

GROWTH, RESOURCES AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	AGENDA ITEM No. 7
19 MARCH 2024	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Executive Director of Corporate Services and S151 Officer and Interim Director of Legal & Governance and Monitoring Officer
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor John Howard, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Finance
Contact Officer(s):	Cecilie Booth, Executive Director of Corporate Services and S151 Officer Adesuwa Omoregie, Interim Director of Legal & Governance and Monitoring Officer

CABINET PORTFOLIO UPDATE FOR THE DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND FINANCE

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: <i>Cecilie Booth</i> , Executive Director of Corporate Services and S151 Officer and Interim Director of Legal & Governance and Monitoring Officer	Deadline date: March 2024
It is recommended that Growth, Resources and Communities Committee note the progress outlined within the report, which covers the Key service areas within the portfolio of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Finance.	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

1.1 This report is submitted to Growth, Resources and Communities Committee to provide a progress update from the Corporate Service and Law & Governance directorates, which form part of the *portfolio of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Finance*.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

2.1 The purpose of this report is to update the Scrutiny Committee on the progress of items under the portfolio of the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Governance and Finance:

- Finance (including the Capital Programme & Treasury Management)
- Commercial Partnerships, Property and Assets
- Procurement
- Bereavement and Registration Services
- Business Transformation
- People Services (HR & Development, Business Intelligence & Transformation)
- IT
- Legal Services
- Information Governance
- Constitutional Services

2.2 This report is for the Growth, Resources and Communities Scrutiny Committee to consider under its Terms of Reference Part 3, Section 4, Overview Scrutiny Functions, Paragraph No.2.1 Functions determined by Council:

- 3. Equalities;
- 8. Economic Development and Regeneration

- 10. Strategic Financial Planning;
- 11. Partnerships and Shared Services; and
- 12. Digital Services and Information Management;

2.3 Services included within the Corporate Service and Law & Governance Directorates form a key part of how the Council works, serves and enables. For that reason, this can be linked to supporting all four of the Councils priorities, however they are strongly geared towards enabling the Council to deliver on the following priority:

- Supported by a Sustainable Future City Council - adjust how we work, serve, and enable, informed by strong data and insight capability, and led by a culture of strong leadership.

3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	NA
Date for relevant Council meeting	NA	Date for submission to Government Dept. <i>(Please specify which Government Dept.)</i>	NA

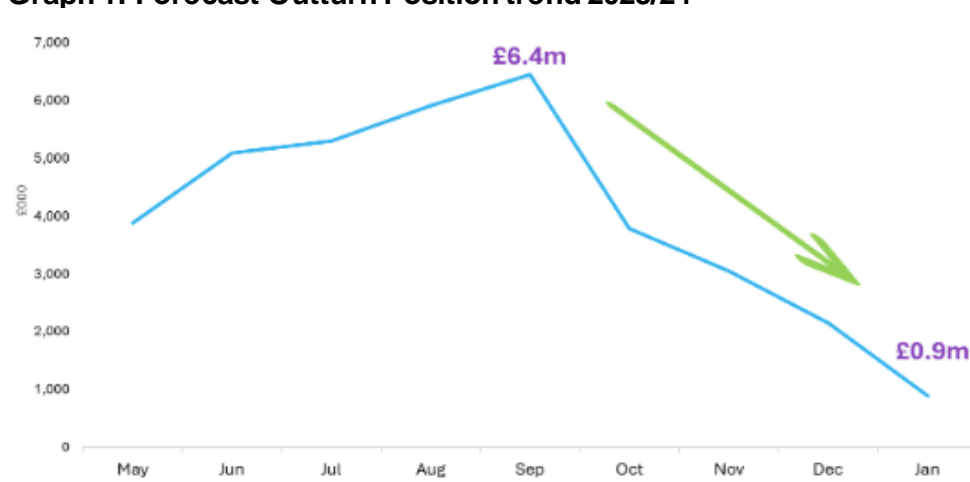
4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

4.1 Finance

Current year position

At the end of January 2024, the forecast outturn position for 2023/24 is showing a projected overspend of £0.9m, which is an improved position in comparison to the previous months forecast (£2.1m). That much improved position is demonstrated in the graph below and has been the result of significant organisational emphasis being placed on reducing the overspend as far as possible by year end. With a key focus on protecting our reserves balances. This has included reviewing the use of agency staff, only spending where essential, driving up the level of income delivered via our sales fees and charges, properties or treasury investments or driving down the cost of borrowing by reducing capital expenditure.

Graph 1: Forecast Outturn Position trend 2023/24



There are still key pressures amongst the projected overspend. These are the same pressures other Local Authorities are also reporting, and includes:

- A rise in the number of families and single people requiring temporary accommodation,
- An increase in the number and rising complexity of placements within Childrens Services,
- An increase in the number of routes required for Home to School Transport.
- Rise in Demand for Adult Social Care Services

- Inflation in relation to pay, energy income and costs.

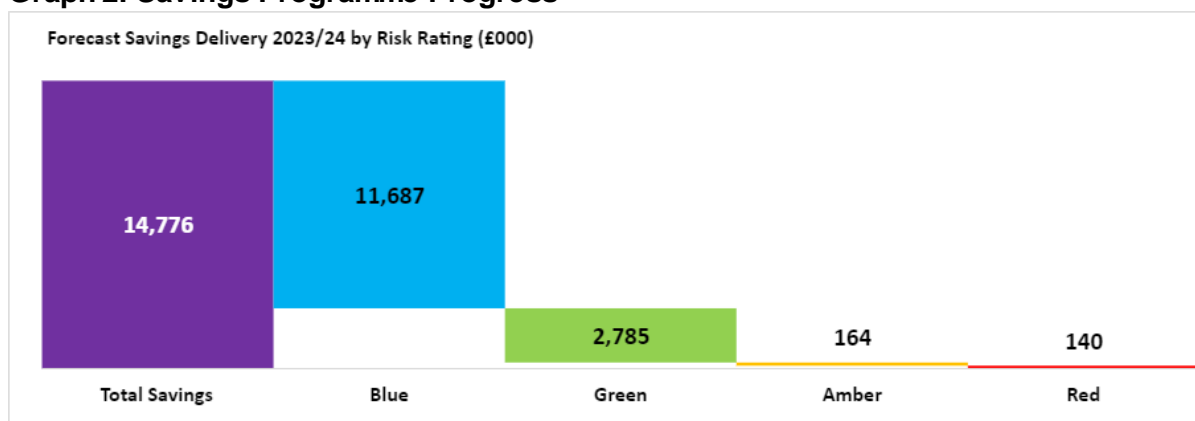
The following table provides an overview of the current forecast at a directorate level:

Table 1: BCR forecast at Directorate level

Directorate	Budget £000	Actual £000	Forecast £000	Variance £000	Overall Status
Place & Economy	26,367	17,352	26,232	(134)	Underspend
Children and Young People	49,442	(19,437)	52,824	3,382	Overspend
Adult Social Care	68,050	53,881	67,025	(1,025)	Underspend
Public Health	(57)	(4,861)	(57)	(0)	On Budget
Corporate Services	35,883	34,033	35,191	(691)	Underspend
Capital Financing	33,126	11,209	32,781	(345)	Underspend
Total Expenditure	212,810	92,177	213,997	1,187	Overspend
Financing	(212,810)	(208,200)	(213,110)	(300)	Underspend
Net	(0)	(116,022)	887	887	Overspend

The Savings Programme delivery has also seen a positive trajectory over the course of the year, with 98% as either delivered and only 2% (£0.3m) as risk.

Graph 2: Savings Programme Progress



The Council's Capital Programme for 2024/25 is set at £156.9m. As at the end of January the forecast spend is £121.9m, 78% of the total programme. At this point £95.8m (61%) has been spent or committed.

In May the Council also acquired Sand Martin House, which it previously leased from Legal and General. Although this purchase has increased the Capital programme by £50.4m, the business case outlined a significant financial benefit over the remaining 20-year lease.

The capital programme includes a number of vital programmes including

- ICT Projects to improve systems, automation and the customer journey
- Projects to provide a supply of housing to prevent homelessness.
- Regeneration of the City including the Levelling up Fund and New Towns Fund

Any unspent projects at the end of the year will either be slipped into future years or reviewed.

Budget 2024/25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan 2024/25-2026/27

The balanced budget was approved by every councillor in the chamber on 21 February ([link to agenda](#)), with the 3 year position being shown in the following table:

Table 2: Budget Gap 2023/27

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Funding	(202,634)	(220,310)	(230,442)	(240,653)
Net Revenue Expenditure (NRE)	202,634	220,310	233,707	247,587
Budget Gap	-	-	3,265	6,934

Although the Council is in a more stable financial position the budget does contain a moderate level of risk driven by rates of inflation, rising levels of demand and complexity of need, uncertainty around future government funding and the greater reliance being placed on local taxation. More crucially the need to deliver the savings and transformation programme we have set out for next year.

Detailed Service Delivery and Improvement Plans from 2024/25 are underway, which will be used to provide greater assurance around savings plans and risk mitigation. Throughout the year we will continue to monitor financial performance monthly and report this to members on a quarterly basis.

The Capital programme for 2024/25, summarised in the below table was also approved as part of the Budget. The Council recognises it needs to invest in the city to encourage economic development, provide vital council services and improve the way it works. However, it is also recognised the need to reduce the current level of debt (£460m) and the resulting ongoing cost of borrowing which puts a strain on the revenue budget. The budget assumes that capital receipts, third party funding and savings generated because of investment will be used to fund the programme. Other than refinancing of maturing loans (£79m ,1 year), new borrowing will only be undertaken where absolutely necessary over next three years.

Table 3: Capital Programme 2024/25 Summary

	£m
Capital Programme	120.44
Funded by:	
Third Party Funding	60.54
Corporate Resources*	36.88
Revenue	0.83
Corporate Resources (funded by Invest to Save)	22.20
Total Funding	120.44

As part of the budget report the Treasury Management Strategy (TMS) was also approved. This sets out the Council's borrowing limits to fund capital expenditure, and how and where to invest surplus funds.

Statement of Accounts

There are issues nationally with completing local authority audits. The Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities, supported by the Financial Reporting Council and the National Audit office have recognised these challenges. Phased steps have been proposed to address this, as outlined within the [Addressing the local audit backlog in England: Consultation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/addressing-the-local-audit-backlog-in-england).

The Councils [Statement of Accounts](#) for 2020/21 were signed off at the end of January. The [2022/23 draft Statement of Accounts](#) were also published in February. The external audits on 2021/22 and 2022/23 have started, albeit reduced and focussed on VfM and key areas. The Council has experienced resourcing issues in the technical team during 2023/24, but the team is now fully recruited to following the restructure of the Finance Team. These resourcing challenges are also a national issue, and the Council is part of a LGA working group to support the future workforce development in this area.

Financial Management Improvement

During 2023/24 there has been huge strides made to improve Financial Management across the Council and lay strong foundations for us to move forward with the rest of the improvement plan. In June the Finance restructure concluded which provided stability to the current team and enabled us to welcome new colleagues including two apprentices. Since then a number of the team have started the CIPFA Finance Business Partner diploma with financial training also being provided for Budget Managers and Councillors. So far this has been well received and proved to be effective.

A self-assessment of the Councils compliance with the CIPFA Financial Management Code has recently been completed, with actions being recommended for implementation to strengthen this. This has been built into the overall Financial Management Improvement programme for the next year, which will also include the development of an ongoing training programme, a review of the financial regulations and other financial controls/processes, implementation of the Finance Business Partner approach and enhancements to the finance system (unit4).

Unit4 Financial Planning and Analysis (FP&A) module, on track for go live on 11 April. Training and support will be provided throughout April and May with Budget Managers using the system to complete their first Budgetary Control Report for May.

4.2 **Commercial, Property and Asset Management (including Procurement and Health and Safety).**

The Estates team transferred from NPS 12 months ago. In that time the team has settled and delivered across several notable projects including the Localities Review, Disposals Plan and Asset Management Plan. The team has delivered an increase in income for the Council via its leased estate. Phase 1 of the Localities Review has commenced and is on track to deliver its targets, Phase 2 will commence shortly. The team have worked with colleagues in Housing to deliver the acquisition of a number of homes to support the LHAF and SCHAP programmes. The team are currently under consultation to transfer from NPS contracts. This consultation includes the creation of a property records officer role which is important to support the Chartered Surveyors and to free their time to continue to deliver against high priority projects.

There are significant challenges for the team in delivering the MTFS targets around income and disposals as well as against the Localities Review. With a small team any loss in resource has a significant impact to output. In addition the current property database is not fit for purpose and needs to change.

The Strategic Asset Management team is new. The Head of Strategic Assets started in September and they are currently recruiting a senior surveyor. The service plugs a much needed gap in the wider Estates Offering. This focusses into two main areas. Firstly the delivery of major capital projects for Education and the building of new schools. This has never been managed in house by the Council before (previously delivered by Cambs CC). The team have already created a multi disciplinary team to deliver a new School in Great Haddon and are working with Education colleagues to bring forward a number of other projects. Secondly the team are responsible for delivery of property advice, acquisitions and disposals for the Councils strategic regeneration sites including Middleholme, North Westgate, Station Quarter etc. These are large scale strategic sites that require specialist advice and management. These sites will be transformational for the City.

In addition the team are involved in a pipeline of other opportunities arising (eg London Road Car Park, Green Back Yard, Pleasure Fair Car Park etc as well as working alongside finance colleagues to resolve the Hilton Hotel issue.

All of these projects are very high profile. It is clear that the current scope of work including changes to how Education Capital is being managed (ie by the Council) and new projects such as the Hilton Hotel, means that the team is under resourced and needs to expand the team, this is the key challenge for the team.

The Compliance & Facilities Management team was in the main transferred across from NPS at the same time as the Estates Team. The team has taken on a new remit to include property

compliance and a new role was created and recruited to this year. The team currently provide an 'intelligent client' function that was highlighted as being required in the CIPFA report on Peterborough Ltd. The team are also under consultation with a view to affirming roles and responsibilities for FM (Hard and Soft), Compliance and supporting functions. The team have brought rigour and challenge to the status quo and have delivered a number of successful projects, most notably the temporary roof support to the Key Theatre.

From 2024 the FM budgets will sit with this team. This is new and will take time to settle and manage but there are expected efficiencies to be delivered.

The key challenge for the team are to settle the new structure, get to a steady state with the Capital and Revenue Budgets, continue to improve FM service delivery and compliance and to support the integration of Serco Teams into the Council.

The Commercial and Procurement Team have been under resourced all year. It has proven challenging to recruit competent procurement staff. This places a pressure on the team to deliver against the procurement plan. The team have developed a procurement plan and are delivering against it, this creates more visibility and control of what is procured and by whom but also places an extra workload on the team. The procurement team are responsible for the successful roll out of the Oxygen Finance System and are part of the Unit 4 change programme.

There are too many hours of work for the team to deliver so workloads need careful managing and procurement prioritised. This is supported by changes to the ways of working (which the team are also leading on with Finance and Legal Colleagues).

There is a high risk that the full amount of procurement savings are not achievable. Success will be dependent on the scope of procurements to be delivered and how savings are measured as well the level of resource in the team.

The key challenges are to agree and embed the new ways of working/systems and processes, to recruit to a full staff complement and to agree how savings will be measured and tracked.

The Commercial part of the team remains under the sole remit of the Head of Service. This has focussed on supporting the Council in improving the Peterborough Ltd service. The role needs to expand to look at the broader commercial activities such as PIRI, Serco, Westcombe Engineering and Medesham. This needs close working with Legal over the governance of the companies, reporting and member involvement. The key challenge for the team is to settle the Procurement function so that time is released to focus on the Commercial functions. The team need to agree how the Commercial function will operate, roles and responsibilities and interface with other departments.

The Health and Safety Team was transferred into the wider Estates function during the year. This followed a review of service provision and a series of recommendations made by external consultants around improvement to the structure, management and systems. More specifically the creation of a new 'Head of Service' role and the production of a new Health and Safety Policy. The team have been regraded and the recruitment of a new Head of Service is ongoing. Key challenges for the team are to embed the new structure and ways of working and to review and update systems and policies. In addition the key risk identified is the 'golden thread' of accountability on H&S matters between the Council and its main suppliers, in particular Peterborough Limited.

Bereavement & Registration Services

4.3

Cremation numbers - historically we have consistently undertaken an average of 2200 cremations per year, however during 2023/2024 this has taken a significant drop with predictions showing that we will be below 2000 cremations for the first time since 1979/80. It is thought that the reasons for this are:

- The impact of Covid (premature deaths took place during the pandemic meaning lower death rate in 2023)

- The number of Crematoria being built locally (Fenland, Spalding, Huntingdon)
- The number of families opting for direct cremation with national companies
- The number of families opting for direct cremations at a lower cost at Peterborough Crematorium compared to standard services.

Environmental Audit - a successful Environmental Audit took place in accordance with the Environmental Permitting (England & Wales) Regulations 2016 (EPR 2016) as relevant to cremators, summarised in the Secretary of State's Process Guidance Note PG 5/2 (2012), the cremators and abatement plant at Peterborough Crematorium are required to be independently tested for emissions to atmosphere. The results obtained from the annual emissions test show that the cremators and abatement system are compliant with the PG 5/2 (2012). This is essential to maintain our permit to cremate issued under the above legislation.

Cemeteries Audit - the audit of Fletton and Eastfield Cemetery has been completed and from this we have established that there is approximately 10 years burial space left to accommodate all communities. The search for a new cemetery site is ongoing.

Hive of Memories - a post box in the shape of a bee-hive was installed at Peterborough Crematorium allowing visitors a chance to post letters to lost loved ones. For a small donation, mourners can write messages on paper impregnated with wildflower seeds which will be planted when the hive is emptied. To date this has been very well received with lots of positive comments.

Team of the Year - Bereavement services were very proud to be the recipients of the award for Team of the Year at the Peterborough City Council staff awards.

Crematorium Inspection - FBCA Crematorium Inspection in December 2023 which found that we complied with the 7 key areas of compliance and that our service was excellent. Out of a total of 470 possible points we scored 462

Staff Service Review - a restructure of the bereavement services was successfully undertaken ensuring the retention of valued and skilled staff, business continuity and resilience.

Brick Graves – Eastfield Cemetery - 36 Brick Lined graves at Eastfield Cemetery were constructed to be used by members of the Muslim community with minimal disruption to our services.

Mausoleums – Fletton Cemetery and Eastfield Cemetery - Successful Planning applications were submitted for 30 Mausoleums at Eastfield Cemetery and 81 Mausoleums at Fletton Cemetery.

Charter for the Bereaved - Bereavement services have once again been awarded a gold standard for the ICCM Charter for the Bereaved.

Citizenship ceremonies – have returned to the Town Hall this year with the service being very busy with many new citizens attending their naturalisation ceremony as well as continued demand at the Register Office as the home office continue to clear cases.

Doctors Strikes - the recent industrial action taken by Doctor's has had an impact on the receipt of MCCDs (Medical Certificate Cause of Deaths) and consequential delays in the bereaved receiving the necessary documentation required to register a death. This has impacted the national key performance target to register all deaths within 5 days.

Certificates - the Archive service is again fully operational, busy and a useful local alternative to otherwise having to apply directly to the General Register Office to obtain historical certificates, as well as a valuable income source for the council.

Births - the backlog of birth registrations that built up during the pandemic has now been successfully cleared with availability to register all babies now comfortably within 42 days.

Zipporah System Upgrade - testing of an upgraded booking system has commenced that will allow greater self-service for customers who currently need to access the service via the call

centre or in person at the Register Office for many straightforward transactions. The upgraded system is planned to go live by Summer 2024.

Support for Food Bank - the Registration service team took part in the annual drive to contribute dry food, toiletries and goodies to the local food bank's Christmas Appeal. This year donating a massive 89KG which the volunteers told us was the equivalent of 202 meals.

4.4

People, Business Intelligence & Transformation

The **Business Intelligence** team separated from the shared Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Business Intelligence Service in April 2023. Staff were allocated back to their sovereign authorities. This resulted in an imbalance of skills and experience, which reduced the team's capacity in 2023/24. The team have worked hard to re-establish our service and we are now providing a Business Intelligence function to a good basic standard to those council services who were previously receiving support from the shared offer. This includes:

- Providing routine and ad-hoc performance reporting and responding to performance queries for Children's Social Care, Adult Social Care and Education services.
- Updating and maintaining near-live interactive performance dashboard reporting for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, Special Education Needs and our HR Team. Data collection, quality assurance and submission for a wide range of statutory returns including the Child in Need Census; 903 (Children Looked After) return; Adults Client Level Data return; SEN2 Census; Alternative Provision Census; ONS Workforce Returns; Social Care and Education workforce census returns.
- Preparing data for inspection readiness and responding to queries during inspection for OFSTED ILACS, SEND inspections and the CQC quality assurance framework.
- Maintaining the council's Corporate Performance Framework; collecting and reporting on performance data for Key Performance Indicators for City Priorities and against national performance benchmarks (e.g. OfLog).

In 2024/25 we will continue to develop a professional and adaptable performance and analysis service. We will proactively partner with service areas across the Council to deliver effective reporting and analysis, improving decision-making at all levels. We will provide accessible, accurate reports and dashboards that can be efficiently managed and maintained. We will move towards 'best in class' reporting technology based on MS database and reporting tools. We will develop the right skills and experience to manage and maintain this reporting. In the immediate future this means that the team will:

- Complete our planned reorganisation
- Recruit a new permanent Head of Service for Peterborough
- Continue with our planned programme of training and development
- Work with ITDS to continue the development of our data and reporting infrastructure

Corporate Delivery Unit (CDU)

The CDU is a relatively fledgling service having been established mid 2023 following agreement that an assurance and transformation support function was required to help the organisation along its improvement journey. It was set up primarily to support directorates and portfolios across three distinct areas:

1. Transformation Support
2. Transformation Assurance & Reporting
3. Risk Management

Over the last 12 months the CDU has been fully recruited to and has supported across all improvement efforts by establishing and maintaining a library of common standards, methods, processes, tools, and templates. This is necessary to support Transformation initiatives, provide

support across the delivery lifecycle of Portfolio Transformation Programmes whilst providing independent and transparent programme development and deliver assurance.

In February 2024 the CDU branched into two distinct functions. One specialising in Transformation and Programme Management, the other having a responsibility for reporting on Risk, Programme Performance and a wider range of Corporate Performance measures.

4.5

People Services (Previously HR & Development)

In 2023 additional financial investment was provided to the service to enable it to meet the requirements of the corporate plan and address the key flaws in the design and operating model. This resulted in a redesign of the service which was completed in November 2023 and included the service being renamed as People Services. Whilst we recruit to our vacant roles, workloads are being carefully managed to ensure focus is on delivering our key priorities. Key achievements for 2023 include:

- Progressing our People & Culture Programme. This focuses on how we identify, attract, retain, develop and grow the workforce we need to maintain the delivery of high value, high quality services in the short term and supports our transformation journey in the longer term. The programme will enable positive outcomes for the people and place of Peterborough envisaged in the Corporate Strategy and City Priorities by ensuring that our workforce is fit for purpose
- Decoupling shared working arrangements with Cambridgeshire County Council in Adult Services and Children and Young People's Services to ensure our workforce is focused solely on improving outcomes for the residents of Peterborough
- Rolling out a PCC wide staff engagement survey to baseline the organisation's culture, identify and take action where change is needed as well as acting as a measure for cultural improvement. The outcome of the staff survey identified a number of areas requiring improvement which confirmed the People & Culture Programme is focused on the correct areas of improvement
- Implementing new reward and retention initiatives in response to concerns raised in the staff survey

In 2024/25 we will continue to embed and develop our service and implement a new HR and payroll system in June 2024 which will align to our finance systems. We will continue to drive forward the People and Culture programme with the initial key focuses being:

- Implementing a new leadership development programme that combines organisational development outcomes with personal leadership opportunities
- Implementing and embedding a new suite of HR policies which affords managers autonomy in the way they manage
- Implementing an attraction strategy and overall value proposition, together with more effective and modern recruitment processes

4.6

IT

Our IT and Digital Services department is dedicated to providing innovative and reliable technology solutions to support the needs of the council. Our vision is to be a leader in the use of technology to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of our operations.

This last year has seen improvements in the way that we deliver IT.

Implementing a chat function to obtain quicker fixes to IT issues, being able to book your own laptop collection, new improved cyber security measure and a wholesale move to everyone having laptops making it easier and cheaper for users to access the things they need. New procurements have meant that there has been a large saving on mobile telephony and desk phones are now a thing of the past.

The service was originally designed with shared services in mind, now that the number of shared services has diminished and the previous shared service director has left, an opportunity has arisen to re-focus our efforts to being purely Peterborough centric, as part of this the service is

about to go into consultation to decouple from Cambridgeshire County Council. This presents both challenges and opportunities due to financial constraints, resources requirements and a rapidly changing environment in which we are working.

Looking to the year ahead, digital is currently going through an epochal change at the moment with the accessibility of Artificial Intelligence and the momentum that is gathering, this will present opportunities for us as a council to be more efficient and effective, doing more with less and enabling better more consistent data in order to make faster and more effective decisions .

Cyber Security is an increasing risk not just within organisations but personal lives as well. The council has vastly improved its posturing over the last couple of years but there is still more to do in an ever changing landscape.

Our digital services are currently going through a change to move them to a cloud based environment, increasing access, reliability, security, sustainability and reduced carbon emissions and ensuring that we are making the most out of the latest advancements in the tools. We are currently about 50% through this with still an on-premise presence that will see Peterborough no longer use its data centre by the end of the year.

Digital skills are the abilities that relate to using technology effectively, such as computer software, applications and devices. They are important for both personal and professional purposes. The council has made significant investments in IT to improve its services and operations, but these investments will only pay off if the staff have the necessary digital skills to use them. Therefore, it is essential that the council invest in upskilling all staff in digital, by providing them with training, resources and support to develop their digital skills. This will enable the staff to benefit from, participate in and contribute to the digital world, and help the council achieve its goals and objectives.

Data insight and analytics

4.7

LAW & GOVERNANCE

Legal Services

The service continues to provide support, assistance and advice to each department across the council. officers at all levels and elected councillors. The service also provides legal services to Fenland and Rutland council which generates income for the directorate. The service is currently in transition.

Recruitment is currently underway for a permanent Director of Law and Governance. Consultation on changes to the legal structure (Feb – March) are underway. The team have experienced increases in work areas across the different areas, most notably in the areas of Children's Services. For most of the last financial year, the service has been heavily reliant on the use of locums due to the difficulty with trying to recruit to vacant permanent posts.

Information Governance

Information Governance provides a central service ensuring oversight and compliance with data protection, Freedom of Information Act, Environmental Information Regulations and other information rights legislation. It is a small team of 5.68 full time employees with a growing workload.

The council is receiving an increasing amount of FO/EIR requests up by more than 20% to a level of 1200 this year with over 300 in the last two months. These can often be simple requests around the council's activities but can often also relate to contentious matters such as council finances, Council Tax and planning matters like the Werrington Fence. The service bring their knowledge and experience to drafting high quality answers with our colleagues' input and applying exemptions where appropriate. The council sees a very low percentage of its answers challenged either by the requester or the Information Commissioner. We are currently looking at

developing the new FOI application to re-enable the disclosure log and identify repeat requests for proactive publishing as well better visualisation of reporting for directorates.

We also deal with more than 250 subject access requests a year which relate predominantly to social care files and individuals wishing to understand their journey through care. These can often run to thousands of pages of very sensitive information which needs review and redaction. We currently have a temporary resource in place for four days a week due to the full time permanent employee having started maternity leave.

The service also oversees compliance matters such as all data incidents/breaches reported to the council, ensuring that matters are correctly risk assessed and reported. We have recently developed reporting to enable clearer vision of those reported and potential weaknesses or training issues. Similarly we review and consider data protection impact assessments on new IT systems, new projects or pieces of work that use personal data. We have seen this area of work grow from perhaps 10 assessments a year to more than 200 a year. We also respond to increasing numbers of requests for advice or support across the council.

Constitutional Services

This area comprises of Democratic, Electoral and Executive and Members Services, who all provide support, guidance and advice to all departments across the Council as well as the Leader, Cabinet and other elected members.

There is currently a lack of resource in the Democratic and Executive and Members services team, however, recruitment has been very successful and by June we should be back to full capacity. During this time the limited team will facilitate meetings, with some pre-meets being cancelled to support the increased workloads.

Elections are currently planning for the 2 May Polls, Locals and Police and Crime. The UK Parliamentary continues to loom, with a deadline date for this to be called being 26 March 2024,

5. CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Consultation relevant to each aspect of the portfolio has been carried out as part of 'business as usual' operations.

6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

- 6.1 Following debate and discussion at committee, it is anticipated that Members will be fully informed as to the progress and priorities of the portfolio holder, and the portfolio holder will be able to consider suggestions that come forward during that debate.

7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 Not Applicable – Progress report, item for information.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 8.1 Not Applicable – Progress report, item for information.

9. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 9.1 Not Applicable – Progress report, item for information.

Legal Implications

- 9.2 There are no legal implications in respect of the report which is providing an update on progress on key services within Corporate services and Law and Governance. .

Equalities Implications

9.3 This report is to give an overview / progress update and as such there are no anticipated equality implications.

9.5 **Carbon Impact Assessment-** Not Applicable – Progress report, item for information.

10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

10.1 None

11. APPENDICES

11.1 None