

**From Mountain to Sea**

**BUSINESS SERVICES**

**DIRECTORATE PLAN**

**2022 – 2023**

**February 2022**

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**FOREWORD**

I am delighted to introduce the updated and refreshed Directorate Plan for Business Services. This continues to provide an overview of all our services and as you will see it describes our organisational arrangements alongside information on staffing, budget and performance.

This is very much set in the context of strategic and local issues and reflects the Council’s own priorities. Those priorities have not changed, so therefore this update provides continuity as well as setting out progress through our Directorate Action Plan in **Appendix 1** (pages 30-40).

Where appropriate we have provided links to other detailed documents and that reflects one of the areas that this plan will continue to progress and develop which is around that outward look in terms of benchmarking and searching out good practice elsewhere. Continuous improvement is integral to our practice and this plan helps set out how we will take that forward.

The nature of Business Services is such that as well as delivering specific services of our own directly to our communities, we also work with and support a range of other services across the Council. Working with colleagues efficiently and effectively is critical in helping deliver the outcomes sought by the Council for our residents and our communities.  We also recognise the important contribution of working in our localities and across all our areas is equally critical – as we understand the impact resulting from recent and continuing challenges. More broadly, the Council has an excellent reputation with regard to partnership working and in Business Services we intend to reinforce that positive reputation.

We fully embrace the One Aberdeenshire Principles, as demonstrated by the commitment of colleagues across Business Services who are continuing to go the extra mile to ensure we support our communities at the most critical of times. That has been demonstrated in abundance by the support to our NHS colleagues throughout the pandemic and also the response to the recent storms.  Staff from Business Services, and indeed staff from across the whole Council, have stepped into new or additional roles in order to ensure vital services were or continue to be provided.  I am grateful and proud of the way everyone has responded and thank all colleagues for all they have given.

This Plan reinforces our own vision and direction.  It builds on what we have achieved, our ongoing commitment to supporting the wellbeing of our colleagues, embracing progressive ways of working, providing innovative, forward thinking and trusted advice and services to promote the interests of Aberdeenshire Council, in the context of the Council priorities.

I hope you find this Plan both informative and stimulating and I am very much looking forward to playing my part in working with colleagues, councillors and all stakeholders in helping deliver on the commitments set out in our Directorate Plan.

A person in a suit and tie

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Ritchie Johnson

Director of Business Services

1. **INTRODUCTION**

The Aberdeenshire Council Plan provides the strategic policy framework for the delivery of services by the Council. The Council Plan is the Council’s corporate plan and covers two years from 2020-2022.

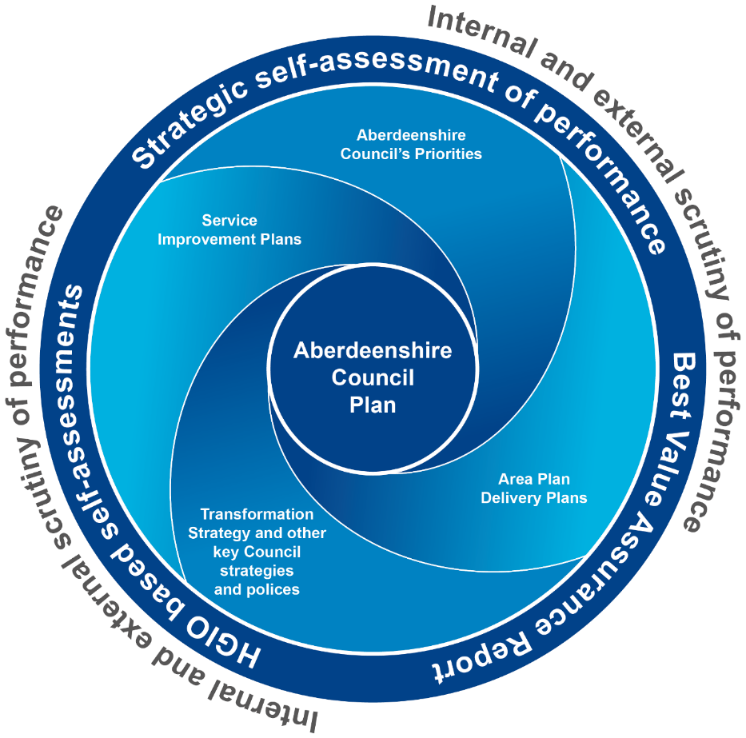
The Council Plan is implemented through six strategic priorities, namely education, health and wellbeing, infrastructure, resilient communities, economy and enterprise, and estate modernisation and the day-to-day work carried out by services across the Council.

Directorate Plans are an essential element of the Council’s performance management and improvement framework. They set out the key issues for delivering services in support of the Council vision and priorities, provide a focus on performance improvement and describe directorate specific risks that may impact on the delivery of the service.

The Directorate Plans need to be strongly rooted in the community impact assessment, with a firm focus on working with our partners and communities to deliver those priorities identified by our residents as important to them during this recovery and renewal period.

Directorate Plans are informed by the Strategic Assessment 2019/20, the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2020 (MTFS), Community Impact Assessment and Workforce Planning. The MTFS is designed to ensure that council services remain financially sustainable in the current economic climate. Directorate Plans should align clearly with the Council Plan and Community Planning Partnership priorities. They should also clearly demonstrate how they will support delivery of corporate improvement action plans including the Child Poverty Action Plan, How Good is Our Governance and the Best Value Assurance Report 2020.

The diagram below provides a graphic representation of the Council’s performance management framework and shows the strategic context within which directorate plans sit. It also shows the wider performance management and improvement framework which the Council has adopted to ensure rigorous scrutiny of performance and drive directorate across the Council.



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| **2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT** |
| The Council Plan 2017-2022 was approved at Full Council at its meeting on 23 November 2017, providing strategic direction through the confirmation of 11 priorities which would provide a focus for the delivery of council services and how the council would engage and work with partners, communities, businesses and the third sector in future years.  The Covid-19 pandemic has, from March 2020, had a huge and continuing impact on Aberdeenshire communities, the economy (both locally and nationally) and on public services. In response, Aberdeenshire Council decided that a new set of priorities should be developed which better reflect and address the challenges being faced currently by the council and the wider community.  A new [Council Plan 2020-22](https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/council-plan/) was developed and thereafter agreed by Aberdeenshire Council in October 2020. The Plan is centred around three pillars aimed at supporting wider recovery. Under the three pillars sit six Strategic Priorities:  Visual representation of the 3 pillars of new council priorities  The Strategic Priorities will help fulfil Aberdeenshire Council’s vision to be the best area for those who wish to live, learn, work and play here whilst ensuring the area is served by the best council.  Underpinning the six Strategic Priorities are a number of key principles which are directly relevant to and supported by Business Services:   * right people, right places, right time * responsible finances * climate and sustainability * community Planning Partnership Local Outcome Improvement Plans * human rights and public protection * tackling poverty and inequalities * digital infrastructure and economy |
| **2.1 Council Plan**  The nature of Business Services is to provide professional and business support to all Services within the Council and as such will input to and provide a supporting role in helping deliver many of the Council Priorities.  Business Services has a lead role for the delivery of the following Council Priorities:-   * **Effective delivery of the Council’s priorities through a programme of digital innovation and web-based services.** This Council Priority contributes to the delivery of the Resilient Communities strategic priority. * **Our workforce plans are sustainable, affordable and supports employee wellbeing.** This Council Priority contributes to the delivery of the Health & Wellbeing strategic priority. * **Income is maximised through reducing costs alongside commercialisation.** This Council Priority contributes to the delivery of the Economy & Enterprise strategic priority. * **We have an estate that is sustainable, efficient and fit for purpose.** This Council Priority contributes to the delivery of the Estate Modernisation strategic priority.   Details of how we intend to deliver on these priorities is included in the Action Plan attached as **Appendix 1** (pages 30-40).  Business Services also has lead responsibility for the key principle of Tackling Poverty & Inequalities. The Tackling Poverty & Inequalities Team sits within the Area Manager (Buchan)’s support team and plays a key role in addressing one of the Community Planning Partnerships key priorities which is reducing child poverty. Information relating to Tackling Poverty & Inequalities has been detailed in section 2.3.1. |
| **2.2 Area Plans**  Area Plans have been developed to show the Council’s intentions for developments and projects which affect each of the six areas within Aberdeenshire during the period of the Council Plan and also provide a clear performance and scrutiny framework. The actions identified in the Area Plans include those actions identified in the Directorate Plan that have a specific Area dimension as well as actions that reflect contact and dialogue with local communities, community groups, organisations and individuals as well as with Community Planning Partners. Responsibility for Area Plans lies with Area Management Teams which consist of cross-representation of services at a senior level and the plans will provide Local Elected Members oversight of service delivery in their area as well as allowing the required scrutiny.  Area Plans will:   * set out Directorate Plans at an area level * capture and reflect council and local priorities and delivery of actions * collate proposed service delivery and give Area Committees oversight of the service delivery in their area * allow the required scrutiny and monitoring that is specific to the area and provide the opportunity for the formal scrutiny process to be taken forward by Area Committee * support Area Committees as the decision makers on local issues * have regard to the public sector equality duty and the climate change commitment recognised by the Council * provide linkage between the Council and the Community Planning priorities * reflect and complement statutory and other community plans relative to each area e.g. [Local Outcome Improvement Plans](https://www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk/our-priorities/local-outcomes-improvement-plan/) (LOIPs), Locality Plans, Community Safety, Community Justice, Children’s Services, Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP)   Whilst many of the actions to be taken by Business Services to deliver the Council Priorities will be planned and managed across Aberdeenshire, there are actions that have a specific area dimension and these are included in each of the Area Plans which have been approved by their respective Area Committee. The approved Area Plans can be accessed on Aberdeenshire Council’s website: [Banff & Buchan Area Plan](https://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/FunctionsPage.aspx?dsid=107652&action=GetFileFromDB); [Buchan Area Plan](https://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/FunctionsPage.aspx?dsid=108000&action=GetFileFromDB); [Formartine Area Plan](https://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/FunctionsPage.aspx?dsid=107558&action=GetFileFromDB); [Garioch Area Plan](https://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/FunctionsPage.aspx?dsid=107490&action=GetFileFromDB); [Kincardine & Mearns Area Plan](https://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/FunctionsPage.aspx?dsid=107632&action=GetFileFromDB); [Marr Area Plan](https://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/FunctionsPage.aspx?dsid=107637&action=GetFileFromDB). |
| **2.3 Local and National Policy issues**  There are a range of local and national policy issues which impact on the services to be delivered by Business Services. The following summarises the main issues affecting Business Services and the actions being taken as a result.  **Area Managers (Buchan & Formartine):**  Continued response to, and recovery from, the Covid-19 pandemic and socio-economic changes will remain the significant local and national policy issues that impact on communities and the role of Area Managers and teams to provide leadership and guidance to support resilience within communities will continue to influence the work of Area teams.  **Customer & Digital Services (C&DS):**  [Aberdeenshire’s Digital Strategy](https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/digital-strategy/) aligns with the [Digital Strategy for Scotland](https://consult.gov.scot/digital-directorate/digital-strategy-for-scotland/) and the actions required to realise Aberdeenshire’s ambition will be reflected in our Digital Strategy Roadmap.  The Coronavirus Regulations and associated guidance and pressure on services as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic continue to present challenges highlighting the on-going need for staff mobilisation and service prioritisation as well as welfare policies to be continually refreshed and cascaded.  Briefings are provided for Members on COSLA reports and the Corporate Policy team also produces the monthly Policy Bulletin to share local and national policy news as well as information on consultations, events and training, Local Government Improvement Unit (LGIU) briefings. The Business Strategy team ensures that Members are made aware of Audit Scotland reports and bulletins are posted on Ward Pages.  Regulations on the accessibility of public sector websites came into force in September 2020 setting a legal duty for the Council to make its website accessible. The Council must publish [accessibility statements](https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/online/accessibility/) and explain how accessible our website is. The aim of the legislation is to help make sure online public services are available to all users including people with disabilities. The regulations mean that all documents published on the Council and Community Planning Partnership websites meet the accessibility standards.  **Commercial & Procurement Shared Services (CPSS):**  The Covid-19 pandemic recovery and Brexit continue to represent the major local and national policy issues affecting Commercial & Procurement Shared Services.  CPSS continues to demonstrate agility in responding to Scottish Procurement Policy Notes, COSLA requirements, statutory consultations and other regulatory guidance and best practice e.g. supplier profiling, supplier relief and business continuity risk.  Action has been targeted where business continuity risk is particularly acute and could impact on our most vulnerable citizens. For example, the Social Care team have worked with the HSCP and all providers of social care services to implement policy on supplier sustainability during the Covid-19 pandemic supporting compliance with National Principles for Sustainability and remobilisation payments issued jointly by Health and Social Care Scotland and COSLA.  The team has worked collaboratively with Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City Councils to implement a consistent process, to the benefit of both councils and all service providers that are often shared between the two councils.  Supply chains globally are increasingly under pressure as a result of both Covid-19 and Brexit. Cost pressures due to increased logistical, manufacturing, raw material, energy and inflation are prevalent across all supply sectors. CPSS are collaboratively working with all partners, private, public and voluntary to mitigate where possible the impacts of these pressures.  **Finance:**  The Scottish Government has provided additional financial resources to support local communities affected by the Covid-19 pandemic measures. A number of Business Grants have been administered and continue to be distributed in line with national guidance to support the Aberdeenshire business community. Further support is also being provided to our customers including self-isolation payments, additional free school meals payments, hardship funds and crisis grants in line with national guidance.  Finance continues to demonstrate flexibility and agility in responding to the pandemic but also ensuring any changes to legislation are implemented along with COSLA requirements and other statutory duties including the setting of, billing and collection of Council Tax and Business Rates and the administration of Housing Benefits, Council Tax Reduction, Discretionary Housing Payments, Crisis Grants, Community Care Grants, Money and Welfare advice, Free Schools Meals and School Clothing Grants as well as blue badge applications. The service continues to invest and encourage the use of on-line offering and is actively working towards a more self-service model for budget holders across the Council.  In response to the pandemic and the Council’s financial position, the Service is leading on the implementation of changes to pay and conditions of service, whether nationally or locally agreed, undertaking the required development, modelling and impact assessment.  The payroll system and associated processes continue to be enhanced with the further rollout of self-service functionality. Improvements to reporting functionality, allowing access to real-time workforce data, supports the Council’s response to the pandemic and is integral to the development of service workforce reports.  The Finance service plays an important role in the overall financial management of the Council in facilitating the preparation of the Council’s financial plans, policies, budgets and accounts, ensuring effective budget monitoring and control, undertaking treasury management, providing financial advice and reporting on financial performance.  It also has responsibility for the provision of advice and support to services on emergency planning, civil contingencies, organisational resilience, business continuity and risk.  **Internal Audit:**  Internal Audit will continue to support, and where appropriate challenge, progress with policy implementation and the associated impact on internal controls, governance and risk management. Internal Audit will always give consideration to the risks facing the Council when preparing planned work. The risks associated with the Covid-19 pandemic and the Council’s response to this will be considered when developing the Audit Plan for 2022/23. Areas of interest include new ways of working, revised governance arrangements, financial sustainability and the impact of the pandemic on vulnerable groups.  **Legal & People:**  The workforce implications arising from the budget and the pandemic have been the main drivers for local and national policy change. In the last year, a framework of workforce planning has been put in place encompassing the national and local picture. The workforce plans will capture the key steps required to shape a workforce fit for the future, including terms and conditions, pay strategy, service redesign, wellbeing, absence and performance management, re-skilling, voluntary severance, national recruitment and retention campaigns, and the digitalisation of services.  **Property & Facilities Management:**  The Council is the largest construction client in the region, with public sector overall contributing more than half of the nation’s £8bn expenditure on construction: with the construction sector providing 6% of Scotland’s GDP; hence the importance of construction to the economy.  In addition, the Council has the largest portfolio of property assets in the North East with the use of those assets having a direct correlation to the quality of services being delivered; whilst the investment portfolio helps both stimulate economic activity and provides income generation to the Council. |
| **2.3.1 Tackling Poverty & Inequalities**  The Scottish Government has made a commitment in tackling poverty and inequalities across Scotland. The work on tackling poverty spans a number of policy areas and is outlined within  The Fairer Scotland Action Plan which consists of five high-level ambitions.   * [A Fairer Scotland For All](https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-action-plan/pages/7/) * [Ending Child Poverty](https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-action-plan/pages/8/) * [A Strong Start For All Young People](https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-action-plan/pages/9/) * [Fairer Working Lives](https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-action-plan/pages/10/) * [A Thriving Third Age](https://www.gov.scot/publications/fairer-scotland-action-plan/pages/11/)   Specifically in relation to ending child poverty, the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017places astatutory requirement on Local Authorities and Health Boards to jointly prepare and submit, to the Scottish Government, an annual “Local Child Poverty Action Report” identifying actions that have been taken in the previous 12 months and what action will be taken in the future to reduce child poverty. Aberdeenshire Council agreed a Child Poverty Action Plan 2018-2028 in April 2019 and the Action Report is reported annually to Communities Committee. The Child Poverty Action Plan is also the delivery plan for the Aberdeenshire Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2017-2027 and the priority ‘Reducing Child Poverty’. This priority is one of three priorities set by the Community Planning Partnership, the other two being Healthy Eating and Active Living and Connected & Cohesive Communities. A link to the most recent Community Planning Partnership Annual Report can be found [here](https://www.ouraberdeenshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/LOIP-Annual-Report-2020-21-Final-1.pdf). The [Tackling Poverty Progress Report 2021](https://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/FunctionsPage.aspx?dsid=109167&action=GetFileFromDB) and the [Tackling Poverty Allocation of Budget Report](https://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/FunctionsPage.aspx?dsid=107142&action=GetFileFromDB) can be found on the Aberdeenshire Council website.  Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, 2.1% of Aberdeenshire’s population was living in six data zones identified as being in the most deprived 20% of Scotland and seven times more likely to be employment deprived compared to the average for Aberdeenshire. The child poverty profile highlighted that in 2019/20, 16.7% of children are living in poverty after housing costs are accounted for however this rises to over 21% in the Banff & Buchan UK Parliamentary constituency. In relation to Child Poverty 65% of children in poverty do have at least one adult in work. Evidence indicates that the impact of the pandemic will increase poverty despite actions being taken to try and reduce it. In particular, the impact is likely to be heightened for certain groups, including low-paid workers, under-employed workers, and women and ethnic minorities, who were already struggling before the pandemic. Areas with a high number of low-paid at-risk jobs will be heavily impacted by the threat of rising poverty.  The Tackling Poverty & Inequalities Teamsupports the Tackling Poverty & Inequalities Strategic Partnership (Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership) which coordinates strategic development in order to:   * improve the lives of disadvantaged people across Aberdeenshire * utilise the Fairer Aberdeenshire Funding to address poverty holistically * reducing the number of households living in poverty * preventing households falling into poverty * enabling children to live poverty free in adult life * improve the wellbeing of people living in poverty   The priorities of the Partnership are:   * invest in services and projects that address the causes of poverty, not its symptoms. * support services & projects that deliver early interventions for vulnerable individuals, families and disadvantaged communities * facilitate joint working and co-location between local partners ensuring service delivery is integrated increasing accessibility * promote the voice of lived experience is used to inform practice and co-produce services   To comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty, all projects and spend through the Fairer Aberdeenshire Fund, the budget supporting the work of the Tackling Poverty & Inequalities partnership, is supported by an Integrated Impact Assessment. In Aberdeenshire, our approach to tackling poverty focusses on early intervention and prevention, tackling the root causes of poverty and building people’s capabilities through income maximisation, employability and promoting positive life chances.  Aberdeenshire’s Local Voices Forum, a forum of households with lived experience of poverty and representing all Protected Characteristics, influences and informs service design and delivery.  Key achievements and positive messages are:   * Increased income maximisation support has resulted in an additional £19,387,164 to 14,205 low-income households to increase their income and cover household costs. * 127 low-income households were supported to reduce fuel poverty through the Eat & Heat scheme delivered by Scarf * 2,697 food parcels/ boxes being delivered per month. * Using the Information & Advice framework 7569 people have accessed information & advice services through a blended approach of online, phone & face to face. * Client financial gain is over £5,819,939 resulting in, on average, an additional £679 per household. * Through the range of funded programmes 1,750 adults and 1,007 young people have accessed support and opportunities which have improved their skills and secured employment. * Partners have secured 287 digital kits to support low-income households to become digitally engaged |
| **2.4 Public Sector Equality Duty**  Under the Equality Act 2010, the Council has a duty to demonstrate that we consciously consider or have due regard to our equality obligations. In order to meet our legal obligations under the 2010 Equality Act, the Council must report every two years on progress in making equalities integral to our activities. The most recent [Aberdeenshire Equality Mainstreaming and Outcomes Report 2021](http://publications.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/dataset/d94d5751-0329-4fce-88ae-0355d1197da7/resource/437937ef-48d6-4833-9a52-08c32aa1f25a/download/aberdeenshire-equality-mainstreaming-and-outcomes-report-2021.pdf) was published in in 2021.  Business Services discharges the public sector equality duty by adhering to [Aberdeenshire Council’s Equalities Policy](https://arcadialite.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/equality/).  The Fairer Scotland Duty Part 1 of the Equality Act 2010 places a legal responsibility on particular public bodies in Scotland to actively consider (‘pay due regard’ to) how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socioeconomic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions. To fulfil the obligation under The Fairer Scotland Duty, the Council must be able to meet two key requirements:   1. To actively consider how we could reduce inequalities of outcome in any decision we make; 2. To publish a written assessment, showing how we have done this.   The Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) allows us to assess the impact of the Council's policies, procedures and functions on those that have Protected Characteristics and are at risk of socio-economic deprivation within Aberdeenshire. It enables us to make balanced judgements in all decisions.  Area Managers and their teams will continue to ensure that Equalities considerations are embedded within working practices and local decision making. Through effective community engagement, communities, regardless of Protected Characteristics can participate in decision making and influence policy decisions and service delivery that impacts on them.  Customer & Digital Services (C&DS) has lead responsibility for Equalities, ensuring that Integrated Impact Assessments are undertaken when required and providing support to officers and members around Equalities issues. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated and inflamed inequalities in our communities and its impact on those with protected characteristics and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds is well documented. The Equalities team will support Services to ensure that Equalities considerations are embedded in strategic decision making when any changes to service provision are being considered to ensure that Members are provided with robust assessments detailing impacts on those with protected characteristics throughout the decision-making process. Communities and residents need to be reassured that the Council is taking steps to mitigate negative impacts of decision making.  An Integrated Assessment tool has been developed which incorporates the Equalities assessment as well as other statutory impacts including climate change, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the Fairer Scotland Duty. The tool is currently in the testing phase.  The Equality Act (Scotland) 2010 specifies that councils, education authorities, and licensing boards must:   * Publish a report on the progress of mainstreaming the equality duty every two years * Report on progress of their equality outcomes every two years   Web accessibility regulations came into effect in September 2020, to ensure that content across all content types on our website and graphic/video content is accessible. A rigorous process of ensuring accessibility is in place among Creative Services and website UX team before any content is produced or web pages amended.  The focus on digital technologies has been fundamental to the business continuity of the Council in our response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Digital is a primary focus for the Council in delivering the new priorities and we are actively looking at how we can channel technologies to improve our business, enable economic growth, support the environment and benefit residents while at the same time ensuring that no one is left behind. The IIA underpinning Aberdeenshire’s Digital Strategy identifies vulnerable groups with mitigation incorporated into Aberdeenshire’s Digital Roadmap. This recognises the commitment to working with partners in building digital confidence with communities, addressing accessibility and connectivity within our sphere of control. The focus on services, not buildings, requires the need to develop new models for service delivery, often in conjunction with our partners and utilising new technologies. In order to maintain those vital services, which address the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities, we will move to self-service coupled with building personal and community resilience. Working with our stakeholders, including customers, will be central to designing new models and process.  The need to continue building digital confidence across the council’s workforce is also recognised with actions already progressing to expand the Digital Champion programme and to identifying resources to support employees in developing skills. The needs of the workforce, Elected Members, Partners, and community are an integral factor to designing our Virtual Working Environment, which specifically includes aspects directly relating to protected characteristics. Outputs from engagement activity undertaken initially between August and December 2020 and still ongoing continues to inform the future direction of the Office Space Strategy based on the understanding of opportunities and challenges identified by stakeholders as the potential for a blended approach to working between home and office is further considered building on the learning gained from both the pandemic and employee feedback.  As a shared service, Commercial & Procurement Shared Service (CPSS) has formed strong strategic partnerships with equalities teams in Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and The Highland Councils. Best practice and common approaches to new national policy or case law can be shared as a result of these connections.  The Procurement Reform (Scotland) Act 2014 requires local authorities to comply with the sustainable procurement duty in all regulated contracts. The 2014 Act specifically refers to **“**reducing inequality in the area” in the definition of “improving wellbeing”. CPSS policy and guidance re Community Benefits/Sustainable Procurement has strong focus on the Public Sector Equality Duty, Fair Work Practices and a wide range of other socio-economic considerations designed to alleviate various forms of poverty and disadvantage under the Fairer Scotland Duty and National Performance Framework.  Best practice can be highlighted in Procurement Annual Reports. In addition, CPSS contributes extensively to corporate Equalities Mainstreaming reports, Child Poverty improvement activity, Best Value audits (as required), Equalities Strategy Board and other corporate initiatives concerning equalities.  When setting the Council’s Medium-Term Financial Strategy, all savings options are subject to an Impact Assessment and are collated by the Finance Service.  Internal Audit will continue to provide support, and where appropriate challenge, in the application of the Public Sector Equality Duty through review of associated internal controls and governance arrangements.  Legal & People will continue to monitor and provide advice on issues of equality across the Council. Workforce profiling forms a key activity of workforce planning and all services over the course of the next calendar year will have a better understanding of the staff profile in terms of age, gender, etc. Workforce actions arising from profile analysis will be included in the plans.  In recent years there has been a push to increase opportunities for young people and this will continue along with monitoring the age profile of the organisation. Aberdeenshire Council currently has 300 apprenticeship opportunities for young people, and this increase will be maintained in the coming years.  Property & Facilities Management give consideration to the Public Sector Equality Duty through the undertaking of an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) to support recommendations and decisions being made in respect of construction activity, use of property assets and the budgetary process. |
| **2.5 Sustainability and climate change commitment**  Aberdeenshire Council has committed to working towards being a carbon free society through targets and commitments set down in its [Climate Change Declaration](https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/media/25146/climatechangedeclaration.pdf). In support of this, the Carbon Budget for the council for 2021/22 was set at the meeting of Aberdeenshire Council on [17 March 2022](https://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/FunctionsPage.aspx?dsid=106916&action=GetFileFromDB). Business Services target for carbon reduction for 2021/22 was set at 1750 tCO2e, which is 35% of the Council’s overall target. The 2022/23 target for Business Services will be agreed at the meeting of Aberdeenshire Council in March 2022. The Covid-19 pandemic has changed working practices significantly and impacted on achieving the target. Each Service is required to update their policy committee on a 6-monthly basis. The latest update provided to Business Services can be found [here](https://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/FunctionsPage.aspx?dsid=106237&action=GetFileFromDB).  Across the Service, the majority of Business Services employees transferred to working from home as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Maximising the use of technology to communicate electronically with customers, partners and community groups has become the norm and has significantly reduced the need for staff travel. Through ongoing stakeholder engagement, the potential for alternative active travel opportunities will be an integral part of the Office Space Strategy. The potential to build on the momentum of doing things differently, where the crisis has produced innovation, where services have adapted, and printing reduced demonstrates our ability to work and serve customers in different ways. Significant progress has been made throughout the pandemic in revising governance structures to allow virtual Policy and Area Committee meetings and to reduce dependence on printing. Opportunities exist to extend sustainable practices into the future and build on the appetite for change.  The Communications team within Customer & Digital Services (C&DS)is working with officers to communicate sustainability targets to internal and external audiences, and through officers supports the work of the Sustainability Committee. The Business Strategy team is engaging with Economic Development and Zero Waste Scotland to ensure that carbon reduction and circular economy is captured within Directorate Plans and strategic programmes – the Circular Economy forms an integral part of the Office Space Strategy. Sessions are currently being planned for Elected Members.  Commercial & Procurement Shared Services (CPSS)contributes extensively to corporate commitments/wider influence around net zero/biodiversity and circular economy initiatives. As with equalities, CPSS policy and guidance re Community Benefits/Sustainable Procurement has strong focus on carbon/environmental wellbeing beyond basic statutory requirements. E-Learning modules have been developed relating to “Sustainable Procurement/Community Benefits” which provide necessary awareness/training on these areas including “whole of life costing” to officers with delegated procurement authority. CPSS has formed strong strategic partnerships with sustainability/climate teams in Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and The Highland Councils. Best practice and common approaches to new national policy or case law can be shared as a result of these connections. Best practice can be highlighted in Procurement Annual Reports. In addition, CPSS provides information annually to the corporate [Climate Change](https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/environment/green-living/environmental-policy/) return and is directly involved in work of the Scottish Government led “Climate and Procurement Forum” which looks to provide proportionate and relevant business-friendly and procurement orientated solutions to the emerging climate emergency.  Finance is looking at a reduction in printing of Council Tax and Business Rates bills by moving these to electronic bills. Electronic Recovery Notices will also be available. Finance will continue to support both the Property Service and the Capital Plan Group to ensure that Carbon Reduction and the associated monetary savings are considered and captured as part of the budget setting process.  The Energy Management Team within Property & Facilities Managementleadsthe Business Services development of the 2022/23 Carbon Budget which will be presented to Council in March 2022. The service main unit is through energy management and energy efficiency aligned to the targets within the Carbon budget together with input to the Council and national indicators to reduce carbon emissions by 75% by 2030 and zero by2045.  Continual monitoring of energy consumption is carried out by the Energy Management Team and this is reported monthly to the Finance Service to allow them to manage the energy budgets for the Council. |

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| **3. BUSINESS SERVICES DIRECTORATE PROFILE** |
| **3.1 Introduction**  Business Services delivers a range of services and functions that support the front-line services of the Council and helps them achieve their aims and objectives within the framework of a modern and effective organisation. We have contact with every household and ratepayer in Aberdeenshire through the Revenues Taxation team; we oversee public perception of the council through corporate communications and customer services; we have contact with every employee of the council via Legal & People; and our property team have responsibility for a range of services focussed on managing the council’s physical assets. We also have a particular interest in supporting activity in the Formartine and Buchan areas through the Area Managers and their teams.  In providing the breadth of services, we rely on the contribution of each and every colleague throughout Business Services each of whom brings a unique set of skills and talents contributing to the overall effectiveness of the services we provide.  Our workforce demonstrates their commitment to serving our customers by embracing Aberdeenshire Council’s “One Aberdeenshire” Principles that represent the cultural aspirations and underpin how we will achieve the Council’s vision to be the best council, from mountain to sea. Supporting this, Business Services’ vision is: Providing innovative, forward thinking and trusted advice and services to protect and promote the interests of Aberdeenshire Council. We will do this by:   * engaging effectively with customers and resident to provide the best services * enabling employees to fulfil their potential by equipping them with the necessary knowledge, skills and tools * promoting good governance by ensuring the right things are done in the right way, by the right people, at the right time * encouraging innovation to create a culture of improvement   Business Services is made up of a number of sub-services:  **Area Managers (Buchan & Formartine)** - The Area Managers for Buchan and Formartine form part of the Business Services Leadership Team. Aberdeenshire Council has established six areas within which local decisions will be taken locally by elected Members. Each of the six areas has an Area Committee, an Area Manager and an Area Management Team.  The main activities include: leadership of the Area Management Team (AMT); management and operation of Area Committees; working closely with communities and partners to ensure effective plans are developed and delivered (including Community Plans, Locality Plans, Community Action Plans, Resilience Plans and Regeneration plans); Area Projects e.g. placemaking activity and other projects in communities; responsible for community budgets; and ensuring monies received through Developer Obligations are spent within agreed timescales and to the benefit of communities.  **Customer & Digital Services (C&DS)** is an invaluable resource of business intelligence, professional advice, technical expertise and customer service excellence that drives Aberdeenshire towards achieving the Council’s priorities. C&DS is made up of the following teams: IT; Business Strategy; Business Change; Customer Services; and Communications & Marketing.  **Commercial & Procurement Shared Services (CPSS)** is shared with Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and The Highland Councils. Through its Procurement Strategy the service will ensure that procurement activity delivers value for money and contributes to the achievement of each of the authority's broader aims and objectives. The key themes of the Joint Procurement Strategy focus on efficiency, governance and improvement. The Council’s Procurement Mission Statement commits to delivery of **“**ethical and sustainable value for money solutions that support the operational needs and wider strategic aims of the councils and the communities they service to further local and national priorities to the fullest extent possible”.  **Finance** - the main purpose of the service is to ensure the proper administration and stewardship of public funds. This is discharged through the following functions: Section 95 statutory officer, Revenues; Corporate Finance; Strategic Finance; and Pay & Rewards.  **Internal Audit** is a statutory requirement under the Local Authority Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2014 and is provided in accordance with UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. It provides high quality professional, objective and independent analysis and advice. Internal Audit supports the Council to achieve its objectives through systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of its governance, risk management and internal control arrangements, and through the promotion of good corporate governance. Internal Audit is a shared service with Aberdeen City Council.  **Legal & People** aims to support the organisational customer as a trusted adviser. The service is made up of the following teams: Advice, Representation, Registration and Elections; Commercial (including Conveyancing and Developer Obligations); Governance (including Committee Services, Information Governance and Licensing); Health, Safety & Wellbeing; Learning & Development; Resourcing; HR (both Transactional & Operational)  **Property & Facilities Management** aims to provide the delivery of Aberdeenshire Council’s Strategic Priorities through the provision of high-quality customer focussed professional property management services. Its objective is to provide the best buildings for Aberdeenshire Council – the Council has 624 operational assets and over 330 investment assets. The impact of the Service is wide ranging but can be segmented into key areas of activity; namely, Property Asset Management (including Estates); Facilities Management; Construction Programme Delivery; and Energy Management. |
| **3.2 Staffing and Workforce Planning**  The Business Services workforce has been relatively stable in recent years although there has been a recent increase in headcount and FTE which, in part, reflects the demands arising from the pandemic.   |  |  | | --- | --- | |  |  |   Over the past 12 months the most significant increase in workforce numbers occurred within Property & Facilities Management, with the recruitment of additional cleaning operatives to support the implementation of Covid-related control measures. There were also additional staff recruited to the Area Manager (Buchan)’s team to support the work relating to the resettlement of refugees.   |  |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **Sub-Service** | **January 2021** | | **January 2022** | | **Difference** | | |  | **Headcount** | **FTE** | **Headcount** | **FTE** | **Headcount** | **FTE** | | Directorate | 2 | 1.98 | 2 | 1.98 | 0 | 0 | | Area Manager - Formartine | 8 | 4.89 | 6 | 4.65 | -2 | -0.24 | | Area Manager - Buchan | 7 | 5.89 | 14 | 13.54 | 7 | 7.65 | | *Commercial & Procurement Shared Services \** | *26* | *24.2* | *41* | *38.55* | *15* | *14.35* | | Customer & Digital Services | 220 | 201.43 | 217 | 198.57 | -3 | -2.86 | | Finance | 259 | 217.48 | 261 | 224.72 | 2 | 7.24 | | Internal Audit | 12 | 11.61 | 14 | 13.59 | 2 | 1.98 | | Legal & People | 177 | 150.15 | 172 | 149.80 | -5 | -0.35 | | Property & Facilities Management | 1066 | 456.83 | 1082 | 471.71 | 16 | 14.88 | | Support Services | 28 | 25.07 | 31 | 27.23 | 3 | 2.16 | | Tackling Poverty & Inequalities | 2 | 1.98 | 2 | 1.98 | 0 | 0 | | **Total** | **1780** | **1077.29** | **1801** | **1107.77** | **21** | **30.48** |   \* Staff employed by Aberdeen City Council and are not included in total staff numbers for Business Services. Figures for 2022 also include the Social Care team within Procurement.  In accordance with Covid-19 national guidance, the majority of office-based staff within Business Services have continued to work remotely from home. As office working restrictions are lifted decisions will be made, both corporately and within Service teams, as to appropriate working arrangements going forward.  Business Services staff were deployed to the Grampian Covid Assistance Hub until July 2021 when the Hub was incorporated into the Contact Centre. Staff have also assisted Economic Development with the payment of grants to small businesses and are currently providing support to Finance with the processing of self-isolation support grants.  The turnover rate within the Service fell from 13% in 2020 to 11.8% in 2021 while 537 vacancies were advertised during this period (compared to 365 in 2020) with 331 new starts recruited (compared to 228 in 2020). 391 of the vacancies advertised for 2021 were for positions within Cleaning Services.  An analysis suggests that the Business Services workforce is under-represented in the younger age brackets, and this has been the case for many years, with only 7 modern apprentices being based within Business Services. Also, a large proportion of the workforce is over the age of 60 and this combined with the recent voluntary severance programme constitutes a potential risk, with the loss of experience and skills. This is an indicator that succession planning and talent management should be prioritised within Business Services over the coming years, starting a programme immediately.    Although stable for many years the Business Services workforce is entering into a period of change and fluctuation through the voluntary severance and service design programme. This has the potential to reshape the workforce and this will be done through voluntary severance, natural turnover and re-skilling.  The fluctuation in the workforce coupled with the ongoing pandemic response means the wellbeing of the service is being monitored closely. A number of key indicators, including sickness absence rates and responses to polls and attitude surveys, are being used to determine wellbeing. Since 2019, there has been a slight upward trend in sickness absence levels, although these appear to be returning to a similar absence pattern as would be seen pre-pandemic. Absence levels in January 2022 were 5.38%, which was 1.91% higher than the comparable January 2019 figure.  Workforce Planning  Detailed workforce plans are under development alongside the programme of service design within individual services in Business Services. This focussed workforce planning can either stand alone as a plan or be incorporated into service and team plans and will cover elements such as workforce reshaping and reducing absence, workforce performance, turnover, recruitment, voluntary severance, re-skilling/redeployment and talent management. |

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| **3.3 Organisational Chart** |

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| **3.4 Financial Profile**   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **Revenue Budget 2022 - 2024**   **Business Services** | **Base Budget 2022-23 £000** | **Base Budget 2023-24 £000** | |  |  |  | | **Area Manager (Buchan)** | 407 | 419 | | **Area Manager (Formartine)** | 420 | 431 | | **Customer & Digital Services** | 12,705 | 13,024 | | **Directorate & Support Services** | 1,199 | 1,235 | | **Finance** | 8,632 | 9,154 | | **Internal Audit** | 420 | 439 | | **Legal & People** | 7,782 | 7,988 | | Commercial & Procurement Shared Services | 1,429 | 1,434 | | **Property & Facilities Management** *(Note 1)* | 5,787 | 5,714 | | **Tackling Poverty & Inequalities** | 992 | 1,005 | |  | **39,773** | **40,843** | | Other Budget Pages included within Business Services *(Note 2)* | 1,603 | 1,699 | |  |  |  | | **Revenue Budget agreed at Full Council in March 2020** | **41,376** | **42,542** | |  |  |  | | **Note 1** The figure provided for P&FM is net budget, gross budget 2021/22 amounted to £34.677 million | | | | **Note 2** The following Budgets are included within the agreed Business Services Revenue Budget but no separate section included within Business Services Directorate Plan**:** | | | |  |  |  | | **Chief Executive** | 355 | 365 | | Councillors' Remuneration & Expenses | 2,354 | 2,419 | | Grampian Joint Valuation Board | 2,181 | 2,202 | | Charges to HRA, Capital & Other | (3,287) | (3,287) | |  | **1,603** | **1,699** | |  |  |  | |  |  |  | | **Capital Budget 2020 – 2022** *(Note 3)* | **43,896** | **30,094** | | **Note 3** Business Services lead on the delivery of the overall Capital Plan | | | |

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| **3.5 Efficiency savings**  Through on-going self-evaluation areas for improvement will be highlighted. In addition, the Service is undertaking Service Reviews to identify areas where efficiencies can be realised leading to a reduction in expenditure or an increase in income generation. During the preparation of the Business Services Revenue Budget these areas are put to Councillors for consideration and when agreed budgets are amended. The Revenue Budget will be considered by Full Council on 10 March 2022.  The workforce implications of efficiency savings will be reported to committee through the performance measures contained within the Directorate Action Plan and future bulletins where appropriate. Ongoing workforce and trade union engagement will continue to take place. |
| **3.6 Consultation and Engagement**  This Directorate Plan 2022-23 is a refresh and continuation of the core Directorate Plan 2020-22.  During the preparation of the core plan, Business Services Leadership Team held three workshops with Elected Members from Business Services Committee. The purpose of the workshops was to identify and endorse the four priorities that Business Services has responsibility for and to agree the required actions and performance measures that would sit under each priority to ensure delivery.  This updated and refreshed version of the Directorate Plan continues to reflect these consultations.  Employee and trade union consultation will take place regularly as the Directorate Plan actions are progressed. This is a key document for engagement with the workforce on the future direction of their service. |
| **3.7 Peer review**  A Peer Review of the core Directorate Plan (2020-22) was carried out by Strategic Leadership Team who were a “critical friend” in terms of the information contained with the Plan and provided feedback which has been incorporated as appropriate. |

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| **4. DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE FRAMEWORK** |
| **4.1 Performance**  Aberdeenshire Council aims to be the best in Scotland and we support this by setting challenging targets and benchmarking our performance against the best-performing local authorities.  Performance Management is essentially about planning what the Council wants to achieve, doing the work, reviewing what has been done and assessing whether it has had the desired impact. The Council needs to be clear about its priorities so it can understand what to measure when developing its approach to managing performance  The [Performance Management Framework](https://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/FunctionsPage.aspx?dsid=108049&action=GetFileFromDB) captures the principles of performance management and provides a comprehensive and robust approach to managing performance across the organisation by ensuring a corporate approach is adopted; by ensuring credible and quality information is provided at the right levels of the organisation; and by developing a positive and supportive performance management culture. Managers and individuals are encouraged and empowered to identify when performance information shows under achievement or where there is a risk of a target not being met without risk of retribution. Self-evaluation activities are central to managing performance and improvement.  Business Services uses the Council’s performance management system to record, monitor, compare and report on progress and performance. Information input is sourced from various internal information systems with the performance management system providing the mechanism to turn this information into reports, scorecards etc for presentation to Policy Committees, Area Committees, Leadership Teams, Boards and for external scrutiny.  Business Services reports its performance in relation to projects, actions and measures contained with the Directorate Action Plan (Appendix 1) on a six-monthly basis to the [Business Services Committee](https://committees.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/committees.aspx?commid=492). These reports can be found on Aberdeenshire Council’s website along with the most recent [Best Value Assurance Report](http://publications.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/dataset/best-value-assurance-report). Recommendations within these reports will be used to strengthen our approach to performance.  In addition, Business Services also presents performance reports to each Area Committee on a six-monthly basis to allow for further scrutiny of performance within each Area. Initial feedback received to date from Area Committees has focussed on the Contact Centre, Housing Benefits and operational assets. These comments inform the focus for some of the projects/actions and measures contained with the Directorate Action Plan (Appendix 1).  **Appendix 1** (pages 30-40) details the actions/projects and performance measures which relate to and support the delivery of the four priorities that Business Services has responsibility for and also details the priorities and areas for improvement in relation to Tackling Poverty & Inequalities. |
| **4.2 Benchmarking**  In addition to reporting performance to committee, Business Services also contributes to the Aberdeenshire Council response to key national trends against the Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) annual statutory performance indicators.  The Local Government Benchmarking Framework is a common set of performance indicators that are measured for every Scottish Council. The indicators focus on core service delivery areas such as schools, leisure facilities, waste collection, roads maintenance and disposal and collection of council tax. The council can use the indicators as a basis for working and learning with other Scottish local authorities in order to improve service delivery. Each year we highlight the improvement activity we are undertaking through the Local Government Benchmarking Framework on our [website](http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/strategy-and-performance/about-performance/#howweperform).  Residents can see how Aberdeenshire Council is performing in comparison to other Scottish local authorities through the [mylocalcouncil](http://scotland.mylocalcouncil.info/Data.aspx?id=S12000034&lang=en-GB) website.  The latest LGBF benchmarking information relating to Business Services, including the Scottish Average and National Ranking, will be published in March 2022 following which the Service will review the results. Further analysis of these measures, in particular those currently sitting in quartile three or four, will then be undertaken. Where action is to be taken to improve the measure(s), this will be incorporated into our Directorate Action Plan and specific updates on how we would propose to deal with those will be brought forward as part of the regular performance reporting to Business Services Committee. |

**4.3 Where are we now? Self-Evaluation, Positive messages, Areas for Improvement**

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, Business Services was required to make rapid changes to the way it works to ensure continuity of service. In addition, and in reaction to the new Council Priorities and publication of Aberdeenshire’s Best Value Audit, Business Services conducted a light-touch self-evaluation exercise in December 2020 with the extended Business Services Leadership Team. This took the form of a survey with specific questions asked around two themes: how well do we meet the needs of our stakeholders; and what is our capacity for improvement.

Responses identified a significant number of areas of good practice across the Service as well as acknowledging areas where we could improve. The main themes in relation to areas for improvement across the Service are:

* Better partnership/collaborative working – with internal and external partners
* More robust performance management framework
* Better use of benchmarking data
* A more strategic approach to workforce planning
* Learning from other authorities
* Stronger leadership around prioritisation

The Areas for Improvement have been incorporated into our Directorate Action Plan as set out in **Appendix 1** (pages 30-40). In addition, each part of the Service has their own detailed and discrete action plan that supplements the Directorate Action Plan.

The table below provides a summary of progress for each sub-service:

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| **Customer & Digital Services (C&DS)** | Where are we now? |
| * All service reviews completed with new structures and responsibilities in place * Digital Strategy funding and governance board in place and programme taking shape * Wide Area Network upgrade completed on time and on budget * Developing equality outcomes * Revising the Gaelic language plan * Provided community support in Storm Arwen * Agreed a new model of corporate self-assessment PSIF |
| Positive messages |
| * Worked together as one service, focussed on the same, shared priorities * Continued to support the wider organisation to cope with Covid and other emergency demands including community testing, vaccination centres, welfare checks, Storm Arwen |
| **Commercial & Procurement Shared Services (CPSS)** | Where are we now? |
| * Priority focus has been ensuring stability and business continuity of the Council’s supply chain particularly with those suppliers with whom the Council has high dependency on for the delivery of business-critical services * The Annual Procurement Performance Report which has focus on metrics around financial efficiencies, social value outcomes (community benefits) and the development of the local supply chain has been reported to Business Services Committee in Autumn 2021. Reporting on circular economy and carbon reduction initiatives was reported to Committee during Autumn 2021 |
| Positive messages |
| * Assessment under the nationally audited Procurement Capability & Improvement Programme (PCIP) shows that Aberdeenshire Council has remained in the highest rated performance quartile across 32 Scottish Councils for the last 12 years * Covid recovery and Brexit represent the major local and national policy issues affecting the service area in recent months and for the foreseeable future. CPSS teams have absorbed and applied a considerable amount of policy/best practice and regulation * CPSS has demonstrated agile and proactive responses to ensure business continuity in the midst of the pandemic which has played a significant part in safeguarding the resilience of suppliers/local suppliers and contributed positively to the future growth of local economies in Aberdeenshire * In terms of the Covid response, the Council has supported 96 providers of critical services (approx. 72 contracts) and 192 providers of non-critical services (approx. 160 contracts) in Aberdeenshire. In addition, the social care commissioning and contracts team has supported 56 providers of critical services (approx. 90 contracts) and 38 providers of non-critical services (approx. 57 contracts) in Aberdeenshire |
| **Finance** | Where are we now? |
| * Covid has continued to provide challenges across the whole organisation, which has resulted in continued pressure on the finances. The Finance Service has continued to provide advice and support to all Directorate teams * Finance has reported more regularly and in greater detail on financial data to enable service delivery decisions to be made; a greater leniency when issuing and collecting debts, the ability to adapt resources to administer new grant schemes and ensure that suppliers and staff are paid accurately and on time * The Risk and Resilience Team had to support the Council’s response to Storm Arwen, the most adverse weather event in a number of years resulting in 70,000 homes without power, some for more than a week |
| Positive messages |
| * Received a clean bill of health following the annual audit of the 2020/21 annual accounts * The Revenues team prepared and issued all Council Tax, Business Rates and BIDS bills in an environment of late and changing legislation. Collection processes were amended to take into consideration people and businesses who were affected by Covid offering extended payment plans and holiday periods to help remove the burden of debt during difficult times. The Team continue to work in collaboration with colleagues in Economic Development to assess and pay business grants * The Corporate Finance Team have also taken on additional responsibilities by processing self-isolation grants, direct free school meal payments and hardship grants all within specific and tight timescales * The service has been able to provide support to services and partners during the response and recovery phase of a number of incidents, most recently Storm Arwen, releasing staff and adapting processes to meet the needs of the situation |
| **Internal Audit** | Where are we now? |
| * There is a statutory requirement under the Local Authority Accounts (Scotland) Regulations 2014 to operate a professional and objective internal auditing service in accordance with UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards. An annual self-assessment is undertaken, which identified in 2019/20 that the service generally complies with the Standards. Peer reviews are undertaken every 5 years. A quality assurance and improvement plan was set out and has been implemented to move towards full compliance where appropriate * An Internal Audit Plan is agreed with Audit Committee annually and progress with delivering the Plan is reported regularly |
| Positive messages |
| * Internal Audit has continued to provide support, advice and an appropriate level of assurance. This has included support and advice in respect of Covid related business grant schemes, investigations, and continued delivery of a programme of planned audit reports |
| **Legal & People** | Where are we now? |
| * Successfully navigated the first year as a merged service. The service continues to better understand customer expectations, harness digital efficiencies and build on the learning from the last year * Our services have readily adapted to the new working environment, for example providing much of our learning content online and dealing with Sheriff Court actions through Webex * Key priorities such as workforce planning, and staff mobilisation have taken significant steps forward as the challenges of service prioritisation have been better understood and actioned * Registrars are largely operating digitally and commercial activities have continued remotely * New governance arrangements have enabled significant advancements in relation to virtual meetings of the council’s committees |
| Positive messages |
| * Robust governance arrangements promote clarity, stability and innovation as evidenced during the pandemic. The service demonstrates the ability to adapt, for example the overnight change to largely digital engagement across the board with clients and stakeholders and the swift move to virtual Committee meetings during lockdown * Supporting the transition to an increasingly flexible, multi-skilled workforce and building on the agility and pro-activity of our employees during pandemic response are key workforce objectives. Providing and supporting options for employees' future careers, skills and voluntary severance are key components of the coming year. Likewise, the continued support and guidance for all employees around the increasing critical issues of health and wellbeing culture, systems and processes remain central to the work of the team |
| **Property & Facilities Management** | Where are we now? |
| * The Council was commended as part of the recent Best Value for its approach to Estate Rationalisation. The methodology has informed the approach to the wider Estate Modernisation agenda * Despite the external environment, there continues to be high occupancy levels for commercial properties albeit there are some financial challenges around rental income * Within Facilities Management part of the cleaning service will transfer to ECS, whilst the Hard FM programme has recently been re-procured with the associated fragmentation of Minor and Life Cycle Component Works. * Construction Programmes have increased in recent years across both General Capital and Housing Capital Plans. This is scheduled to continue in future years |
| Positive messages |
| * The Service continued to optimise the number of operational properties with a reduction over the last decade from 848 to 624 operational assets. The approach to Estate Rationalisation was commended by Best Value Auditors * Occupancy levels for commercial and industrial properties remained buoyant, at over 90% * Around 48,000 response and planned preventative maintenance tasks are delivered each year, whilst there remains significant activity across both Housing and General Capital Plans |

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| **4.4 Where do we need to be?**  The Business Services Transformation Programme exists to ensure that the professional support we provide to the council continues to be valued and supportive of the Council’s priorities and service ambitions. It is also an opportunity to be bold and innovative in our approach to streamline processes and deliver significant benefits to the organisation through modern and effective working practices.  Recognising the financial context in which we are working, along with opportunities to modernise our processes, our focus for improvement will sit across four themes:     * **Commercialisation** –providing professional services that can be offered externally to generate income, to offset costs and reduce the pressures on budgets * **Digital Innovation** – making use of digital technologies to change and improve a business model * **Service Design** – planning and organising people, infrastructure, communication and component parts of a service to improve its quality * **Workforce – Wellbeing & Planning** – working towards a high performing, digitally confident workforce, composed of diverse, skilled, adaptable, engaged, empowered and creative teams   By reviewing each of our service areas in line with these themes, we will strive to deliver modern and effective professional services that are fit for purpose, driving efficiencies and delivering savings. The Business Services Transformation Board will oversee the Transformation Programme as well as monitor continuous improvement activity taking place across the service. A range of data will be used to inform and shape both the transformation programme and the rolling programme of improvement activity. The Transformation Programme projects have clear targets and deliverables. The Transformation Programme is also a live and rolling plan that evolves over time and will incorporate indicative proposals for future years as they are developed.  The overarching aim is to deliver Best Value high quality professional services. |
| **5. RISKS** | |
| Fundamental to delivering the ambitions of the new Council Priorities and the Business Services Directorate Plan 2022-23 is the way the Aberdeenshire Council implements robust management of risks and opportunities.  In Aberdeenshire Council, Risk Registers are currently maintained at a Corporate, Directorate and Operational level which are reviewed at Service and Directorate Management Teams, with progress reported to Corporate Risk Management Steering Group. Risks which require urgent escalation are reported to Senior Leadership Team for monitoring with the most significant risks the Councils’ face being reported to appropriate Committees for oversight, scrutiny, and monitoring. The current Corporate and Directorate Risk Registers can be found [here](https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/about-us/plans-and-reports/).  Following the establishment of the new Risk and Resilience Team in January 2020 and the refreshed set of Council Priorities, a full review of the Risk and Resilience service of Aberdeenshire Council was carried out and the findings of the Review were reported to Audit Committee on 1 July 2021. The review considered governance, assurance, accountability, strategies, policies, frameworks, processes, and procedures associated with the Risk Management and Resilience service. Aberdeenshire Council is dedicated to developing a proactive approach to the management of risk in the context of and as a result of the findings of the review developed a Risk Management Policy which was approved at Business Services Committee on 6 January 2022.  The next steps include the development of a Risk Appetite Statement in conjunction with Corporate Leadership Group and Elected Members, draft Guidance for services, a revised Risk Register template and more nuanced Risk Matrix.  It has become widely recognised that the management of risk is everyone’s responsibility. Whilst Guidance and supporting documentation is being developed, assurance can be provided that as part of business-as-usual activity, Service and Directorate Teams continue to monitor, manage and report on risk across all Services.  Whilst the Council is committed to continuously horizon scanning for new and emerging risks, it must be acknowledged that some risk and associated mitigation measures lie outside the control of the Aberdeenshire Council. Aberdeenshire Council seeks to reduce and mitigate against the Council’s exposure to risk where practicable, recognising that some mitigation measures may be the responsibility of third parties or partner agencies. | |

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| **6. OPPORTUNITIES** |
| The focus for Business Services is moving forward and continuing to deliver high quality services and support. The Covid-19 pandemic significantly impacted how we work, with many positive changes put in place to allow us to continue working and maintain delivery of key services. We need to capitalise on and further develop these changed ways of working to ensure we continue to provide high quality professional and business support fit for the future.  Some of the identified opportunities within Business Services are:   * Aberdeenshire’s Digital Strategy sets the direction for Aberdeenshire’s digital future, with the roadmap and governance framework being key enablers to driving forward the actions which will contribute to fundamentally changing the way services are delivered and accessed by customers. The strategy also brings a focus to digital accessibility and inclusion across our communities working with partners to bring about positive outcomes for our citizens. Funding agreed by Full Council is supporting the realisation of the strategy which is expected to provide a range of customer benefits and savings in the coming year. * Making better use of our data will be a focus in 2022/23. A data strategy is being developed which will set out how we use data to inform services to residents and deliver cost effective services. * A new model of self-assessment will be implemented across the council, ensuring that we are self-aware and can target improvement activity appropriately and demonstrate the difference that activity is making. * Through new ways of working Finance has been able to accelerate the pace of change which has provided the opportunity to re-set and reshape the way in which we provide information and advice across a range of specialist areas – accountancy, insurance risk and resilience. * Through the digital strategy there are also opportunities for Finance to enhance the use of technology, back-office integration, automation and data analysis so that future decision-making is evidence led. * The Digital Strategy, service design and workforce planning provide Business Services with an opportunity to understand existing and future skills over the next 18 months. Legal & People will facilitate more robust development programmes at all stages, entry level into new and existing skills, career broadening, developing and re-skilling opportunities. * Business Services will build on best practice gained through the move to virtual working, improve productivity and reduce travel consistent with the Council's carbon budget. * Legal & People will continue to explore opportunities for commercialisation. * Opportunities will arise through the Voluntary Severance programme for further service design, restructuring and improved performance. * As part of the Estate Modernisation priority, the aims and objectives are to ensure alignment with Service requirements, communities and place: Assets are safe and fit for purpose; meeting Climate Change targets; commercial portfolio to support the Aberdeenshire economy and income generation; optimise property running costs; and efficient Asset Disposal property running costs; and efficient Asset Disposal |

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| **BUSINESS SERVICES’ DIRECTORATE ACTION PLAN 2022-23** |

| **Council priority/**  **Service priority** | **Key Action** | **Anticipated outcome** | **Performance measure** | **Responsible person** | **Timescale** |
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| **STRATEGIC** | | | | | |
| **Effective delivery of the Council’s priorities through a programme of digital innovation and web-based services**  (Resilient Communities) | Improve telephony service | Customers have greater choice accessing online  self-serve options  reducing Contact Centre demand | Average call wait time for Contact Centre (target - maximum of 5 minutes)  Contact Centre call abandonment rate (target – maximum of 25%) | Head of Customer & Digital Services | 31/03/2023 |
| Average customer satisfaction for service provision from service points and contact centre | Customers are satisfied with the quality of service they receive | Average customer satisfaction for service provision from service points and contact centre (Target - 95% satisfaction)  Percentage of web chats that are automated (target – 85%) | Head of Customer & Digital Services | 31/03/2023 |
| Delivering improved and broader range of online services for the benefit of customers |  | Deliver new/improved online services:   * Breach of planning control * Roads streetlight reporting improvement requests * Waste - reporting abandoned vehicle * Joint Equipment stores improvements | Head of Customer & Digital Services | 20/06/2022  19/09/2022  19/12/2022  13/03/2023 |
| % employees participating in learning identifying increased confidence using O365 packages | Employees are confident using a range of O365 packages | Percentage of employees who feel they are digitally confident (target - 80%)  Percentage of employees participating in 0365 learning opportunities identify increased confidence using O365 packages (target - 80%) | Head of Legal and People | 31/03/2023 |
|  | Implement website refresh | Improved customer experience, easier access to information, improved speed of updating service information. | * New site search implemented (end Dec 2022) * New forms solution in place (end Dec 2022) * Scope of page templates complete (by April 2022) * Templates created in draft (before end October 2022) | Head of Customer & Digital Services | 31/03/2023 |
| **Our workforce plans are sustainable, affordable and supports employee wellbeing**  (Health and wellbeing)  (links to Business Service self-evaluation) | Recommend all services have Individual workforce plans linked to the Directorate Plan | Workforce Planning tracker and Workforce data PowerBI are key tools in monitoring service workforce priorities and outcomes. Tools will be used to form a continuous feedback loop to monitor outcomes and determine new priorities. Success will be reported to Collaboration Board and through service committees. | Workforce planning and workforce data are regularly reviewed and discussed by BS managers | Head of Legal & People to provide tools, all BS Managers to lead in own area. | 31/03/2023 |
| Invest in the Business Services workforce to maximise workforce wellbeing to ensure the service continues to thrive | Workforce wellbeing indicators established included in Business Services employees attitude survey and appropriate action taken on the results  Workforce wellbeing and productivity levels are maintained or increased | Wellbeing indicators report positive trend year on year because of wellbeing action taken corporately and specifically in Business Services:  Sickness Absence stats:   * Average number of days lost to sickness per employee in Business Services (target 5 days) * Sickness absence days per employee * Sickness absence days per teacher | Head of Legal & People | 31/03/2023 |
| As the younger demographic are underrepresented in the Business Services workforce action is required to improved opportunities for young people to enter the Business Services workforce. Only 7 apprentice opportunities currently in Business Services along with other trainee positions. | Increase apprenticeship and trainee opportunities in Business services to 1% of workforce which equates to 25 opportunities. | Creation of 25 apprenticeship or trainee opportunities (e.g., work experience for school, college or university placements, as well as foundation apprenticeships) | Head of Legal & People | 31/03/2023 |
| Better understanding of future service and workforce requirements across business services through the development of an 18-month service design and workforce planning programme | Reshaped workforce brought about by reskilling, natural turnover and voluntary severance. | Service design and workforce planning programme completed for all parts of Business Services | Director of Business Services | Summer 2022 |
| **Income is maximised through reducing costs alongside commercialisation**  (Responsible finances) | Completion of an Interim Commercial Strategy to 2022 | A clear plan with a realistic and balanced approach to enhanced commercialisation is achieved | The actual level of income generated by the Strategy will be detailed in July 2022. This will detail the returns on investment, timelines, outcomes and risk.  Engagement has been undertaken with every Service area across the Council to identify and appraise opportunities. These options are now being worked up with the sponsorship of the Director of Environment & Infrastructure Services. | Initially Head of Central Procurement Shared Service, then each affected budget holder | 31/07/2022 |
| Promote new ways of generating income e.g. through alternative delivery models, risk and reward, sponsorship and advertising | A more contemporary approach to the topic of income but linked to the Strategy and Policy above. | The adoption and inclusion of new ideas then the actual income generated from these ideas. Engagement has been undertaken with every Service area across the Council to identify and appraise opportunities. These options are now being worked up with the sponsorship of the Director of Environment & Infrastructure Services.  Percentage of procurement spend spent on local enterprises (target – 30%) | Initially Head of Central Procurement Shared Service then each affected budget holder | 31/07/2022 |
| **We have an estate that is sustainable, efficient, and fit for purpose**  (Estate Modernisation) | Review and update Service Asset Strategies to inform and formalise how Services delivered services in future and identify future asset requirements  Develop Asset Strategies for assets within Business Services remit  Support other Services (ECS, HSCP and IS) in the development of Asset Strategies within their respective remits | Updated Service Asset Strategies which reflect current, and emerging, best practice for service delivery. To include key Asset Drivers concerning service delivery along with future management, and operation, arrangements.  Asset Strategies to identify future asset requirements, i.e. those for retention and investment, and those which are underperforming; surplus to requirements; do not contribute to Council strategic priorities etc.  Informed Investment Programme where facilities for retention and investment are highlighted and projects/works arising incorporated within Capital Plan, Planned Maintenance Programmes etc. | Asset Strategies developed for assets within Business Services remit i.e., Offices and Public Conveniences  Asset Strategies developed for asset within remit of other Services i.e., ECS, HSCP and IS | Heads of Service | 31/03/2023  Timescale determined by Services engagement |
| Identifying Shared Need across the Council and wider Public Sector | Synergies between Aberdeenshire Services, Public Sector partner agencies and communities and their asset needs identified. To take cognisance of impact on localities/areas and place principles on a cross service basis. | Opportunities for co-location and delivery of services by Aberdeenshire identified.  Opportunities for co-location with Public Sector partner agencies identified.  Increased utilisation of operational assets, coupled with overall reduction in both Aberdeenshire, and wider Public Sector assets. | Principal Asset Management Officer | 31/03/2023  TBC – determined by activities of Public Sector partner agencies |
| Corporate Asset Management Plan to be updated | Corporate Asset Management Plan to be updated in line with current best practice/guidance to reflect Aberdeenshire’s 2021-2026 requirements.  Review, update and develop wider corporate asset management policies and strategies for the management of Aberdeenshire’s built estate. These policies and strategies will support Service(s) needs and support opportunities to rationalise portfolio and modernise the management of assets. | Corporate Asset Management Plan updated and published.  Policies and strategies identified along with programme for their preparation. | Principal Asset Management Officer | 30/06/2022  30/06/2022 |
| Identify programme of Asset Disinvestment | Asset disposal programme developed which is informed by the early identification of facilities for release through Services Asset Strategies and asset challenge exercise. Since 2010, reported operational portfolio has reduced by 25% from 848 facilities to 635 in 2020, with Services Strategies and asset challenge exercise to identify these further releases and associated timescales.  Disposal programme to be prioritised taking cognisance of vacant building holding costs in addition to ensuring the Disposal Process is effective in securing capital receipts, removing liabilities and takes account of local factors (e.g., Asset Transfer) | Timeous marketing and wider disposal of assets identified for release through Services Asset Strategies – conclusion of disposal process is determined by external factors e.g. market conditions etc.  Reduction in the period of time for which facilities remain vacant, and positive impact this will have on capital receipts, in addition to a proposed 10% reduction in overall holding costs and wider risks/liabilities associated with vacant facilities.  These will be reported to Committee through an annual report | Asset Disposal Surveyor | 31/03/2023 Ongoing process |
| Complete the review of the Capital Plan | Continue to deliver and Review Capital Plan including but not solely Depot Programmes, Office Space Strategy, Rolling Programmes | Capital Plan aligned with updated Service strategies and in line with financial strategy/budgets. | Head of Property & FM | 31/03/2023 |
| Identify programme of Asset Investment | Programme of wider asset investment including maintenance and improvement works developed with this informed, in part, from ongoing Condition Surveys and Services Asset Strategies. | Programme of works developed.  This will be reported to Committee through an annual report.  Proportion of operational buildings that are suitable for their current use (%)  Proportion of internal floor area of operational buildings in satisfactory condition (%) | Head of Property & FM | 31/03/2023 |
| Linked to the Carbon Budget, develop the programme to reduce Energy Use in Buildings | Net zero carbon roadmap developed which informs how Aberdeenshire can meet legislative requirements in carbon reduction.  Continue to develop actions to ensure Energy use in buildings is considered alongside the Council’s Climate Change Commitments | Net zero carbon roadmap completed.  Programme of works which reduces energy use in buildings developed.  This will be reported to Committee through an annual report.  Energy usage – KWh per M2 gross internal building areas of Council operational buildings  CO2 Emissions – Kg per M2 gross internal area of Council operational buildings  Quantity of Biomass energy consumed in Council properties | Engineering Services Manager | 31/03/2023  Ongoing process |
| **KEY PRINCIPLE (Lead Responsibility)** | | | | | |
| **Tackling Poverty & Inequalities** | To lead the Tackling Poverty & Inequalities Strategic Partnership ensuring delivery of the annual workplan and the Reducing Poverty Action Plan. The workplan and action plan to be continually assessed to reflect the impact of Covid and Brexit and priorities continue to support those who are at risk or who are living in poverty, especially those that are experiencing this for the first time. | The life chances of people at risk of falling into poverty, or already living in poverty, will be improved | The indicators for Tackling Poverty & Inequalities are in the Child Poverty Action Plan and part of the reporting to the Communities Committee which is undertaken on a 6 monthly basis. | Area Manager (Buchan) | 31/03/2023 |
| To build capacity within the Information & Advice Framework to meet the future need | People in Aberdeenshire will have better access to advice and information services, including debt and money advice | As above. | Area Manager (Buchan) | 31/03/2023 |
| **OPERATIONAL** | | | | | |
| **That Business Services are effective and efficient**  (Right people, right places, right time & Responsible finances)  (links to Business Services self-evaluation) | Undertake a phased programme of service reviews for functions across Business Services through to Summer 2022 | Provide assurance that all parts of Business Services are fit for purpose, effective and efficient in supporting the work of the Council. | That all reviews are complete within the timescale set out and that any findings from the reviews have SMART actions associated with them. | Director of Business Services/  Business Services Leadership Team | Summer 2022 |
| Undertake an annual review of the LGBF (Local Government Benchmarking Framework) indicators with a view to providing specific updates to Business Services Committee in respect of any recommendations that may arise. This will particularly focus on service areas that are in the third or fourth quartile. | That each service area is performing at the appropriate benchmark level. | For each indicator, performance meets or exceeds the target as part of the benchmarking framework. | Director of Business Services/  Business Services Leadership Team | 31/03/2023 |