

Public Document Pack



**Service Director – Legal, Governance and
Commissioning**

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Friday 29 October 2021

Notice of Meeting

Dear Member

Corporate Scrutiny Panel

The **Corporate Scrutiny Panel** will meet in the **Virtual Meeting - online** at **10.00 am on Monday 8 November 2021.**

This meeting will be live webcast. To access the webcast please go to the Council's website at the time of the meeting and follow the instructions on the page.

The items which will be discussed are described in the agenda and there are reports attached which give more details.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Julie Muscroft", on a light-colored background.

Julie Muscroft

Service Director – Legal, Governance and Commissioning

Kirklees Council advocates openness and transparency as part of its democratic processes. Anyone wishing to record (film or audio) the public parts of the meeting should inform the Chair/Clerk of their intentions prior to the meeting.

The Corporate Scrutiny Panel members are:-

Member

Councillor Andrew Cooper (Chair)

Councillor Mahmood Akhtar

Councillor James Homewood

Councillor John Taylor

Councillor Charles Greaves

Councillor Alison Munro

Philip Chaloner (Co-Optee)

Agenda

Reports or Explanatory Notes Attached

Pages

1: Membership of the Committee

To receive apologies for absence from those Members who are unable to attend the meeting.

2: Minutes of the Previous Meeting

1 - 16

To approve the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on the 16 August 2021.

3: Interests

17 - 18

The Councillors will be asked to say if there are any items on the Agenda in which they have disclosable pecuniary interests, which would prevent them from participating in any discussion of the items or participating in any vote upon the items, or any other interests.

4: Admission of the Public

Most debates take place in public. This only changes when there is a need to consider certain issues, for instance, commercially sensitive information or details concerning an individual. You will be told at this point whether there are any items on the Agenda which are to be discussed in private.

5: Deputations/Petitions

The Committee will receive any petitions and hear any deputations from members of the public. A deputation is where up to five people can attend the meeting and make a presentation on some particular issue of concern. A member of the public can also hand in a petition at the meeting but that petition should relate to something on which the body has powers and responsibilities.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10 (2), Members of the

Public should provide at least 24 hours' notice of presenting a deputation.

6: Public Question Time

The meeting will hear any questions from the general public. Questions should be emailed to jenny.bryce-chan@kirklees.gov.uk no later than 10.00am Friday 5 November 2021.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 51(10) each person may submit a maximum of 4 written questions.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11(5), the period allowed for the asking and answering of public questions will not exceed 15 minutes.

7: Leaving the EU Update

19 - 24

This paper provides an update on Kirklees' work to manage the effects of the UK's exit from the EU.

Contact: David Bundy – Policy Officer, Strategy and Policy and Jonathan Nunn – Strategy & Policy Officer (Sustainable Economy), Strategy and Policy. Tel: 01484 221000

8: Kirklees Councils Access Strategy 2021 - 2026

25 - 40

The Panel will receive an update on Kirklees Council's Access Strategy 2021 – 2026.

Contact: Dave Thompson Head of Access Strategy and Delivery tel: 01484 221000

Contact Officer: Jenny Bryce-Chan

KIRKLEES COUNCIL

CORPORATE SCRUTINY PANEL

Monday 16th August 2021

Present: Councillor Andrew Cooper (Chair)
Councillor Mahmood Akhtar
Councillor John Taylor
Councillor Charles Greaves
Councillor Alison Munro

Co-optees Philip Chaloner

In attendance: Eamonn Croston, Service Director for Finance
Matthew Garbutt, Disposal and Acquisition Surveyor
Steve Bird, Head of Welfare and Exchequer Services

1 Membership of the Committee

Apologies were received from Cllr James Homewood.

2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

That the minutes of the meeting held on the 26th July be approved as a correct record.

3 Interests

No interests were declared.

4 Admission of the Public

All agenda items were considered in public session.

5 Deputations/Petitions

No deputations or petitions were received.

6 Public Question Time

No questions were asked.

7 Council Financial Management Update

In attendance at the meeting were Eamonn Croston, Service Director for Finance, Matthew Garbutt, Disposal and Acquisition Surveyor and Steve Bird, Head of Welfare and Exchequer Services.

The Panel was advised that Eamonn Croston would provide an update on the high-level Council financial management update incorporating 2021/21 financial outturn, current financial position 2021/22 and early consideration of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2022/23 and future years. Matthew Garbutt would update the Panel on specific information in relation to the impact of Covid on

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commercial lettings and the Town Centre and Steve Bird would provide an update on the impact on Council Tax and Business Rates revenue.

The Panel was reminded that financial management updates are presented to the Panel on a regular basis throughout the year and this report provides an opportunity to reflect in terms of the financial outturn position for 2021 and also undertake horizon scanning and forward looking in terms of the medium-term financial strategy refresh.

The Panel was informed that a detailed outturn position report was presented to Cabinet on the 27th of July and will then be presented to Council in September.

The report before the Panel was a summary overview of key highlights of 2021 position.

The Panel was informed that as expected, Covid has had a significant impact on Council finances as well as every other aspect in terms of impacts on individuals, businesses, communities, council service delivery, partner organisations and voluntary third sector organisations. It has been a challenging year.

As part of the outturn position the general fund overall, which accounts for revenue, operational expenditure, (apart from social housing which is separately accounted for in a ring-fenced revenue housing account) the overall year end position was break-even.

In summary, key highlights from the 2020/21 financial outturn report includes:

- In a typical year pre-Covid, the spend would be approximately £600 million in revenue in 2020
- Additional Covid spend in-year is in excess of £200m over £140m relating to business grant payments to over 9,000 eligible local businesses; additional £48m spend on targeted Covid related activity; and £15m discretionary service income losses from reduced 'business as usual' activity
- General fund revenue outturn spend break-even (rounded) against a net revenue budget of 274.7m
- The above funded by over thirty discrete government funding grants across eight separate government departments each with their own government departmental eligibility criteria & grant conditions, assurance, and reconciliation processes
- In year- Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit of £10.7m; accumulated DSG deficit of £25.1m at year end; of which £23 is High Needs related
- Housing Revenue Account £2.6m in-year deficit on £91.5m annual turnover budget
- HRA reserves at year end £56.1m (58.6m in 19/20)

The Panel was informed that the collection fund income was another area particularly hit in 2021, in terms of business rates income collection and recovery and council tax. The Panel was advised that the Welfare and Exchequer service has been heavily involved in supporting and directly delivering the administration of business grants and Steve Bird will update the Panel with further information; and

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Matthew Garbutt, will update the Panel specifically on the impact of Covid on commercial lettings and Town Centre impact.

There has been significant impact not just in terms of business spend but also service income that covers commercial lettings, education catering income, car parking, a whole range of regulatory fees, planning fees etc. Overall identified in the outturn position for 2021, across all services, the general fund income was about £50 million down on what it would normally be.

The government introduced a compensation scheme that recognised that councils were going to be impacted by service income loss because of the local impact of national measures around infection control and that garnered approximately £8 million.

In summary, Matthew Garbutt advised the Panel that there are approximately 500 lease assets within the commercial estate which covers retail, industrial, office accommodation and a number of ground leases, managed by a small team of officers from within the Growth and Regeneration Directorate.

For context, for the last 5 years the income from the commercial estate been around £2.5 million annually and expenditures have been approximately £1,000,000, this gives a surplus of approximately £1.5 million that the commercial state then returns to the Council. This has been fairly consistent for the past five years leading up to Covid.

The bad debt provision from the commercial estate in terms of unpaid invoices was running at between three hundred and four hundred thousand pounds prior to Covid. That was in relation to rents and service charges that were not paid in the time and then that would be chased by officers in the recovery department to try and recover the money.

Covid had two major impacts on the commercial estate the first was around bad debt. When Covid hit, the council took a decision to defer two quarters of the rent for all tenants of the commercial estate from 1st of April through to the end of September. That means it was not written off or credited, it was just paused for a period of time while the impact of Covid on business was understood and to understand how central government was going to allocate grants and funding to these businesses to try and get through the difficult period.

The impact of this led to the Council's bad debt increasing. Currently the debt position is approximately £1m which is unpaid invoices merely from that period of time, and officers are still dealing with tenants and trade to recover the money.

In September 2020, Cabinet adopted the central government's code of practice in respect of commercial property relations. The code of practice aims to assist landlords and tenants in coming to agreements over unpaid rent, dealing with lease renewals during Covid and various other landlord and tenant implications for commercial properties.

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The recovery of debt is being undertaken on a case-by-case basis, talking to each individual asking for evidence of grants they may have received, with the aim of coming up with an affordable payment plan to recover those monies. Recovery of the monies may be over a longer period of time than would have previously been allowed prior to Covid.

Different businesses have been affected in different ways, which means it is difficult to have a one size fits all approach, particularly in circumstances where there are tenants that have been the hardest hit, or they haven't received any support from government. A decision will need to be taken if any of that debt is to be written off or if the rent is to be reduced for the period of time the business was closed. This will be considered once all that information has been collated however, the majority of tenants are now paying.

The ultimate debt recovery action of forfeiting the lease and taking a commercial property back is now suspended until March 2022, and that does cause some issues and will continue to cause some issues if tenants do not continue to pay.

The other impact that Covid has had, is on the income and the projected income going forward. As previously stated approximately £2.5 million income is generated and costs approximately £1m to manage. In the budget figure provided for 21/22, the income projection was £2.8m, however under the current forecast it appears that the income generated will be approximately £2.3m leaving a short fall of half a million pounds.

The majority of the commercial estate approximately £1m of the generated income comes from Huddersfield Town centre mainly from retail and hospitality uses within Huddersfield Town Centre. Covid has accelerated the changes to the Town Centre and the retail changes and prime high street rents have declined.

The Panel was informed that retail and hospitality properties within the Town Centre is where the big impact is likely going to come. A number of businesses have gone into liquidation and it's been challenging to relet those properties and when they are relet it is often for less rent and with an incentive to secure the letting. There is now however, an opportunity when reletting the premises that this can be carried out in line with the blueprint and aligning the commercial estate to the blueprint.

In response the initial information received the Panel made comments and asked a number of questions including the following:

- With regard to the £1m in outstanding debt is it possible to determine how much of that is recoverable?
- Does the commercial estate portfolio include the markets?
- Is there sufficient capacity with the team to meet the current volume of work demands?
- An early part of the blueprint work was acquiring more assets, have those assets increased the rental income?
- A common misconception is that Kirklees owns all of the properties within the ring road how much commercial properties does Kirklees actual own within the ring road area?

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- It is a very competitive environment how does the council work out its offer is when compared to other providers of commercial properties?

The Panel was advised that in respect of commercial properties within the ring road the council owns approximately ten percent. Generally, where there are council offices, with retail underneath the council owns and manages those buildings such as High Street Buildings, Kirkgate Buildings, Somerset Buildings, Byram Arcade and Estate Buildings. Matthew Garbutt agreed to circulate a plan of the commercial estate buildings owned and managed by the council.

The Panel felt it would also be useful to have a list of the total number of properties in each area, the numbers that are vacant and the numbers that are let under management. The Panel felt it would also be useful to have a snapshot at the end of each year to see progress on lettings.

The Panel was advised that in addition, to managing the commercial properties the team also manages the housing stock portfolio advising on leases, dealing with valuation inquiries, and undertaking asset valuation. More recently, the team has also been involved in the work around the blueprints, major projects, and housing growth. The Panel was informed that senior managers are aware of the gaps in the resources needed to deal with the workload are trying to recruit disposals and acquisitions officers and, surveyors and hopefully the recruitment process will be successful.

The Panel enquired how it would be possible to make the work being undertaken in this area more visible to elected members and the public. In response, Matthew Garbutt agreed to discuss the matter with the Head of Service and report back.

The Panel acknowledged the work Matthew Garbutt, and his colleagues do on a daily basis working to balance the need to maintain income while trying to provide support to tenants and thanked him for the information he provided.

Steve Bird, Head of Service for Welfare and Exchequer provided the Panel with a breakdown of the services covered by the team which includes Council Tax, Business Rates, Sundry Debts, Collections, Client Financial Affairs, Housing Benefits, Council Tax Reduction, Local Welfare Provision, Free School Meals, DHP, Blue Badge and self-isolation payments.

The Panel was provided with an update on the recovery plans for Business Rates and Council Tax. In summary, the Panel was advised that with regard to business rates it has been a very challenging year with the business rates arrears rolled over from the 31st of March, totalling £15.5 million which is the highest the council has ever known. The average is usually approximately 4.5 million. There was £11.7m from 2021, which the majority was COVID related and about £3.8m from all previous years. This is three times higher than the previous level.

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The Panel was informed that bad debt provision has increased to £11.2m and usually, collection is approximately 98.5%, which is really good, however this has been adjusted down to 96.25%. This has reduced the collection and increased the bad debt provision because the outstanding arrears have increased. In terms of in-year collection, for 21/22, as of the 1st of August 2021, 24.87% of the net debit has been collected which is down on target by 4.63% or £4.9 million in monetary terms. There are many businesses that are struggling, and collection will be a balance moving forward.

In terms of the restart grants and the support and help for businesses, which the service administers, since the start of March 2021, a total of £173m had been paid out to approximately 11,000 businesses. At the peak, to respond to the additional work generated an 85 additional staff were helping out in the Business Rates Team and there are usually only nine people in that team.

Since the 1st of April extended retail relief totalling £34.6m has been granted to the same sectors, retail, hospitality, and leisure. All those businesses received new instalments started in July and August. This was a government and national scheme where they granted three months at 100% relief and then the remaining nine months at 66% relief. The combination of both those equates to 75% relief that has been awarded for the entire year.

The Panel was informed that moving back towards business as usual, those business that have been awarded extended retail, no recovery action will be taken against them because their instalments only started in July and August and have yet to determine how many of the most affected group will pay.

The Panel was advised that in terms of other relief, on the 25th of March 2021, the government announced a new Business Rate Relief Fund of £1.5 billion nationally, which is still awaited. A bill is currently going through Parliament, called Rating, (Coronavirus) and Directors Disqualification (Dissolve Companies Bill), which is due back to the Commons on the 9th of September. The criteria which is currently unknown will need to be looked at along with the funding to determine how much funding Kirklees will get. This is for businesses outside retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors.

The Panel was informed that during COVID, no recovery action was taken for Council tax or Business Rates arrears. The delay in recovery and collection and business as usual, was paused because the magistrates and the county courts were closed. Therefore, the amount of business rates recovery last year was nil. Now that the courts have re-opened 3163, reminders and 989 summons totalling approximately £11m have been issued.

The first part of the year has been trying to catch up with all the outstanding work and trying to make suitable payment arrangements that are affordable. The new MCC relief, may clear some of these accounts, however it is not clear which business sectors it affects or how much funding the Council will be awarded.

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In terms of the resilience and the succession planning for business rates, two new apprentices have been recruited and a growth bid has been submitted for the revenues team, which is council tax and business rates for an extra eight staff, and that's been approved. Overall, in Welfare and Exchequer the staff numbers are expected to increase by 26.5 staff to deal with the extra demand.

The Panel was informed that in respect of council tax, it is a similar theme to business rates however, the council tax collections rates have held up much better. In terms of arrears, rolled forward to the 31st March 2021, the arrears were approximately £21.23m. As of the 1st August this has reduced by approximately £3m.

In terms of context, the annual debit raised for Council tax is £235 million and for business rates this year it was £84m therefore the aim is to collect that as the collectible debit. The ask is to collect this monies for the Council to run its services.

The main issue for Council tax last year as well as the delays in any court action and recovery action, is the increasing council tax reduction as people lose their jobs this has meant that the council tax reduction numbers increased resulting in an extra 3000 claims for council tax reduction. This increased the annual award for council tax reduction by approximately £6m.

Council tax collection is currently running at 34.89 which is up on target, 0.88% which in monetary terms is approximately £2m and that is mainly due to council tax reduction awards, however overall collections are up.

The Panel was provided with information on council tax reminders in a normal year for example 2019/20:

- 72,247 reminders were issued
- 28,252 people were summonsed
- 22,351 liability orders were obtained

Last year the recovery of council tax started in September and there were 4738 liability orders, approximately 21% of the normal recovery and 57,000 reminders were issued in the last six months of the year.

To date this year,

- 31,648 reminders have been issued
- 9,411, liability orders have been obtained

The main part of the recovery is to strike a balance between getting people to pay rather than taking the high-level recovery action.

The Panel was informed that the other suppressed demand is the review of the single persons discount and exemptions which are reviewed automatically every year or bi-annually. There are approximately 65,000 people receiving this discount and the review should have been undertaken last year and this will be picked up at the latter part of this year. That would increase the council's income because it considers those people who may have forgotten to notify the council that their

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circumstances had changed. There is not a backlog of work on council tax it is mainly suppressed demand.

The team are in the process of recruiting. Currently there are 48 temporary staff, and the aim is to crystallise and make as many of those permanent. On the revenue side, which is council tax and business rates an extra eight staff are being recruited from the approved growth bids. In addition, three new Assistant Senior Managers have been appointed.

In response the information received the Panel made comments and asked a number of questions as follows:

- In terms of the business rates are people being directed towards business debt and insolvency practitioners so they can get professional help?
- What is the time frame from obtaining the liability order to obtaining payment and costs and what percentage of liability or orders are usually recoverable?
- The enforcement action work that is being done is very similar to what was previously described by Matthew Garbutt's team, why is there not a single enforcement team which undertakes enforcement type actions as opposed to separating it out?
- All the intelligence gathered through the grants process about Kirklees businesses is effectively like a business census which is rich source of data, is there capacity to make best use of it or are there any restrictions on the use of the data that have been gathered from businesses?

In response to question from the Panel Eamonn Croston advised that in respect of the pay award the national employers organisations have submitted 1.75% pay and 2.75% at the bottom of scale across councils. The national unions have rejected that offer. In attendance at the meeting was Eamonn Croston, Service Director for Finance, Matthew Garbutt, Disposal and Acquisition Surveyor and Steve Bird, Head of Welfare and Exchequer Services.

Eamonn Croston provided a high-level Council financial management update incorporating 2021/21 financial outturn, current financial position 2021/22 and early consideration of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2022/23 and future years.

The Panel was reminded that financial management updates are presented to the Panel on a regular basis through the year and this report provides an opportune time to reflect in terms of the financial outturn position for 2021 and also undertake horizon scanning and forward looking in terms of medium-term financial strategy refresh.

A detailed outturn position report was presented to Cabinet on the 27th of July and will be presented to September Council and the report before the Panel is a summary overview of key highlights of 2021 position.

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As part of the outturn position the general fund overall, which accounts for revenue, operational expenditure, (apart from social housing which is separately accounted for in a ring-fenced revenue housing account) the overall year end position was break-even.

In summary, key highlights from the 2020/21 financial outturn reports includes:

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Collection fund income was another area particularly hit in 2021, in terms of business rates income collection and recovery and council tax. The Panel was advised that in attendance at the meeting was Steve Bird, Head of Service for Welfare and Exchequer and this service has been heavily involved in supporting and directly delivering the administration of business grants.

In addition, Matthew Garbutt, Disposal Acquisition Surveyor was also in attendance to update the Panel specifically on the impact of Covid on commercial lettings and Town Centre impact.

The Panel was informed that there has been significant impact not just in terms of business spend but also service income that covers commercial lettings, education catering income, car parking, a whole range of regulatory fees, planning fees etc. Overall identified in the outturn position for 2021, across all services, the general fund income was about £50 million down on what it would normally be expected to be. There was a government compensation scheme that recognised that councils were going to be impacted by service income because of the local impact of national measures around infection control and that garnered approximately £8 million. Matthew Garbutt advised that there are approximately 500 lease assets within the commercial estate which covers retail, industrial, office accommodation and a number of ground leases, managed by a small team of officers from within the Growth and Regeneration Directorate.

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For context, for the past 5 years the income from commercial estate been around £2.5 million annually and expenditures have been approximately £1,000,000, which gives a surplus of around 1.5 million that the commercial state then returns to the Council. This has been fairly consistent for the last five years leading up to Covid.

The Panel was informed that the bad debt provision from the commercial estate in terms of unpaid invoices was running between three hundred and four hundred thousand pounds prior to Covid. That was in relation to rents and service charges that were not paid in the time given to pay and then that would be chased by officers in the recovery department to try and recover that. There's was always sort of balancing figure of three hundred and four hundred thousand pounds.

Covid had two major impacts on the commercial estate the first was around bad debt. When Covid hit, the council took a decision to defer two quarters rent, therefore the rent from 1st of April through the end of September, for all tenants of the commercial estate, there was a decision to defer that rent. That means it was not written or credited, it was just paused for a period of time while the impact of Covid on business was understood and how central government was going to give grants and funding to these businesses to try and get through the difficult period.

The impact of this has led to the Council's bad debt increasing. Currently the debt position is approximately £1m which is unpaid invoices merely from that period of time, and officers are still dealing with tenants and trade to recover the money.

In September 2020, Cabinet adopted the central government's code of practice in respect of commercial property relations. The code of practice aims to assist landlords and tenants in coming to agreements over unpaid rent, dealing with lease renewals during Covid and various other the landlord and tenant implications for commercial properties.

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The majority of the commercial estate approximately £1m of the generated income comes from Huddersfield Town centre mainly from retail and hospitality uses within Huddersfield Town Centre. Covid has accelerated the changes to the Town Centre and the retail changes and prime high street rents have declined.

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The Panel was advised senior managers are aware of the gaps in resources and are trying to recruit disposals and acquisitions officers and, surveyors and hopefully the recruitment process will be successful.

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The Panel felt it would also be useful to have a list of the total number of properties in each area, the numbers that are vacant and the numbers that are let under management. The Panel felt it would also be useful to have a snapshot at the end of each year to see progress on lettings.

The Panel enquired how it would be possible to make the work being undertaken in this area more visible to elected members and the public. In response, Matthew Garbutt agreed to discuss the matter with the Head of Service and report back.

The Panel acknowledged the work Matthew Garbutt, and his colleagues do on a daily basis working in trying to balance the need to maintain income at the same time support providing support to tenants.

Steve Bird, Head of Service for Welfare and Exchequer provided the Panel with a breakdown of the services Covered by the team includes Council Tax, Business Rates, Sundry Debts, Collections, Client Financial Affairs, Housing Benefits, Council Tax Reduction, Local Welfare Provision, Free School Meals, DHP, Blue Badge and self-isolation payments.

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The Panel was informed that bad debt provision has increased to £11.2m usually, in the fullness of time collection is about 98.5%, which is really good, however this has been adjusted down to 96.25%. this has reduced the collection and increased the bad debt provision because the outstand arrears have increased. In terms of in-year collection, for 21/22, as of the 1st of August 2021, 24.87% of the net debit has been collected which is down on target by 4.63% or £4.9 million in monetary terms. There are a lots of businesses that are struggling and it is a balance, and collection will be a balance moving forward.

In terms of the grants, the restart grants and the support and help for businesses the service has administered grants for businesses and since the start of March 2021, a total of £173m had been paid out to approximately 11,000 businesses. At the peak, to respond to the additional work, 85 additional staff were helping out in the Business Rates Team and there are usually only nine people on that team.

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The Panel was informed that moving back towards business as usual, those business that have been awarded extended retail, no recovery action against them because their instalments only started in July and August and have yet to determine how many of the most affected group will pay.

The Panel was advised that in terms of other relief, on the 25th of March 2021, the government announced a new Business Rate Relief Fund of £1.5 billion nationally, which is still awaited. A bill is currently going through Parliament, called Rating, (Coronavirus) and Directors Disqualification (Dissolve Companies Bill), which is due back to the Commons on the 9th of September, which is imminent. The criteria will need to be looked at along with the funding, to determine how much funding Kirklees will get. This is for businesses outside retail, hospitality, and leisure sectors.

The Panel was informed that during COVID, no recovery action was taken for Council tax or Business Rates. The delay in recovery and collection and business as usual, was paused because the magistrates and the county courts were closed. Therefore, the amount of business rates recovery was nil last year. Now that the courts have re-opened 3163, reminders and 989 summons totalling approximately £11m have been issued.

The first part of the year has been trying to catch up with all the outstanding work trying to make suitable payment arrangements that are affordable. The new MCC relief, may clear some of these accounts, however it is not clear which business sectors it affects or how much funding the Council will be awarded.

In terms of the resilience and the succession planning for business rates, two new apprentices have been recruited and a growth bid has been submitted for the revenues team, which is council tax and business rates for an extra eight staff, and that's been approved. Overall, in Welfare and Exchequer the staff numbers are increasing by 26.5 staff to deal with the extra demand.

The Panel was informed that in respect of Council Tax, it is a similar theme to business however, the Council Tax collections rates have held up much better. In terms of arrears, rolled forward to the 31st March 2021, the arrears were approximately £21.23m. Since then, this has reduced by approximately £3m as of the 1st of August.

In terms of context behind that the annual debit raised for Council tax is £235 million and for business rates this year was £84 million therefore the aim is to collect that as the collectible debit. This is the ask is to collect this monies for the Council to run its services.

The main issue for Council tax last year as well as the delays in any court action and recovery action, is the increasing council tax reduction as people losing their jobs has meant that the council tax reduction numbers increased and there was an extra 3000 claims for council tax reduction. This increased the annual award for council tax reduction up approximately £6m.

Corporate Scrutiny Panel - 16 August 2021

Council tax collection is currently running at 34.89 which is up on target, 0.88% which in monetary terms is approximately £2m and that is mainly due to council tax reduction awards, however overall collections are up.

The Panel was provided with information on council tax reminders in a normal year for example 2019/20:

- 72,247 reminders were issued
- 28,252 people were summonsed
- 22,351 liability orders were obtained

Last year the recovery of council tax was started in September and there were 4738 liability orders, approximately 21% of the normal recovery and 57,000 reminders were issued in the last six months of the year.

To date this year,

- 31,648 reminders have been issued
- 9,411, liability orders have been obtained

The main part of the recovery is to strike a balance between getting people to pay rather than taking the high-level recovery action.

The other suppressed demand is the review of the single persons discount and exemptions which are reviewed automatically every year or bi-annually. There are approximately 65,000 people receiving this discount and this review should have been undertaken last year and this will be picked up at the latter part of this year. That would increase the council's income because it considers those people who may have forgotten to notify the council that their circumstances had changed.

There is not a backlog of work on council tax it's mainly suppressed demand. The team are in the process of recruiting. Currently there are 48 temporary staff, and the aim is to crystallise and make as many of those permanent.

On the revenue side, which is council tax and business rates an extra eight staff are being recruited from the approved growth bids. In addition, three new Assistant Senior Managers have been appointed.

In response the information received the Panel made comments and asked a number of questions as follows:

- In terms of the business rates are people being directed towards business debt and insolvency practitioners so they can get professional help?
- What is the time frame from obtaining the liability order to obtaining payment and costs and what percentage of liability or orders are usually recoverable?
- The enforcement action work that is being done is very similar to what was previously described by Matthew Garbutt's team, why isn't there a single enforcement team which undertakes enforcement type actions as opposed to separating those out?
- All the intelligence gathered through the grants process about Kirklees businesses is effectively like a business census which appears to be a rich

Corporate Scrutiny Panel - 16 August 2021

source of data, is there capacity to make best use of it or are there any restrictions on the use of the data that have been gathered from businesses?

The Panel acknowledged the work of Steve Bird and his colleagues and thanked him for a comprehensive presentation.

In response to a question from the Panel Eamonn Croston advised that in respect of the pay award the national employers organisations have submitted 1.75% pay and 2.75% at the bottom of scale across councils. The national unions have rejected that offer.

Cllr Paul Davies Cabinet member for Corporate commented that it is impressive what has been achieved with regards to that balance of looking after businesses and residents during a very challenging period while ensuring that the income is still coming in.

RESOLVED

That the officers be thanked for providing a very comprehensive update on the Council's financial position.

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KIRKLEES COUNCIL					
COUNCIL/CABINET/COMMITTEE MEETINGS ETC					
DECLARATION OF INTERESTS					
Corporate Scrutiny Panel					
Name of Councillor					
Item in which you have an interest	Type of interest (eg a disclosable pecuniary interest or an "Other Interest")	Does the nature of the interest require you to withdraw from the meeting while the item in which you have an interest is under consideration? [Y/N]	Brief description of your interest		

Signed: Dated:

NOTES

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

If you have any of the following pecuniary interests, they are your disclosable pecuniary interests under the new national rules. Any reference to spouse or civil partner includes any person with whom you are living as husband or wife, or as if they were your civil partner.

Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain, which you, or your spouse or civil partner, undertakes.

Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from your council or authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by you in carrying out duties as a member, or towards your election expenses.

Any contract which is made between you, or your spouse or your civil partner (or a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest) and your council or authority -

- under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and
- which has not been fully discharged.

Any beneficial interest in land which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, have and which is within the area of your council or authority.

Any licence (alone or jointly with others) which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, holds to occupy land in the area of your council or authority for a month or longer.

Any tenancy where (to your knowledge) - the landlord is your council or authority; and the tenant is a body in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest.

Any beneficial interest which you, or your spouse or your civil partner has in securities of a body where -

- (a) that body (to your knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of your council or authority; and
- (b) either -

the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or

if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which you, or your spouse or your civil partner, has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.



Name of meeting: Corporate Scrutiny Panel
Date: 08 November 2021
Title of report: Leaving the EU Update

Purpose of report

Following on from previous updates to Corporate Scrutiny Panel on this work, most recently on 01 December 2020, this paper provides an update for the Scrutiny Panel on Kirklees' work to manage the effects of the UK's exit from the EU.

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	N/A
Key Decision - Is it in the Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports?)	N/A
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	N/A
Date signed off by <u>Director</u> & name	Rachel Spencer-Henshall – 22.10.2020
Is it also signed off by the Assistant Director for Financial Management, IT, Risk and Performance?	N/A
Is it also signed off by the Assistant Director (Legal Governance and Monitoring)?	N/A
Cabinet member portfolio	Councillor Paul Davies

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: N/A

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? The report does not include personal data that could identify a living individual.

1. Summary

The UK left the EU on 31 January 2020 and reached the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020 after which point the EU/UK free trade agreement (FTA) came into effect. This paper seeks to update the Corporate Scrutiny Panel on the work to ensure preparedness on the part of the council, residents, partners and local businesses and to manage subsequent regulatory changes.

2. Information required to take a decision

2.1. National context

Following the European Union membership referendum was held on 23 June 2016 resulting in a leave outcome. Theresa May invoked Article 50 on 29 March 2017 defining the initial timetable for negotiation of an exit agreement with a deadline of 31 March 2019. After two extensions of this deadline to 31 October 2019 and 31 January 2020 an agreement was made and endorsed by both sides leading to commencement of a transition period to 31 December 2020 during which an EU-UK Free Trade Agreement would be negotiated. This FTA was agreed on 24 December avoiding the trade relationship defaulting to WTO rules on 1 January.

It is important to note that in several thematic areas the impacts of the COVID pandemic have exacerbated impacts of leaving the EU; this is the case with the current shortage of lorry drivers where the pandemic prevented large numbers of HGV licence tests occurring reducing the inflow of new drivers while leaving the EU has prevented resulting vacancies being filled by EU nationals. In other cases the pandemic has complicated mitigating actions. This is particularly the case in the work with communities promoting the EUSS scheme.

2.2. Kirklees context

- Kirklees Council established a project to manage the local impacts of leaving the EU with formation of the Brexit Tactical Group in March 2018 with the involvement of partners such as West Yorkshire Police.
- The Tactical Group developed an action plan overseeing its delivery and monitoring its appropriateness in the rapidly shifting context throughout this period.
- It was agreed by ET in January 2021 – on the recommendation of the Tactical Group – that several work streams be embedded into business as usual with a small number remaining under the active consideration of the Group, and the Group's membership reduced to reflect this change.
- The themes no longer considered of direct concern to the Group at this time were:
 - Specific concerns around livestock;
 - Monitoring of care workforce vacancies in light of points based immigration system;
 - Monitoring developments on state aid and procurement opportunities;
 - Medication supplies;
 - Impact of tariffs or trade barriers on catering services;
 - Supplies for food banks; and,

- Brexit related tensions and protest risks.
- Following the passing of key milestones defined by the EUSS programme and the FTA, remaining work streams have completed or been absorbed into business as usual (see section 2.3), and the Tactical Group has been dissolved.
- The Policy team will provide on-going monitoring of the opportunities and risks related to the legislative and regulatory changes opened up by leaving the EU. These are most prominently in the area of procurement and state aid but may include the potential for devolution of EU powers to both a local and West Yorkshire level.
- Prior to formal dissolution of the Tactical Group a lessons learned exercise was conducted to inform future projects. Key points were:
 - The strength of the multi-disciplinary team involving relevant partner organisations, and the flexible and pro-active manner in which it worked;
 - The value of political support both from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder and this Scrutiny Panel; and,
 - The challenge of weaknesses in data availability to inform the targeting of work (e.g. EUSS and business intelligence).
- To ensure knowledge retention it has also been agreed that files from the Brexit project will be archived for reference, to support future business continuity projects to take a similar approach.

2.3. Updates on Final Work Streams

a) Business Preparedness

A sub-group formed to consider impacts for local businesses identified communications as the key area for action leading to development and implementation of a joint communications campaign. The formation of this group has strengthened relationships between the Council, Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses. It is anticipated these meetings will continue on a quarterly basis with a broader membership to consider issues of relevance to local businesses including COVID impacts, and the gathering and sharing of intelligence.

b) EU Settlement Scheme

The Council continued to work with KCALC and other partners to raise awareness of the EUSS scheme and the need to apply by the deadline of 30 June. This work will have continuity through a new NRPF group with a wider remit.

Statistics for numbers of applications by local authority area up to the deadline were published on 16 September and reveal that 16,900 Kirklees residents had applied through the scheme of which 14,690 applicants were granted either settled or pre-settled status leaving 2,220 applications (13.1%) still to be determined. The split between settled and pre-settled grants was 7,660 settled status (45%) and 6,190 pre-settled (37%). The high number receiving pre-settled status carries with it a need to provide continuing support for up to five years from the grant of pre-settled status as applicants who fail to 'upgrade' once they have evidence of 5 years' residence could fall into NRPF or be faced with immigration enforcement if applying for benefits, healthcare, tenancies, employment and the like.

The top 5 nationalities of Kirklees residents who applied through the EUSS scheme were Polish (4,790), Romanian (2,530), Italian (1,620), Hungarian (1,460) and Spanish (990). A total of 1,550 Kirklees applicants were of non-EEA nationality. These individuals will have accessed the scheme as family members of EU, EEA or Swiss citizens.

A significant majority (73%) of Kirklees applicants were aged 18-64 with the rest comprising of those under 18 (24%) and only 2.5% of applications coming from those aged 65 or over.

Nine Looked After Children were identified in Kirklees that required EUSS applications or other related support. One of these received British citizenship and the remaining eight have received pre-settled status.

c) Food Certification

In January it was identified that the Environmental Health team anticipate two pressures resulting from 1) increased requirement to provide export certificates and 2) need to undertake checks on imported goods at destination where these have been allowed to pass through ports without checks in order to facilitate free movement of goods.

The Minister for the Cabinet Officer gave a statement to the House on 11 March explaining that introduction of most of these checks is now postponed to 1 January 2022. The pressures described above are therefore delayed and the team will continue to monitor developments on this front as part of business as usual.

d) Data Governance Arrangements

The EU-UK FTA incorporated provisions on interim cross-border data flow arrangements. These were for four months – with possibility of extension by the EU to six months – providing time for the EU Commission to consider an adequacy decision for the UK. As the UK had already granted data adequacy to the EU the risk was not to the ability to send data to the EU but to be able to subsequently retrieve it. Having extended the period from four months to six, the EU granted the UK a data adequacy decision on 28 June avoiding any issues in this area.

e) Food Supply Chain Issues

The supply chain issues mentioned above primarily relate to the shortage of HGV drivers resulting from both Brexit and COVID factors. In line with decisions made during earlier Brexit work it is recognised that the scale and national nature of supermarket operations that local authorities do not have effective levers to engage in this issue. However, the Council continues to monitor the impact of supermarket supply issues on local foodbanks and wider food supply impacts on schools and care homes. At the time of writing no concerns have been identified in these areas.

3. Implications for the Council

3.1. Working with People

Throughout preparations for leaving the EU community issues and potential tensions were monitored regularly. Furthermore, the EUSS support programme in partnership with KCALC has ensured advice was available for those eligible and played a significant role in increasing applications from Kirklees.

3.2. Working with Partners

The Kirklees approach to Brexit preparations has drawn on the strength of our partnerships with the police, NHS partners, business support organisations, KCALC and community organisations.

3.3. Place Based Working

Our support and communication to ward members has been vital to support their critical role as place leaders, able to provide appropriate assurance messages within our diverse communities.

3.4. Climate Change and Air Quality

Having now left the EU the UK is no longer tied to European environmental legislation, EU state aid rules or the Common Agricultural Policy. It remains unclear at this stage whether this will lead to the UK following more relaxed or more ambitious approaches to the climate agenda.

3.5. Improving outcomes for children

As stated above (see 2.4 (b)) the Council has actively supported EU national looked after children and care leavers in their applications for settled status.

3.6. Other (e.g. Legal/Financial or Human Resources)

Kirklees received £315k from Government, split across 2018/19 and 2019/20. Costs to year end in 2020/21 were £87k with the remaining £228k rolled forward to 2021/22. It is currently expected that a further £177k will be spent in this financial year with around £50k unallocated. Costs can largely be classified as funding existing capacity dedicated to Brexit work, recruitment of additional staff capacity and funding for KCALC to provide legal support to those requiring EUSS applications.

Work is ongoing to ensure all related costs are captured and minimise any risk of this funding being clawed back. Around £50k remains unallocated that it has been agreed officers will seek opportunities to spend avoiding the risk that the outstanding value be clawed back by government.

4. Consultees and their opinions

We have actively engaged with local businesses, partners and colleagues in the region to ensure we understand the potential impact on all sectors.

5. Next steps and timelines

- Monitoring of regulatory and legislative developments on ongoing basis.

6. Officer recommendations and reasons

For the panel to note and comment on the work done to ensure preparedness of the Council and the closure of this work.

7. Cabinet portfolio holder's recommendations

The portfolio holder is supportive of the content and recommendations set out in this report.

8. Contact officer

David Bundy – Policy Officer, Strategy and Policy

Jonathan Nunn – Strategy & Policy Officer (Sustainable Economy), Strategy and Policy

9. Background Papers and History of Decisions

Leaving the EU Update, Corporate Scrutiny Panel, 01 December 2020

Transition Period Preparations Update, Corporate Scrutiny Panel, 10 September 2020

Transition Period Preparations Update, Corporate Scrutiny Panel, 28 February 2020

Brexit Preparations Update, Corporate Scrutiny Panel, 10 January 2020

Preparations for leaving the EU, Corporate Scrutiny Panel, 20 September 2019

Leaving the EU Preparedness Update, Corporate Scrutiny Panel, 12 July 2019

Leaving the EU Preparedness Update, Economy and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Panel, 17 July 2019

Discussion at Full Council on the implications of Brexit, 12 December 2018

10. Service Director responsible

Naz Parkar - Director for Homes and Neighbourhoods



Name of meeting: Overview and Scrutiny

Date: 8th November 2021

Title of report: Kirklees Councils Access Strategy 2021 - 2026

Purpose of report: To generate discussion and provide information which will help councillors decide whether to investigate issues, debate issues and hold the executive to account.

Key Decision - Is it likely to result in spending or saving £250k or more, or to have a significant effect on two or more electoral wards?	Yes Impact on two or more wards
Key Decision - Is it in the <u>Council's Forward Plan (key decisions and private reports)?</u>	Key Decision – Yes Private Report/Private Appendix – No
The Decision - Is it eligible for call in by Scrutiny?	Yes
Date signed off by <u>Strategic Director</u> & name Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Finance? Is it also signed off by the Service Director for Legal Governance and Commissioning?	1 st October 2021 – Richard Parry Eamonn Croston 1 st October 2021 Julie Muscroft 1 st October 2021
Cabinet member portfolio	Cllr Paul Davies

Electoral wards affected: All

Ward councillors consulted: No

Public or private: Public

Has GDPR been considered? Yes – not applicable.

1. Summary

The current Access Strategy was agreed by cabinet and published in 2017. In early 2021 the Modern Organisation Board requested a complete refresh of the strategy. This work has been undertaken, although delayed due to the COVID-19 outbreak. Political endorsement is sought on Kirklees Council's Access Strategy (2021-2026).

2. Information required to take a decision

This report seeks political endorsement of the strategy, subject to any amendments.

Background

The current strategy has been in place since 2017. We have had successes in many of its aims, for example the digital by design programme has encouraged more of our contacts to be through online channels.

Although successful, the strategy needs a refresh and redesign as our citizens and communities' requirements have changed, as we come out of the pandemic and recover our services. This gives us a great opportunity to address those needs and place a refreshed focus on inequality, isolation, and vulnerabilities. Offering a whole council, systems approach, to provide place based and holistic services for communities.

Under the direction of the Modern Organisation board, we have been working closely with services across the council, our partners, volunteer groups and with communities to identify what they need and what is important to them in relation to Access.

This new proposed strategy (Appendix 1) acknowledges that feedback, and the work that has been undertaken over the last 10 months and is reflected in the aims and principles.

Central to the new proposed Access strategy is how it can support a number of our shared outcomes.

- Addressing inequalities, building inclusion
- Working across the life course and in the places that people live
- Local capacity building - Building on the strengths and local resources

The new strategy also aligns to key initiatives and strategies on Integration, Adult Social Care Vision, Children's Social Care improvement/SEND, Place Based Working and the Homes and Neighbourhoods Improvement Framework.

Key Issues

The pandemic has shone the light on inequalities, on isolation as well as health and care needs in our communities and the role Access plays in addressing these barriers. It is also clear from the co-production work we have done that many have

been unable to connect with us. Our services are not visible or accessible to some people for a range of reasons.

This updated strategy whilst continuing to promote online and digital platforms, as well as commitments to improve those platforms, also promotes the following:

- Bringing access more localised where it is needed (Links with place-based working and Asset strategies).
- Up-skilling and empowering staff to be able to support all customer needs presented and acting as advocates for them with specialised services. Moving away from siloed services that deal with initial presenting need only (aligning with the People Strategy and organisational development).
- Reviewing the journey of how people connect with us and our processes, the mechanisms and technology (links with Technology Strategy)
- Improving consistency in communication across all platforms (links with Communication Strategy)
- To work alongside our communities, our partners and others in developing our services and improving outcomes.

This strategy sets out the principles and conditions for the change required. The strategy aims and principles are for **all our** services where access is required by our people and businesses.

3. Implications for the Council

3.1 Working with People

The strategy has been co-produced, building on feedback from people and communities identifying their needs and what works for them. A principle of the strategy is to involve people in the development and delivery of key projects and for future service delivery models. It puts people at the heart of what we do. The strategy includes commitments to obtain regular feedback from people on their experiences of receiving services.

3.2 Working with Partners

Our partners are key to us achieving the aims of the strategy. Partners are involved in the boards and steering groups we have created to develop the strategy and monitor our progress. We are working with health partners and the voluntary and community sector to better understand local needs to develop the best possible outcomes.

3.3 Place Based Working

Place based working is a key aim of the strategy. Our ambition is that people will be able to access the support and information they need at the right time in their life as well as in the place they live. The strategy builds on existing resources in our places and builds on our strength-based approaches across ours and partners delivery and supports Kirklees integration agenda.

3.4 Climate Change and Air Quality

As we develop our future service delivery model's we will provide more localised support therefore potentially reducing the need for people to travel to Huddersfield or Dewsbury to get support. This may impact positively on Climate change and air quality.

3.5 Improving outcomes for children

This is the council's strategy for Access and therefore speaks to every directorate; the strategy has been developed to further improve links with Children's and Families.

3.6 Other (eg Legal/Financial or Human Resources) Consultees and their opinions

Delivery of the strategy has the need to be cost effective and offer value for money. Although some initial development resources have been provided to initiate this work, there will be need for financial support on key projects identified to deliver the strategy. For example: Place based working and technology improvements. However, we are confident that the robust and longer-term implementation of this strategy, across all services, will realise the longer-term financial benefits of working upstream.

Effective communications and engagement to launch this strategy will be crucial in ensuring the strategy is recognised, understood and begins to inform our ways of working across the council and with partners.

3.7 Do you need an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)?

We have taken account of our equality duties. A Stage 1 Integrated Impact Assessment has been completed and is at Appendix 2

4. Next steps and timelines

Following political endorsement, roll-out of the Access Strategy will be supported by a comprehensive and insight-led communications programme. Cabinet and overview and scrutiny panel will be updated on progress on an annual basis.

5. Officer recommendations and reasons

It is recommended that Cabinet approve the Access Strategy 2021-26, attached at Appendix 1. To be implemented from October 2021 for the following reasons:

- This new strategy puts people at the heart of our approach
- It will support delivery of the corporate plan and ambition
- It has been developed through feedback from people and groups about what is required to meet both individual and collective access needs.

6. Cabinet Portfolio Holder's recommendations

Not Applicable

7. Contact officer

Dave Thompson Head of Access Strategy and Delivery

8. Background Papers and History of Decisions

<https://democracy.kirklees.gov.uk/mglIssueHistoryHome.aspx?Ild=25520&PIanId=163&RPID=1658742>

9. Service Director responsible

Jill Greenfield Service Director Customers and Communities

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ACCESS STRATEGY

2021-26

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Foreword

There is sometimes the risk of making assumptions about how people wish to access council services. Such assumptions could result in alienating some people and communities who can't get the support they need due to a variety of technological and/or cultural barriers.

Recognising this, I am pleased that we have developed an Access Strategy that puts people at the heart of our approach, so they are able to benefit and feel included when accessing and using services and that will support the delivery of our Corporate Plan and ambition.

Our vision for Kirklees is to be a district which combines a strong, sustainable economy with a great quality of life – leading to thriving communities, growing businesses, high prosperity and low inequality where people enjoy better health throughout their lives.

By working with people, our partners, businesses, volunteer groups and communities, we aim to provide access across Kirklees that addresses the diverse needs of people and places.

I look forward to seeing the implementation of this strategy and the impact it will have on our people in how they access services that are most important to them.



Councillor Paul Davies

Cabinet Member – Corporate

Introduction – Our Council Vision

Kirklees Council is ambitious for its people, its places, and its partners. We are committed to making sure that everyone's experience of contacting the Council is a positive one. We aim to make people's lives easier.

Our values commit us to listening to and working with people, communities, and businesses, so as to understand their needs, what is important to them, and to put in place appropriate affordable services. This strategy sets out our vision to deliver these commitments and to provide the best possible outcomes for whoever has contact with us, and however they contact us.

Learning from a year that has highlighted existing inequalities and the social isolation people experience, this strategy aims to respond to the ways access is provided so as to ensure those who need and receive our services are supported in the most appropriate and efficient way.

As a result of this Strategy, we aim to realise the significant benefits of working in partnership to:

1. Make a positive difference from the first contact, reducing the need for repeated and multiple contacts
2. Provide more localised services in communities which meet the needs of the communities they serve
3. Continue to develop our online and phone services, increasing take up and access
4. Co-design, co-produce and co-evaluate services with people, to ensure a culture of shared learning, power and voice
5. Build on the trust we have developed with partners, volunteer groups and businesses.

This supports the ongoing journey the council has been on over the last few years. To develop early intervention and prevention approaches, to get closer to our communities through place-based working, and to strengthen our ability to build positive relationships and partnerships. Which we have seen develop even more positively throughout the pandemic.

We are committed to working alongside people, places, and partners, and to ensure we always seek out new and proactive ways to enable, empower and resource our communities. We recognise that communities have needs and ambitions, as well as individuals, and will work towards meeting collective needs and making ambitions a reality.

We will continue to work with many groups to deliver the strategy. Some of the groups already worked with are:

- Councillors and Senior leadership teams
- Partners including LOCALA, Public Health, NHS Commissioning Bodies
- Volunteering Groups, Community Groups
- People and communities of Kirklees
- Businesses.

What do we mean by 'Access to Services' – a whole Council approach

Access refers to the services we provide as a council, but also how we handle those who contact us when they are trying to access those services.

Access is required across the whole life-course. We recognise that the type of contact and services required will vary throughout people's lives.

It is also important we design access that responds to individual needs and the needs of local communities, that are delivered in a way that provides value for their money.

Access to Services covers:

- Contacting the council for information, advice, guidance, support, a service,
- Carrying out transactions like pay council tax or rent, book tickets, pay for services provided or a pay parking fine,
- Finding out about or reporting a missed bin, fly tipping,
- Finding support for a child or adult,
- Contacting to volunteer, or in relation to a business or employment and
- To take part – help us co-design, create and procure support and work in partnership with us.

Sometimes we use the term 'channel' in relation to Access to Services – channel is used to describe the different ways people can be in contact with the council, for example via websites and apps, in person, by phone, email and forms, via social media, and through our community and place-based teams.

Understanding our area and those who live and work in it

In the last census there were 431,000 people living in Kirklees. In 2020 it was estimated that would now have risen to over 447,000. There are approximately 15,000 businesses in the Kirklees area.

We know our population will continue to rise and change demographically. To keep pace with our evolving local population, both demographically and culturally, we need to change the way we do things, to ensure high expectations for good quality services are made a reality.

In an ever-changing world it is important that we understand our area now and what it will look like in the future so that we tailor support to the presenting needs of our population and businesses.

We know that in our higher volume transactional services people want quick and easy access to meet their needs. For example, paying bills or rent, ordering a repair or reporting an issue. We also know that at certain points in people's life a more person centred approach is required.

We know the demographics and needs of our population, places and service users will change. We will embed the use of insight and evaluation to continuously review and respond to changes so that our services meet the current and future needs of our people, our places, our partners and our businesses in the most effective and efficient way possible.

Delivering place-based working is key to ensuring we know who our people, places, and partners are, what their needs may be, and how we can ensure our services meet those changing needs.

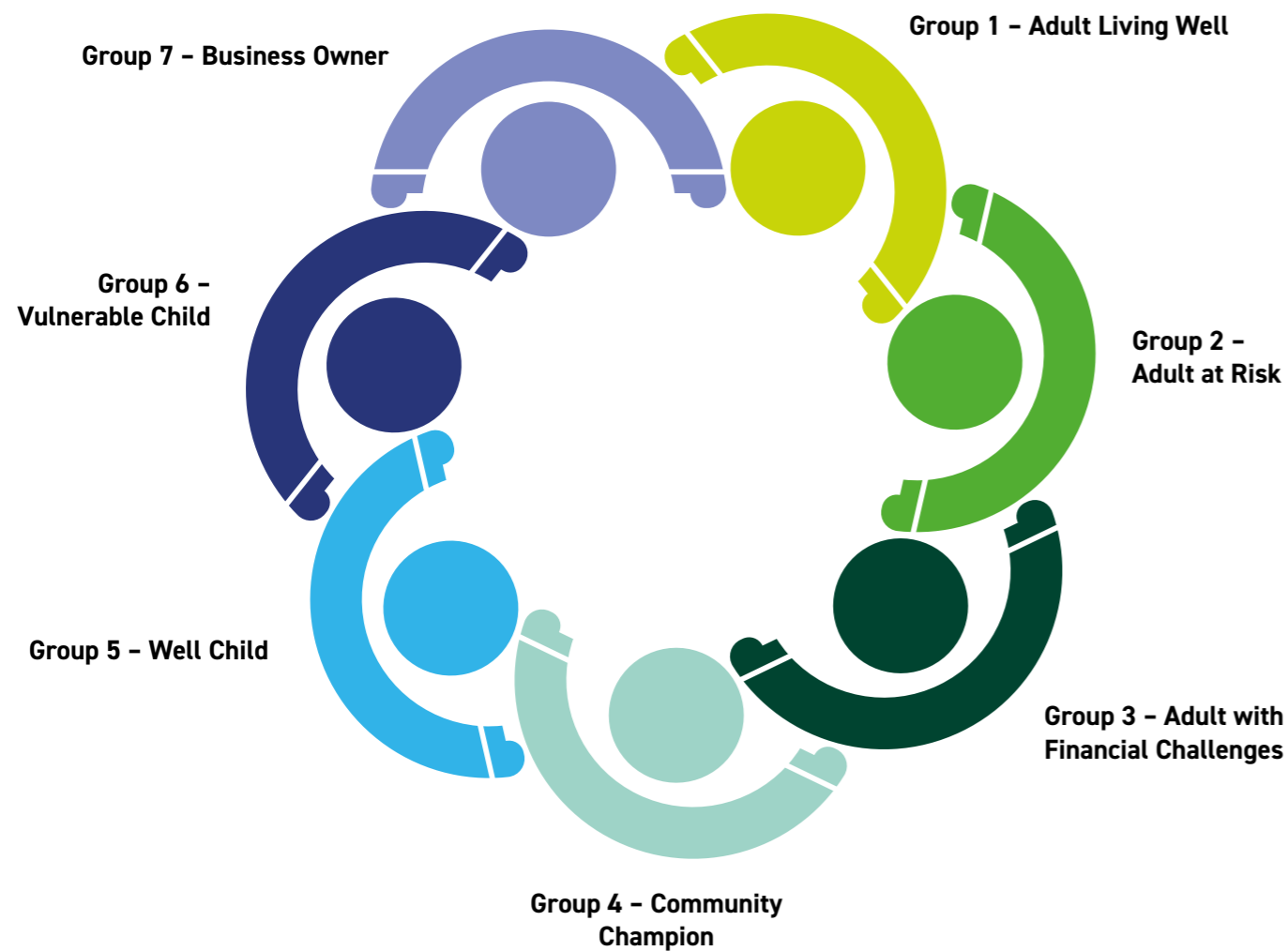


Who connects with the Council?

Our research has shown that we have **seven main groups** who access our services, who all have different circumstances and present different needs.

We also know that within these groups some people are comfortable with technology and some are not. We will take this into account across these groups when providing services.

The seven groups are:



Group 1 – Adult Living Well

Adults living fulfilled lives and with stable economic circumstances.

Like Stacey: “I am healthy. I enjoy my leisure time, particularly swimming at the leisure centre pool and keeping fit. When possible, I like to support my local community. I rarely contact the council but when I do it’s because something has gone wrong or I need a service that only the council provides.”



Group 2 – Adult at Risk

Adult living with a disability or illness (mental health or other condition) needing help to look after themselves or protect themselves from harm.

Like Colin: “I live with a mental health condition which means I sometimes struggle with daily life. I regularly feel lonely and not part of the community. Sometimes I need help to live well and as independently as possible, but other times I don’t need any help at all.”



Group 3 – Adult with Financial Challenges

Those working or on benefits or both.

Like Adele: “I have always worked but struggle to make ends meet as my income barely covers my living costs. I rely on welfare support without which my personal situation would be unmanageable.”



Group 4 – Community Champion

Those with a strong interest in their local community.

Like Shabbir: “I care about my community and like to see it is well looked after. I report problems to the council when I see them. I take an interest and I am keen to have my say on surveys and local plans that affect my community.”



Group 5 – Well Child

Children with no long-term health issues.

Like Chloe: “I am healthy. I enjoy playing outdoors in the park and countryside. I am concerned about climate change and how we make it better.”



Group 6 – Vulnerable Child

Children with long term mental or physical health conditions.

Like David: “I am living with a long-term health condition and my home life is difficult.”



Group 7 – Business Owner

Business owners who work in Kirklees.

Like Jo: “I run a business in Kirklees. I normally contact the Council for planning or licensing services. I am keen to share ideas with other business owners and like to be involved in the regeneration of the area.”



Our principles

This Strategy is built around our principles. The principles define how we will achieve our aims.

The principles have been developed with feedback from people and groups about what is required to meet both individual and collective access needs. These principles are:

- **Getting the basics right** – Develop the design of service access, the language we use and understand what it means to people. Identify what people want to achieve and how they want us to help them get there.
- **Tackling access inequalities** – using access to services to address inequalities, vulnerabilities and loneliness including cultural, digital, financial, and other barriers
- **Offering multiple contact points** – We recognise that people want choice in how they connect with us and our communication will extend beyond the traditional channels to include our Community coordinators, social media, community buildings and more
- **Working with people** – Ensure regular reflection and improvements to our processes and arrangements by co-producing our services and how we deliver them with the people that access them, so that we are adaptable to meet needs and access to services is the best it can be.

Getting the basics right

Develop the design of service access, the language we use and understand what it means to people. Identify what people want to achieve and how they want us to help them get there.

It is vital we get the basics right as this helps us address the other principles where more support is required for people who need it.

People interact with the council through channels that best suit their needs. Some of these channels are:

- **Website and online** – we have had significant success through our Digital by Design programme where thousands of transactions take place efficiently and effectively. This is through our website (booking tickets, paying for services) and the citizen account, reporting issues and accessing information (e.g., council tax bills).
 - We have also developed the use of online forms to help ensure the right support is identified quickly for those in need.
- **Phone** – putting callers in contact with those who can deal with their enquiry/issue/request appropriately.
- **Customer Service Centres** – where there is public access equipment (IT, telephones, and other equipment) and the opportunity if needed for a 'face to face' contact with a member of staff.

We already have class leading services developed through co production, but we want to do more. We want to continue to build changes around what people need from us so that we can support them in the appropriate way.

What we will do

- We will improve our digital offer, enabling many of our services to be easily accessed online by ensuring that links and pathways work and are clear, contacts and referrals are followed up quickly and competently, and all possible considerations for contacting a service are included.
- We will continue to promote digital as our channel of choice for most services, enabling people to help themselves through self-serve first.
- We will focus our staffing resources on more complex enquiries where digital may not be appropriate and for those who are not able to use digital channels.
- We will improve the technology that supports our contact centres to ensure they operate effectively.

The outcomes expected

- Increased usage in our online channels. Our channels will be more tailored to needs, the support people require and how it is provided. What people tell us will be safe and secure. Efficient and effective processes, mechanisms, and experiences.
- Our staff will become more empowered to help people achieve what they need regardless of the channel they use to contact us.
- Improved satisfaction surveys.

What might look different

- Increased effectiveness of online support.
- Consistency in communication of messages whichever way people contact the council.
- Training for staff around digital skills, including data analysis.
- The language and set-up we use for digital services.

Tackling access inequalities

Using access to services to address inequalities, including cultural, digital, financial, and other barriers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted inequality of access for communities. We have learned from this and have continued to make improvements to access so that people are supported appropriately.

What we will do

- We will review our existing services with people to ensure that we fully understand the journey people go on to connect with us, and crucially, from their perspective.
- We will tailor our services to meet needs so that those that need our support are able to obtain it in a way that suits them.
- We will be working with the Inclusion Commission to develop ideas on how to do this even better.
- We will ensure people can access services more locally without the need to travel.
- We will develop our information and advice services by identifying what people are entitled to as well as what they need.
- We will explore human rights models of customer care and delivery which focus on what needs to be delivered to create good inclusive services.
- We will have a culture where the needs and aspirations of people are considered at each stage of service design.
- We will review the training we provide to staff to ensure they have the skills and knowledge to provide the right support for presenting needs.

The outcomes expected

- Those without digital access can get support.
- More personalised services where people feel remembered by staff and not a faceless customer.
- People do not need to repeat their stories several times.
- Services more localised and easier to access.
- Services more visible and accessible for communities.

What might look different

- More localised support that reduces the barriers to digital and financial help, advice, and guidance.
- Increased use of services provided.
- Increased involvement in development of services from people, groups and networks.
- Greater confidence levels in delivering good inclusive services.

Offering multiple contact points

We recognise that people want choice in how they connect with us and our communication will extend beyond the traditional channels to include our Community coordinators, social media, community buildings and more.

Making every contact count, we want to make our services more accessible for local people by utilising our workforce in new ways to ensure people get the appropriate support needed.

This means that whilst we will ensure that there is consistency and clarity in our communications between services and with the people we support, access to services will take a much more localised approach.

Through the work done by our staff and partners working out in communities, through volunteers and through feedback from councillors we know that many don't have easy access to equipment and don't travel to our centres for support.

In line with the council's ambition on place-based working, we aim to improve access on a local basis creating environments that have the right equipment and where staff can and will deal with needs as presented and obtain appropriate levels of support.

What we will do

- We will work as one organisation offering clear and consistent experiences.
- Ensure our staff have the knowledge, skills, capability and tools to deliver consistent and high-quality services wherever and however people choose to interact with us.
- We will identify key areas where providing more localised support presents opportunities to improve outcomes for local people.
- We will learn from the pilot work in these areas, so we can inform our overall approach to developing place-based provision.
- We will be honest about what we can achieve but our plans and arrangements will always be co-produced with people and communities.

The outcomes expected

- Better connection and opportunity for people to access services in their local area.
- Increasing the opportunity for people to access all channels in an area more local for them.
- Our staff will become more empowered to help people achieve what they need regardless of where they present, resolving more issues at first point of contact.
- Provide appropriate staff with a single view of the citizen and access to the systems they need to be able to deliver services without having to refer on to someone / somewhere else.
- Develop clear and visible clear escalation routes to address complex, non-standard issues or for when things go wrong

What might look different

- Where our access points are situated and available.
- Personalised choice and control.
- Less of being signposted for support and more of staff taking ownership to support presenting needs.

Working with people

Ensure regular reflection and improvements to our processes and arrangements by co-producing our services and how we deliver them with the people that access them, so that we are adaptable to meet needs and access to services is the best it can be.

What we will do

- Embed co-production principles and listening feedback loops in all that we do.
- Co-production will be viewed as an opportunity for the council and staff, as well as those who access services.
- When things go wrong, we will learn lessons and make changes to ensure they don't happen again.
- We will have strong working relationships with people where they have opportunity and confidence to comment on how well we are doing. This feedback will be listened to, responses will be quick and effective, and solutions will be explored with people.
- We will explore different ways to co-produce services with people and partners.
- We will share learning of what good co-production looks like so all our council contact services can learn from each other.
- Through a better understanding of varying needs and circumstances, we will offer services that are proactive from the council and our partners.
- Where our services are required to protect individuals or the environment, we will do so in a clear and consistent way that makes it easier to understand dependent on situation, condition and personal wishes.
- We will be honest about what we can achieve but our plans and arrangements will always be co-produced with people and communities.

The outcomes expected

- Increased use of co-production in changes to service delivery.
- Increased confidence in services meeting needs.

What might look different

- Invitations to give feedback on performance, and to co-produce solutions will be more regularly available.
- Opportunities to co-produce our developing programmes will be more widely available.
- Power and voice will be shared.
- People will be seen as experts on their own situation or that of their community.
- People will be seen as assets to improving access to services

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