



COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT  
**January 2021 - March 2021**

# Forest of Dean District Corporate Plan 2019-23

## Our vision for the Forest of Dean District

Our vision is for the Forest of Dean District to be a great place to live, learn, do business and enjoy.

## Our main areas of focus

Working towards our vision, we have five key areas of focus - not shown in any priority order:



## Protect and enhance the local environment and address the climate emergency

### The context

Forest of Dean District Council declared a state of climate emergency in December 2018 'a situation in which urgent action is required to reduce or halt climate change and avoid potentially irreversible environmental damage resulting from it'. The Council then declared a biodiversity emergency in February 2020, meaning a 'nature recovery' is also at the forefront of the Council's agenda.

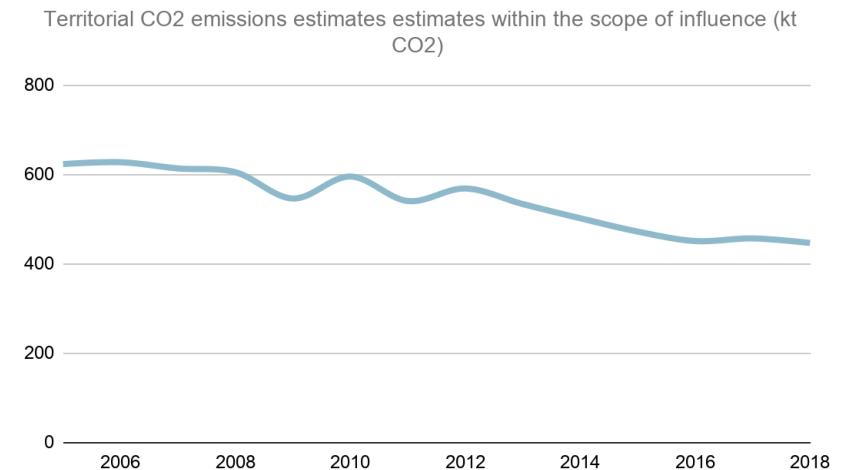
Public forest estate accounts for 21% of the District's land area, presenting both opportunity and challenge when it comes to protecting and enhancing the local environment. Possessing such a large body of trees means that the district has sizeable carbon sequestration potential, the harnessing of which bolsters our commitment to carbon neutrality for the Council and the District by 2030. Global carbon emissions have reduced by 5.5% as a result of decreased travel and industry during the pandemic, and although this is not enough to meet the Paris agreement target, it is focussing international conscience on the importance of working together to mitigate the impact of our day-to-day lives on the planet. In the Forest of Dean, we are well-placed to use our natural heritage sites to inspire the community to take notice and responsibility for their environment, boosting community wellbeing in the process.

We are also faced with the challenge of balancing growing tourism in the District with a need to protect biodiversity. As a result, community and partner engagement is integral to the Council's work to establish the region as a stronghold for nature and the environment.

### The actions we are taking

In March, a full-time Climate Emergency Officer was appointed to work on projects to reduce the Council's and district's Greenhouse Gas emissions in order to ensure it achieves its goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

In January, a £126,000 grant from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme managed by Salix Finance was secured to part fund the project to decarbonise the Coleford offices. The project includes a range of measures, the main measure being the installation of a photovoltaic renewable energy system incorporating solar panels on the building's large south-facing roof, as well as some battery storage. The latter will enable excess generated electricity to be stored and used at times outside of peak sunlight hours, and will also have the capability to store cheaper off-peak grid supplied electricity for use later during peak hours. The invitation to tender for the contract to design and install the system went live on 31st March 2021 and the aim is to have the work completed



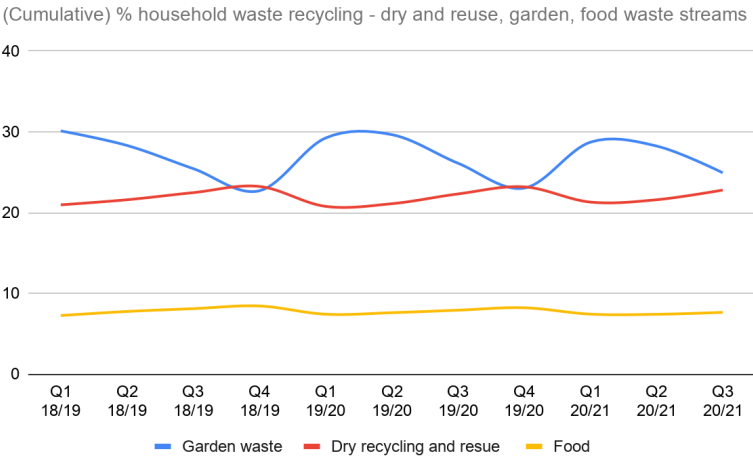
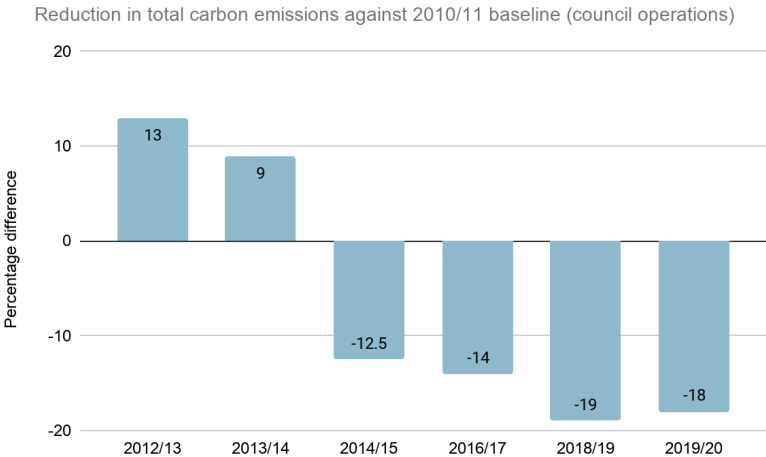
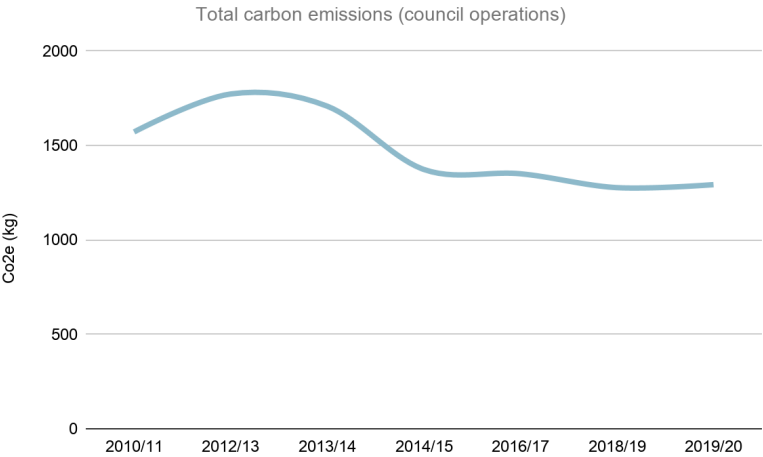
by September 2021. Additionally, seven day timers have been fitted on printers in the office as part of the project, which will also include replacing existing lighting in the building with LEDs and installing some automatic lighting controls. The total project cost is £209,000 with the Council covering the excess, with the savings to the Council from the combined measures estimated at £16,988 per year. The payback period is estimated to be 4.9 years. The estimated reduction in carbon emissions is 3% of the Council's total greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Additionally, work is underway to explore options for the deployment of electric vehicle charging points (EVCP) in council owned car parks in order to support the use and facilitate the uptake of electric vehicles by people living and travelling in the district. With GHG emissions from transport accounting for 35% of the district's total emissions and the Government planning to end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2030, installing EVCP in council owned car parks was identified in the Council's Climate Emergency Rapid Action Plan as playing an important role in decarbonising transport within the district. Following a feasibility study funded by South West Energy Hub and carried out by Element Energy Ltd assessing different charger types, car park suitability, potential business models and deployment strategies, further work has been undertaken to establish whether or not there is a business case for the project via conversations with Western Power Distribution, charge point operators and funding providers. The project would demonstrate local leadership by the Council in the transition to electric vehicles and provide it with an ongoing source of revenue.

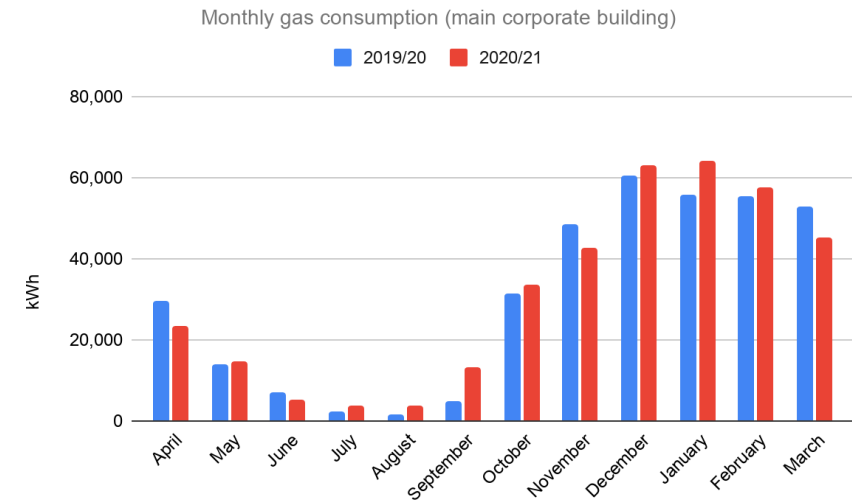
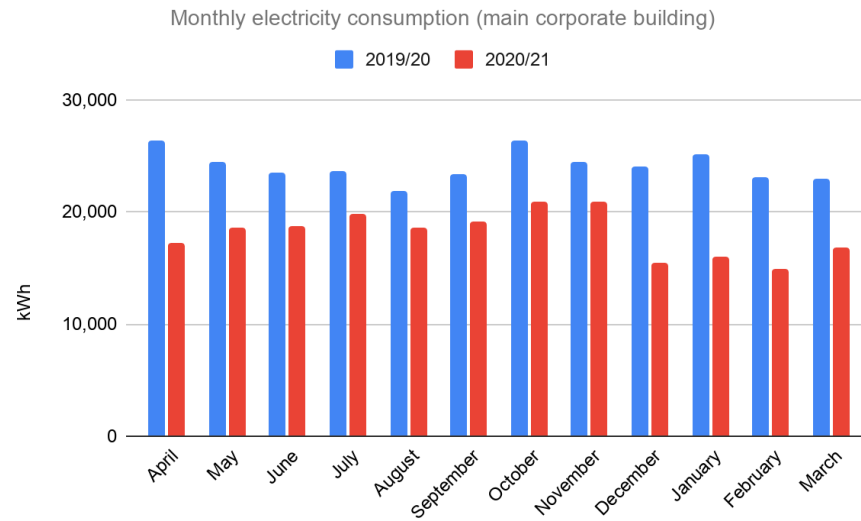
Waste reduction and improved recycling rates are also key areas of focus within the Corporate Plan. During the last quarter, 10 different versions of the waste and recycling calendar were designed, printed and distributed by the Council to households in the District, reminding residents how to correctly dispose of their waste. The Council also promoted WRAP's national 'Food Waste Action Week' on its social media channels at the start of March. The initiative highlighted the prevalence of food waste in the UK and the ways in which it is exacerbating the climate crisis, whilst providing practical ways for people to reduce their contributions. Partnership work with Gloucestershire waste colleagues has also been key to deliver the countywide Clear on Plastics campaign, which highlights environmental issues associated with plastic usage, and explains how to recycle commonly used plastics that are not taken with kerbside collections. Associated promotional material was posted on the Council's social media channels and was also shared on Heart radio. Additionally, the Council has continued to support Hubbub Foundation's Love Your Forest anti-litter campaign, with planning underway for more active work to come when lockdown restrictions allow.

Preliminary work is underway to establish whether or not there is a business case for a new waste depot within the District. The current Waste and Recycling Contract with Biffa is up for renewal in 2024, and therefore offers an opportunity to review future service design. The Council has identified that it may be operationally efficient and financially beneficial in the long-term to acquire a depot. Along with an appraisal of financial risks and benefits of acquiring a waste depot, the Council is also keen to explore the environmental lifecycle costs and carbon impact of all potential Waste and Recycling Contract options going forward. Following a procurement exercise, in December Frith Consulting were selected to complete the service modelling work, including a carbon review, to establish support, or lack thereof, for a business case going forward. Work to understand the impacts of service models is expected to continue into Summer 2021.

# Measures of success for climate change



Overall emissions are down 18% from the baseline 2010/11 figure. Council-owned vehicles made up the largest proportion of emissions (48%) in 2019/20, followed by emissions from gas consumption in our partner leisure centres (27%). This is a similar pattern to previous years.



Since the start of the pandemic, electricity consumption in the Council's main office has fallen due to Covid-19 and home working. Gas consumption has not reduced as the building is heated to prevent condensation forming during the colder months.

## Improve community wellbeing, supporting and celebrating our distinctiveness

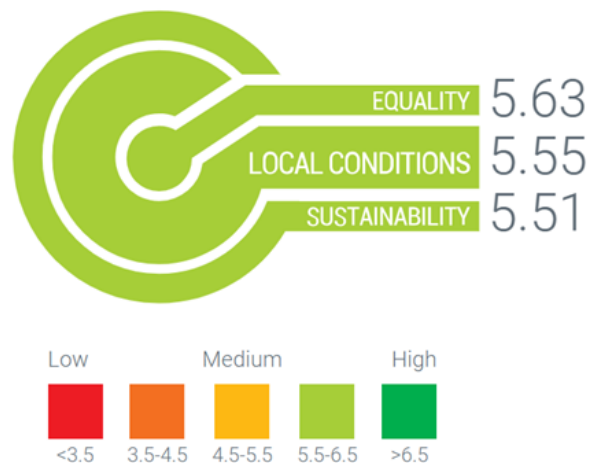
### The context

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to present a significant challenge for community wellbeing in Quarter 4. The District has a large proportion of residents aged over 65, as well as a significant proportion of residents experiencing long-term illness or providing unpaid care. As a result of the pandemic, there have been fewer opportunities for more vulnerable residents to socialise, exercise and engage in activities within their community, which can negatively affect mental and physical health.

Tackling inactivity within the District is also a key focus. The Forest of Dean has a higher proportion of inactive adults than both the regional average and Gloucestershire average, as well as a higher rate of Type 2 diabetes diagnosis.

Historically, the District has also struggled with low social mobility. The new Corporate Plan aims to address this issue in the long term by harnessing education and opportunity to nurture the aspirations of the District's younger population.

### Forest of Dean



© Centre for Thriving Places 2020

The Thriving Places Index (TPI) provides a baseline against which we can measure progress in improving community wellbeing and resilience. The TPI 2020 scorecard shows how the District is performing in three key areas: local conditions, sustainability and equality. Each area is given a score between 0 and 10, 10 indicating the best possible conditions have been achieved. Medium scores (4.5-5.5) indicate that a local authority has scored the same as, or very similar to, the England average, while very high or low scores indicate a local authority's score is furthest from the England average.

The headline scores for Forest all fall into the 'high' category (see graphic, left), however the breakdown of these results reveals that the District scores poorly for transport, children's education and health equality.

### The actions we are taking

The Community Engagement Team has continued to be at the forefront of responding to the needs of the District throughout the ongoing pandemic. Working closely with the County's Help Hub and Volunteer groups across the district as well as the Town and Parish Councils they have worked to ensure that all our vulnerable residents are linked to community groups that can

support them. When the nation went into the third lockdown in January, the team began making weekly wellbeing calls to residents considered Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) to ensure their needs were being met whilst they were shielding.

The community grants scheme was awarded to 19 community causes this quarter; the money will support community projects that promote healthy lifestyles. The 'We Can Move' programme, a campaign that helps keep Gloucestershire residents fit and healthy through exercise, will receive a grant as part of the scheme, as will other community organisations such as Forest Mobile Meals and Forest Voluntary Action Forum (FVAF). The Council also received funding to support Covid Compliance, which has been given to the community via FVAF to help support groups and organisations to return to activity safely.

The Street Warden team has continued with Covid marshalling work, acting as a high visibility presence in smaller day visit spots, and handing out masks and sanitiser. The team has played an active role in the reopening of the High Street preparations by using stencils in town centres to support the social distancing guidelines. The team has also secured £15,000 funding for the development of a Drug and Alcohol awareness campaign across the District; work is currently underway via a partnership subgroup.

The Council has also been issuing Co-Op food vouchers to those in need - families with at least one child under 5 and receiving council tax benefit were allocated £90 voucher and older single people on council tax benefits were allocated a £50 voucher. The surplus vouchers have been allocated to the housing department for use with those who have been homeless and are newly housed. The remaining vouchers have been given to the North & West Gloucestershire CAB who will distribute them on our behalf to those who evidence a need. The Social Prescribing and Help Hub teams will be able to refer residents to the scheme.

The Community Wellbeing service experienced pre-pandemic referral numbers for the first time in Quarter 4, with an average of 59 referrals per month. Referrals continue to focus on mental health and wellbeing and social isolation. However, there continues to be an increase in referrals for working age people, where debt, finance and housing issues are the main referral reasons. The service continues to provide one to one telephone/ remote support and have conducted some socially distanced visits in the community for more vulnerable people.

The Exercise Referral team have maintained regular contact with existing class participants, and now have a regular timetable of 13 online sessions that are delivered directly. The team are also taking direct referrals from the Macmillan cancer rehab team, as well as promoting accessible activity as part of the Get Out Get Active Forest of Dean project which aims to break down the barriers to inclusive exercise.

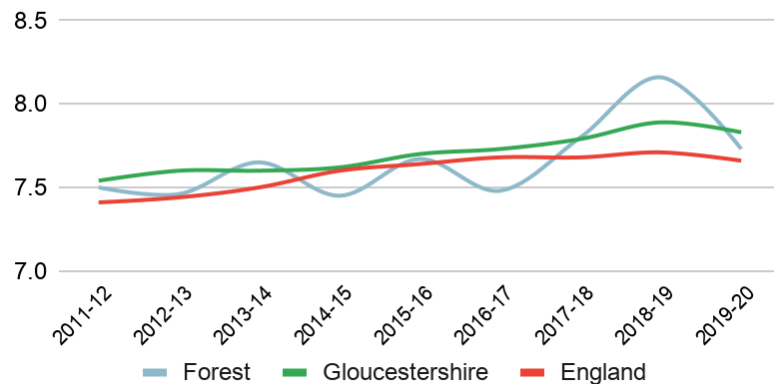
The Dementia Enablers have continued to develop their dementia awareness sessions, delivering 28 online sessions this quarter across Gloucestershire. The Community Dementia Link course has now also been made available online, and in December the team began training the housing advisors at Two Rivers Housing in Newent. Additionally, the Dementia and Domestic Abuse leaflet has been produced and circulated this quarter, and is also now available countywide. A bid has been made this quarter to the Thriving Communities fund to help make community buildings more accessible for people living with dementia, as well as a successful bid to the Barnwood Trust to fund work around ensuring technology is accessible to people with dementia and their carers.



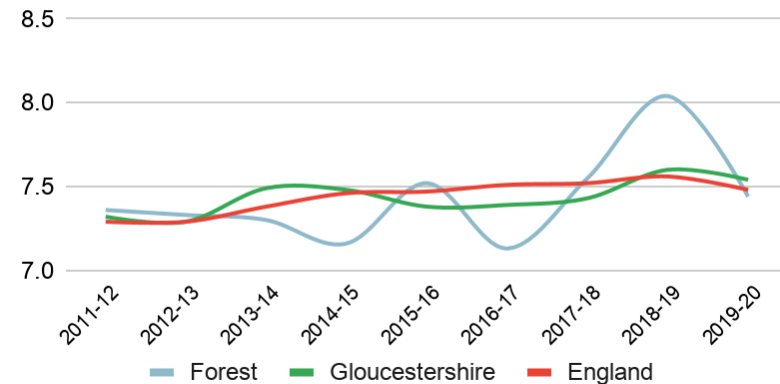
## Measures of success for wellbeing

We will be measuring success using a mixture of indicators; some will be linked directly to the actions the Council is taking while others provide context and broad trends of well-being. The 'contextual' indicators are generally from external sources such as the ONS and Sport England; they are produced at less frequent intervals than the Council's performance reporting cycle, and there is often a time lag which makes the data look out of date. Therefore these indicators should be viewed as broad brush trends

Life satisfaction estimates  
Source: ONS, Annual Population Survey

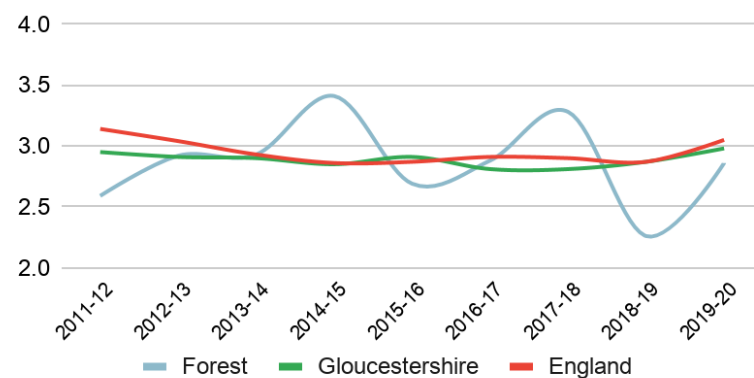


Happiness estimates  
Source: ONS, Annual Population Survey



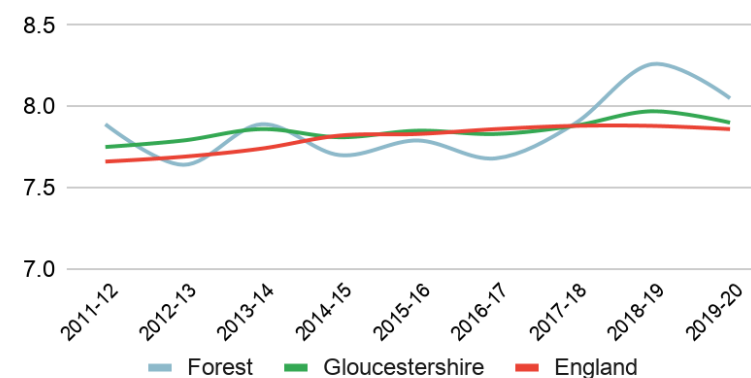
### Anxiety estimates

Source: ONS, Annual Population Survey



### Worthwhile estimates

Source: ONS, Annual Population Survey



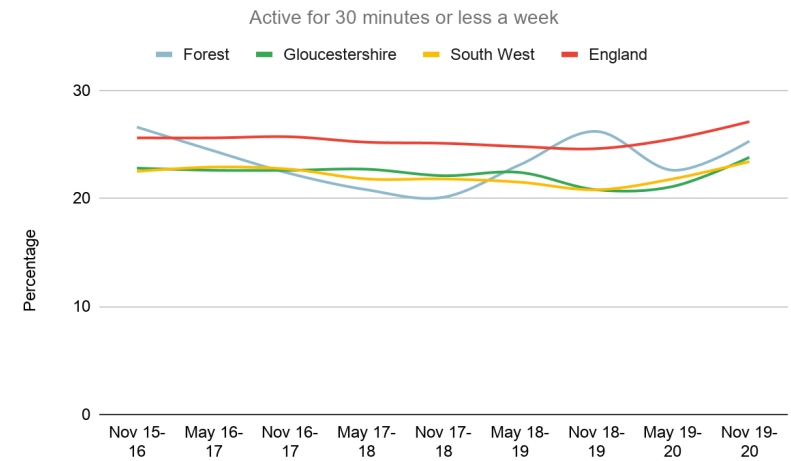
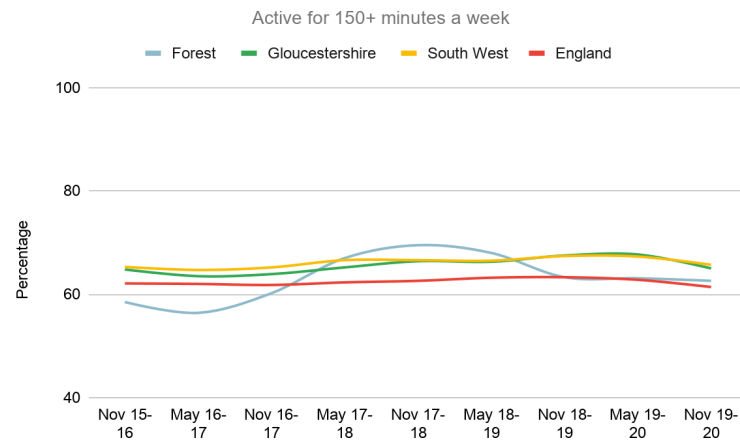
Since 2011, the ONS has asked personal well-being questions to adults aged 16 years and over in the UK to better understand how they feel about their lives. People are asked to respond on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'completely', from which estimates of the mean ratings are produced.

The results from the survey are estimates not precise figures. Estimates for small groups such as local authorities are less reliable and tend to be more volatile than for larger aggregated groups, this is further exacerbated by the reduced scale used on the charts to provide more detail.

In general, over the last few years, the national average ratings for life satisfaction, happiness and anxiety have all improved. Forest of Dean's estimates broadly follow the same trend. The latest results for the year April 2019-March 2020 which covers the period when the UK left the EU and the build up to the national lockdown, show a deterioration in ratings

Source: Office for National Statistics, Annual Population Survey

Source: Sport England



Sport England's activity estimates count minutes involving walking, cycling, dance, fitness and other sporting activities. An 'active minute' is a minute of moderate activity, whereas a minute of vigorous activity counts as two 'active minutes'. Less than 30 active minutes a week is considered inactive, and upwards of 150 active minutes is considered active.

Inactivity in the District appears to have risen in the November 2019 - November 2020 period. This is likely a result of lockdown restrictions in place during parts of 2020, which have made it more difficult for some people to exercise due to gym and sports facility closures.

## Provide a range of affordable housing to meet the needs of the District

### The context

House prices in the Forest of Dean have been increasing towards the national average for house prices in England and Wales, particularly since September 2018. This is likely in response to the removal of Severn Bridge tolls at the end of 2018, meaning the District has become a more accessible area to live in for commuters working in Bristol and other parts of the South West of England and South Wales.

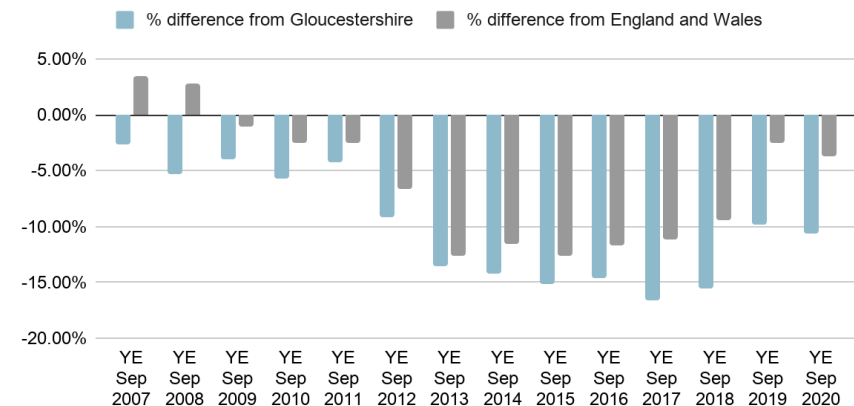
Homeseeker Plus applications have been increasing year on year. Between 2016 and 2018, there was a 58% increase in bronze-banded applications, and a 15% increase in silver-banded applications.

As a result, it is imperative that we provide the necessary supply of good quality affordable homes in partnership with housing providers and local



Median house prices in the Forest of Dean compared with house prices in Gloucestershire and England & Wales

Source: HPSSA Dataset 9. Median price paid for administrative geographies, ONS



developers to meet the needs of the District.

### The actions we are taking

The Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan for the Forest of Dean District which will set out how the Forest of Dean will develop over the next 20 years to 2041 to deliver new homes and employment whilst protecting the environment and its environmental assets. At its meeting in October, Council approved and endorsed the Local Plan preferred option, and approved it for an eight week consultation, which was extended into January due to Covid-19 restrictions. The preferred option aims to meet the future needs of the District in a manner which is considered to best address the Council's corporate priorities while providing a sound plan. Material received from the consultation has been published this quarter, and the next stage will be to consider alongside members

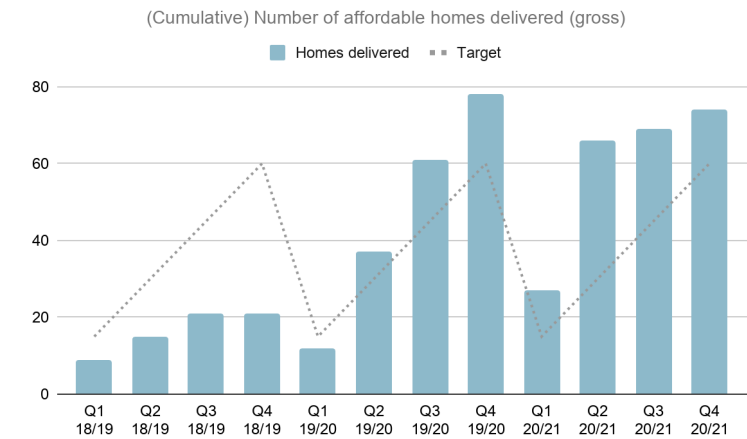
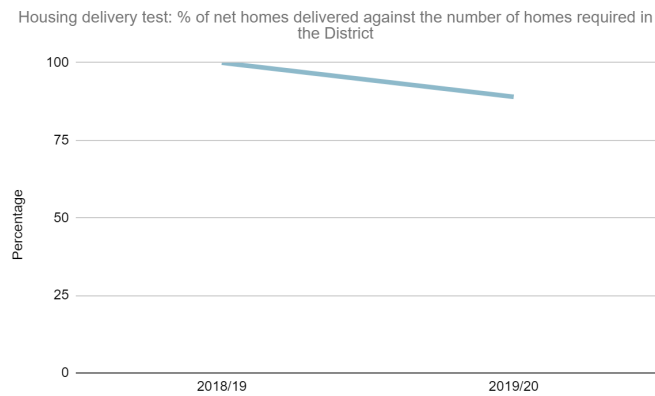
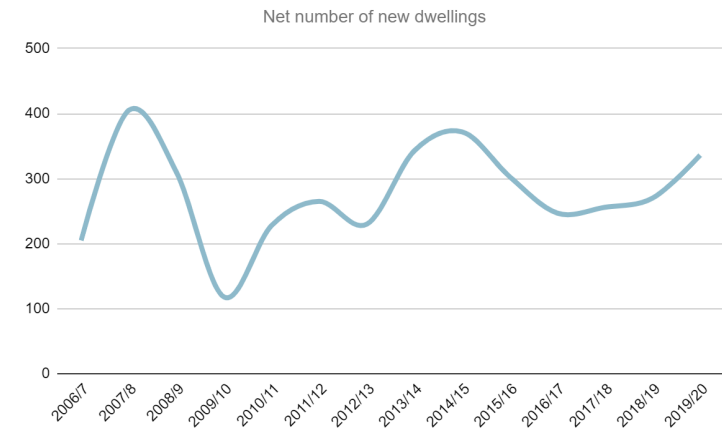
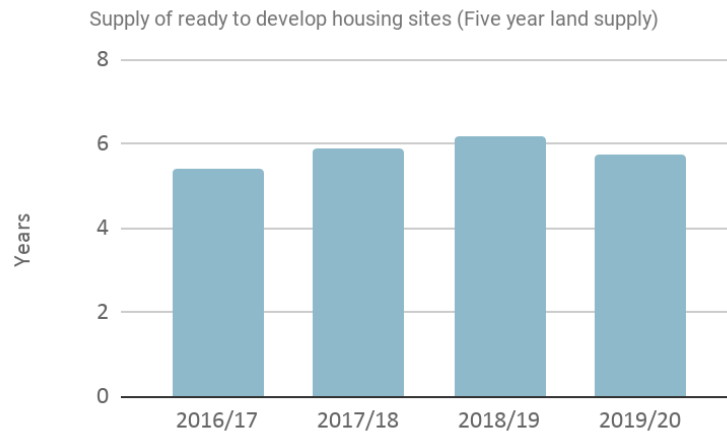
the responses and to look at which sites and draft policies should be included in the draft Local Plan. This process has been held back by Covid-19 restrictions and is likely to take longer than expected.

In Quarter 4, five new affordable homes were delivered across two different sites: Highbrook Way in Lydney (1 unit) and The Vines in Redmarley (4 units). These units were a mixture of affordable rented homes and shared ownership homes. A combination of 1, 2 and 3 bedroom properties were delivered in Redmarley to meet the needs of the rural population in the area. Additionally, 13 new affordable homes in Lydney have been granted detailed planning permission, bringing the total to 321 for the year.

In July 2020, the MHCLG launched the Next Steps Accommodation Programme to support local authorities to provide a range of solutions to tackle both short term/interim accommodation needs and longer-term move-on options, as well as support linked to this accommodation. The Council was successful in securing funding to support a wide range of housing projects across the county including homelessness accommodation, and in December purchased Acorn House in Cinderford for this purpose. Acorn House contains 10 self-contained bedsits formerly used as part of a countywide supported housing project. Refurbishments have been completed this quarter, and the property is ready for occupation from 1st April. It will offer accommodation and round the clock support for individuals with varying levels of need who would otherwise be at risk of homelessness, and it is expected to be at full capacity by the end of May.

# Measures of success for housing

## Housing delivery



## Develop a vibrant economy that is resilient and future-proofed

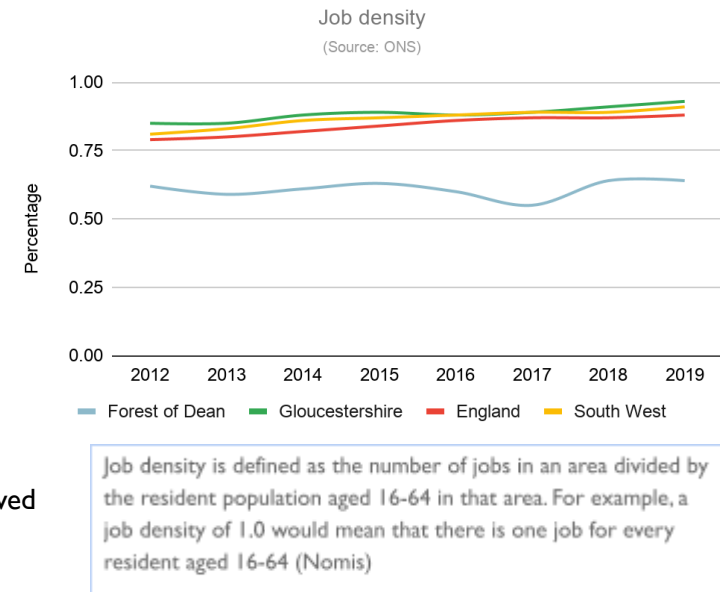
### The context

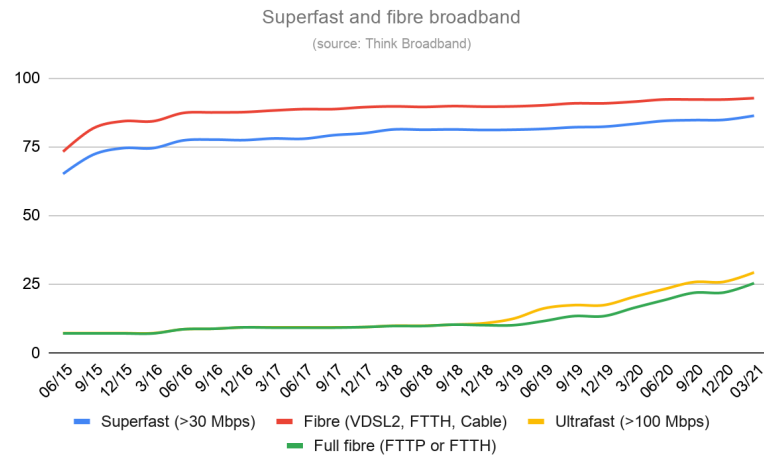
Whilst employment rates for the Forest of Dean are above national average, more and more residents are commuting to work outside of the District borders. Additionally, businesses are moving away from the area, either to larger towns or overseas now that remote working is becoming a popular option. As a result, there is a need to secure business and employment opportunities within the District, to provide more jobs and to foster future economic resilience. High speed broadband and mobile coverage, however, is not consistent across the district, which can be a deterrent to new businesses moving to the area, as well as making it more difficult for people to work from home.

Prior to the pandemic, tourism in the District was continuing to prosper. The Council Plan states the commitment to building on the success of the visitor economy, but also to draw permanent business into the region by promoting the local environment and the quality of life that the District has to offer. Not only would this contribute to long-term economic resilience for the region, but it would provide opportunities for improved social mobility and employment prospects within the community.

### The actions we are taking

Work has progressed on the Five Acres site this quarter, which once completed is expected to deliver diverse employment opportunities for the local community as a Council-owned destination leisure facility. In January, consultants prepared site condition surveys, and also designed and costed additional options for the redevelopment of the site. These options are being reviewed, and will be presented to the Cabinet and Full Council in due course. To date, the regeneration has directly created two consultant roles.





Job creation is also a key benefit of the Destination Lydney Harbour project. Destination Lydney Harbour (DLH) is a £2.1m project funded by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), which is part of the Lydney Coastal Community Team's (LCCT) ambition to develop Lydney over the next decade into a thriving and prosperous place to live, work and visit. The project will create conditions for significant private investment in the area, creating new employment and training opportunities for residents and bringing tourism to Lydney. To date, the regeneration has created one direct job (Community Projects Leader), as well as seven safeguarded jobs, and at least 10 FTE construction jobs. The development will also provide opportunity for the community to learn new skills, incorporating a not-for-profit boat building company, which will support up to 20 volunteers to learn traditional craft skills. The conversion of the former Mortuary and Store buildings into public toilets and a visitor hub has been completed this quarter. Once electrical connections have been installed - formal agreement to lay connections has been received from the owner of the adjacent land - the toilets will be fully operational. The

visitor hub is awaiting the installation of internal signage before it is fully operational. Landscaping is underway at the front of the buildings to create an area for visitors to sit once the cafe, which has received significant local interest from prospective tenants, is open.

The Chepstow Transport Study Consultation, led by Monmouth County Council and supported by Forest of Dean District Council and Gloucestershire County Council, was completed this quarter. The consultation aimed to establish public opinions on options for improving transport in and around Chepstow, due to congestion and resultant poor air quality in the area. Once Monmouth County Council have considered the findings, they will be made available to partners to assess any arising next steps.

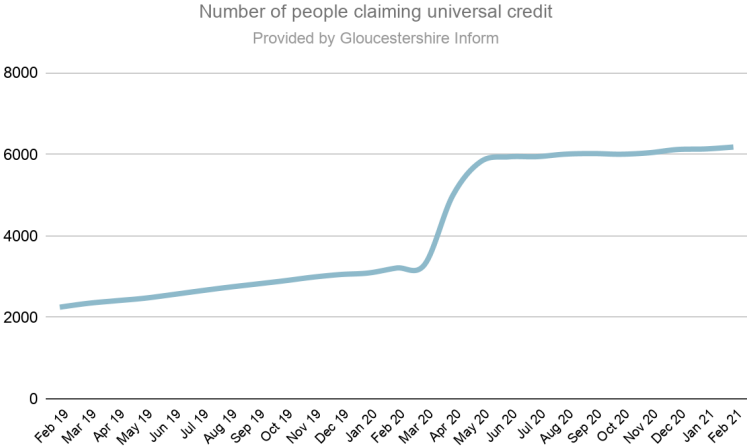
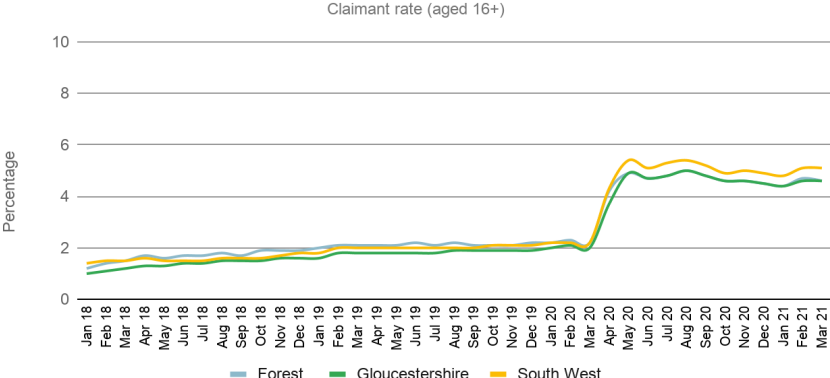
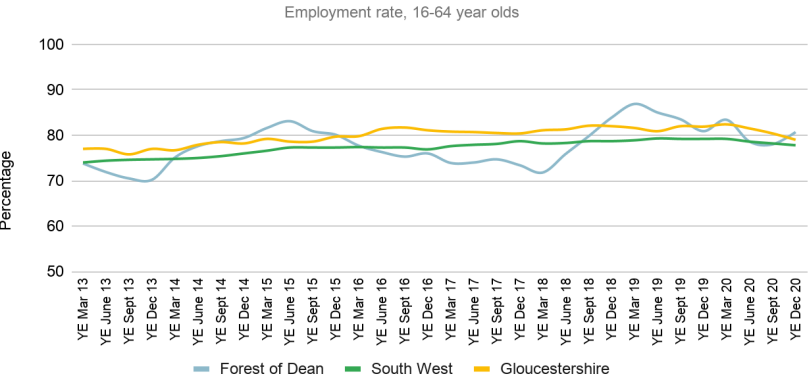
A joint funding bid with Gloucestershire County Council has been submitted for the Life Lab project. Life Lab is an online community platform which will act as a centralised virtual learning portal where 18-24 year old claimants can learn new skills, gain confidence, explore new ideas and access training and support in relation to other life areas that may be restrictive or preventative to successful employment, such as housing, mental health and money management. The Life Lab project aims to enable Young People to access employment related training and the skills to seek work, for example creating a CV, accessing job vacancies and provision, interview skills, and to remove barriers and raise the aspiration and employment levels in the District's most remote areas.

The Council is continuing to support local businesses who are having to adapt to changing Covid-19 restrictions, and multiple lockdowns. It is responsible for distributing the large range of business grants made available by central government. Financial support is also available to those individuals having to self-isolate under the Test and Trace support payment. Since 5 November 2020, a number of grants has been made available to businesses that have been required to close under the Tier system or national lockdowns, or were able to remain open but were severely affected by Tier restrictions:



- Local Restrictions Support Grant (Closed, Mandatory) – a total of £4,103,357.97 was paid out to 3110 businesses in retail, leisure, hospitality, accommodation and events which were mandated to close between 5 November 2020 and 31 March 2021;
- Additional Restrictions Grant (Discretionary) – a total of £1,222,759.58 was paid out to 814 businesses from November to the 4 April 2021. This grant is available for businesses that do not have a business rate assessment of their own as well as other businesses with a rateable value that have remained open but have been severely impacted by the pandemic. This category includes charity properties and regular market traders;
- Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open) - a total of £ 671,213.36 was paid to 1364 businesses that remained open but were severely impacted by restrictions;
- Christmas Support Payment for wet-led pubs scheme – one-off grants of £1,000 were paid to 43 businesses between December 2020 and February 2021;
- Closed Businesses Lockdown payment – 775 businesses were supported with a one-off payment. A total of £3,306,000 was paid out between 5 January 2021 and 4 April 2021

# Measures of success for economy

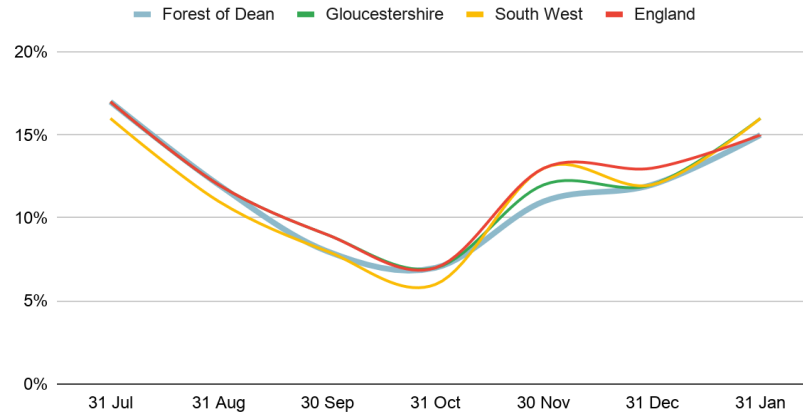


The increase in the claimant rate this quarter is likely to be the result of the rise in people being made unemployed during the Covid-19 crisis.

Sources:  
Employment rate: ONS, Annual Population Survey  
Claimant rate: ONS, Crown Copyright Reserved (Nomis)  
Unique job postings: data provided by Gloucestershire Inform

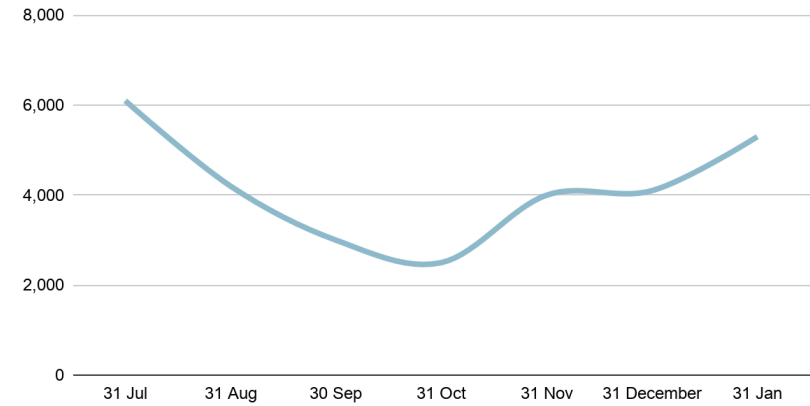
Total uptake rate of Coronavirus Job Retention (furlough) scheme

Provided by Gloucestershire Inform



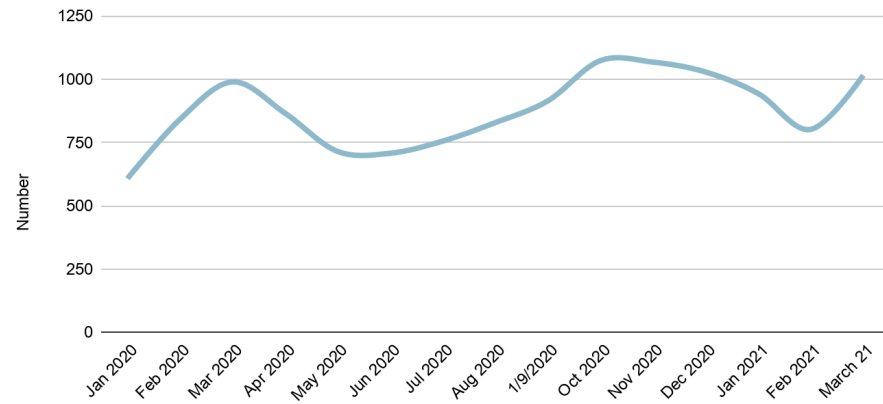
Number of employments furloughed under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme

Provided by Gloucestershire Inform



Number of unique job postings per month

Provided by Gloucestershire Inform



## Deliver great services through ensuring financial sustainability

### The context

With local government facing ever-increasing financial challenges and uncertainty it is more important than ever that the Council is continuing to deliver value for money services that meet the needs of a growing population. In looking to safeguard and improve these services, the social, economic and environmental value of the way they are delivered will be considered to make sure that any new ventures are shaped around the Council priorities.

It is also important that the Council and the way it interacts with its customers is evolving in line with the community it serves. A survey carried out by the Customer Experience Improvement Team found that customers wanted to have easy access to our services. The modernisation of Council services through provision of digital options for residents and businesses will allow customers more choice in how they work with us. By offering online self-serve tools, customers can access Council services more conveniently, whilst still having the option of speaking to an advisor on the phone or face to face if they would prefer. Providing digital service is not only economically beneficial but also upholds our commitment to safeguarding the local environment, by reducing the need for both staff and customer travel to the office.

### The actions we are taking

Salesforce development in Quarter 4 was mainly focused on the COVID-19 Business Grants development. The Grants system built in Salesforce has continued to evolve, attempting to keep pace with Government announcements. New fields and tasks have been added to application forms and assessment screens to allow for new data gathering requirements added to the process by the Government. The mass email function has been improved to enable easier engagement with existing applicants when new schemes are launched. When initially designed, the grants scheme was built around the concept of a single payment per grant application. The architecture has now been changed to allow multiple payments per application. Since November, Salesforce has been used to manage/process over £9 million of COVID-19 Business Grants at FoDDC.

The new Revenues and Benefits system went live in October 2020, with the next step being to move to a universal system across the three Councils. Additionally, improvements to the Council website to integrate the Open Portal product have been underway this quarter. Once completed, this will allow customers to complete benefit requests and changes online where previously they'd been required to download forms.

## Forest of Dean District Council

[Home](#)

### Grants for rate paying businesses closed by national restrictions

\*Have you already successfully applied for (or have an application pending for) a business grant, administered by the local authority, since the beginning of November 2020?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

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The Customer Experience Improvement Team (CEIT) continues to work to improve services for the customers who use them. The team has worked with the Planning service to introduce the new validation process in January 2021 which included the implementation of a new application called Enterprise which enables staff and managers to have a clear overview of current workload and case allocation across the team. Validation has proved difficult as a home-based task, and the ongoing lockdown restrictions have reduced the time available to officers to complete this step. Other planning improvements that the CEIT has been progressing include the planning validation checklist and planning forms to streamline the planning application process. Work has commenced on a universal validation checklist for the three partner Councils. The validation checklist sets out what information /evidence needs to be supplied along with the planning application. Two of the current planning forms have also been redesigned - the 'Do I need planning permission?' form, and the pre-application advice form. The IT team will begin testing of these forms after Easter before they are launched on the Council website.

The introduction of charges for pre-application advice was approved by Cabinet in December 2020. Previously, the Council has not charged for advice given to a customer prior to them submitting a planning application, although the process can take a considerable amount of time and resource. Following a review of fees and charges, it was decided that applying a charge when offering pre-application advice would be beneficial in recovering some of the costs of the service. The new charging schedule was implemented in February 2021.