

Financial Services

Key updates from this quarter

- City's Estate accounts for 2022/23 signed by auditors Crowe, meaning that all accounts for City Fund and City's Estate are up to date in terms of signing off in advance of the start of the 2023/24 year end. A significant achievement.
- Power Station and all charity accounts (except for the School bursary fund) also signed and submitted for 2022/23.
- Recruitment into key roles has continued, focusing on bringing in new talent as well as providing internal opportunities through lateral development and progression. Of three further roles advertised two have now been offered with potential start dates of May 2024.
- 2024/25 Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) approved by Court of Common Council in March, including a funding strategy for £133m of Cyclical Works Programme (CWP) spend.
- An enhanced Capital Strategy was included within the MTFP detailing the 2024/25 programme and key elements within it.
- Quarterly monitoring process completed for Q3 and reported to ELB which included further information on areas such as CWP.
- Year end guidance and training has been rolled out to relevant teams and individuals taking lessons learned from last year to support the 2023/24 closedown.
- Business partner element of the matrix structure has gone live, with plans for further role outs in the first quarter of 2024/25.

Challenges faced over this quarter

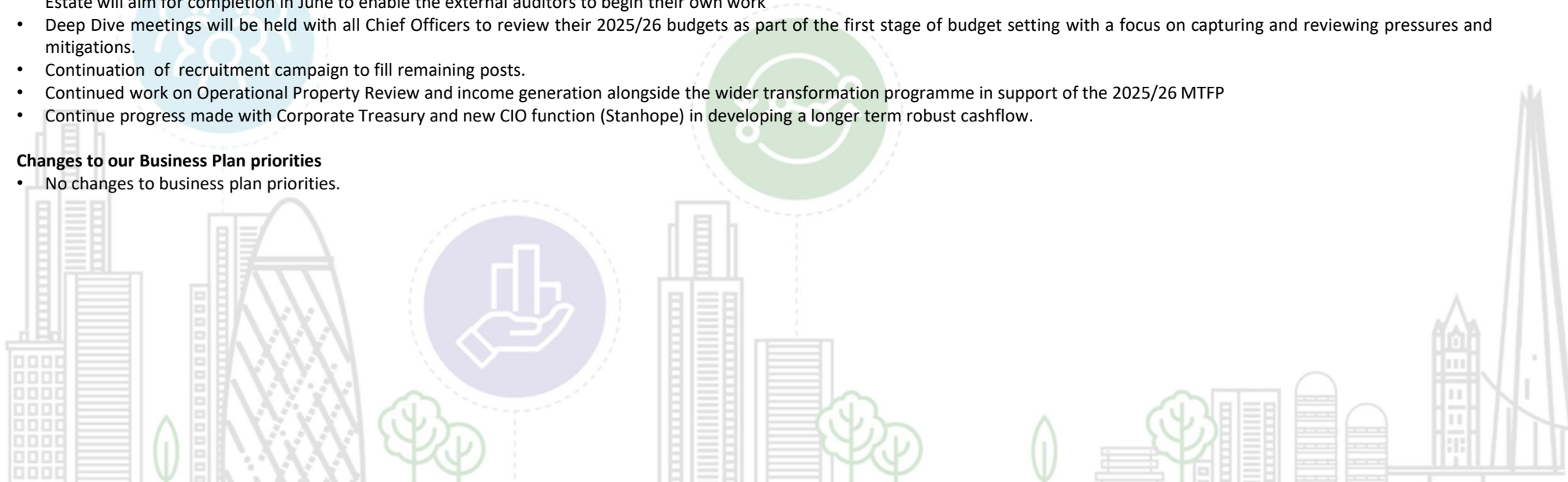
- Significant effort was required to close off the prior year City's Estate accounts in advance of the 31st March extended deadline, but these were worked through methodically and in partnership with the auditors.
- Recruitment challenges across finance sector - employees market where the interim market is more lucrative (shift from permanent to interim market), this is evidenced in the one role we were not able to recruit to during our most recent round of recruitment.
- Inflationary pressures continue to impact on budgets and will need careful monitoring and risk management accounting continues.
- ERP programme delays have meant work on the new solution is yet to begin with the system integrator (SI).

Plans for the next quarter (Q1 2024/25)

- Financial Services Director continues to focus on 3 key priorities - 1) Well-being of staff; 2) Recruitment; 3) Getting the basics done.
- This is a key period of work in closing the 2023/24 year-end accounts for City Fund and City's Estate. The statutory deadline for publishing the City Fund accounts is the 31st May and City's Estate will aim for completion in June to enable the external auditors to begin their own work
- Deep Dive meetings will be held with all Chief Officers to review their 2025/26 budgets as part of the first stage of budget setting with a focus on capturing and reviewing pressures and mitigations.
- Continuation of recruitment campaign to fill remaining posts.
- Continued work on Operational Property Review and income generation alongside the wider transformation programme in support of the 2025/26 MTFP
- Continue progress made with Corporate Treasury and new CIO function (Stanhope) in developing a longer term robust cashflow.

Changes to our Business Plan priorities

- No changes to business plan priorities.



Key updates from this quarter

- Collection are marginally down for both Council Tax and Business Rates.
- Payroll and Schools Improvement project is underway
- Housing Benefit System conversion has been completed on time.
- Annual Billing for 24/25 was completed on time.
- Project underway to address discrepancies in Visiting Music Teachers Pensions.
- Launched a new online Charitable Relief application form for business rates.

Challenges faced over this quarter

- Continued delay in third party solution to automate invoices due to internal system restrictions.
- Split from DHLUC to NNDR Multipliers (decoupling National and Small Business Multiplier) created additional complexity in delivering Annual Billing for 2024/25.
- Challenges in operating and learning the new Property Management System (Horizon).

Plans for the next quarter (Q1)

- Staff away Day to launch and imbed Division Vision Statement and transformation agenda.
- Continue to work with our supplier to deliver a solution to automate more invoices.
- Replacement Income Manager system go live (May 2024).
- Council Tax and Business Rates E-billing and DD automation (AUDDIS) projects underway.
- Kick off project to add the Housing Benefit paper files to the electronic document imaging system.

Changes to our Business Plan priorities

- No changes to business plan priorities

Key updates from this quarter

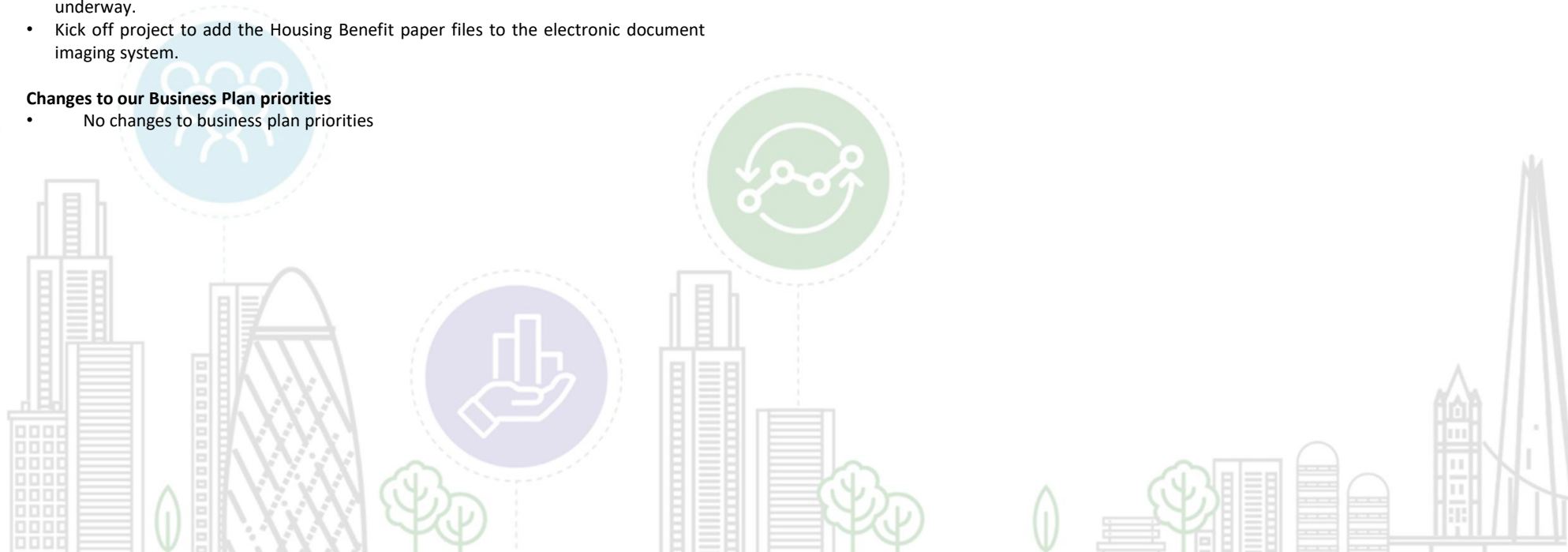
- Continuing with the implementation of the 'McCloud Remedy' for both the Local Government and Police Pension Schemes.
- Roll out of Member Self Service for the Pension Administration system to test group within Chamberlain's.
- Starting to collect year-end data to allow the production of the 2024 Annual Benefit Statements for both the Local Government and Police Pension Schemes
- Finalisation of the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) for 2024/25
- Pension Fund Annual Report and Accounts for 2022/23 signed off by the external auditors
- Finalisation of CoL's second 'Task Force on Climate Related Financial Disclosures' (TCFD) report due for formal publication in the next quarter.
- Finalising end of year adjustments for the December insurance policy renewals and collating exposure and claims data for the June insurance policy renewals

Challenges faced over this quarter

- Maintaining appropriate liquidity in light of the pace of potential spend on the major projects..

Changes to our Business Plan priorities

- No changes to business plan priorities



Key updates from this quarter

- Delivery against anticipated programme of work for 2023/24 was fair, although smaller than anticipated owing to vacancy and long-term sickness absence.
- Corporate Risk Assurance reviews have been delivered as planned within the current year.

Challenges faced over this quarter

- Continued management of Senior Auditor vacancy following unsuccessful recruitment in Q3.
- Long term sickness absence has further impacted available resources and capacity.
- High profile work continues to require significant time commitment from Head of Internal Audit.

Plans for the next quarter (Q1)

- Recruitment for Senior Auditor.
- Business case development for additional resourcing for Internal Audit.
- Delivery of 2024/25 Q1 planned Internal Audit reviews.
- Preparation of Annual Report.
- In-depth review of outstanding and overdue Internal Audit recommendations..

Changes to our Business Plan priorities

No changes to business plan priorities.

Key updates from this quarter

- Number of freedom applications processed in Q4 was 780.
- Continuously received very positive feedback from guests and participants of freedom ceremonies and throughout the application period.
- Continue to significantly reduce the backlog of ceremonies as a result of COVID-19 by encouraging the Livery to have group ceremonies.
- Finalising plans with Mansion House regarding "en masse" Freedoms for the Lord Mayor and invitations have been sent out.
- Further testing on the new freedoms application system and meetings with supplier to ensure that the system is fit for purpose.
- Progression of the development of finance training for non-financial managers workstream.
- Updated /published content on COLNET pages.
- Successfully implemented the annual Freedom fee increase in line with RPI (4.9%)

Challenges faced over this quarter

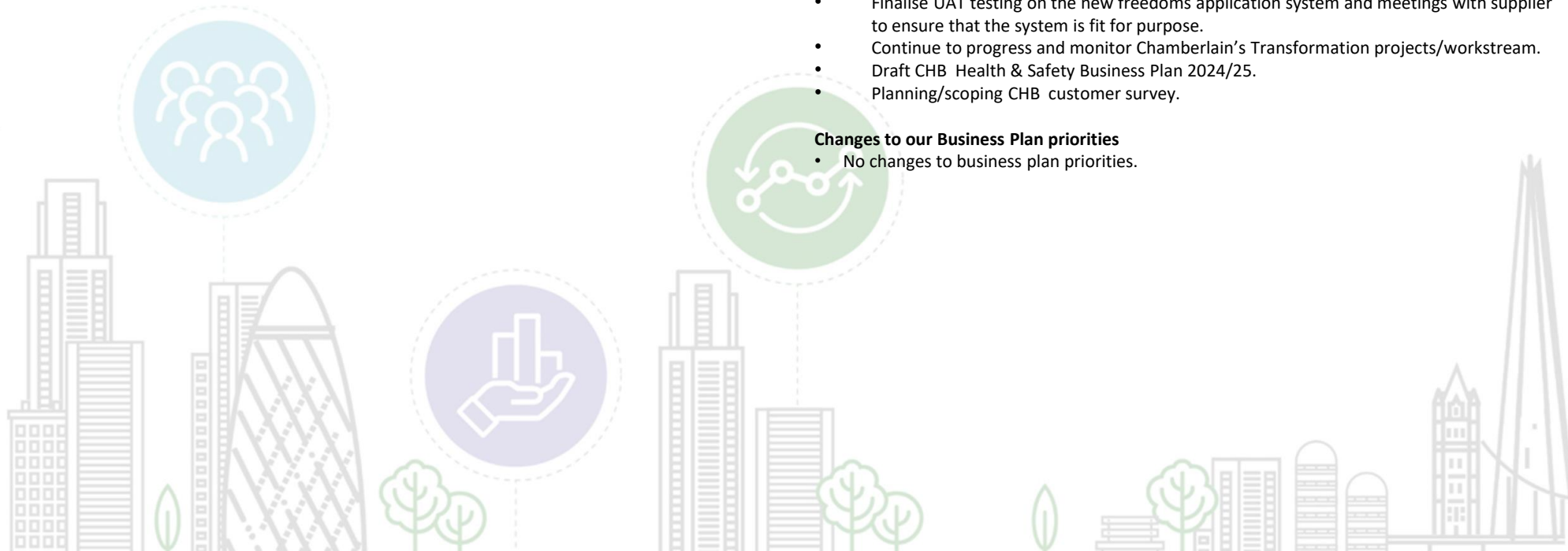
- The Chamberlain's Court continues to have capacity challenges to meet pressing deadlines and last-minute stakeholder requests.
- Delay on freedom application system (Agenda) implementation due to supplier performance.

Plans for the next quarter (Q4)

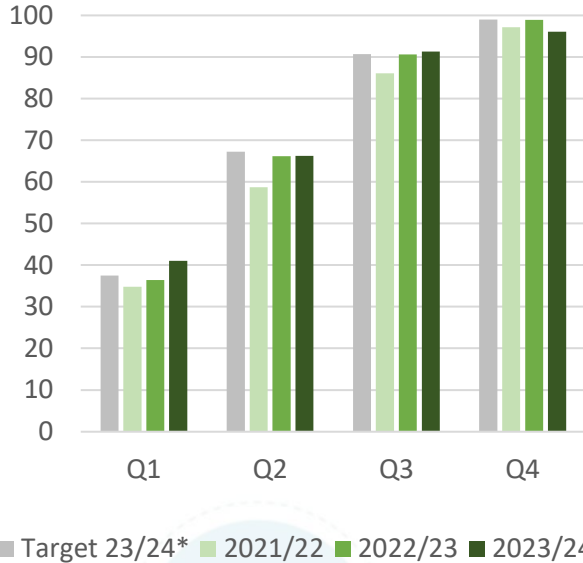
- Finalise UAT testing on the new freedoms application system and meetings with supplier to ensure that the system is fit for purpose.
- Continue to progress and monitor Chamberlain's Transformation projects/workstream.
- Draft CHB Health & Safety Business Plan 2024/25.
- Planning/scoping CHB customer survey.

Changes to our Business Plan priorities

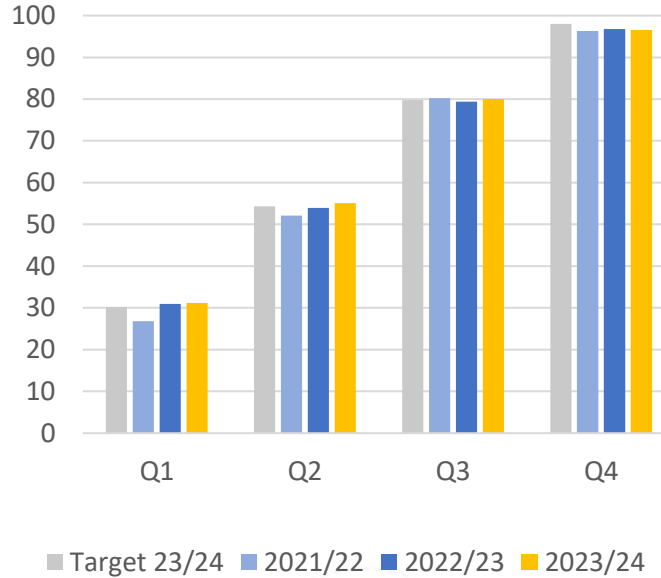
- No changes to business plan priorities.



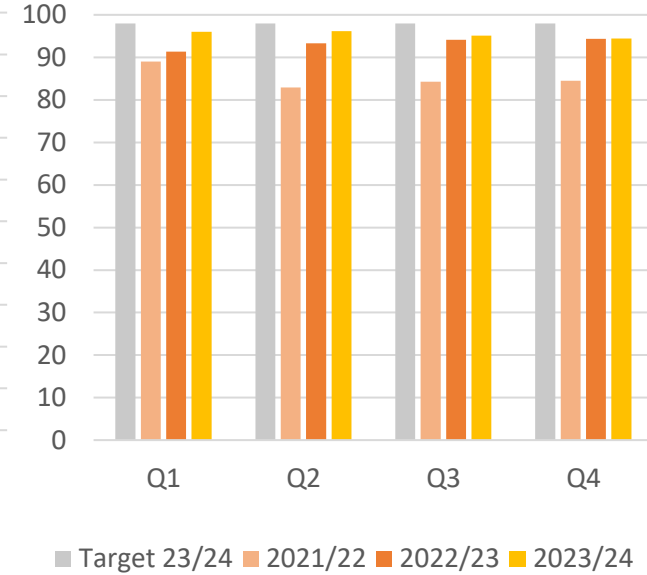
Business rates in year collection 23-24
% collected



Council tax in year collection 23-24
% collected



Commercial rent collection 23-24
% collected



*The target in the 23/24 business plan agreed by Members was 98%, however, following the 22/23 outturn a stretch target of 99% has been set.

Publication of the Draft City Fund Accounts within Statutory Deadline of 31st May. The authority has been unable to comply with this requirement due to the additional workload from the delayed audit of 2020/21 and 2021/22 statements. This is partly due to a national issue on the accounting for infrastructure assets, and also due to the pensions triennial valuations impacting 2021/22 accounts. Draft City Fund accounts were published on 12th July. Accounts 2020/21 and 2021/22 were signed and published in November. **COMPLETE.**

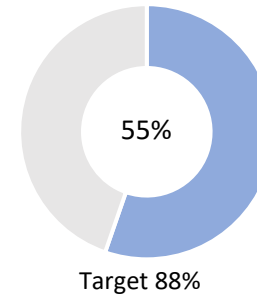
Publication of City Fund Audited accounts on 30th September. **Impacted by the above and delay to auditing of accounts with just 22/23. COMPLETE.**

Publication of draft BHF Accounts end of July and Publication of draft City's Estate Accounts end of August. **COMPLETE.**

IN PROGRESS
Effective financial management: expenditure against departmental local risk budgets (Target < 1%)

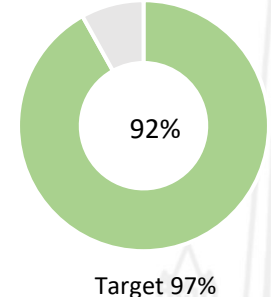
COMPLETED FOR 24/25
Delivery of a balanced budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan for City Fund, approved by Court of Common Council by 31 March

Invoices paid to SMEs within 10 days 2023-24



10 Day SME transactions 34,250, 15,311 paid after 10 days

Invoices paid within 30 days 2023-24



55,044 transactions, 4,455 paid after 30 days