreen to facilitate the renovation, repurposing and letting of Elmfield to the service officer provider, Hexagon generating an additional income for WODC.
- Freeing up lettable space at the FODDC offices and facilitating the MPs office move into the Council Offices.
- Asset management strategies developed and adopted at three Councils, facilitating:
 - Sale of assets which are a financial liability such as the Old Station Cirencester.
 - Condition surveys in West Oxfordshire to shape leisure contract procurement.
 - Review of income generating assets such as Pyatts Court in the Forest of Dean.

Housing and Wellbeing: Delivering housing, affordable homes and supporting resident wellbeing

Publica supports shareholder councils to achieve their housing and wellbeing priorities through a wide range of projects and interventions. We are particularly proud of expanding our activity during the past year through the LIFT programme and County leading work through the Housing First project.

- LIFT - implemented the Low Income Family Tracker (LIFT) dashboard to identify and support residents at risk of financial hardship.
 - The work secured **over £88,000** in unclaimed benefits for pensioners, with an estimated lifetime impact of **£421,000**. LIFT represents the start of our journey in delivering the Councils' ongoing strategy to support vulnerable residents.
- Cotswold Housing First project
 - Partnership working between the Council, Bromford, and P3 to support residents unable to thrive in regular tenancies, eliminating rough sleeping.
- Forest of Dean Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2025–2030
 - Preventing homelessness for **200** residents
 - reduced reliance on costly B&B accommodation, minimising disruption for families.
- WODC Local Authority Housing Fund Round 3
 - Four additional housing units, bringing the total number of units to **27**.
- Supporting the development of Local Plans
- Homelessness – Councils in the **top 10%** nationally, with one or fewer rough sleepers.
- Affordable homes delivery:
 - CDC - **56**
 - FODDC - **30**
 - WODC - **198**



Our performance of key services across the year

BENEFITS

68,288

residents supported
with applications



HOUSING

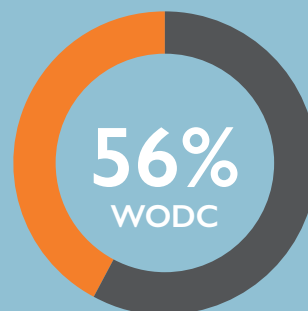
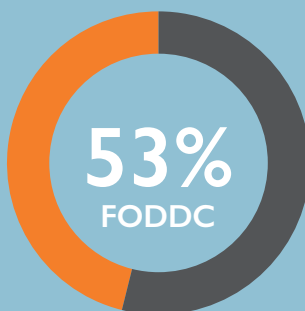
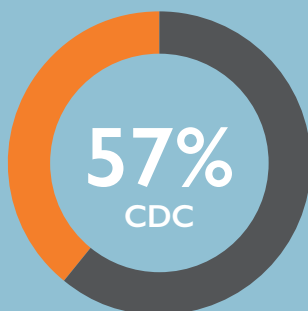


620

residents prevented from
becoming homeless

WASTE

Our partnership delivers some of the best recycling rates nationally



£4.6M



cummulative savings from
environmental services
innovation programme

76,766



green licences sold

PEOPLE



136

Carbon literacy
training

700

Staff supported
through learning
and development



CUSTOMER SERVICE

22%

Fewer phone calls



70%

Increase in digital contact

98%

of customers satisfied

REGULATORY



5,000

Planning applications
validated



1,400

Food businesses inspected

Modern Services: Customer service excellence through the Customer Promise

Whether supporting residents with transactional requests or making it easier to access services digitally, meeting customer needs and ensuring that they have a consistently good experience is at the heart of everything Publica does.

Building on the partnership's earlier successes of improving accessibility to digital services and delivering significant savings off the back of customer service transformation across the partnership, the last financial year follows in a similar vein. The following areas have been the focus of our work:

Maintaining a sector leading position for customer satisfaction

Throughout 2025 partnership councils were present in the top three councils for phone satisfaction 18 times! They have also taken the lead position in each month between January and August with an incredible 98% satisfaction level. When considered in tandem with the significant savings previously achieved (£256,000 per annum shared equally between CDC and WODC) and sustained in the last financial year, this is a real commendation to the hard work that the team puts in to achieve sector leading results.

- **313120** customer interactions
- **550** Services
- **98%** satisfaction
- **No.1** GovMetric in 2025
- **£256k** of annualised savings

Innovation and driving positive change

In addition to having satisfied customers, supported by staff operating within a strong, customer focused, framework of standards, the last financial year's emphasis has been on improvement and innovation for our residents. The following areas have undergone improvement and transformation to offer even better service and value for our customers, shareholders and staff:

- The Revenues Service Improvement Programme took a multidisciplinary approach to improvement, including specialists from the team, Customer Services, IT and Data/Performance. The work focussed on five key objectives:

- Improving Performance - resulting in up to **25% increase** in individual performance.
- Improving Collection Rates – overall collections are now **99%** on average.
- Reducing Outstanding Workloads - compared to September 2024 we have **60% less** Council Tax work outstanding and **40% less** Business Rate work.
- Workforce Planning and Generic Working - a new efficient workforce plan is in place.
- Enabling Digital Access: Our customer portal, now has over **50,000** residents, signed up, a **64% increase** on our signup for 2023/24. This has supported phone calls decreasing by **22%**.
- Round Reorganisation – Housing growth requires periodic re-balancing of waste collection rounds to make sure they remain efficient and fit for purpose. A collaboration between Publica and UBICO involved an engagement campaign with over 70% of households in Cotswold to support changes leading to more efficient and better-balanced rounds and delivering £500k of annual savings.



Modern Services: Strong Secure Infrastructure: ICT Security and Support for Change

Strong ICT capabilities have always been at the core of our approach to provide fundamental building blocks for many of our shareholder councils' (and partners') services, including facilitating the main means by which residents and businesses access and engage with council services.

During the past financial year, we have followed this approach closely, by developing our core capabilities of optimising network performance, managing devices effectively, and enforcing robust governance over data access, systems, backups, and business continuity.

Successes have been achieved in the following areas:

- Additional Cyber capabilities building on the investment made in 2023.
- Wi-Fi upgrades across all Council buildings supporting the latest standards and security.
- Improving Internet connectivity and responsiveness
- Enhancing Disaster Recovery.
- Introduction of secure and compliant AI capabilities for everyone
- Implemented replacement IT Service Management solution.

Disaster Recovery Case Study:

In September 2024 significant rainfall destroyed the Cirencester office network after overwhelming gutters. By rapidly deploying temporary networks, staff were able to work safely and provide services. Later the same week, the building suffered an unrelated

catastrophic power surge, destroying vital Server Infrastructure. By working through the night, basic services were restored ensuring services could continue to operate throughout the weekend. Our ability to continue delivering services and rapidly recover demonstrates the strength and resilience of both our infrastructure and the skill and ability of our teams.

• Cyber Protection

- Investment in our team's knowledge, threat prevention, incident response, and awareness training has been at the core of our Cyber Security prevention and response capability for many years.
- Our teams operate systems that collect over 100 million security events every day which are analysed automatically for patterns and threats. These events are turned into approximately 50 incidents a day which are investigated.
- Our capability is critical across council operations, ensuring that our core systems remain stable and functional for our people and customers.

Environment: Supporting decarbonisation, nature recovery and creating a better environment for people and wildlife

Whether it be through managing and delivering projects to decarbonise council operations or by upskilling staff through Carbon Literacy training, Publica continues to play a vital role in tackling climate and ecological emergencies declared by shareholder councils.

- Expansion of electric vehicle charging infrastructure and fleet
 - Charge points installed at:
 - Car parks in Tetbury, Cirencester, Stow-on-the-Wold, and Moreton-in-Marsh.
 - CDC, WODC and FODDC Council offices to support electric pool cars.
 - Valley Road Waste Depot, enabling deployment of two electric kerbside recycling vehicles—the first of their kind in England.
 - Three Electric vans and an ultra-narrow vehicle deployed in Witney
 - Electric pool vehicles have been leased for Councils
 - Roof mounted Solar PV has been installed at Trinity Road, Elmfield, and Windrush leisure centre
 - Climate, ecological, and social value considerations have been embedded into procurement processes

Publica is incredibly proud of the enthusiasm and passion that staff have shown in relation to both becoming Carbon Literate and taking direct action to reduce their carbon impact. **Over 130** members of staff were trained in the 2024/25 financial year and are in the process of delivering or submitting their decarbonisation pledges.

Our staff have committed to interventions across a wide range of areas including:

- 134 Staff
- A range of interventions including:
 - Energy Use (Reducing digital storage)
 - Travel (Pool Bikes, dedicated days to leave vehicles at home)
 - Building Efficiency (Business grants for decarbonisation)
 - Project Management (Embedding & mitigating climate impacts)
 - Waste Reduction (Supporting business to increase recycling)



People & Transition: Supporting staff to deliver modern services



During 2024/25 we have successfully implemented a number of initiatives which continue to support our greatest asset: our employees:

- The Wellbeing Strategy - a go-to resource for all things related to mental and physical wellbeing.
- Developed our team of wellbeing advocates, trained in mental health first aid.
- Introduced ILM certified training aimed at developing essential leadership and management skills for our current and future leaders.
- Supporting fresh talent in the partnership through the Apprenticeship Levy in specialist sectors such as planning, regulation, and democracy.
- Launched the first 'women in leadership' cohort.
- Provided a range of support for employees who are returning to councils:
 - Managing change and stress courses
 - CV building and interview skills for staff who applied for new council roles.
- **700** staff supported
- **89** courses
- Courses cover a range of topics
 - Carbon Literacy
 - IT
 - Health & Safety
 - Cyber Awareness
 - Specialist career development

Transition

The decision by our partner councils to in-source services and staff from Publica has been a significant focus in 2024/25.

To ensure our employees transferred seamlessly in November 2024 and July 2025 we:

- Formed a Transition Team to manage the transfer across both Publica and the Councils.
- This was a cross functional team, delivering on all 'people' related deliverables including union engagement, employee consultation, communication, pay, wellbeing and training, all ICT changes, as well as developing a robust financial model which has been used to model service redesign and enable informed decision-making.
- supported the Councils with an agreed approach and detailed planning for heavily integrated (fragmented) services, limiting the scope for TUPE.
- Delivered service redesign and cost modelling

Our Payroll and HR support team also successfully supported two further TUPE's in 2024/25, transferring Cheltenham Borough Homes back into Cheltenham Borough Council and at the Forest of Dean, moving Biffa's staff into Ubico.

- **258** people transferred back to councils
- Managing the transfer of **circa £13.1m** budget

The skills, experience and knowledge developed over the past year will be invaluable as we navigate the complexities of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).



Meeting the financial challenges of our partner councils

Over the full financial year Publica has met its budget targets. The budget for 2024/25 incorporated a savings target of £340k. An additional £878k of one-off (non-recurring) savings were also delivered for the partner councils.

Our savings and modernisation plan for 2024/25 included the second half year savings of the Customer Experience Improvement Programme, amending our operating hours and focusing resources to match service demand. In addition to this the first five months of savings from the Publica senior leadership restructure delivered a **further £170,000** of recurring savings.

The savings made in 2024/25 bring the total underlying annual budget savings to **£3.5m** since the formation of Publica set against a target of **£2.1m**

at this stage of the business case. In addition to this underlying budget reduction Publica has delivered back to the partner councils a total of **£4.3m** of one-off savings through a seven-and-a-half-year track record of delivering the service within the budget envelope allowing partners to reinvest these funds in priorities of the councils. Total cumulative savings over the period since Publica was formed have now reached **£22.3m**.

TABLE 2 : BUDGET VS ACTUAL 2024/25

BUDGET VS ACTUAL 2023/24	Current Budget Q4	Actual / Accrued Q4	(+) / -
SALES	£000s	£000s	£000s
Contract income	27,710	27,710	(0)
DIRECT COSTS			
Salaries (Inc. oncosts)	(23,838)	(21,905)	(1,933)
Agency costs	(30)	(1,108)	1,078
Contractor costs	0	0	0
Employee transport and travel	(165)	(127)	(38)
Other staff costs	(402)	(453)	51
GROSS SURPLUS	3,275	4,117	(842)
Administration expenses	(2,018)	(2,072)	54
Other operating expenses	0	0	0
OPERATING SURPLUS	1,257	2,045	(788)
Net interest (payable)/ receivable	76	202	(126)
SURPLUS BEFORE TAX	1,333	2,247	(914)
Tax	(14)	(50)	36
Contract fee refund	(1,319)	(1,319)	0
RETAINED SURPLUS	0	0	0
Additional surplus / (deficit) distribution	0	878	(878)

£1.4m Exceeded business case savings by £1.4m

£22m Cumulative savings since 2017

Areas of focus for the coming year

Just as 2024-25 has been a period of substantial change for Publica, the year ahead will require considerable flexibility from Publica as the councils develop unitary authority models and start to consider how services may be delivered in the future.

The Publica Business Plan 2025 – 26 reflects on the potential implications of Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution for the company. Publica has presented future options for the company to its shareholders, as we prepare for LGR. These could include:

1. **Refocus Publica:** Publica continues to deliver core services, with some further locality services transferring to districts or new unitary.
2. **Services transfer to districts:** Transfer all the services delivered by Publica ahead of vesting day.
3. **Services transfer to new unitary:** Transfer all services delivered by Publica to a new unitary or new unitaries on vesting day.

LGR aims for councils to design and implement the best local government structures for efficient and high-quality public service delivery. We believe Publica can offer newly formed unitaries an established delivery vehicle, with a wealth of experience in bringing together services delivered by individual councils, amalgamating separate teams and then delivering substantial transformation and cost savings. Refocusing Publica would enable the company to consolidate and strengthen the core services which it excels at.

2025-26 will therefore be a period over which Publica prepares for transition into whichever unitary environment will ultimately be adopted. In practical terms, we anticipate that we will need to support a range of preparatory activities including:

- Robust analysis to enable partner councils to make informed decisions on options for service delivery vehicles ahead of Vesting day.
- Ensuring that strong ICT fundamentals remain at the core of our approach, including:
 - Strengthening our cyber security capabilities
 - Access to AI models for all employees
 - Providing modern and responsive ICT support and applications to our services
- Focus on staff retention, development, reward, and wellbeing through our People Strategy
- Determine if there are any services remaining with Publica, which may be better delivered at a locality level, on a case-by-case basis.

The next few years will be a period of considerable uncertainty in local government, resilience, agility, and good preparation will be critical in ensuring that Publica is at its most effective in supporting its shareholder councils and new unitaries in the future.



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.



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Publica Annual Report: Progress in 2024/25



The Publica partnership:
Delivering more locally by
working together

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