EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

18 August 2022

Report by Director of Business Operations & Partnerships

BUSINESS OPERATIONS & PARTNERSHIPS DEPARTMENT
(FORMERLY CORPORATE AND COMMUNITY SERVICES)
END YEAR PERFORMANCE REPORT 2021/22

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.   The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the 2021/22 end year performance of the Business Operations & Partnerships Department (formerly the Corporate and Community Services Department until 30 January 2022).

RECOMMENDATIONS

2.   It is recommended that the Cabinet scrutinise and comment on the Business Operations and Partnerships' end year performance for 2021/22, including its contribution to the COVID-19 pandemic.

BACKGROUND

3.   This report contains data on progress against the department's key performance targets, and updates on the main actions we are taking to contribute to the achievement of the Council's strategic outcomes. Annex 1 gives an overview of the performance of each of the main service areas. The report also gives an overview of the Department's contributions to the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted priorities in a range of areas across the year.

4.   Following the announcement of the retirement of the Director of Corporate & Community Services, in September 2021 Council approved the re-designation of the department to Business Operations and Partnerships, with effect from 31 January 2022.

5.   Our priorities each reflect the cross-council enabling role of the department:

- **Efficient and effective business operations** – these are common across departments (e.g. ICT, HR/Payroll, payments, customer contact) and the goal is to maximise economies of scale and the use of digital technology to focus on meeting the needs of our customers (both internal and external) in the best way. In terms of staff and budgets, business operations are the most significant part of the department.

- **Council wide digital transformation** – this focuses on 3 digital priority areas: business systems & processes; customer experience and workforce productivity. As a department, we lead these programmes and manage a core group of experts who transfer their skills from project to project as required. We are also responsible for delivering a number of projects in our own services.

- **Effective community, partnership and strategy development** – the focus here is to ensure we take a long-term perspective for the East Renfrewshire area, which addresses the impact of the pandemic; digital opportunities; the impact of climate change; at a time of financial pressure. Our work on 'Vision for the Future', the Council's 10-year strategy, has been complemented by fantastic partnerships with communities and other public sector partners during the pandemic. Community Planning, participatory budgeting, community empowerment as well as robust evaluation of the effectiveness of our work all contribute to ensuring that we are delivering the best possible services for our residents. We advise Council and the Corporate Management Team and ensure the Council achieves its duties under Best Value.

2021/22 PERFORMANCE

6.   Annex 1 gives a summary of performance for each of the main services in the Business Operations & Partnerships Department across 2021/22.

7.   There was an increase in the overall number of complaints received by the Department from 152 in 2020/21 to 213 in 2021/22. This increase was concentrated in the first half of the year and mainly because of backlogs caused by the introduction of the new Council Tax and Benefits system. The issues were addressed swiftly by deploying additional staffing resources and data tracking. As a department we handled complaints within the national statutory timescales (averaging 4.8 days for frontline stage and 17.2 days for investigation stage complaints). We continue to learn from complaints and make service improvements.

8.   Our department's invoice processing rate has improved from 74.9% in 2020/21 to 95.1% in 2021/22. This includes data on Covid hardship payments, low income pandemic payments and grants. The department continues to lead on improvements to the invoice payments process, providing greater financial control and assurance and automating processes wherever possible.

9.   Our department's absence rates have increased from last year from 3.5 days to 7.9 days. This is below the target of 8.9 days but remains a cause of concern. In line with the broader Council picture, the main areas of absence in the department are stress (non-work-related); musculoskeletal (except back pain) and fractures.

Impact of COVID-19

10.   The Business Operations and Partnerships Department has played a considerable role in the Council's response to Covid-19 and the more recent recovery and renewal phases.

11.   As well as managing the impact on their own services and our departmental response, the Department's Heads of Service have each been key members of the Crisis Resilience Management Team (CRMT), which commenced meetings in January 2020 and continued to meet at least weekly in 2021, reducing in frequency in 2022. The CRMT was chaired mainly by the Head of Digital and Community Safety, who also gave regular briefings to the Chief Executive and at least weekly updates to the Corporate Management Team.

12.   In 2021/22, the Department continued to lead on Humanitarian Assistance/Isolation Support, including processing hardship payments and Self Isolation Support Grants. We also commissioned research into the impact of the pandemic on local residents. This was reported as part of a strategic planning update to Council in March 2022 and the results will be used to inform local recovery and renewal, including development of 'Vision for the Future'.

13.   Many of our services have continued to be affected in different ways by the pandemic. Examples include:

- our Communications team continuing to lead a high level of internal and external communications to ensure staff and residents were aware of all measures, precautions and service impacts;
- our HR team working to fulfil stringent national absence reporting requirements; keeping manager guidance up to date as new guidance emerged and also meeting increased demands for recruitment driven by short-term pandemic-related funding;
- our Customer First team dealing with a high volume of calls throughout the period and transitioning to more time-consuming remote death registrations, which have now been extended nationally until at least September 2022;
- our Money Advice and Rights Team (MART) dealing with increased income maximisation referrals and assisting the Council's humanitarian response in various ways, including administering a COVID discretionary grant;
- our Scottish Welfare Fund team implementing a new Council Tax and Benefits system at a time of rising caseload and whilst processing new Self-Isolation Support Grants (SISG);
- our Community Safety team seconding 2 community wardens between September 2020 and June 2022 to deliver isolation support and assessments for SISGs;
- our Democratic Services team transitioning to hybrid meetings and delivering Council elections with the additional constraints of pandemic guidance;
- our Strategic Insight and Communities teams facilitating the daily call lists for isolation support; providing COVID dashboards for CRMT and senior leaders on key metrics and trends; and leading the humanitarian response including research and several national funding streams; and
- our Accounts Payable team who continue to process thousands of additional COVID hardship payments and grants.

14.   As is the case across the country, we continue to experience challenges in terms of absence and recruitment, with several areas of service finding it difficult to fill vacancies. This has impacted performance in some areas, especially around response times, and has, impacted capacity in our digital transformation programmes.

15.   The overview reports to Council, most recently in June 2022, give more detail on the impact of the pandemic on services.

KEY CHALLENGES FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

16.   As with many services across the Council, Business Operations and Partnerships continue to balance business as usual, with increased Covid-related demands in some services, especially those related to the cost of living. Whilst focusing on a shift to recovery and increased priority on digital transformation, we are mindful of the potential for further pandemic impacts as we enter the autumn and winter period. Given the pressures of the last 2 years, we are also keen to support employee health, wellbeing and resilience as we transition to new ways of working and navigate the challenges of increased absence levels, skills shortages, particularly in frontline workers, and succession planning.

17.   We will be working with the new Administration and local communities in the coming months as we refresh our 'Vision for the Future'. We must also consider the context of major public service reforms, including the proposed National Care Service, and the potential implications for the Council and our own services. There will be significant work to identify the scale of the changes and plan accordingly.

18.   We will also be concentrating on achieving benefits from our digital transformation programme and carefully managing our ambition with the capacity of our staff and the resources available. This will include encouraging customers to use our online services; implementing the new digital-ready Telecare Alarm Receiving Centre and driving staff adoption of the new features available in Microsoft 365. There will also be challenges of information governance and security and a key focus will be to help the organisation prepare for the risks and opportunities that these present.

19.   We have major concerns about the significant budget savings that will be required over the next 3 years and the impact of further cuts to services and staff that are already under pressure and essential to the running of the Council. Our key business operations (e.g. ICT and HR) will be engaging further with leadership teams across the Council to ensure that these key services are meeting customer expectations and delivering effectively and efficiently to support the needs of the wider business. We expect the savings to be a particular risk to our frontline services which is a real concern alongside the rising demands created by the cost of living crisis which is putting pressure on local residents and our employees, with rising demand for financial support services and money advice; potential for growing inequalities and impacts on mental health and wellbeing.

20.   We have been working hard with services across the Council to develop participatory budgeting approaches but given increased workloads and decreased access to local communities in recent times, meeting the national 1% target will be a challenge for 2022/23.

PUBLICATION OF END YEAR PERFORMANCE INFORMATION

21.   Information contained in this report will be posted on the Council's website so the public can view the Department's performance.

FINANCE & EFFICIENCY

22.   There are no specific financial implications arising from this report.

CONSULTATION

23.   Between October and December 2021 East Renfrewshire residents were invited to take part in a budget consultation to help shape the Council's future priorities for 2022/23. The budget consultation gave residents the chance to have their say on how the Council supports the people of East Renfrewshire. Six key themes were outlined within the survey, with a focus on how COVID has impacted on our lives and the priorities for post-pandemic recovery. In February and March 2022, we also ran a successful online survey to gather residents' views on the availability of period products which will inform future provision. We publicised the survey through social media, community groups and word of mouth, with a particular focus on equality groups and received 323 responses.

24.   There were other less formal consultations across 2021/22 as a result of the pandemic, but services found new and innovative ways to engage with users where appropriate. For example, the launch of the My East Ren and online council tax portals were developed using service design principles and customer feedback to improve uptake and encourage residents to sign-up. We were also able to run successful Youth Participatory Budgeting events and work with Linking Communities to re-plan broader PB events in our locality planning areas in May and June 2022.

25.   We commissioned humanitarian research into the impact of the pandemic on local communities and this will be used to inform future strategic planning and recovery. Further details can be found here.

26.   Staff across the Council also completed a pilot wellbeing survey in December 2021. The survey was designed around the 5 Pillars of Wellbeing: Health, Financial, Working Environment, Purpose and Relationships which supports the core standards recommended by the Stevenson Farmer review.   This UK Government commissioned review was to understand how employers can better support the mental health of all people currently in employment including those with mental health problems or poor wellbeing to remain in and thrive through work. Overall responses were positive and areas for attention are being incorporated into the Health and Wellbeing action plan to improve employee experience. Plans are also underway to undertake a Council wide survey in 2022.

27.   There are opportunities to work more closely with local communities and the voluntary sector to shape recovery and our priorities for the future, including addressing the impact of the pandemic; supporting local economic recovery; addressing inequalities; and moving forward with key priorities including tackling poverty and climate change.

PARTNERSHIP WORKING

28.   This report highlights the Business Operations & Partnership Department's contribution to the delivery of the Community Planning Partnership Community Plan and the Council's Outcome Delivery Plan. Whilst it focuses on the department's contribution, many of the results could not have been achieved without excellent partnership working across Council services and with partners. Relationships with Voluntary Action East Renfrewshire and other third sector responders have noticeably strengthened since the onset of the pandemic and it will be important to build on these strong connections as we move forward in the recovery and renewal phases.

IMPLICATIONS OF REPORT

29.   As this report is primarily a progress and performance update, there are no particular implications in terms of staffing, property, legal, IT, equalities or sustainability. Each of these issues has been mainstreamed throughout the departmental reports and specific equality impact assessments have been carried out where appropriate.

CONCLUSION

30.   This report summarises a high level overview of the Business Operations & Partnerships Department's performance at end year 2021/22.

31.   The performance results outlined in this report demonstrate the huge variety of services, initiatives and support provided by the Department both to internal services and local communities. We continue to be very proud of our teams and grateful for the commitment and efforts they have shown throughout the year.

RECOMMENDATIONS

32.   It is recommended that the Cabinet scrutinise and comment on the Business Operations and Partnerships' end year performance for 2021/22, including its contribution to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Louise Pringle, Director of Business Operations & Partnerships
July 2022

REPORT AUTHORS

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

- COVID-19 Recovery, Council 29 June 2022
- Community Plan: Annual Performance report 21-22; Fairer East Ren: Transition Plans 2022-23; Local Child Poverty Action Report: Year 4, Council 29 June 2022
- Strategic year-end performance 21-22 & Draft Outcome Delivery Plan ODP 2022-23, Council 29 June 2022
- Update on Digital Transformation Programme, Cabinet 16 June 2022
- Strategic Planning, Council 3 March 2022
- Post of Director of Corporate & Community Services, 8 September 2021

End-Year Review
2021/22

Department of
Business Operations & Partnerships

our **values** Ambition Kindness Trust

Business Operations & Partnerships Department

Introduction

- Business Operations & Partnerships was newly formed on 31 January 2022, replacing the Corporate & Community Services Department.

- The Department has <300 employees, with a budget in 2021/22 of £23M.

- The Department leads a unique blend of frontline, strategic and support services and has a cross-council enabling role.

- Key priorities:
  - Efficient, effective business operations
  - Council-wide digital transformation
  - Effective community partnerships and strategy development

Business Operations

In terms of staff and budgets, these services form the most significant part of the department. They provide the foundation for other services throughout the Council to run their own services. These include: ICT, HR/Payroll, Revenues (incl. Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates), Accounts Payable/Receivable, Communications and Democratic Services.

ICT

Summary

The ICT Service has had a challenging year, balancing business as usual with digital transformation, Covid-19 response and a significant email issue, which resulted in the migration of council mailboxes to Microsoft 365 in January 2022. The service has been undertaking a range of projects to improve security and stability on our ICT network and the work completed over the last year brings us to a tipping point where our digital transformation programme can begin securely realising the benefits of further M365 and data capabilities.

Customer

- Significant challenges with our Exchange email platform led to the successful migration of approx. 1950 user and 220 group mailboxes to Microsoft 365 email in January/February.
- Introduced online bookings to manage face to face ICT appointments.
- Deployed new version of Windows to laptops remotely, which minimised impact to internal customers.

Efficiency

- ICT network availability measures how much downtime was experienced by the core network, connectivity and base services over a year. 99% equates to 3.5 days unplanned downtime a year. The figure for 2021/22 was 98%. The Council website was also available 99.95% of the time.
- Several initiatives undertaken to improve efficiency and effectiveness of ICT Service Desk to improve incident response times and drive self-service for basic Service Requests.
- Removed all remaining Windows 7 devices from the network (~500).
- Supported digital transformation projects in the form of the Civica Chip & PIN upgrade; the retirement of Lagan, the Council's longstanding Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system; a review of the Taxi and Private Hire process; the My EastRen launch and an upgrade to the Council's document management solution Info@Work. In addition, there has been higher than predicted input to the Analogue to Digital Telecare (A2D) project this year due to staffing challenges.
- Undertook multiple network upgrades across all sites and nationally (via SWAN). Whilst normal lifecycle work, the volume this past year has been unprecedented, and included transitioning all sites to BT Openreach circuits.
- Leading the Technology workstream of The Way We Work project, with a particular focus on hybrid meeting room technology and room bookings

People

- Given national recruitment issues, there have been challenges recruiting replacement and new roles include Business Relationship Officer, Trainee and Senior ICT Officer (DBA), ICT Officer (Infrastructure)
- There has been a significant degree of face to face, onsite working required from the ICT team throughout the pandemic to support the wider needs of the organisation.

Summary

It has been a challenging year for the HR and Payroll teams supporting the implementation of the new HR and Payroll system , whilst managing increased service demand as a consequence of covid-related absence and recruitment. Consequently there has been less capacity to focus on process improvement than planned.

Efficiency

- Capacity issues have delayed process improvements through the HR/Payroll ICT system. The new digital transformation programme should help and prioritisation is underway to focus on the most beneficial opportunities. We have also started working collectively with other councils to plan system improvements with the external supplier.

- There were data/system integration issues which led to an improvement notice from the pension service. The resulting improvement plan brought additional workload and weekly oversight meetings with the pension service – this work has now been completed on target.

- Education staffing volumes increased in line with Scottish Government funding and a temporary post has been funded by the Education Department to support the additional transactional work.

People

- There was a significant increase in Council turnover (LGE - 13.8% for 2021/22 against 4.7% the previous year; Teachers 14.9% compared to 4.8%) this has been driven by the national trend of the 'big resignation' and retirements following the pandemic and also the increase in temporary contracts associated with short-term funding. In addition we issued 412 more contracts of employment this year (total 3008).

- HR Case Team continued to log COVID absence in line with national requirements and HR Business Partners supported with Covid manager guidance and assistance in individual cases. The absence and capability caseload increased to 359 this year compared with 296 last year council-wide due to the impact of the pandemic. Occupational Health referrals also increased from 472 to 589 this year. Absence rates for Business Operations & Partnerships Department averaged 7.91 days, up on last year's 3.5 days, but below our target of 8.9 days per FTE.

- LG pay award and back pay processed (Feb 22), teacher pay award was implemented with staged approach between May and June.

- There are concerns over increased level of absence cases and Occupational Health referrals with a focus on development of Health & Wellbeing strategy and financial assistance.

- Employee benefits schemes generated loan savings for employees (average £1,187) and National Insurance savings as a result of car salary finance for departments (~£17K in total) and 1272 employees have signed up to the online benefits portal.

- Supported 'The Way We Work' people workstream, with training being delivered to upskill managers in new ways of working; partnered with Women's Aid and HSCP to pilot Equally Safe training; supported Employability team with youth and long term unemployment and supported the Pregnancy Loss pledge

- Participated in a Scottish Government-led equalities group to share best practice across large public sector employers.

- Ongoing Trade Union engagement throughout past 12 months has included weekly meetings. Potential strike action in November 2021 was averted at the last minute; processes were reviewed in case of future industrial action with a current ballot due to conclude 26 July 2022.

- Significant organisational change activity supported across the Council for budget savings and structure reviews.

- 20% increase in We Are East Ren awards compared to previous year though there was a 24% decrease in the level of Kudos awards.

- 10 mentoring relationships established and 4 funded graduate apprenticeships.

Summary

2021/22 has been a challenging year, with services under pressure to deliver a range of competing demands. The new Council Tax and Benefit system go live was achieved in Dec 2020, on time, in a remote environment, alongside additional Covid challenges. The new Education Benefits module went live in June 2021, delivering Clothing Grants and Free School Meals, and the online Council Tax service was opened to ERC staff/residents in Feb 2022. Backlogs resulting from the new Council Tax and Benefits ICT system, significantly affected performance for 21/22, but have been managed and additional demands related to Covid 19 have been delivered. Teams have delivered substantially higher workload as a result of Covid-19 e.g. hardship and grant payments, Scottish Welfare Fund and Self-Isolation Support Grants and at times this has had impacts on morale and wellbeing. Performance outturns have improved in 2022/23.

Customer

- Backlogs experienced due to new Council Tax & Benefits system, cleared by December 2021. Complaint volumes during 2021 were higher than usual, exacerbated by challenges with busy phone lines. This was addressed using agency & contract staff, overtime and data tracking. Processing time for Housing Benefit: Change of Circumstances 27.2 days vs 4.5 days last year; New Claims 48.9 days vs 36.5 days last year. Processing times for Council Tax Reduction Change of Circumstances 34.7days vs 7.3 days and New Claims 88.2 days vs 41.2 days last year. There have been substantial improvements in performance to date in 22/23.

- Improved automation from new Revenues & Benefits system driving increased awards of Discretionary Housing Payments & real time updates of customer accounts

- Demand for Scottish Welfare Fund and Self Isolation Support Grants (SISGs) continued to increase in 2021/22, resulting in resources being pulled from other areas (such as Benefits and MART) to provide timely customer service to meet statutory deadlines. (SWF crisis grant applications 1015 vs 807 last year; SWF community care grants 709 vs 625 last year; Discretionary Housing Payments 994 vs 604 last year;

- Service design and user engagement techniques via Teams continued with residents on the Citizen Access customer portal, which is accessed through mygov.scot. Soft launch in February 2022 to ERC staff/residents. Full launch of Council Tax online in May 2022

- Education Benefits module of new Council Tax and Benefit system went live in June 2021 with 2,100 clothing grants paid to customers and 1,700 Free School Meals processed. Scottish Government's changes to bring in Universal Free School Meals led to additional work on Free School Meals process during Summer 2021. 1,700 family bridging payments made throughout 2021/22 and over 5,000 low income pandemic payments made during October 2021

- Backlog on taxi license processing due to sickness absence during January-April 22. Processes reviewed and improved, agency staff recruited and backlogs cleared

Efficiency

- Embedding of the new Council Tax and Benefit system has been a priority. Efficiency benefits for staff include automation to/from DWP systems, Direct Debit updates, new property additions and Housing Benefit overpayment recovery

- Council Tax collections have improved on prior year level at 96.76% (96.42% in 2020/21), recovery processes mostly resumed and £1m additional cash delivered (total £54.8m)

- Accounts Payable end to end processing times improved, with 86.6% of invoices paid within 30 days. Accuracy improved to 0.1% error rate (from 0.21% in prior year), compares with external best practice 0.3%, while delivering 40% additional workload. Methodology of PI requires review for comparability. Review of Accounts Receivable processes and tasks continue, but slower progress as additional COVID deliverables for Accounts Payable taking priority

- Benefits performance indicators impacted by resolution of backlog due to implementation of new system, COVID tasks & increased workloads

People

- During the year there has been sustained pressure and workload in Revenues and AP. HR supported us to improve wellbeing & resilience of staff

Communications

Summary

There has been a focus on supporting all the Covid messaging and communications via all channels. The team continue to promote the changes to online services and have led a reduction in print materials to deliver efficiencies.

Customer

- Communications support continued for Covid safety messaging and promotion of testing and vaccination programmes.

- Supported Garden Waste permit renewals with number of permits sold on track to surpass last year's total. Significant decline in negative customer reaction.

- Following extensive promotion on social media, this round of the interactive Beat the Street game had the highest engagement of any game currently running across Scotland. A total of 6,874 players took part, covering 7,483 miles across Barrhead, Newton Mearns, Neilston and Uplawmoor.

- Preparation and support for budget process.

Efficiency

- 96% of media enquiries responded to within deadline, supporting the protection of the Council's reputation.

- Social media engagement continues to grow with the number of residents following our two main channels (Facebook, Twitter) up 20%. Our newly-launched Instagram account has doubled its followers – opening up our communication to a wider, younger audience.

- There has been a 24% reduction in recharge costs to departments from the print room comparing this year to 2019/20.

- Streamlined the design and production of subject option booklets across the 7 high schools.

Democratic Services

Summary

Successful preparation and delivery of the Council elections including planning for different levels of Covid impact. Preparation for establishment of new administration and Elected Member training.

Customer

- Preparation for local Council elections.

- Establishment of Crookfur Community Council.

- Communications and Democratic services created and promoted a virtual Holocaust event with Renfrewshire via online channels and support for in person Remembrance service at Cowan Park.

- Hybrid meeting equipment installed in Chamber and first successful Council meeting delivered – need to review resource implications for team.

People

- Preparation of induction materials for new Elected Members

Frontline Services, Community Partnerships & Strategy Development

We deliver a range of frontline services including Customer First, Money Advice & Rights, Community Safety and Community Learning & Development. We also have responsibility for leading the Council's approach to Best Value, Community Planning and community empowerment and we co-ordinate our approach to equalities. Throughout the pandemic we have led the local partnership Humanitarian response including shielding, isolation support and attempts to mitigate hardship.

Summary

The Customer First team successfully transitioned to a new Customer Experience IT platform and are now making improvements to online services and simplifying processes for customers. Overall key measures are on track with the exception of call answering times which have been impacted due to more complex calls, reduction in resource and staff absence including Covid impacts.

Customer/Efficiency

- Customer Services worked in partnership with customer-facing colleagues across the Council to successfully migrate from our legacy Customer IT systems (Lagan and Merritec) to our new customer platform, Goss.

- This transition included the improvement of all existing online forms and the development and introduction of new online services, including high volume services for civic amenity bookings and garden waste permits. This has contributed to an increase in contact made online which is 34% compared with 10% last year (as a comparison 7% of contact is face to face; 43% via phone; 16% via email (incl. Live chat & social media).

- Preparations were made for a successful 'soft launch' of My East Ren customer portal in May with 374 customers signed up during this initial phase and over 6000 customers now signed up.

- Complex system integration work was completed which will allow customers to access various services through a single, secure sign-on. As part of our digital transformation programme more and more services will become available online.

- Remote death registrations will continue nationally until at least Sept 2022. Remote birth registrations are also being considered nationally. There has been positive feedback from customers about these online services but they do create more workload for internal teams. There were 3215 registration transactions in 21/22 vs 3101 last year.

- Redesign of Money Advice & Rights Team (MART) completed to focus on improved customer contact and create process efficiencies to meet future demands. MART dealt with 3604 enquiries in 21/22, with 3420 new cases opened, a 90% success rate for income maximisation interventions and 85% on appeal cases, with total client financial gains of £5,600,000 in the year.

People

- Staff absence has impacted Customer First teams throughout year and resulted in longer wait times for customers - there was an average phone queuing time of 6 minutes.

Community Safety

Summary

The Community Safety service has now returned to near normal working practices after prolonged Covid restrictions. There have been challenges of recruitment and retention which have put pressure on the Analogue to Digital Telecare project, which is critical to ongoing service life and limb provision for the ~3K users, however this is now getting back on track. The long-term secondment of 2 Community Wardens to deliver the highly regarded Covid Isolation Support service has now come to an end.

Strategic Outcomes - Outcome 4

- During 2021/22 Wardens responded to a total of 3,172 calls for service (1,179 in 20/21 due to pandemic). There were 450 noise complaints (307 last year) with 192 of these classified as anti-social behaviour (121 last year). 20 of these calls (10.4%) were from customers who had previously reported issues with their neighbours (22 / 7% last year).

- Community Wardens have now returned to near normal working practices and are able to go into households when required.

Customer

- The number of Telecare clients has consistently approximated 3000; the total number of calls handled 21/22 was 242,485 (284,375 in 20/21).

- There were 181 calls (63 in 20/21) passed to Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) from a total of 766 fire/smoke alarm activations (526 last year); therefore staff helped avoid false alarm call outs on 76% of these types of call (88% last year), resulting in cost avoidance to SFRS of around £102,000 (£80,600 last year).

- The Analogue to Digital Telecare (A2D) programme has continued to progress despite repeated challenges with staff retention and recruitment. The new platform was made available to staff in March for testing and training.

Efficiency

- Planning and consultation commenced on the modernisation of security at the Thornliebank Depot to enhance security provision at a reduced staffing cost (22/23 budget saving).

People

- The Control Room saw issues with staff recruitment and absence which meant that the team were extremely busy with cover, alongside collaboration on the A2D Telecare project.

Communities

Summary

The pandemic negatively impacted community activity and presented service delivery challenges in 2021/22. Key community groups played a vital, on-the-ground, role the pandemic response - however many community groups could not operate or meet in person over this period. Indoor gatherings were restricted and numbers in indoor spaces were limited. This, combined with staffing challenges, delayed participatory budgeting events and ambitions. There was substantial work to manage the successful Isolation Support service and co-ordinate the various COVID Humanitarian funding streams. A significant piece of research to help understand the impact of the pandemic on local people was undertaken and is being used to help shape our recovery response and future strategies. The Community Learning and Development (CLD) service developed new ways to engage with local people and young people in particular through street work and outdoor activities. The CLD service worked closely with Community Planning partners to target resources and prioritise work with those most need of support.

Outcome 4 – Safe, Supportive Communities

- Moved from indoor programmes to outdoor "detached" street work across four areas in evenings and at weekends. While under COVID restrictions the CLD team had 3,437 street work contacts with young people. Weekend street work resulted in:
  - Young people in Clarkston and Barrhead areas engaging in work around drugs & alcohol harm reduction; anti-social behaviour, crime & safety - behaviour & consequences; sexual health & age of consent; challenging the negative image of young people, lack of facilities/opportunities at weekends.
  - The establishment of a Sunday afternoon "drop in" in the Museum in Barrhead.
  - A skate-park project with 50 young people using funding from Police Scotland & Cashback for Communities.
  - Targeted Anti-Social Behaviour work with 47 S3 and S4 pupils from Mearns Castle, Williamwood and Woodfarm High Schools, focusing on harm reduction, drugs and alcohol, vaping, the consequences of anti-social behaviour and the law.
- The CLD team supported 'Youth Voice' to deliver the first ERC Youth Participatory Budgeting event. 14 groups from across ERC were successful in securing a share of £5000 to fund their own projects/activities.
- The Team worked with the community-led Linking Communities group to prepare for restrictions lifting and resuming PB activity in 2022/23
- Progressing the Council's equalities plan and duties. Engaging with local groups and providing support to LBGT+ young people who were struggling/isolated.
- Increased availability of free period products to all residents by providing in more venues; populating the new 'PickUpMyPeriod' app with East Renfrewshire data
- Delivering the Connection Scotland programme and supported the Digital Network. Since April 2021, we have issued around 40 Chromebooks and Mi-Fi devices to unemployed young people and adults, low-income households, and those at risk of social isolation and loneliness (including older people, people with a disability and single parents).

Customer

- Continued to lead on co-ordinating the COVID Humanitarian work stream:
  - Funding/co-ordination of posts/activities across ERC, including managing Isolation Support.
  - Successfully commissioned and delivered the Humanitarian Research used to help shape post-pandemic strategic planning.

People

- Developed and launched a new training course to support the new Equality Fairness and Rights Impact Assessment process

COVID 19 – Humanitarian Support

Isolation Support

- Isolation Support was formed in September 2020, following the end of the 'shielding' period.
- A broad range of Business Operations and Partnerships Department services have worked collaboratively and flexibly over the last 2 years to operate Isolation Support, Self-Isolation Support Grants (SISGs) and hardship payments.
- Two Community Wardens were seconded from Community Safety to lead the Isolation Support team, supported by the Community Learning and Development Manager, MART and a broad range of sessional staff from the Council and ERCLT.
- Daily call lists were sent to the Council from Public Health Scotland. Our data team used Robot Process Automation RPA (data integration tools) to bring the data in and organise it for the call handlers, allowing them to capture call outcomes/referrals. There were some significant peaks in demand, particularly linked to spikes in case rates. Staff worked weekends and holidays to support people, even doing calls on Christmas Day.
- The Isolation Support service closed formally at the end of July 2022, although applications for Self-Isolation Support Grants still continue through the Scottish Welfare Fund team.
- Over its run, the Isolation Support service dealt with c.11k outgoing calls to people that either had COVID or had been a close contact. Over 150 emergency food parcels were delivered by Community Wardens to the most vulnerable. The team also dealt with 2,774 SISGs in that period, with 2110 successful claims, amounting to over £1M of support to local residents.

Hardship Payments

- There has been good collaborative working between our department (incl. Accounts Payable, Strategic Insight & Communities) and Education Department to make hardship bridging payments during each holiday period to families receiving Free School Meals (FSM). There are also FSM payments to cover cost of meals during school holidays.
- In addition, we've co-ordinated various COVID Humanitarian funding streams which have seen us able to top-up the hardship payments; provide payments to those only on Clothing Grants and provide support to a range of local services, initiatives and groups to support COVID response and recovery.
- Low Income Pandemic Payments were also paid in October 2021, working with the Revenues Service, to support residents in receipt of Council Tax Reduction (CTR)
- In line with national guidance, Cost of Living Awards were also administered in March 2022 for residents in Council Tax Band A-D and those in Bands E-H in receipt of Council Tax Reduction.
- In addition, we have supported colleagues in Environment to make a range of Business Grant payments throughout the last 2 years.

Digital Transformation

The department leads the Council's Digital Transformation Strategy, focusing on:

- Customer Experience – providing a consistent, efficient customer experience, designed with the user at the heart.
- Business Systems & Processes - efficient and effective business systems and processes enabled by digital technology and optimised across the Council.
- Workforce Productivity - increasing the productivity and effectiveness of our workforce, enabled by Office 365 capabilities and better use of data.

We are also responsible for leading and delivering a range of digital transformation projects within our own department.

Summary

There has been good progress in launching our new Digital Transformation programmes in 2021/22. Governance is now in place to oversee the 3 key priority areas and the structure and roles and responsibilities to deliver the programme have been reviewed, with key posts filled. There are ambitious projects underway, and whilst progress has been made, there is a need for further work on project prioritisation and benefits management so we can target resources most effectively.

Updates below focus on our department's responsibilities for Programme Management and projects where we have been the lead department in 2021/22. Broader updates can be found in the Cabinet update from 16 June 2022 here.

Customer

- Developed and tested our new customer portal, My East Ren, which launched successfully alongside our new online Council Tax service in May 2022. Already there have been over 5,500 sign-ups and over 2K requests for paperless billing for Council Tax.
- Introduced new online processes for the various high-volume Environment processes like bulky uplifts; replacement bins and the new charging scheme for brown bins.
- Upgraded our Civica Chip and Pin and payments platforms to make it easier for customers to pay by cashless methods and now also by Google and Apple Pay.
- Progressed the Analogue to Digital Telecare project, which is critical to ongoing life and limb service delivery to over 3K local residents.

Efficiency

- Digital Transformation portfolio in place, with 3 programmes: Customer Experience, Workforce Productivity and Business Systems & Processes.
- Focusing on project prioritisation and developing resource management capacity plans.
- Driving the use of Microsoft 365 across the Council, building on the greater use of Teams during the pandemic, and successfully migrating our email estate onto M365 in January/February 2022 for greater stability and new functionality, including online room bookings for meetings.
- Decommissioned our Customer Record Management System, Lagan, and moved all customer forms and processes to GOSS which has contributed to an increase in online customer transactions up from 10% to 34%.
- We have made significant progress towards replacing Pentana, our performance management system, by developing a more dynamic suite of data dashboards.

People

- Experiencing challenges within the recruitment market for digital and project roles, which can mean vacancies can be hard to fill.
- Restructures of programme and team roles ongoing.
- Embedding new roles of Product Owners for key systems/groups of systems, in line with national Digital, Data & Technology skills framework.
- Leadership session held for senior officers on agile project methodology.
- Trained managers to ensure greater use of self-service functions in Finance/Procurement system.
- Underpinning our Digital Transformation Programme is a council-wide approach to data and information governance and that is a key part of our projects. The Council's Data Protection Officer delivered training to hundreds of staff and provided advice and support across a range of data protection incidents.

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