

Corporate Solutions Performance Report Quarter One 21/22

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.

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 (OPAS) 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.

In line with the route map as the second lockdown eased, we were able to offer click and collect in libraries, and on Monday 26 April 2021 we reopened our libraries including Gorebridge where plans for refurbishment are also being progressed. We have also set out a range of quick and easy ways to pay Council Tax and House Rents across the Midlothian, shifting from reliance on a central collection office and highlighting that it is now easier than ever to pay locally, saving our customers the time and trouble of making unwanted journeys or waiting in a queue.

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

Achievements

- Completion of the 2020/21 Final Accounts for the Council in advance of the statutory deadline to ensure that strong financial management and stewardship is maintained.
- Concluding the year end with the overall position reflecting services delivered within the revised budget.
- Presentation to Council in June of a full suite of financial monitoring reports for 2020/21 which, in addition to normal governance reports, included completion of the hugely challenging task of reporting on COVID income and expenditure for 2020/21.
- Financial input to key projects in the Medium Term Financial Strategy including Destination Hillend, Early Years Expansion, Demographic pressures in service areas and the Learning Estate strategy.
- Maintaining Council Tax collection rates and reducing the increase in rent arrears by supporting customers with advice and support from Council Tax Reduction and Discretionary Housing Payments.
- Maintained processing times for Housing Benefit for new claims and changes of circumstances with increased demand for crisis grants from Scottish Welfare fund, including Self-Isolation Support Grants.

Workforce Strategy

The purpose of the Workforce Strategy is in essence quite simple, but nevertheless of critical importance, and will 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 whether as a consequence of national or local issues. It is underpinned by the Council's values and vision.

The Workforce Strategy is important as it outlines the organisation's approach to articulating how workforce issues will be managed to ensure the Council has the people and skills to manage change and deliver service. The strategy will ensure we have the right people at the right time and who have the right skills, knowledge and attitude to provide services confidently and competently.

Achievements

- Achievement of Bronze Accreditation for Equally Safe at Work after participating in a programme on advancing gender equality at work, and preventing Violence Against Women recognising that the council as employer take steps to advance equality and diversity at work.
- Completion of work with Nesta on the transformation of Neighbourhood Services with Neighbourhood Services Strategic framework finalised and welcomed cohort one of Kickstart employees into Neighbourhood Services to ensure we continue to support those at risk of long term unemployment in our communities.
- Continuation of a rolling programme of Wellness@Midlothian initiatives to ensure we continue to support the wellbeing of our staff.
- Resilient Leadership Programme for 2020/21 was completed this quarter.
- Endorsement by CMT of a draft Employee Wellbeing Strategy which will now move to consultation stage.

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 is as good as any bank or supermarket website, 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

- Digital Strategy – Empowering people, enabling growth was presented and approved at Council in June.
- Equipped for Learning project approved and funding in place to support delivery. Project management resource secured from Socitim Advisory and a number of work streams already progressing well at pace.
- New Vodafone mobile data sharing contract implemented this quarter. The data sharing plan is more efficient and cost-effective than our previous set data allowance, allowing the pool and share of data across the organisation to suit the way people are working. This will see a reduction in quarterly billing costs and also includes a new technology fund for new devices.

- Digital enabled projects: a number of business applications have been upgraded and these continue to improve Customer and staff experience.
- Successful decommissioning of the old Danderhall school, library and leisure sites and commissioned new Danderhall campus – School, Library and Leisure centre with supporting Digital infrastructure and Digital assets.
- Continued deployment of Technology solutions in support of Covid response Council Meetings – New Service setup for the live streaming of Council Public meetings.
- CyberSecurity resilience: number of improvements made to the Council Cyber defences. Implemented further enhancements to Council infrastructure and wider security management, in response to heightened cyber threats along with regular review and maintenance of ongoing threats and risks.

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. We already have a well-managed public facing website with SOCITM awarding our site four stars. Midlothian is one of only four Councils in Scotland to achieve this accolade. Our Web Team, 50 Content Editors and Council employees, generally 'get it' and already we have been able to transform how our customers interact with the Council. 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 to progress the Customer Services Strategy is ongoing in conjunction with the new Digital Midlothian Strategy, NESTA and Neighbourhood services provisions.
- Customer Services Platform (CSP) for Midlothian Council and redesign of key services work continues to redesign services that will improved the end to end customer journey. Several modules such as missed bins, registrars certificates, FOIs, complaints (contact us) being progressed and nearing implementation over the next few months.
- A new library in Danderhall opened in May, offering services including reserve and collect, bookable browsing sessions, bookable PC access and dealing with NEC cards and blue badges. Four other library locations have also re-opened for the first time since covid lockdown. The mobile library has resumed service in East Lothian as well as Midlothian. All services have resumed with permanent removal of fines and hire charges making services even more accessible to the most vulnerable in our communities.

Procurement Strategy

The procurement function 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 has utilised 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:

- Successful development of the SME/Local Procurement Strategy 2021 to aid in supporting Best Value in the procurement of services.
- High value contracts awarded for carer support services, community mental health support services, sale of ground with requirement to enter into a contract for the design and construction of 70 units for social rent at Bonnyrigg, rendering contracts for Newtongrange/Dalkeith and Gorebridge.
- Legal: Section 75 agreements settled with developers to enable housing developments to proceed. Large scale property transfers as well as individual purchases to increase the Council's housing portfolio in particular transfer of 13 housing units at Main Street Roslin.
- Delivery of Midlothian North and Musselburgh Scottish parliamentary Election.

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.

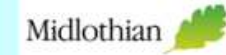
The approved Capital Strategy sets out the infrastructure required to meet those demographic pressures and includes the financial contributions Midlothian will make to the Edinburgh and South East Scotland City Region Deal.

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

Given the divergence from budget as a result of the pandemic, the expectation of continuing challenging grant settlements representing a real terms reduction in core funding and the impact of a rapidly growing population and greater demand for services, the Council will need to maintain a focus on securing a sustainable and deliverable Medium Term Financial Strategy. A corporate solution was secured for 2021/22 with a similar aim for 2022/23. In turn, this allows the Leadership Team to focus on a sustainable MTFS covering the term of the next Council and to present this to incoming members in 2022.

Corporate Solutions



Successes and Challenges

Corporate Performance Indicators (latest)

● 2 ● 8 ? 1 9

Service Plan PIs (latest)

● 6 ● 3 ? 3 24

Service Risks (latest)

▲ 0

Corporate PIs Off Target

PIs ● 2

% of Service PIs that are on target/ have reached their target. (does not include Corporate PIs)

Percentage of complaints at stage 1 complete within 5 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)

High Risks

Risks ▲ 0

There are no High Risks

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
? Data Not Yet Available