

Report To:	CABINET	Date:	29th JUNE 2021
Heading:	CORPORATE PLAN REFRESH AND YEAR END POSITION 2020/21		
Portfolio Holder:	COUNCILLOR JASON ZADROZNY, LEADER OF THE COUNCIL		
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	YES		
Subject to Call-In:	YES		

Purpose of Report

This report presents to Cabinet the year-end outturn position and proposed refresh of the Corporate Plan for approval.

The report also provides, where relevant, updates regarding the impact of the pandemic and the Council's continued provision of services.

Recommendation(s)

1. For Cabinet to consider and proactively review the levels of performance achieved against the Corporate Plan and Corporate Scorecard, as at year-end 2020/21.
2. For Cabinet to note the significant levels of continued service provision to date, despite the impacts of the pandemic.
3. For Cabinet to approve the Corporate Plan Refresh.
4. To authorise the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to review and revise the Corporate and Place Scorecards, aligned to the Corporate Plan.

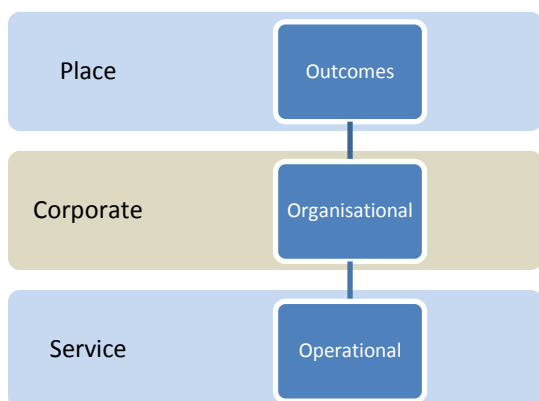
Reasons for Recommendation(s)

The Council's ambitions for the period 2019 – 2023 are clearly identified in a set of revised and updated Corporate Priorities which are presented in our Corporate Plan. These were developed by Cabinet in 2019 and have since been reviewed and updated, with particular consideration of the impact of the pandemic and our intended recovery activity.

Our priorities for the future and the key projects and initiatives we intend to deliver, are then translated and cascaded, through our Performance and Strategic Planning Framework, into specific Service Plans to facilitate focussed delivery.

The Corporate Plan sits above a wider strategic context which includes the Corporate Project Management Framework, Corporate Performance Indicators and a range of strategic documents relating to the Council and its services.

Our performance framework incorporates balanced performance scorecards on three separate levels as indicated below.



Our Corporate Scorecard measures organisational performance, and as such typical perspectives of a balanced scorecard have been adopted including Community and Customer, Funding the Future, Organisational Effectiveness and Our People. The Corporate Scorecard is aligned to our Corporate Priorities and key initiatives identified in the refreshed Corporate Plan 2019-2023.

Every four years we also undertake a Peer Challenge Review, engaging peers from across the sector through the Local Government Association sector led improvement offer, with an independent evaluation of the organisation which is mostly focussed on leadership, governance, corporate capacity and financial resilience. The outcome of the most recent Peer Challenge Review, on 29th to 31st January, 2020, is also reflected in our updated Corporate Plan and Scorecard.

We are a Values based organisation whose purpose is to create a future where everyone has the chance of a better quality of life, as such we are currently developing our approach to measuring and understanding social value which will be incorporated into our Performance Management and Project Management frameworks. A Social Value Policy has recently been developed and approved by Cabinet.

Alternative Options Considered

None

Detailed Information

The Council's Corporate Plan 2019 – 2023 was approved by Cabinet and endorsed by Full Council in September 2019. The Corporate Plan sets out our revised priorities for the future and the key projects and initiatives we intend to deliver.

The Corporate Plan sits above a wider strategic context which includes the Corporate Project Management Framework, Corporate Performance Framework and a range of strategic documents relating to the organisation and its services.

In March 2016, Cabinet agreed the use of a balanced scorecard methodology to enhance the organisation's performance framework and ability to understand how successfully the Corporate

Priorities are being delivered, the approach providing a more rounded view on performance with a greater emphasis on customer satisfaction and quality.

The Corporate Plan has been reviewed in light of the second year's progress and performance outturn, and also significant factors impacting upon the Council such as the COVID pandemic. The plan has been refreshed to ensure alignment to the Council's future ambitions and Corporate Priorities for the four year period of the plan (2019-2023).

Corporate Plan progress is monitored through both the effectiveness of successful delivery of key projects and initiatives and performance achieved against the Corporate Scorecard.

This report details progress against delivery of the Corporate Plan, for the period April 2020 to March 2021, as measured through our Corporate Scorecard and Corporate Performance Framework. The report also details how the Council has successfully continued in the delivery of services through the pandemic and our support to residents and businesses in Ashfield.

It should be noted that Ashfield is the only local authority in Nottinghamshire that has delivered all tier 1 and 2 critical services without interruption during the pandemic to date. The whole organisation has worked effectively together as one council, re-deploying staff into important roles outside of their normal duties to ensure continuance of service, whilst also delivering humanitarian services across the District.

It should also be noted that, despite the pandemic, the organisation has also delivered additional services, above and beyond standard service levels, continuing to support residents and businesses in Ashfield.

Despite the impacts of the pandemic, overall, the corporate scorecard position for April 2020 to March 2021 indicates the following positive position:-

- 67% of measures achieving or exceeding target, or within 10% variance of target.
- 75% of measures indicating an improved position compared to the same period in the previous year, or within 5% of previous year's performance levels.

We are pleased with Corporate Plan key successes delivered within the 2020/21 year and to date:-

Health and Happiness Priority

- Leisure Centres – The Leisure Centres operated for 4 months of 20/21 due to national restrictions. During this time, activities were restricted, and capacity significantly reduced to enable social distancing. Everyone Active are following strict guidance to ensure they are Covid secure and have received positive feedback from customers. The Council meets with Everyone Active weekly to review memberships, attendance, class sizes and income & expenditure. £280,000 was secured through the National Leisure Recovery Fund to support the successful reopening of leisure from 12 April 2021 onwards. Focus in 2021/22 will be to deliver the capital investment programme for the Hucknall and Lammas Leisure Centres, support the recovery of participation, and to begin to deliver the Active Communities programme to reduce physical inactivity levels in Ashfield.
- Leisure Operator Contract - following a successful procurement process, Everyone Active were awarded a new 10 year contract to continue operating Lammas, Hucknall and Festival Hall/new centre in Kirkby. The new contract will be at least cost-neutral for the Council and will see significant capital improvements, and a rise in participation year on year, by 38% to 1,698,500 per annum 2025/26.

Focus in 2021/22 will be to maximise the health and wellbeing outcomes from the new contract, complete the capital improvements and recover from the impacts of the pandemic.

- Kirkby Leisure Centre –The Council has appointed Kier as the preferred contractor. Works have commenced onsite with works completing to phase one in late April 2022. The Sport England and LEP bids were successful, securing £3m towards the build costs.
- Through the Ashfield Community Fund over £40,000 was distributed to the Community and Voluntary sector in Ashfield, to help them support residents negatively impacted by Covid. This included £20,000 from Nottinghamshire County Council, and £21,000 from Ashfield District Council.
- Volunteering activities have largely been on hold this year due to the pandemic. Individual volunteering took place during late Summer/Autumn, and then was put on hold, as we entered the third lockdown. A mixture of online inductions and face-to-face inductions have been delivered since 12 April to existing and new volunteers. Group volunteering will recommence after final lockdown restrictions have been removed.
- Officers have responded to 117 community support requests since April 2020.
- Ashfield District Council submitted an application for the Armed Forces Covenant Employers Gold Award in March 2021. We will receive notification of the outcome in late July 2021.
- £70,000 Infrastructure grants distributed to Our Centre, Under one Roof, and Ashfield Citizen's Advice.
- During the year 'Feel Good Families' provided an extensive programme of community based and online activities. This included activity promoted via the Facebook page, superhero and princess online craft and bootcamp sessions, themed trails and pebble hunts on local parks. Over 650 families have engaged in these activities and 400 activity packs were distributed to children whose families were accessing support through foodbanks.
- Since Covid-19 our Feel Good Food project has a greater focus on reducing food poverty and a District food group has been created, led by the Council in partnership with three local foodbanks. Foodbanks have been awarded c.£30k to support food supply, delivery, equipment and building improvements.
- A number of resident engagement events have taken place in the priority areas, including Leamington Secret picnic, virtual pizza making party, and street entertainment at Christmas and Easter.
- Ashfield and Mansfield Dementia Partnership continues to support local people and their carers, telephone counselling support has proved successful for carers as part of the Lammas working age dementia hub in partnership with Carers Federation. An application was successful to NCC Community Covid fund to support the extra costs associated with social distancing.
- Ashfield Health and Wellbeing partnership has launched a new strategy for 2021 – 2025, which is focussed on delivering outcomes to enable residents to have the best start in life, make healthy choices, age well, be physically active and live and work in environments that foster positive mental wellbeing. Looking forward, we will work towards achieving the vision that 'Everyone who lives in Ashfield leads a healthy and happy life', taking targeted approaches in priority places and with priority groups.
- The Environmental health team has worked tirelessly with Public Health England to provide safety advice to businesses in relation to Covid interpreting legislation, providing advice and guidance and have intervened, with warning letters and final warning letters being served upon business operators, where necessary. Despite carrying several vacancies, in the last year (April 2020 to 28th May 2021), the team have dealt with 2,261 requests for service from members of the public, commercial premises and small and medium enterprises in the District of Ashfield. Requests for new food businesses working from home were higher than

The council co-ordinated over £120,000 of Covid Winter Grants (food vouchers) to vulnerable residents.

previous years and the team prioritised inspecting these to meet our duty of care and statutory functions. There were also 146 new food premises registrations, more than double the normal application rate.

- In addition to service requests, the team investigated and helped prevent community spread of the virus by working with external partners and implementing interventions at a large warehouse in the District.
- Illegal dog breeders - Action has been taken against several unlicensed dog breeders to apply for dog breeding licences.
- We have successfully joined up to the Food Standards Agency's 'Regulating our Future' digital platform, which helps potential new businesses apply to register on line.
- The Council has assisted the health authorities over the last 10 months with the provision of sites that can accommodate community Covid testing facilities. These consist of sites for the deployment of drive-through Mobile Testing Units (MTUs), walk-through local testing sites and collect and drop facilities for self-test kits, all of which have been vital in driving down local infection rates

Homes and Housing Priority

- Ashfield acquired 32 new social housing properties as at 12th May, 2020 with a further purchase agreed of 8 S106 properties in 20/21 and 21/22.
- Planning consent has been granted for the next sites identified for affordable housing development through our Development Programme. Work will commence in 2021/22 on these.
- Non-decent housing stock has remained at 0.18% for the year. This is well within the target of <0.40%. As and when new property standards are introduced, our focus will be to implement these in all properties and thereby achieving Decent Homes 2 requirements.
- Throughout the year, we have continued to successfully prevent households from becoming homeless, through the hard work of the Housing Options, Complex Case and Tenancy Sustainment Teams. Due to the pandemic, and in line with the previous 3 quarters, the teams have successfully and positively adapted to reflect the change in the working environment and in the nature of residents' housing needs and issues. Despite the increasing complexity of cases and limited move on options, excellent casework has meant that targets have been exceeded and most importantly residents have been assisted either to remain in their current accommodation or into alternative accommodation. Over the course of the year, set in the context of COVID 19, a significant number of residents have had their housing issues resolved.
- We have been the lead authority in securing £1m Rough Sleeper Initiative funding for improvement opportunities and support for rough sleepers and those threatened with rough sleeping across the County.
- In partnership with Framework we secured Next Steps Accommodation Programme funding to fund 3 additional units of specialist accommodation for rough sleepers with complex needs.
- The Future High Street and Towns fund team has identified opportunities to let flats above existing retail units.
- During the 1st COVID 19 lockdown all households who were rough sleeping or threatened with rough sleeping were made an offer of accommodation, circa 40 households, the majority of whom were then assisted into suitable long term accommodation.

Work has commenced on 2 new affordable council housing developments, a 22 unit development of family homes and adapted bungalows and a further 9 units, including a further 4 adapted bungalows. Applicant's with an identified need for the adaptations will be prioritised. The new homes will be thermally efficient and will minimise carbon usage

- We have continued throughout the year to consistently support 100% of Council tenants to remain in their tenancy for 6 months or more following completion of their support package. This is through the work of the Tenancy Sustainment Officers, both by carrying out pre-tenancy work and by providing comprehensive support during the first few months of their tenancy to vulnerable tenants. This includes proactive partnership working with other external agencies and charities etc.
- The Council introduced an online application process for HMO and Selective Licensing, improving the service for landlords and property owners and ensuring a more effective use of resources.
- Issued further civil penalties where landlords and property owners have failed to work with the Council to address issues of serious disrepair or a failure to licence their property.
- Ashfield were one of the first councils to resume major works programmes to tenants' homes, in early June 2020, adapting to the new guidelines and restrictions.
- Successfully bid for £1m funding to improve thermal efficiency ratings of domestic properties, both Council owned and private sector.
- The Council has a statutory duty to undertake a gas safety check to all its social housing properties that have a live gas supply, and this has continued despite the impact of Covid restrictions, with no easement of the requirements to complete a gas safety check every 12 months. We have continued to visit tenants' homes and conduct gas safety checks prior to the 12 month anniversary date to meet the regulatory requirement. Throughout 2020/21, the lowest non-compliant rate reached 99.67% of the 6653 properties requiring a gas check, only 22 properties could not provide access due to issues such as self-isolating or shielding, with an average non-compliance rate of just 33 days over these 22 properties. Currently the compliance rate is at 99.97%, with only 2 properties remaining non-compliant.
- In addition, the Repairs and Maintenance section continued to complete emergency repairs during the first lockdown before gradually reverting back to a full repairs service as the restrictions eased. For 2020/21, 99.46% all repairs appointments made were kept (20,695 appointments out of 20,808), and 99.37% of emergencies repairs were attended to in government timeframes (5,356 repairs out of 5,390)
- We also successfully concluded the first enforced sale of a private property in serious disrepair. The property was a disused off-licence that had been left neglected as the owner had failed to complete essential repairs.
- There will be continued focus in 2021/22 to further develop plans commenced in last 6 months which ensure we meet the requirements set out in the Social Housing White Paper 2020 (The Charter for Social Housing Residents) .

Economic Growth and Place Priority

- Kirkby and Sutton Towns Funding –the Town Investment Plan for Kirkby and Sutton was submitted to MHCLG in February with a request for over £62m and potential investment of £99m. Through the hard work of Council Officers, Councillors and the Discover Ashfield Board it has been confirmed that £62.6 million has been secured for Ashfield as part of the government's Towns Fund. This is a tremendous achievement for Ashfield, the District as a whole and the wider area.
- Town centre masterplans for Kirkby and Sutton were adopted and underpinned towns bids and station masterplans bids.
- Ashfield's ranking against the UK Prosperity Index has improved by a third in one year from 306th to 217th (out of 379)

Confirmed that £62.6 million has been secured for Ashfield as part of the government's Towns Fund. Together with funding secured from the Towns Fund Accelerator Fund and the recently announced Future High Streets Fund of £6.27m, over £70m has now been secured for Ashfield

- To help support high street businesses through the pandemic we have employed Covid Information Officers. From last July to early May 2021 over 3,200 visits were made, offering advice and guidance to retailers, small businesses and licenced premises.
- We have installed hand-sanitising units in town centre car parks to help give confidence and reassurance to shoppers.
- The markets team continue to work closely with the market retailers, they ensured that traders selling essential goods and services could trade throughout the lockdowns, including click and collect and home deliveries. The indoor and outdoor markets are now fully reopened.
- Employment opportunities in the Idlewells Indoor Market are restricted due to the pandemic and are unchanged at 47. One trader has left the market due to financial difficulties and returned to the outdoor market in January.
- The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) funded project for Kings Mill Reservoir has seen the completion of the dredging, silt management and monitoring contract alongside the café refurbishment and creation of the heritage centre as well as new and upgraded footpaths and increased parking provision. The restoration of Kings Mill Viaduct has been completed protecting the structure for the future and enhancing the pedestrian access gateway between Ashfield and Mansfield. New entrance and way marker signage has also been introduced across the sites.
- Planning applications continue to be processed well above nationally prescribed standard targets, with 95% of major applications being processed within 13 weeks and 91% of minor applications within 8 weeks.
- All dilapidated commercial buildings on the Dilapidated and Empty Buildings Priority list have received some form of intervention over the year. The group has dealt with 10 long standing empty properties this year with a range of outcomes, being either demolition, redevelopment or significant improvement. There are currently 11 long standing empty properties being worked on. The Council has undertaken a number of very positive actions which has resulted in 13 premises being taken off the dilapidated buildings list. It is of note that the roof structure is now in place for Annesley Hall, tiling battens and tiles on site. The demolition of Stoneyford Road is now complete which will resolve long term issues of anti-social behaviour, with development of new social housing estate scheduled to begin in 2022.
- An Economic Recovery Plan post Covid has been developed and is being implemented.
- Officers have offered a range of business support to residents and have dealt with over 1,270 business support enquiries throughout the year.
- Social value - the Council has introduced social value deliverables in procurements over £25k and as at 1 April 2021 the committed social and local economic value is £1,119,351, deliverables which includes local employment, apprenticeships etc.
- The Council was successful in achieving the Restoring Your Railways bid up to £50k from the Department for Transport
- The new regeneration team have created a business support directory, in an e-book format, supporting response to business enquiries and promoting inward investment. The directory is also used to monitor live schemes and we have over 130+ actively showing. The team have also set up a new local skills partnership to help us focus what training provisions partners deliver in our area and ensure they meet employer needs. From September 2020 to March 2021, the regeneration team responded to 3,209 business support enquiries.

Cleaner and Greener Priority

- The national pandemic is the backdrop to all performance reports, with increasing numbers of people using public spaces such as Parks and more people working from home, generating more household waste. The Council's Environmental Services team has been

outstanding in keeping the District clean and tidy and responding to these changing patterns of demand and will continue this in 2021/22:

- The levels of resident reported dog fouling incidents has seen a year on year decrease over the past 3 years (-54%), with a further 2% reduction in reported incidents by year end, compared to the previous year. The areas where most incidents occur are located on footpaths and Ashfield residents increasingly view owners who allow dogs to foul as irresponsible. Using digital and mapping solutions the Council has been able to identify hotspot areas and deploy staffing resources. The Council also collaborates with Keep Britain Tidy in campaigns like 'Love Parks' and the 'Responsible Dog Owner' scoreboard.
- Despite the closure of the County Council's Household Waste and Recycling Centres during the summer lockdown, resident generated reports of fly tipping have slightly reduced compared to the previous year. The District Council has been swift in removing and investigating fly tips where evidence permits. The number of fly tipping investigations from enforcement saw an increase of 142 investigations from last year making a total of 477 investigations carried out. This resulted in 56 warning letters and 23 FPNs being issued compared to 47 warning letters and 7 FPNs in the previous year. The Council is now working in partnership with WISE, undertaking targeted action against litter and dog fouling whilst also renewing public spaces protection orders to provide additional legal powers.
- A successful Big Spring Clean campaign was run in February 2021, following a successful Bag It! campaign which was run in November
- Street cleanliness in our town centres continue to meet excellent standards with all of our town centres maintaining a B+ grade in street cleanliness.
- Significant improvement in levels of detritus and graffiti across the District.
- Investment in parks and green spaces has continued with improvements completed at 19 sites.
- The Council has switched to the provision of 'clean' electricity for its larger buildings (half hourly metered electricity) under a new procurement framework, and the remainder (non-half hourly metered electricity) transitioned in April 2021 when the current non-half hourly framework ends and the new framework comes into force.
- The Council has developed a set a carbon emissions baseline for its activities, which can be used to track progress in the reduction of such emissions in future.
- The Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan is nearing completion. The Council set up an Officer Working Group in relation to Climate Change, which is now well established, bringing together key officers from different departments to work collaboratively to reduce carbon emissions across its activities and the wider community through policy and promotion. This includes considering investment in 'green' projects as part of the commercial investment strategy. The Council is also working with Nottingham City Council in the development of the strategy and action plan, including options to reduce energy usage and carbon emissions across its built assets, due to be completed in early 2021/2022.

A review of the standard of all of our parks, open spaces, play areas and sports facilities has been completed which will inform a rolling programme of improvements and investment, including the aim to extend our six green flag awards to seven in 2021/22.

Safer and Stronger Priority

- The Council responded to 6,069 reports of anti-social and nuisance behaviour between April 2020 and March 2021, a 38% increase compared to the previous year, impacted by periods of lockdown: people working from home, schools closed and a lot of people less tolerant of

noise/bonfires/bbqs from neighbours. However, work undertaken by the Community Safety Section has resulted in a high volume of enforcement outputs over the same period.

- In September 2020, the Section headed up a Sutton Town Centre Taskforce to tackle on street anti-social behaviour (ASB), environmental crime and rough sleeping. The initiative resulted in a formal action being taken against a number of repeat offenders as well as providing support and accommodation to rough sleepers and vulnerable persons.
- Partnership Risk Management Panels take place bi-weekly between the Council and Police to identify victims and vulnerable persons, and increase identification and co-ordinate active targeting of offenders and hotspot locations.
- An early intervention joint Halloween and Bonfire initiative named Operation Safekeep was co-ordinated between Council, Police and partners in October 2020, to create awareness and tackle on street ASB and Covid-breaches across the District. The Operation was highly successful with over 50 Shops and Off-Licences visited and 30 incidents being responded to.
- In March 2021, Community Safety, working alongside Environmental Health Teams led on a successful day of Action In New Cross, Sutton resulting in the issue of 14 Prevention of Damage by Pests Act Notices and 23 Community Protection Warnings and notices.
- CCTV is supporting the continued identification of ASB and crime and disorder across the District with the use of cameras deployed in hotspot locations to tackle both ASB and environmental crime.
- Complex case and safeguarding – Complex Case Panels take place on a bi-weekly basis in order to discuss escalating safeguarding scenarios. Through the development of risk management action plans, targeted interventions are undertaken to assist those who are vulnerable or considered at significant risk. Throughout 2020/21, resulted in the Complex Case Team providing intensive support to 56 highly complex residents across 5 key life areas (Health, Housing, Community, Finances and Employment).
- Community Protection Officers have provided pivotal support to vulnerable persons throughout the pandemic having delivered 82 food parcels and undertaken 112 welfare checks. We have successfully recruited new officers and now have a full team.
- E-Learning Training Packages have been devised for Council Staff which includes; Modern Slavery (incorporating Human Trafficking), Hate Crime Training, Prevent (Counter Terrorism/Extremism) in order to increase awareness, risk identification and support pathways.
- Tackling domestic abuse remains a high priority, the Council has appointed a new Domestic Abuse and Vulnerability Officer in October 2020. The officer acts as the Council lead for MARAC (a multi-agency risk assessment conference) and provides key support for survivors across the district. 25th November - 10th December (within Q3), the Complex Case Team delivered the White Ribbon Campaign and 16 days of activism, aimed at ending violence against women and girls, creating awareness and empowering survivors of domestic abuse to reach out and get support. This year, the campaign was seen as more important than ever with suspected increases in domestic abuse connected to the pandemic and lockdown provisions.

- **9 x Court Convictions, 8 x Court ASB Injunctions, 1 x Criminal Behaviour Order**
- **18 x Notices Of Seeking Possession served, 1 x Suspended Possession Order, 48 x Tenancy Warnings, 2 x Sentencing**
- **41 x Prevention of Damage by Pests Notice**
- **103 x Community Protection Warnings, 47 x Community Protection Notices**
- **39 x Fixed Penalty Notices, 16 x Good Neighbour Agreements**
- **5 x Direction to Move on Notice, 24 x Alcohol Confiscations**
- **11 x Mediations**
- **318 x Letters before Action**

Innovate and Improve Priority

- Since the start of the pandemic, Ashfield District Council responded to the emergency by putting in place a variety of control measures to safeguard staff including actively encouraging and facilitating working from home where possible, social distancing measures, increased building cleansing/sanitising routines, procurement and distribution of sanitising hand gel, enhanced vehicle cleansing/sanitising and other procedures such as the ADC Home Visiting Safe System of Work.
- The continued review and implementation of changes to call handling has seen average call waiting time continue to successfully decrease over the year, despite the impacts of the pandemic with a further reduction at just 34 seconds (timed after the welcome message and from when a customer actually connects or joins a queue) which is well below our current target of 1 minute 6 seconds. There has also been a further significant 20% reduction in the level of abandoned calls for the period April 2020 to March 2021, compared to the previous year, with the call abandoned rate out-turn at 3.48%, compared to 2020/21 which was 4.26%
- Over 60,000 payments made online throughout the year, a significant increase of 14% compared to last year and 25% higher over the last 2 years since we implemented our new 'e-store', exceeding channel shift predictions. We have also realised a significant 23% reduction in costly paypoint and post office transactions compared to previous year, reducing transaction costs by £15,000. Expanding our payment channels further last year, we introduced the ability for debtors to more easily make repayments through 'recurring card payments' functionality, which has enabled the collection of over £126,000 of debt over the year.
- 50% of businesses across the District are now signed up for e-billing, a 20% increase on last year, reducing postage costs for bills by £6,000 in 2020/21.
- In 2020/21, much needed support was provided to businesses throughout all phases of the pandemic, through the administration of a variety of business grants. A total of circa 7,300 payments have been made to businesses, with a total value of around £30m.
- Online Benefit and Test & Trace applications received since 1st April 2020 - Our digital transformation programme has seen the expedient implementation of online forms enabling residents and business to be able to apply for benefits, 24/7. We have received over 2,600 online benefits related applications or notifications of changing circumstances. We also received and processed 1,286 test and trace claims, enabling £191,000 to be paid in test and trace grants.
- At the end of September, 2020, we launched a brand new, modern, user friendly website, which was accredited by the Shaw Trust as fully meeting accessibility standards. Over the last six months, since launch, website usage statistics are indicating significant improvements, particularly regarding the customer journey and easier access to information. Compared to the same period last year, page views have increased by 19% with the average time visitors to our website spend on page up by 34%. Use of the search engine is also down by 36% suggesting that visitors are navigating to where they want to be much easier. Searches for the previously most searched for content (planning) are down by at least 84%, suggesting signposting and customer journey improvements. We have also seen a large increase in direct visits to the planning page.

New Website

- Traffic to the Contact Us page(s) is down by a remarkable 53%, which equates to over 4,000 less visits to it per month
- Journeys who attempted a search, and then resorted to Contact Us down by a significant 67%, indicating that the new website is significantly enabling channel shift, reducing telephone contacts which would cost in the region of £30,000 to deal with.
- Over 100 forms now available online

- During the early summer, successful rollout of Office 365 collaboration tools, facilitating a blended approach to working throughout the pandemic and business continuity. Combined with a significant reduction of files and storage space, this has enabled the successful rationalisation of assets through the expedient decant of our Brook Street office, realising circa £200k of cashable efficiencies.
- Sickness absence out-turn has seen a 11% reduction compared to the previous year, with 2020/21 average absence levels at 8.5 days per full time equivalent (FTE) against a target of 9.5 days. Most of this, 6 days, is due to long-term sickness and 2.5 days due to short-term sickness. This is a reduction in short term absence compared to the same period last year which has been correlated to the increase in numbers of employees working from home and has been replicated across other Authorities.

The main causes of absence was due to;

- Anxiety
- Stress Depression Fatigue
- Muscular Skeletal

Absence due to Long-Covid (post self-isolation timelines) was the fourth main cause of absence in 2020/21.

- Financial Outturn was significantly within budget for both the General Fund and HRA.
- Procurement – Procurement activities conducted by Nottingham City Procurement on behalf of Ashfield has delivered savings of £2,790,551.94 in spend avoidance. This is where the procurement process has effectively driven down costs below the anticipated budget.
- Talent and skills – throughout the year, 66% of employees have undertaken training, with a significant 71% completing mandatory courses whilst also delivering services above and beyond throughout the pandemic.
- The Council also employed 8 apprentices during 2020/21.

The Administration is keen to see appropriately high levels of performance across all Council services, whilst taking into consideration the impact the pandemic continues to have on service delivery. Of the measures which have unfortunately not shown improvement compared to the performance out-turn for the same period last year, only 5 of these relate to critical functions:-

- Council Tax collection - The collection rate for Council Tax for the year 2020-21 was significantly impacted by the pandemic. The 2020-21 collection rate was 95.85% compared to a target collection rate of 97.50%. This represents a shortfall on the “in year” target collection figure of £1.1m . This impact was expected during 2020-21 as the current collection rate mirrors the national picture and clearly demonstrates the serious impact that the Covid Pandemic has had on households affected by reduced income and loss of employment. Recovery action has resumed and it is anticipated that recovery rates will continue to be impacted during the next 2-3 years (possibly longer) due to the ongoing collection of arrears.
- Business rates collection - The collection rate for Business Rates for the year 2020-21 was 95.40% compared to a target collection rate of 98.00%. This represents a shortfall on the target collection figure of £752,000. This is to be expected at this time as the current collection rate mirrors the national picture and clearly demonstrates the serious impact that the Covid Pandemic restrictions have had on Businesses, either forced to close or significantly affected by the restrictions imposed under the various Tiers. Recovery action has resumed. It is anticipated that recovery rates will continue to be impacted during the next 2-3 years due to the ongoing collection of arrears.

- Rent collection - The increasing numbers of tenants claiming Universal Credit and restrictions on income recovery enforcement introduced by the Government (eviction ban) during the pandemic has had a significant impact on the ability to collect rent from tenants. The Income Team have been successful in meeting the target set for rent collection and have achieved upper quartile performance (Percentage of rent collected as a percentage of rent due was 99.25% against a target of 99% for 2020/21) which is excellent given the significant challenges/barriers the pandemic has presented.

Welfare and money management advice/support for tenants – This service was provided to tenants during the pandemic, however, Officers also assisted with important humanitarian aid work/support across the district (due the pandemic) which included supporting residents (non-tenants). This along with the restrictions (requirement to undertake 'essential' visits only) has impacted on the number of tenants we were able to support in person (reduction from the previous year). Recovery has resumed in this area.

- The overall time taken to re-let a void property consists of both time to complete the actual repair works and the time taken to advertise and let the property. Inevitably void re-let performance suffered during the year as for the first part of the year only essential lets, to those homeless or fleeing violence, were undertaken. Void re-let performance for the year was 27 days, well above the target of 21 days but remaining upper quartile when compared against our peer group.

The time taken to complete required repairs within a standard void property has remained consistent throughout this challenging period, over the year averaging just 12 days to complete all essential works and return the property to the Lettings team. Void properties that require major works were more difficult during the early part of the year, as these rely more on contractors to complete the specialist required works, the first national lockdown allowing emergency works only in the initial period as contractors went into furlough. Works did resume as soon as they were able to, but this has impacted upon performance with the average number of days, throughout the year, for major voids repair work being 52 days compared with last year's outturn performance of 45 days.

From July onwards performance has improved, with year-end out-turn indicating an overall average re-let time of just 26.9 days, significantly closer to target, and to be applauded due to the ongoing impacts of the pandemic.

Through a successful grant application we introduced an online application process for property licensing, both HMO and Selective Licensing. The change has brought significant resource benefits and improved service delivery. We have also successfully moved to electronic document management by scanning all paper tenancy records. This will enable officers to work in a more agile manner, not needing to be in the office to access records in the traditional way.

- Recycling levels have dropped by 4%. Due to covid-19 restrictions and the introduction of the third national lockdown in the UK, residual waste was primarily collected via the kerbside as opposed to being a split between Waste Sites and Tips. This, included with garden waste not operating in the months of January and February has led to a dip in recycling rates for this quarter and has impacted the 'Year to Date' figure.
- Litter – despite 21% reduction in resident reported incidents of littering compared to the same period last year, the presence of litter on street level has seen increases across High Obstruction Housing areas (streets with dense populations of parked cars on a street level).

This has resulted in Street Sweepers being unable to reach these areas, and so they accrue litter waste, detritus and weeds by the kerbside over time. The majority of this waste is mainly confectionary packs, non-alcoholic drinks related, smokers materials and snack packs. These types of litter are also starting to affect public open spaces as lockdown measures are easing and the weather is beginning to warm up again, so more residents are now spending more time outside. Similar to the lockdown easing in July, litter and fly tipping saw increases. The Council will be undertaking campaigns relating to ‘Council’s don’t drop litter, people do’ in the coming weeks in our parks and open spaces to raise awareness of the issue and to drive positive change around changing behaviours towards littering.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

The report relates to the delivery of the Corporate Plan Priorities. The Corporate Plan sets out the Council’s proposed priorities for the period 2019 to 2023, and intended deliverables which will be monitored and managed through the Corporate Performance Framework.

It covers performance for the period April 2020 to March 2021 and where available includes more up to date performance/achievements. The Corporate Scorecard has been reviewed and refreshed to align with the refresh of the Corporate Plan and associated Corporate Priorities as a means of identifying their successful delivery.

Legal:

The Council’s new Corporate Priorities and strategic plans have been developed in consideration of current and forthcoming legislative requirements.

Finance:

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	The Corporate Plan has been developed in alignment with the Medium Term Financial Strategy and the financial sustainability of the organisation. The ‘Innovate and Improve’ Priority proposes key programmes and projects which will be focussed on identifying and delivering efficiencies and more effective working practices to support financial sustainability, whilst concurrently delivering improved customer focussed services.
General Fund – Capital Programme	
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	
	Financial performance is included within a detailed Corporate Scorecard reported to CLT and Scrutiny. Financial Pl’s form a key element of the balanced scorecard approach, reviewed to reflect future priorities in alignment with the new Corporate Plan 2019-2023.

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
Absence of a Corporate Plan would result in a lack of prioritisation and focus on delivering what matters	Agreed Corporate Plan every four years which is delivered via the organisation's project management framework.
Poor performance would potentially result in inability to deliver the Corporate Priorities as specified in the Corporate Plan	Regular monitoring of performance and robust performance management through the authority's performance management framework.

Human Resources:

The 'Innovate and Improve' Priority proposes key programmes and projects which will be focussed on delivering the People Strategy and developing employees.

High levels of performance can have a positive impact upon employee engagement and retention which in turn can enhance performance further.

Environmental/Sustainability

The 'Cleaner and Greener' Priority proposes key programmes and projects which will be focussed on delivering environmental improvement.

Equalities:

There are no direct implications on equality and diversity as a consequence of the proposals and recommendations outlined in this report.

Other Implications:

(if applicable)

Reason(s) for Urgency

(if applicable)

Reason(s) for Exemption

(if applicable)

Background Papers

(if applicable)

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