

20/21 – Place and Corporate Solutions COVID insights

We've received **2,889**

Covid **Business Grant** applications paying out

£24.4m

since March 2020 to help local business



5,140

Midlothian food and key essentials fund

applications processed



£866,130

Awarded through **food and key essentials fund**



£20,000 of Zero waste funding was used to implement **social distancing measures** at our **recycling centres** and the re-opening of Penicuik depot.

447,000 meals and packed lunches provided in the last year for nurseries, schools and hubs



1,000 additional **cleaning hours** per week deployed across buildings, schools and hubs to reduce the spread of the virus for our keyworkers



1,203

Covid-19 checks carried out by **environmental officers** during May and June 2020



4,500 chromebooks deployed to education to **support remote learning**

We have awarded

3349 crisis grants

518 community care grants

69 self-isolation support grants since March 2020



727 additional laptops

deployed across the council to facilitate the shift to remote working

2,067 users with **direct access** for remote working

430 additional **smartphone** devices deployed to staff council wide

Corporate Solutions Annual Performance Report 2020/21

The last year has brought unprecedented challenges with the COVID pandemic. Staff across Corporate Solutions have refocused their activity, providing a range of additional supports, as well as continuing to deliver key essential frontline services. They have done so whilst maintaining robust governance, effective financial management and security and resilience for our digital networks and infrastructure.

The teams are supporting 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, minimising exposure to Covid-19, or any other viruses, 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 by default 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.

Successes this year

The majority of tasks undertaken by Corporate Solutions have remained similar to pre-COVID times, with staff across the services undertaking a range of additional work to directly support the Council's response to the pandemic. This includes facilitating the rapid deployment of remote working, grant payments and undertaking a range of additional activity such as providing a range of guidance to employees, the rapid assessment of the financial impact of the pandemic on Council services and importantly providing a central point of contact for citizens as part of the Kindness@Midlothian campaign.

At the onset of the pandemic it was recognised that the swift shift to remote working, coupled with an increasing range of expenditure pressures in services would require changes which not only needed to be implemented swiftly but which also required to comply with the Council financial regulations framework and give assurance that the internal control framework was being maintained. Accordingly an overview of the Financial Governance arrangements that would be of most relevance during the pandemic was provided to Corporate Incident Management Team (CIMT) in April 2020 and subsequently presented to the Group Leaders meeting. These arrangements were designed to:

- Support the maintenance of strong and effective financial control
- Provide effective financial oversight
- Allow for both efficiency and completeness in determining the financial impact on the Council
- Support the development of effective mitigation to maintain financial sustainability
- Support reporting and or lobbying for additional funding from Scottish Government
- Aid the recovery phase.

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 all of our libraries with the exception of those restricted by school limitations, and Gorebridge (which is subject to ongoing discussion with members about the proposed refurbishment programme). 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.

Despite the unprecedented challenges that have been faced this year, Midlothian has continued to deliver a range of pre-pandemic commitments, as well as develop a comprehensive programme for recovery and renewal to be realised over the coming years.

1: 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

The MTFS is central to ensuring that the resources available to the Council is directed towards the priorities set out in the Single Midlothian Plan.

Achievements

- Against the backdrop of COVID-19, successful completion of the audited accounts for 2019/20 with an unqualified opinion and some very positive auditor comment
- Completion of the full suite of 2019/20 Financial Monitoring reports for Council in August and September 2020 and February 2021 as part of the robust scrutiny of financial performance, and which included an updated assessment of the financial impact of COVID-19 on the Council
- Securing a green rating for financial management as detailed in EY's 2019/20 annual report
- Continuing to be recognised as performing well compared to our peers in respect of Treasury Management
- Finalisation of the strategic review of the Loans Fund which provides the Council with the option of a corporate solution to the remaining years of the MTFS
- The development of a corporate solution to secure financial balance for 2021/22 and pursuing the same for 2022/23
- 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.

2: 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

- Remote Working Policy endorsed by CMT
- Progressed to formal consultation with the trade unions on implementation of the Remote Working Policy;
- Achievement of Bronze Accreditation for Equally Safe at Work
- Completion of work with Nesta on the transformation of Neighbourhood Services
- Successful recruitment of 2 x Head of Development posts
- Endorsement by CMT of a new Management Development Programme to ensure we continue to develop our current and future managers
- Continuation of a rolling programme of Wellness@Midlothian initiatives to ensure we continue to support the wellbeing of our staff during the pandemic
- Endorsement by CMT of a draft Employee Wellbeing Strategy – this will now move to consultation stage
- Significant progress made with the Kickstart programme to ensure we continue to support those at risk of long term unemployment in our communities
- Significant number of detailed communications issued to both staff and managers in terms of updates, directives, and most importantly supports available during the COVID emergency and continuation of robust and collegiate relations with our trade union colleagues

- k) Provision of high quality content for the Leadership Forum to ensure we continue to support and develop our leadership cohort
- l) Engagement with See Me at Work for 2021/22 to assist Midlothian to continue to support our workforce with their mental health and to address stigma.

3: Digital Strategy and Digital Learning Strategy

The current Digital Strategy has provided ICT infrastructure and facilities that have supported the rapid transition to new ways of working. This demonstrates how they effectively and efficiently underpin delivery of Council services and align with the Single Midlothian Plan and the National ICT Strategy for Scotland.

Midlothian's current Digital Learning Strategy is central to the Council's aim of delivering a world-class education system. It is closely aligned with Scottish Government's policy and advice on digital learning and key national and local priorities.

Embracing the Digital First strand of the Nesta report presents an ideal opportunity to refresh the Council's Digital Strategy. This refreshed digital strategy will support the Council's stated objectives in both the route map and Nesta recommendations and will also promote the opportunities to embrace the power of data insight and data analytics to support service redesign and the implementation of preventative interventions. As such the Council is entering an exciting phase where it can not only continue to embrace use of digital technologies in the workplace and schools but also harness the power of the data it collects to drive innovative and forward looking service redesign for the benefit of all citizens.

Achievements

- a) Significant achievement in the response and deployment of a range of digital solutions and technologies to support the pandemic response and ongoing support
- b) Implemented a number of transformational projects Council wide (Office 365 – cloud solution and Ms Teams)
- c) Delivered a range of digital devices and solutions that allowed users to work remotely with access to Council applications and services
- d) Continuous improvements and changes to Customer and Contact Centre operation to improve Council response and services and to swiftly shift to a remote Contact Centre operating model. This includes Phase 3 – Implemented and redesigned the Scottish Welfare Fund – now live, and Phase 4 - Deployment of payment capabilities for Council services via remote working solution
- e) Education strategy – secured funding from Council to support Education ambition for 1 to 1 devices across Midlothian
- f) Digital enabled projects - a number of new business applications have been implemented and these continue to improve the overall digital end user customer experience
- g) CyberSecurity resilience - number of improvements made to the Council Cyber defences have achieved Cyber essential plus, implemented enhancements to backups and wider security management in response to heightened cyber threats along with regular review and maintenance of ongoing threats and risks. Implement Scottish Government CyberSecurity action plan. Compliance: Preparation and planning for PSN accreditation – certification is currently in progress

4: 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

- a) Working closely with colleagues in the Revenues Team, amongst others, service re-design of the Scottish Welfare Fund resulted in an online form being launched to provide greater options for applicants and help those facing in-work poverty
- b) Implement the Customer Services Platform (CSP) for Midlothian Council and redesign of key services on this platform. CSP Technology has been built in test environment and service redesign of key services has commenced on this environment
- c) The extended Contact Centre staff continue to provide support for core Contact Centre calls in addition to kindness and shielding calls
- d) Libraries have launched new services such as an online Lego Club and online Code Club during the summer and worked closely with colleagues in Education to promote eBooks, eAudiobooks and eComics to families provided with Council Chromebooks. The Summer Reading Challenge was run online and Midlothian recorded the 6th greatest number of children who interacted with the challenge and the 7th greatest number of children who completed the challenge. A range of online events were held during Book Week Scotland including the book launch of a member of library staff's debut novel. Three library branches have re-opened offering Reserve and Collect, a returns service, PC access along with NEC enquiries amongst other things; Library Services also worked with the Red Cross and the Midlothian Community Fire Team of the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service to deliver books and resources to people who were shielding and self-isolating and to children and families who were home-learning
- e) Registrars have maintained service and have provided assistance to Edinburgh and East Lothian colleagues for birth registrations.

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 are working to develop an 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

- a) High value/complex contracts awarded, including:
 - Carer Support Services
 - Community Mental Health Support Services
 - Sale of ground with a requirement to enter into a contract for the Design and Construction of 70 No. units for social rent Bonnyrigg
- b) High value/complex contracts live:
 - Care at Home Recommissioning tender responses due back 26th April
 - School Counselling Services tender response due back 3rd May
- c) Roll out of Cenefits system to assist the Council in obtaining community benefits from contracts
- d) Hosted meet the buyer events held remotely
- e) Roll out of contract variations for all National Care Home Providers contracts
- f) Roll out of contract variations for all H&SC providers regarding the living wage uplift
- g) Care Provider Sustainability Payments for H&SC providers made during the COVID-19 pandemic and still continuing
- h) Development of the SME/Local Procurement Strategy 2021
- i) Worked to protect the supply chain and ensured Council was able to access necessary items during the COVID 19 pandemic.

5: Other Service Improvements

- a) In response to COVID-19 pandemic BACS payments issued for Free School Meals, Self Employed Grants, Bed & Breakfasts and Transition Fund for Nurseries
- b) Successful implementation for the electronic submission and payment of Gas Safety Inspection invoices and associated Gas Safety Certificates
- c) Total Repairs upgrade completed including the replace of TotalMobile services completed in conjunction with Digital Services
- d) Upgrade to Kirona DRS (BMS appointments software) completed
- e) Ongoing support to Economic Development and Education for the payment of Discretionary Fund, Taxi Support Fund and Temporary Restrictions Fund
- f) Support to Food Fund: Design and set up of Opentext (CS16) Capture centre and workflow to manage applications, support in processing of applications, purchase, receipt and validation of food vouchers, management and issue of cash for Fuel payments, reconciliation of expenditure and provision of management information
- g) In conjunction with Revenues successful roll out of Glasscubes (DWP system) within Business Services to support online validation of evidence for Blue Badge applications
- h) Launch of National Entitlement Card (NEC) online for application of Bus Passes for Midlothian residents.

Challenges

The challenges for Midlothian continue with the impact of COVID-19 and 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.

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.

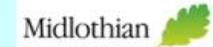
Financial Sustainability

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.

Performance

The report below outlines the Corporate Solutions performance for 2020/21. Delivery against these indicators has been against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic as described above. It is acknowledged, however, that whilst there have been major successes in Corporate Solutions, there are some indicators where progress is not yet fully realised. The two areas that will continue to receive focus to improve are:

- *% of invoices paid within 30 days of invoice receipt (cumulative)* – year on year progress continues to be positive but it is acknowledged that the 95% target was not met after Q1. It is expected that by continuing to roll out Purchase 2 Pay this will improve
- *All recovery overpayments - as a % of all HB overpayment debt* - Recovery has been impacted by the pandemic which when coupled with the continued roll out of Universal Credit reduces the opportunity for Midlothian to recover Housing Benefit overpayments, which is a position that will be common amongst all Local Authorities. For 2021/22 the merits and targets associated with this indicator have been reassessed.



Corporate Solutions

Successes and Challenges

Corporate Performance Indicators (latest)

● 5
 ● 6
 ? 1
 📄 7

Service Plan Actions (latest)

● 0
 ● 14
 ? 0

Service Plan PIs (latest)

● 2
 ● 2
 ? 0
 📄 5

Service Risks (latest)

▲ 17

Corporate PIs Off Target

PIs ● 5

% of invoices paid within 30 days of invoice receipt (cumulative)

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

Average time in working days to respond to complaints at stage 2

Percentage of complaints at stage 1 complete within 5 working days

Percentage of complaints at stage 2 complete within 20 working days

Service Plan Actions Off Target

Actions ● 0

There are no Actions Off Target

Service Plan PIs Off Target

PIs ● 2

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

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

High Risks

Risks ▲ 0

There are no High Risks

- Key
- Off Target
 - On Target
 - 📄 Data Only
 - ? Data Not Yet Available

- Key
- ✘ Off Target
 - ✔ On Target/Complete
 - ? Data Not Yet Available

- Key
- Off Target
 - On Target
 - 📄 Data Only
 - ? Data Not Yet Available

- Key
- ▲ High Risk/Medium Risk
 - ? Data Not Yet Available