Corporate Solutions
Quarter Three Performance Report 2021/22

Corporate Solutions are continuing to support the recovery and the retention of the best elements of transformation that took place in response to the pandemic and securing permanent changes to the way the Council delivers its services in order to build back better. This approach is based on the creation of a wellbeing economy and it is designed to achieve wellbeing and fairness for our people and the rest of nature. The redesign of services and the changes to build back better are predicated on the overarching principle that in delivering services, whether commissioned internally or externally, we will keep our communities, our employees and our environment safe, at the same time as meeting our commitment to being carbon neutral by 2030.

Corporate Solutions will "deliver forward looking services fit for a modern 21st Century organisation and put the citizen at the centre of Service Redesign".

Corporate Solutions is in a period of transition with plans to shift to a structure with five service areas of Finance, Human Resources, Digital, Customer Services, Legal & Governance and Business Services. Building on our nine drivers for change, Corporate Solutions has a particular focus on the key elements of the route map that encompass the delivery and acceleration of the Capital Programme, delivering digital first and remote working.

These elements of the Midlothian 'Route map for recovery through and out of the pandemic' are also captured in the recommendations from the NESTA 'Listen and Learn Report' and having embraced both strategies, the Corporate Solutions teams have a key role in progressing the following strands of work:

- **Valuing Communities** - Being well together, using social media to engage with communities; meaningful local engagement, strengthen and build upon emerging ties with communities and work in partnership to deliver local, place based services.
- **Remote/Flexible Working** - Local and flexible place based working; working smarter; sustainable futures; and a tailored approach.
- **Digital First** - Access to wifi; technical capability; making things easier; digital by default.

As a strategic partner, NESTA, the UK's innovation agency for social good are, through their people powered results team, supporting us to pioneer new approaches to achieving change and innovation. These approaches are smarter, faster, more collaborative and more inclusive of citizens and people working at the front line. This work recognises that people who are closest to services are the experts in both their own experience and the community they live in, but often don't have enough influence over transformation efforts.

The key activity which underpins this work and which the service is focused on includes:

a) Securing continued financial sustainability and maintaining strong financial management across the Council through the delivery of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) incorporating Capital Strategy and Capital Investment plans, Reserves Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy;

b) Nurturing a highly motivated and effective workforce through the delivery of the Workforce Strategy and the development of Service Workforce Plans;

c) Digital first and embracing data insight and analytics by developing and implementing a refreshed Digital Strategy and Digital Learning Strategy;

d) A refresh of the Customer Services Strategy and implementation of the online payments and services (CSP) platform;
e) A refreshed Procurement Strategy and Contract Delivery Plan.

Remote working has brought a range of new challenges but it has by necessity accelerated the adoption of a range of business tools and systems developments that are supporting our staff to effectively continue to deliver services. These developments also provide an effective and efficient means to progress and monitor work and teams performance. The adoption of electronic workflows, for example, has removed reliance on paper and wet signatures and provides an electronic record of what has been carried out by whom and when. Managers and colleagues are using all of the new technology available to them to maintain contact with colleagues, work collaboratively to deliver outcomes and to support continued personal development and learning for staff.

Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
The core objective of the MTFS is to secure the Council's financial sustainability during an ongoing period of financial constraint coupled with acute service demand pressures and increasing customer expectations.

The MTFS is not only about balancing the budgets, it provides a means to ensure as far as possible that the limited resources available to the Council are targeted on delivery of improved outcomes, particularly against the key priorities of:

- Reducing the gap in learning outcomes
- Reducing the gap in health outcomes
- Reducing the gap in economic circumstances
- Reducing Midlothian carbon emission to net zero by 2030

Achievements

- Completion of 2022/23 draft base budget and supporting the work of BTSG to consider options to secure a balanced budget.
- Presentation to Council in November of a full suite of financial monitoring reports for last quarter which included an assessment of the financial impact of COVID and an update on Council reserves.
- Detailed analysis carried out of the impact of the Local Government Finance settlement following the Scottish Budget announced in December.
- Continued and in depth financial input to key projects embedded in the Medium Term Financial Strategy including Destination Hillend, Early Years Expansion, and demographic pressures in service areas and the Learning Estate Strategy.
- Invoice payment performance for Corporate Solutions has remained on target this quarter, 95% of invoices paid within 30 days, continued improvement is expected over the remainder of the financial year.
- Introduction of the Child Disability payments scheme. The scheme provides support for extra costs that a disabled child might have and is made up of care and mobility components as well as mental, behavioural, emotional difficulties.
- Low income pandemic payments were issued prior to the 31st of October deadline.

Workforce Strategy

The purpose of the Workforce Strategy is to ensure that the Council continues to have a workforce that is able to deliver positive outcomes for the people of Midlothian. It sets out an approach to supporting,

developing and reshaping the workforce now and in the future in response to changes as a consequence of national and/or local issues. It is underpinned by the Council's values and vision.

The Workforce Strategy is an important tool to outline the organisation's approach to articulating how workforce issues will be managed and ensures the Council has the people and skills to manage change and deliver services effectively and efficiently.

Achievements

- Welcomed cohort three of the Kickstart programme. The Kickstart Scheme is a new programme aimed at young people across our communities who are currently unemployed facing long term unemployment. Young people from the Kickstart programme are already successfully transitioning into permanent roles. We have 24 placements in total. Cohort 1 have now successfully completed their six month placement with all going on to secure a positive destination within the Council.
- Continuation of a rolling programme of Wellness@Midlothian initiatives to ensure we continue to support the wellbeing of our staff, including 35 attended on the mental health for manager's course and 57 attended our mental health webinar this quarter.
- Positive progress made on the creation of a one-Council approach to organisational wellbeing including the Making it Happen network due to launch mid-February.
- Allocated one of the limited places on Age Scotland's age inclusive matrix programme for 2022 which will see us work with senior consultants from Age Scotland to review current practice, listen to workers of all ages and maintain energy and focus to address and deliver changes to enhance employee experience.
- We secured the Healthy Working Lives award for the 9th year running.

Digital Strategy and Digital Learning Strategy

Supported by the appointment of SOCITIM as a strategic partner and led by the Digital First Board work progressed to deliver an ambitious new digital strategy, aimed at improving the way services are delivered to Midlothian citizens. Entitled 'Empowering people, enabling growth', the 3-year strategy sets out how local outcomes will be improved by delivering digital services to digitally connected communities.

While responding to the pandemic has also transformed the way the council works, and we are already using technology to allow our services to be more flexible and responsive it was recognised that the Council needs to do much more to harness the opportunities that a digital approach can bring. This includes supporting our communities and local businesses to thrive in a digital world and making sure that our children are prepared for the workplaces of the future.

 Among the aims set out in the new strategy are plans to:

- Refresh the council's approach to customer service, focussing on 'digital first', while making sure alternatives remain in place for those who need them
- Have a council website that meets customer needs , enabling customers to request and pay for services online and to log in to see their interactions
- Implement an update service, so that customers contacting the council online can receive follow up text messages or emails
- Look at opportunities to automate and better integrate processes so that staff can focus on the things that matter most to customers
- Enable people to stay independent and healthy for longer by using data and technology
- Introduce bookable online and face-to-face appointments so that customers don't have to waste time queuing or travelling and to help the council reduce costs

- Review and improve online engagement with customers, including online consultations, communications and social media
- Promote Midlothian as a digital destination, creating an environment that attracts leading digital businesses to the area and supporting the innovation of start-ups
- Cultivate digital skills in our communities, ensuring that young people have access to the technology and support that they need to improve educational outcomes and to prepare them with the skills they need for the future
- Reduce digital exclusion and empower learners of all ages, enabling online access and supporting them to develop digital skills
- Support Midlothian to achieve high speed connectivity, smart infrastructure and resilient cyber defences

The new strategy was approved by Council in June and work is now underway to implement the changes.

Funding was secured in the 20/21 budget to deliver the Equipped for Learning project. This will provide every school age pupil in the county with a learning device such as an iPad or Google Chromebook as part of Midlothian Council's £10.5 million investment in digital learning. Midlothian is the first local authority in Scotland to launch a digital learning project on this scale.

The ambitious plan recognises the importance of digital tools to support learning. This investment will ensure Midlothian's young people have the digital skills they need to secure a positive destination such as a job or a Further or Higher Education place, which in turn will help support the local economy. Making sure all pupils have a device will also help young people with additional support needs by giving them access to technology that can help with their different learning needs. Primary schools will have the flexibility to select the right device to support their school community until Primary 7 where all pupils from P7 upward will receive a Google Chromebook. Early years settings will also benefit from the digital strategy as they will have access to shared iPad devices.

Additionally, Newbattle Community High School will continue to be the Digital Centre for Excellence in Midlothian, piloting innovation and creativity in new technologies. This investment will also make sure Midlothian's teaching staff have access to world-class technology, with wider support for other Education staff, Children's Services and Communities & Lifelong Learning.

Achievements

- Continued progression of the new Digital Services Strategy ensuring the Council has the capacity and skills to take forward the associated investment and delivery of plans.
- Equipped for Learning Programme (ELF) project approved and funding in place to support delivery. This will provide every school age pupil in the county with a learning device such as an iPad or Google Chromebook as part of Midlothian Council's £10.5 million investment in digital learning. Significant progress made in supporting Education ambition for 1 to 1 devices. Improvements in Wi-Fi provision across schools to support wider deployment of chromebooks and underlying technologies now complete. In addition, implemented new EFL web filtering solution to support 1 to 1 device deployment.
- Digital enabled projects: a number of business applications have been upgraded and these continue to improve customer and staff experience, including upgrade to the Itrent system this quarter.
- Cyber Security resilience: Log4 Vulnerability mitigation actions taken in December 2021. All Core Business Applications and Technologies had to be checked and verified with Suppliers. Number of improvements planned to strengthen the Council Cyber defences (procured and now in the process of implementing new solutions). Including updated anti-virus solution, a backup health check and staff phishing exercises.

Customer Services Strategy

The Customer Service Strategy defines the key drivers that will enable Midlothian Council to deliver 'customer service excellence' to our communities. It outlines the commitment to provide choice to the customer in the way services are accessed and provided. This includes innovation, partnership working and optimising the use of technology within resource constraints. The strategy will help us to change the way we deliver services utilising the latest technologies and linking to national frameworks.

As one of the fastest growing areas in Scotland, the Council cannot support more customers using the current resources, systems and processes. This means that the adoption of digital and automated processes will be key to continuing to provide a seamless customer journey, satisfying enquiries at the first point of contact and meeting increased demand.

Customer self-service and new automated processes can help deliver some key services without customers dealing directly with a member of staff and could truly transform the way the Council deliver services. During 2020/21, increasing the pace of digital transformation, particularly in front-facing customer services, will be a service and corporate priority, for Midlothian Council – one that can deliver the required efficiencies without negatively affecting customer experience.

   Achievements

- Work continues on implementing the Customer Services Platform (CSP) for Midlothian Council and redesigning key services that will improve the end to end customer journey. The modules in progress (such as missed bins, registrar's certificates, FOIs) are being designed, configured, built and tested with services. New technology components for online payments and for real time reporting are being progressed. A Customer Services Platform demonstration of the Registrars process shown at one of the Director's Drop-In sessions last quarter. Work to progress the Customer Services Strategy continues in conjunction with the new Digital Midlothian Strategy, NESTA and neighbourhood services provisions.
- In October Roslin Library was able to re-open for the first time since March 2020 and the service offered by the Mobile Library was extended beyond Reserve and Collect to allow the public back on-board. The libraries in Lasswade and Newbattle are still being used by Education but were able to extend their opening hours to include Tuesday and Thursday evenings along with Saturday mornings. All libraries have taken part in the Reading Agency's Wild World Heroes Winter Mini Reading Challenge where children were encouraged to read at least 3 books to help combat the dip in reading skills that can often take place over school holidays. Midlothian Libraries were successful in their application for COVID Relief Funding from the Scottish Government and will be working on a targeted Bibliotherapy programme.

Procurement Strategy

The procurement function, led by our new Chief Procurement Officer who joined in September 2021, has a central role in supporting the Council to achieve its strategic priorities within a constrained financial envelope. Procurement allows the Council to use its spending power to drive our key strategic priorities and to secure the best possible value and outcomes for Midlothian. Effective procurement can maximise the value of every pound spent in terms of jobs, skills and supply chain opportunities in the local community. We will aim to address economic, social and environmental considerations at all stages of the procurement cycle within the rules of open, fair and transparent competition.

The Procurement team in conjunction with Economic Development have developed a SME Strategy to support and assist local businesses to win contracts fairly and transparently on a competitive market. We

will further develop our collaborative and commercial relationships with key partners as part of our strategic category management approach, to deliver the best possible outcomes for the citizens of Midlothian.

The team continues to utilise framework agreements with Scotland Excel and Procurement for Housing (amongst others) which not only provides an easier route to market but also delivers value for money. The Procurement team is currently working with Scotland Excel to review the service to ensure it remains fit for purpose. We have also explored with neighbouring Councils albeit with limited success opportunities to collaborate on the joint delivery of procurement services and so will continue to engage with Scotland Excel to help support service development.

Achievements:

- The team continues to utilise framework agreements with Scotland Excel and Procurement for Housing (amongst others) which not only provides an easier route to market but also delivers value for money.
- Care provider sustainability payments for Health and Social Care providers continued this quarter.
- Ongoing work undertaken for the development of the SME/Procurement strategy.
- Various contracts awarded this quarter including design and construction for social rent units and supply of new vehicles.

Challenges

The challenges for Midlothian continue with our recovery out of the pandemic, the growing and ageing population and the increasing demand for services that this brings. Midlothian is projected to have the highest percentage change in population size of all council areas in Scotland. From 2018 to 2028, the population of Midlothian is projected to increase from 91,340 to 103,945. This is an increase of 13.8%, which is in contrast to a projected increase of 1.8% for Scotland as a whole with a 40.9% increase in older people over 75. In addition, Midlothian has 10 zones which falls into the most deprived areas giving a local share of 8.7% living in the most deprived areas in Scotland.

This growth creates the opportunity to meet the housing need with 25% of new homes being built in the affordable housing bracket, in addition to the expansion in Council house building. This construction will directly support employment and will see a steady increase in the value of Council Tax received over time.

The approved Capital Strategy sets out the infrastructure required to meet those demographic pressures and includes the financial contributions Midlothian will make to the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal. Encompassing five main themes the City Region Deal will bring significant investment across the regions with total investment of circa £1.3 billion across:

- Research, Development and Innovation: £751 million
- Integrated Regional Employability and Skills: £25 million
- Transport: £156 million
- Culture: £45 million
- Housing: £313 million

Through the Data Driven Innovation strand the Deal will leverage existing world-class research institutes and commercialisation facilities in order that Easter Bush becomes a global location of Agritech excellence. The Easter Bush project includes significant investment in transport infrastructure along the A701/2 transport corridor. In addition, by improving on-site infrastructure at Easter Bush and transport

infrastructure, The University of Edinburgh expects commercial partners will be able to co-locate at scale to commercialise Agritech breakthroughs.

As highlighted in the last update of the Capital Plans the inclusion of pipeline projects brings total planned investments over the next 5 years to circa £0.8 billion.

Financial Sustainability

The settlement for Local Government for 2022/23 announced in December represented a cash reduction in core grant of Circa £100m at a time where costs continue to rise. On 27Th January a further £120 million one off funding was announced for Local Government. However Councils continue to face a £251m real terms cut which will increase again in 2023/24 by a further £120m if the one-off funding for 2022/23 is not baselined within the Local Government settlement. The settlement announced in December gave Councils full flexibility to set the Council Tax rate that is appropriate for their local authority area.

It is against that backdrop that the cross party Business Transformation Setting Group is currently considering options to balance the 2022/23 budget and as part of that the Council Tax policy for the year ahead. Recommendations from Business Transformation Steering Group will in turn be presented to Council on 15 February 2022 to enable Council to fulfil its statutory duty, as set out in Section 93 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended), namely to set its Council Tax and a Balanced Budget for 2022/23.

The challenging grant settlement presents challenges not just for the year ahead but over the medium term, with projections of recurring expenditure to provide services exceeding the recurring funding available. Decision for 2022/23 will have to be taken in the context of the medium term outlook. Indications are that 23/24 and beyond will require significant service reductions, focusing on statutory requirements as well as continued service transformation.

Proposals for a National Care Service

The Scottish Government's proposals for and scope of a National Care Service will have fundamental implications for the community and for Local Government itself. The wide reaching proposals and aim to deliver a National Care Service by the end of the parliamentary term will impact on all aspects of the work of the Corporate Solutions team, including financial implications, both revenue and capital, our asset base, our workforce, governance and legal arrangements and our digital infrastructure and platforms.   It will require an immediate focus by a range of officers during the consultation phase and beyond.

Service Performance

The COVID pandemic continued to have a direct impact on service performance during the quarter and this is reflected in some of the service performance indicators set out later in this report.

Continued increase in numbers of Self Isolation Support Grant applications is taking priority alongside increased Scottish Welfare Fund applications, leading to increased claim and change of circumstances processing times as resource is focussed on these areas.

The level of housing benefit overpayments has reduced as a consequence of the roll out of Universal Credit and the pandemic, which in turn reduces the level of overpayments that can be recovered, although recovery of overpayments has increased from 3% in Q1 to 7% in Q2 and 11% this quarter.

The contact centre continue to experience a high volume of calls with increased the self-isolation grant and other support services including an increase in offline social work contact. In addition, over the last few quarters as services resume back to pre-Covid levels call volumes have increased. Contact Centre staff have been reconfigured this quarter and deployed to mirror peaks in call demand during the day to increase the percentage of calls answered within 60 seconds and reduce call abandoned times. Figures show slight increase in calls answered compared to other quarters this year.

Invoice payment performance has remained on target this quarter for Corporate Solutions with 95% of invoices paid within 30 days.

Sickness absence days have increased compared to Q3 of last year. Of the FTE days lost, 60% was due to long term sickness, 23% self-certified, 17% short term absence. Up to end of January 2021, Covid related sickness absence or otherwise has been recorded as special leave and not included in the calculation of average days lost. From 1st of February to 7th of July 2021 Covid sickness absence was being recorded via the usual sickness procedures with the exception of special leave granted for up to 14 days for isolation. As of July, Covid absence is being recorded as special leave for up to 12 weeks and recorded as sickness absence thereafter. There is no identifiable trend causing the increase, either in short term or long term absences. Consideration of an appropriate annual target following the change to the new service structure early in 2020 was subsequently deferred as a consequence of the pandemic and the impact on our workforce. Targets will be considered over the remainder of 2021/22 for inclusion in the 2022/23 plan.

Corporate Solutions

Midlothian

Successes and Challenges

Corporate Performance Indicators (latest)
🔴 2 ✅ 9 ❓ 0 📈 9

Service Plan PIs (latest)
🔴 6 ✅ 5 ❓ 0 📈 24

Corporate PIs Off Target
PIs 🔴 2

% of Service PIs that are on target/ have reached their target.

Percentage of complaints at stage 2 complete within 20 working days

Service Plan PIs Off Target
PIs 🔴 6

Corporate Indicator - Percentage of invoices sampled and paid within 30 days (LGBF)

All recovery overpayments - as a % of all HB overpayment debt

% of contact centre calls answered within 60 seconds

% of contact centre calls abandoned

Average processing time for new claims (internally calculated)

Average processing time for change of circumstances (internally calculated)

Service High Risks (latest)
⚠️ 0

All Risks - Corporate Solutions
Risks ⚠️ 41 ✅ 86

Key PIs
🔴 Off Target
✅ On Target
📈 Data Only
❓ Data Not Yet Available

Key PIs
🔴 Off Target
✅ On Target
📈 Data Only
❓ Data Not Yet Available

Key Risks
⚠️ High Risk/Medium Risk
✅ Low Risk