

**Aberdeenshire**  
COUNCIL



**BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY, 11 JANUARY 2024 at 10.15 am**

Your attendance is requested at a meeting of the **BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE** to be held in **COUNCIL CHAMBER - WOODHILL HOUSE, WESTBURN ROAD, ABERDEEN, AB16 5GB**, on **THURSDAY, 11 JANUARY 2024**, at **10.15 am**

This meeting will be recorded and a recording of the public part of the meeting will be made publicly available at a later date.

Wednesday, 3 January 2024

Director of Business Services

To: Councillors G Owen (Chair), J Cox (Vice-Chair), D Black, S Burnett, Y Chou Turvey, G Crowson, S Dickinson, M Findlater, J Goodhall, D Mair, R McKail, C Miller, G Petrie and C Victor

Substitute Members: Councillors J Adams, S Adams, W Agnew, D Aitchison, G Blackett, J Crawley, I Davidson, A Forsyth, D Keating, T Mason, L McAllister, H Smith, S Smith and K Stelfox

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## B U S I N E S S

1	Sederunt and Declaration of Members' Interests	
2(A)	Public Sector Equality Duty Consider, and if so desired, adopt the following resolution:-	4
	(1) to have due regard to the need to:-	
	(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;	
	(b) advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and	
	(c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.	
	(2) where an Integrated Impact Assessment is provided, to consider its contents and take those into account when reaching a decision.	
2(B)	Exempt Information Consider, and if so decided, adopt the following resolution:- "That under Section 50A (4) and (5) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended, the public and media representatives be excluded from the meeting for Items 11, 12 and 13 of business below, on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information of the class described in the relevant paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act."	
3	Minute of the Meeting of 16 November 2023	5 - 17
4	Statement of Outstanding Business	18 - 19
5	Business Services Financial Performance as at 30 November 2023	20 - 37
6	Request to Write Off Unrecoverable Debts Arising from Salary Overpayments	38 - 41
7	Customer Service Strategy	42 - 105
8	Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy Implementation Update	106 - 135
9	Committee Review Process Stage 3: Investigation - Procurement Compliance	136 - 153
10	Annual Report of Activity under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 Policy	154 - 174

**ITEMS WHICH THE COMMITTEE MAY WISH TO CONSIDER WITH  
THE PRESS AND PUBLIC EXCLUDED**

- |    |  |           |
|----|--|-----------|
| 11 | Estates Development and Investment Strategy<br><i>[Exempt under paragraph 9]</i>   | 175 - 213 |
|    | Terms for a contract for acquisition or disposal of property or supply of goods or services.   |           |
| 12 | Office Space Strategy<br><i>[Exempt under paragraph 8 &amp; 9]</i>   | 214 - 242 |
|    | Expenditure to be incurred by the Council under a contract for acquisition of property or supply of goods or services.<br>Terms for a contract for acquisition or disposal of property or supply of goods or services. |           |
| 13 | Business Services' Directorate Supplementary Procurement Plan 2023/24 - Procurement Approval<br><i>[Exempt under paragraph 8]</i>  | 243 - 248 |
|    | Expenditure to be incurred by the Council under a contract for acquisition of property or supply of goods or services.   |           |

**ITEM FOR NOTING**

- |    |   |           |
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| 14 | Minute of Meeting of Licensing-Sub-Committee on 13 October 2023 | 249 - 252 |
|----|---|-----------|

## **PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY – GUIDANCE FOR MEMBERS**

### **What is the duty?**

In making decisions on the attached reports, Members are reminded of their legal duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 to have due regard to the need to:-

- (i) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
- (ii) advance equality of opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
- (iii) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The “protected characteristics” under the legislation are: age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation; and (in relation to point (i) above only) marriage and civil partnership.

### **How can Members discharge the duty?**

To ‘have due regard’ means that in making decisions, Members must consciously consider the need to do the three things set out above. This requires a conscious approach and state of mind. The duty must influence the final decision.

However, it is not a duty to achieve a particular result (e.g. to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination or to promote good relations between persons of different racial groups). It is a duty to have due regard to the need to achieve these goals.

How much regard is ‘due’ will depend upon the circumstances and in particular on the relevance of the needs to the decision in question. The greater the relevance and potential impact that a decision may have on people with protected characteristics, the higher the regard required by the duty.

### **What does this mean for Committee/Full Council decisions?**

Members are directed to the section in reports headed ‘Council Priorities, Implications and Risk’. This will indicate whether or not an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) has been carried out as part of the development of the proposals and, if so, what the outcome of that assessment is.

An IIA will be appended to a report where it is likely, amongst other things, that the action recommended in the report could have a differential impact (either positive or negative) upon people from different protected groups. The report author will have assessed whether or not an IIA is required. If one is not required, the report author will explain why that is.

Where an IIA is provided, Members should consider its contents and take those into account when reaching their decision. Members should also be satisfied that the assessment is sufficiently robust and that they have enough of an understanding of the issues to be able to discharge their legal duty satisfactorily.

For more detailed guidance please refer to the following link:-

[https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.equalityhumanrights.com%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Ftechnical\\_guidance\\_psed\\_scotland.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK](https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.equalityhumanrights.com%2Fsites%2Fdefault%2Ffiles%2Ftechnical_guidance_psed_scotland.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK)

## **BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY, 16 NOVEMBER, 2023**

**Present:** Councillors G Owen (Chair), J Cox (Vice-Chair), S Adams (as substitute for Councillor Burnett), D Black, G Crowson, S Dickinson, M Findlater, A Forsyth (as substitute for Councillor Petrie), J Goodhall, D Mair, T Mason (as substitute for Councillor Chou Turvey), R McKail, C Miller and C Victor.

**Apologies:** Councillors Burnett, Chou Turvey and Petrie.

**Officers:** Director of Business Services, Head of Service (Customer & Digital Services), Head of Service (Property & Facilities), Head of Service (Legal & People), Legal Services Manager (L Cowie), Business Partner, Finance (S Gordon) and Committee Officer (A McLeod).

### **1 SEDERUNT AND DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

The Chair asked Members if they had any interests to declare in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. No declarations of interests were declared.

### **2(A) PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY**

In taking decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010:-

- (1) To have due regard to the need to:-
  - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
  - (b) advance equality and opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
  - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
- (2) to consider, where an Integrated Impact Assessment has been provided, its contents and to take those into consideration when reaching a decision.

### **2(B) EXEMPT INFORMATION**

The Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 50A (4) and (5) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, to exclude the public from the meeting during consideration of the items specified below so as to avoid disclosure of exempt information of the classes described in the undernoted paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 7A of the Act.

**Item No**

**Paragraph No of Schedule 7A**

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### 3 MINUTE OF THE MEETING OF 14 SEPTEMBER, 2023.

There had been circulated and was **approved** as a correct record the Minute of the Meeting of Business Services Committee of 14 September 2023.

### 4 STATEMENT OF OUTSTANDING BUSINESS

A report by the Director of Business Services was circulated detailing the items of outstanding business as at 16 November 2023.

The Director of Business Services introduced the report and provided a verbal update on each item:

Item 1 – the Director confirmed that the Council had now achieved Real Living Wage accreditation, and this item was proposed to be removed.

Item 2 – an evidence gathering session was scheduled for 16 November 2023 and a report would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee. Item to remain on the list.

Item 3 – workshop session on risk management had been held and presentation made available to Members. This item to be removed.

Item 4 – presentation on staff health and wellbeing plan on agenda, and item could be removed.

Item 5 – date being sought for meeting of Office Space Strategy Working Group during December. Item to remain on list.

Item 6 – reporting abandoned vehicles being added to MyAberdeenshire App and further update to be provided once this has been implemented. Item proposed to be removed.

Item 7 – budget workshop scheduled for 16 November 2023. Item proposed to be removed.

Item 8 – report scheduled for early 2024 on Common Good Policy consultation. Item to remain on list.

Item 9 – report awaited on participation request process. Item to remain on list.

After consideration, the Committee **agreed** to:

- (1) note the current position of actions arising from previous meetings; and
- (2) remove the completed actions (Items 1, 3, 4, 6 and 7) from the outstanding actions list.

### 5 FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2023.

There was circulated a report dated 12 October, 2023 by the Director of Business Services, which provided an update on the forecasted financial performance pertaining to the services which were under the remit of Business Services Committee for the financial year 2023/24, as at 30 September 2023.

The report highlighted that the forecast revenue financial position as at 30 September, 2023 was £0.345 million less than budget and whilst the Service was currently projecting an underspend position at the end of the financial year, careful consideration was being applied to vacancy management and discretionary spend to help alleviate pressures on the Council as a whole.

During discussion, Members commented on a number of overspent budget lines, which had resulted in budget virements as detailed in Appendix B; the use of earmarked reserves; asked for more information around the voluntary severance costs and number of posts affected within the Service. With regard to Public Conveniences it was noted that there was an underspend of £40,000 and this was due to efficiencies in the use of cleaning resource, and included an element for demolition, which had been put on hold due to an ongoing review of public buildings. Some Members considered that any funds available to ensure that public conveniences were kept in operation was important, including the possibility of community involvement or partnerships.

There was also discussion of investment in productivity increasing systems to create operational efficiencies and changes to service delivery.

Having considered the report, the Committee **agreed** to:

- (1) approve the Revenue and Capital forecast position pertaining to this Committee for 2023/24 as set out in Appendix A;
- (2) approve the progress of Budget Savings associated with these budgets;
- (3) approve the Earmarked Reserves associated with this Committee and their use;
- (4) note the approved revenue budget virements as detailed in Appendix B; and
- (5) request that officers provide further information on the numbers of posts to date that had been subject to the voluntary severance scheme.

## **6 STAFF HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN. (ORAL REPORT)**

The Head of Legal and People provided an update on the Staff Health and Wellbeing Plan in respect of Business Services. She provided absence data for the last five years, which showed the top 10 reasons for absence over the period. She advised that since a peak in October 2021, the overall levels of absence had been on a downward trend throughout 2022 and had plateaued at a lower level in 2023, with the current high for Business Services sickness absence in 2023 being 2.7% in June. Absence patterns overall were now consistent with pre-pandemic levels. Information was also provided showing the trend of absence data for all council Directorates over the last five years. Details of a Wellbeing Survey were outlined which had been carried out in September 2022, with a response rate of 22% overall within Business Services. A further wellbeing assessment undertaken in early 2023 saw greater levels of engagement with a response rate of 33%, which showed an improvement of the overall level of wellbeing within the Service, and coinciding with a reduction and steadying of sickness absence rates over that period.

Wellbeing actions had been identified for each service and documented within Business Plans and each area of Business Services would be supported by Legal and People teams to achieve their actions. The overall wellbeing of the workforce would be measured annually via the 87% Wellbeing Assessment against the baseline measurement taken in 2023. She concluded by reminding Members that a suite of

wellbeing resources were available to all employees and Elected Members to support them to look after their wellbeing.

During discussion, the need to understand the wider impacts on staff of face to face interactions and the impacts of social media on staff wellbeing were highlighted. After discussion, the Chair, on behalf of the Committee thanked the Head of Legal and People for an interesting presentation.

## **7 CORPORATE CHARGING POLICY UPDATE REPORT.**

With reference to the minute of meeting of the Committee of 8 June 2023 (Item 6) there was circulated a report by the Director of Business Services providing an update on the Council's Corporate Charging Policy.

The Business Partner, Finance introduced the report and advised that a review had been undertaken of the Corporate Charging Policy to ensure its effectiveness since being updated in September 2021. She advised that feedback from Services had indicated that the policy was clear to follow and laid out exactly what was required in terms of charging. She advised that the Services had undertaken full reviews of their fees and charges and these were implemented in the current financial year. The exception to this was in Communities and Education and Children's Services, which were delayed to allow longer to streamline the two sets of letting charges. These reviews were now well underway and expected to be implemented from 1 April 2024. No adverse impacts had been identified on income receivables or uptake of services through the reviews of fees and charges and this would suggest that the policy was working well and as intended.

During discussion, Members welcomed the report and some concerns were expressed around the fees for hire of halls which were providing funding challenges for some clubs and organisations. It was noted that the report before the Committee was based around the policy framework and acknowledged that some further detail in respect of the qualitative data would sit within the remits of the various policy committees.

After consideration, the Committee **agreed** to note the update on the Corporate Charging Policy.

## **8 BUSINESS SERVICES' MID-YEAR PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT - APRIL 2023 TO SEPTEMBER 2023 (COUNCIL PRIORITIES).**

The Committee had before them a report dated 31 October, 2023 by the Director of Business Services which provided a mid-year update on progress made in relation to performance indicators contained within the Business Services' Head of Service Business Plans 2023-24. The report explained that following the approval of the new Council Plan 2022-27, and to support the delivery of the Plan, Business Plans had been developed by Heads of Service in each Directorate, and these plans incorporated performance measures to illustrate how each Directorate was contributing to the Council's overarching priorities. The report also advised that Corporate Performance would continue to provide an annual performance update on the key strategic measures contained within the 2022-27 Council Plan through the Annual Performance report. The report provided a high-level summary overview of progress made during April to September 2023 in relation to a set of 25 performance



measures, as presented in Appendix 1 to the report. The overview provided details of key successes, areas for improvement as well as a summary of progress made towards each of the Strategic Priorities.

During discussion some Members commented on the need for a fuller overview of both areas of success and areas for improvement, in terms of the scrutiny role of the Committee; commented on the presentation aspects of the report and whether it was possible to merge the finance and the performance reviews in order to give a more full picture; there were concerns expressed about the increase in complaints in relation to the rollout of the new 3 weekly bin cycle, particularly in relation to the changes in routes resulting in missed bins and the need for clearer communications to resolve the issues.

After consideration, the Committee **agreed** to:

- (1) note the progress made in relation to performance indicators contained within the Business Services' Head of Service Business Plans which support the Council Plan 2022-27 attached as Appendix 1;
- (2) to instruct the Director of Business Services to continue to present performance reports to the Committee on a six-monthly basis, in line with the Performance Management Framework, evidencing progress and performance with delivery of the Council Plan; and
- (3) to instruct the Director of Business Services to feed back to officers in Environment and Sustainability Members comments around missed bin collections due to changes in routes, and the need for more clarity to communicate how missed bin collections would be resolved.

## **9 CORPORATE IMPROVEMENT PLAN.**

With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 8 June 2023 (Item 9), the Committee had before them a report dated 9 October, 2023 by the Director of Business Services, providing a 6 monthly progress update on the Corporate Improvement Plan, as at 20 September, 2023. The report advised that progress continued to be made across all Plans, with completed actions having been implemented and embedded across the organisation.

The Director of Business Services introduced the report and advised that the Plan showed good progress and there was one overdue action which related to a data hub which had been due to capacity challenges, but was now progressing; that the self evaluation plans for 2022-23 were complete and had been removed; the evaluation plans for 2023-24 were in progress; and the Best Value report would be reported to Full Council on 23 November 2023 and would then be added into this report, providing additional data and assurance of progression of agreed actions.

During discussion, the Committee requested that future reports should have less use of acronyms and the final row of the table on page 71 relating to benchmarking be given some further detail in future reports.

After consideration, the Committee **agreed** to:

- (1) acknowledge the Corporate Improvement Plan (“the Plan”), attached as Appendix 1 to the report;
- (2) note that the Plan was approved by Audit Committee on 9 November 2023; and
- (3) receive six monthly updates.

## 10 **CONSULTATION RESPONSE: DRAFT GUIDANCE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF GAELIC LANGUAGE PLANS.**

The Committee had before them a report dated 9 October 2023 by the Director of Business Services seeking feedback on new draft guidance for the preparation of Gaelic Language Plans by Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which would be submitted to Scottish Ministers for approval.

The Head of Customer and Digital Services provided some background to the report, and confirmed that a corporate response had been developed and submitted under delegation and in consultation with the Chair, Vice-Chair and Opposition Spokesperson, to meet the deadline of 10 November 2023. The view was that there was little difference in the new draft guidance from the current guidance published in 2007, with the main difference being the reference to technological advances since the first set of guidance.

During discussion, Members commented on the need to ensure that the Gaelic language and appropriate resources were made accessible and signposted through the Council website, to ensure the promotion of the Gaelic language as well as Scots and Doric within Aberdeenshire.

After consideration, the Committee **agreed** to:

- (1) note the consultation response in Appendix 1; and
- (2) note that the closing date to submit responses was 10 November 2023 and that the response has been submitted by the Head of Customer and Digital Services under delegation and following consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair and Opposition Spokesperson.

## 11 **CARBON BUDGET UPDATE 2023-2024.**

The Committee had before them a report dated 10 October 2023 by the Director of Business Services presenting an update on progress towards the actions listed in the Carbon Budget 2023-24 which were approved by Aberdeenshire Council on 9 March 2023 for the Business Services Directorate. The report advised that the Council had set a total Carbon Budget for 2023-24 as 44,152 tonnes Carbon Dioxide Equivalent (tCO<sub>2</sub>e) in line with linear progression towards a 75% reduction in Council owned emissions by 2030. It was also agreed that all Directors should submit six monthly updates on in-year progress in relation to these reduction measures to the relevant policy Committees and to the Sustainability Committee.

The Head of Property and Facilities introduced the report and advised the Committee that the 2022/23 emissions for the Business Services Directorate had come in below target, with an output of 46,000 tonnes against a target of 47,000 tonnes. He referred to the significant challenges ahead to ensure a continuation towards the 75%

reduction in emissions to 2030, noting that operational buildings account for 67% of the total emissions. A number of carbon reduction feasibility studies were underway to inform the strategy and the types of activity to be taken forward, with the emphasis to decarbonise buildings as well as improving energy efficiency.

During discussion, Members welcomed the progress to date and commented on the significant amount of work ahead, and the need to identify significant funding streams to enable the Council to reach its 75% reduction in emissions targets from its built assets by 2030.

After consideration, the Committee **agreed** to:

- (1) note the Carbon Budget six-monthly update for Business Services as detailed in Table 3; and
- (2) note the ongoing responsibility of the Director to secure reduction targets as set out in the Carbon Budget, and to report progress at six-monthly intervals to the relevant Policy Committees and to the Sustainability Committee.

## 12 UTILITIES CONTRACTS

The Committee had before them a report dated 5 October 2023 by the Director of Business Services providing an update on energy and water contracts. The report informed the Committee of the current contracts in place, how the expected expenditure would be shared, and requested approval to continue the work on a Spend Analysis and Recovery contract.

After consideration, the Committee **agreed** to:

- (1) note the current Utilities Contracts providers and expenditure for 2022/2023;
- (2) note the success to date with the Spends Analysis and Recovery contract in respect to Water and Waste Water charges, as detailed in the report; and
- (3) the proposed increase in spend on the Spend Analysis and Recovery contract, as detailed within the report.

## 13 MINUTE OF THE MEETING OF THE LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE OF 1 SEPTEMBER, 2023.

The Committee **noted** the Minute of the following meeting, a copy of which forms Appendix A to this minute:

- A. Minute of Meeting of the Licensing Sub Committee of 1 September 2023.

## LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 1 SEPTEMBER, 2023

Present: Councillors A Stirling (Chair), M Ewenson (Vice-Chair), G Crowson, T Mason, R Menard, J Nicol, S Dickinson (Substitute) (In place of J Gifford) and M Grant (Substitute) (In place of L McWhinnie).

Apologies: Councillors J Gifford and L McWhinnie.

Officers: Nicole Chidester (Committee Officer), Shirley Duthie (Senior Authorised Officer), Lynsey Kimmitt (Solicitor), and Fiona Stewart (Senior Solicitor).

Also in attendance: Police Constable Ian Duthie (Police Scotland).

### **1 SEDERUNT AND DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

The Chair asked Members if they had any interests to declare, in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. There were no interests declared.

#### **2A PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY**

In taking decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010:-

- (1) To have due regard to the need to:-
  - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
  - (b) advance equality and opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
  - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and
- (2) to consider, where an Integrated Impact Assessment has been provided, its contents and to take those into consideration when reaching a decision.

#### **2B CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

The Sub-Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 50A (2) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended, to exclude the public and media representatives from the meeting for Items 5 - 10 of the business below on account of the likely disclosure of confidential information in breach of the obligation of confidence.

### **3 MINUTE OF THE MEETING OF 9 JUNE 2023**

There had been circulated and was **approved** as a correct record the Minute of the Meeting of the Licensing Sub-Committee of 9 June 2023.



**6 APPLICATION FOR THE GRANT OF A TAXI DRIVER'S LICENCE (CASE NO. 1080)**

There had been circulated a reported dated 31 July 2023, by the Director of Business Services, which (1) requested that consideration be given to an application for the grant of a taxi driver's licence (identified as Case No. 1080), in respect of which the Chief Constable had made an objection, and (2) detailed information relevant to the application.

It was **noted** that the applicant was not available when dialled into the meeting, but the Sub-Committee **agreed** to proceed in his absence.

Having heard from the Chief Constable's representative, the Sub-Committee unanimously **agreed**:-

- (1) that there was sufficient evidence before them to allow a determination to be made; and
- (2) to REFUSE the application for a taxi driver's licence on the basis that the applicant was not a fit and proper person to hold a licence.

**7 APPLICATION FOR THE GRANT OF A TAXI DRIVER'S LICENCE (CASE NO. 1081)**

There had been circulated a reported dated 2 August 2023, by the Director of Business Services, which (1) requested that consideration be given to an application for the grant of a taxi driver's licence (identified as Case No. 1081), in respect of which the Chief Constable had made a representation, and (2) detailed information relevant to the application.

Having heard from the applicant and the Chief Constable's representative, the Sub-Committee unanimously **agreed**:

- (1) that there was sufficient evidence before them to allow a determination to be made; and
- (2) to GRANT the application for a taxi driver's licence for a period of 3 years on the grounds that the applicant was a fit and proper person to hold a taxi driver's licence based on the submission, evidence, and explanation from the applicant.

**8 APPLICATION FOR THE GRANT OF TAXI DRIVER'S LICENCE (CASE NO. 1082)**

There had been circulated a reported dated 31 July 2023, by the Director of Business Services, which (1) requested that consideration be given to an application for the grant of a taxi driver's licence (identified as Case No. 1082), in respect of which the Chief Constable had made a representation, and (2) detailed information relevant to the application.

Having heard from the Chief Constable's representative, the Sub-Committee unanimously **agreed**:-

- (1) that there was sufficient evidence before them to allow a determination to be made; and
- (2) to REFUSE the application for a taxi driver's licence on the basis that the applicant was not a fit and proper person to hold a licence.

**9 APPLICATION FOR RENEWAL OF TAXI DRIVER'S LICENCE (CASE NO. 1083)**

There had been circulated a reported dated 25 July 2023, by the Director of Business Services, which (1) requested that consideration be given to an application for the renewal of a taxi driver's licence (identified as Case No. 1083), in respect of which the Chief Constable had made a representation, and (2) detailed information relevant to the application.

Having heard from the applicant's legal representative and the Chief Constable's Representative, the Sub-Committee **agreed** that the case should be deferred for one cycle to allow for further information to be supplied by the applicant, particularly around the circumstances of the charge, clarity around the taxi booking process, and if the licensable vehicle had a car radio. The applicant's representative was also reminded that while the case was pending, the licence holder was able to continue to trade.

At this point in the meeting, Members agreed to suspend standing order 2.1.4 to continue beyond 1pm.

**10 APPLICATION FOR GRANT OF PRIVATE HIRE CAR DRIVER'S LICENCE (CASE NO. 1084)**

There had been circulated a reported dated 31 July 2023, by the Director of Business Services, which (1) requested that consideration be given to an application for the grant of a private hire car driver's licence (identified as Case No. 1084), in respect of which the Chief Constable had made a representation, and (2) detailed information relevant to the application.

The Chief Constable's representative clarified that there was a mistake on their representation and that the application was for a grant of private hire care driver's licence.

Having heard from the applicant and the Chief Constable's representative, the Sub-Committee unanimously **agreed**:-

- (1) that there was sufficient evidence before them to allow a determination to be made; and
- (2) to GRANT the application for a Private Hire driver's licence for a period of 3 years on the grounds that the applicant was a fit and proper person to hold a Private Hire driver's licence based on the submission, evidence, and explanation from the applicant.

**11 APPLICATION FOR GRANT OF SHORT-TERM LET LICENCE (CASE NO. 1085)**

There had been circulated a report dated 16 August 2023, by the Director of Business Services, which (1) requested that consideration be given to an application for the

grant of a Short-Term Let Licence for Flat D, Burnside Cottages, Burnside Road, Fettercairn, AB301XY, in respect of which an objection from a Member of the Public had been lodged in response to the display of the site notice and (2) detailed information relevant to the application. There were no adverse observations or objections from the statutory consultees.

Officers clarified that there was a mistake on the report at paragraph 3.1 and that the reference to 'Kirkview' should be ignored. Officers confirmed the application was for Flat D, Burnside Cottages, Burnside Road, Fettercairn, AB301XY.

Having heard from the applicant, the Sub-Committee **agreed** that the objections to the application were partially relevant and they would only consider objections from the objector himself and not from 'other residents' as they were unnamed, not identified by addresses, nor provided written authorisation for the objector to represent their views. The objections would only be considered based on their relation to the grounds of refusal.

The Sub-Committee went on to consider the application.

Having heard from the applicant, and taking the written objection into consideration and on the basis that no grounds for refusal were met, subject to mandatory conditions, the Sub Committee unanimously **agreed:-**

- (1) that there was sufficient evidence before them to allow a determination to be made; and
- (2) to GRANT the application for Short-Term Let Licence for a period of 3 years for Flat D, Burnside Cottages, Burnside Road, Fettercairn, AB301XY.

## 12 APPLICATION FOR GRANT OF SHORT-TERM LET LICENCE (CASE NO. 1087)

There had been circulated a report dated 16 August 2023, by the Director of Business Services, which (1) requested that consideration be given to an application for the grant of a Short-Term Let Licence for Kirkview, Flat B, Church House, Castle Street, Johnshaven, DD10 0ER, in respect of which an objection from a Member of the Public had been lodged in response to the display of the site notice and (2) detailed information relevant to the application.

Having heard from the objector and the applicant, the Sub-Committee unanimously **agreed** that the objections were partially competent and relevant, as advised in section 3.8 of the report, on the basis that they related to the Legal Test.

Members confirmed that had received the additional circulation of submissions and Officers clarified that although conditions could be added to a licence, they could not be enforced and it would not be competent for a Licencing Authority to apply conditions.

Having heard from the objector and applicant, the Sub Committee unanimously **agreed:-**

- (1) that there was sufficient evidence before them to allow a determination to be made;



- (2) to GRANT the application for Short-Term Let Licence for a period of 3 years for Kirkview, Flat B, Church House, Castle Street, Johnshaven, DD10 0ER on the grounds that, with respect to the objection, within the written and verbal statements, the applicant had tried to mitigate those objections by providing information to guests staying in the property; and
- (3) to instruct Officers to provide both the applicant and objector with details about compliance mechanisms, and contact details for Licensing Standards Officers and relevant Services.

Draft

**PROGRESS WITH OUTSTANDING ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS OF THE BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE  
AS AT 11 JANUARY, 2024**

	<b>Item Title</b>	<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>Action Agreed</b>	<b>Responsible Officer</b>	<b>Progress to Date</b>
1.	<b>COMMITTEE REVIEW PROCESS STAGE 2: PROCUREMENT COMPLIANCE</b>	15 09 2022	Agreed that a report would be brought back to the Committee in 6 months with additional information, including an update on the implementation of the Action Plan.	Craig Innes	The investigation report is on the agenda for this meeting.
2.	<b>BUSINESS SERVICES FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AS AT 30 APRIL 2023</b>	08 06 2023	Officers to reconvene the Office Space Strategy Working Group	Rob Simpson	Office Space Strategy MOWG meeting took place on 20 December 2023 and the report will be submitted to the Full Council on 16 January.
3.	<b>Outturn Review of the Performance of the Treasury Management Function for the Period 1 April 2022 to 31 April 2023</b>	14 09 2023	Officers to provide further information on the figures related to the Common Good Fund	Alison Alexander/ Fiona Stewart	The Common Good Policy consultation has now finished and Officers are analysing the responses and will bring a report to the Committee in early 2024.
4.	<b>Participation Request Annual Report 2022/23</b>	14 09 2023	Officers to work with Area Managers to ensure there is feedback process to capture the experience and qualitative insight of the Participation Request process.  Prepare and circulate a briefing note highlighting feedback of the Participation Request process.	Business Services	Briefing issued to Members on 7 December 2023.

5.	<b>Financial Performance as at 30 September 2023</b>	16 11 2023	Officers to provide further information on the numbers of posts to date that had been subject to the voluntary severance scheme.	Aileen Kennedy	Information issued to Members on 8 December 2023.
6.	<b>Staff Health and Wellbeing Plan</b>	16 11 2023	Copy of presentation to be circulated to Committee.	Committee Officer	Circulated to Committee by email on 16 November 2023.
7.	<b>Business Services' Mid-Year Performance Monitoring Report – April 2023 to September 2023 (Council Priorities)</b>	16 11 2023	Officers to feed back to colleagues in Environment and Sustainability Members comments around missed bin collections due to changes in routes, and need for more clarity to communicate how missed bins will be resolved.	Rob Simpson	Email sent to Director of Environment & Infrastructure Services on 16 November 2023.

## REPORT TO BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE – 11 JANUARY 2024

### BUSINESS SERVICES FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE AS AT 30 NOVEMBER 2023

#### 1 Executive Summary/Recommendations

1.1 This report provides an update on the forecast financial performance pertaining to the services which fall under the remit of the Business Services Committee for the financial year 2023/24 as at 30 November 2023.

#### 1.2 The Committee is recommended to:

1.2.1 Consider and comment on the Revenue and Capital forecast position pertaining to this Committee for 2023/24 as set out in Appendix A;

1.2.2 Consider and comment on the progress of Budget Savings associated with these budgets;

1.2.3 Consider and comment on the Earmarked Reserves associated with this Committee and their use; and

1.2.4 Note the approved revenue budget virements as detailed in Appendix B.

#### 2 Decision Making Route

2.1 Business Services Committee has responsibility for monitoring, reviewing and scrutinising of Council's policy and making decisions on matters relating to the functions which fall under the Committee's remit. This report sets out the financial information for these services to enable this process.

#### 3 Discussion

3.1 Council approved the 2023/24 Revenue and Capital budgets on 9 March 2023 as part of agreeing the wider Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The report in **Appendix A** sets out the forecast position in relation to these budgets as at 30 November 2023.

3.2 The forecast revenue financial position as at 30 November 2023 is £0.700m less than budget as shown in paragraph 2.1 of **Appendix A**. Whilst the Service is currently projecting an underspend position at the end of the financial year, careful consideration continues to be applied to vacancy management and discretionary spend to help alleviate pressures on the Council as a whole.

#### 4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 4.1 The work and outcomes delivered through the various services reporting to Business Services Committee helps in the delivery of the following Council priorities:

Pillar	Priority
Our People	Learning for Life Health & Wellbeing
Our Environment	Climate Change Resilient Communities
Our Economy	Economic Growth Infrastructure and public assets

- 4.2 This report helps deliver all six of the Council's Strategic Priorities and the key principle that underpins them of responsible financial planning.

- 4.3 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial	X		
Staffing		X	
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland			X
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing			X
Climate Change and Sustainability			X
Health and Wellbeing			X
Town Centre First			X

- 4.4 The financial implications are inherent in the report. There are no direct staffing implications.

- 4.5 The screening section as part of Stage One of the Integrated Impact Assessment process has not identified the requirement for any further detailed assessments to be undertaken. The report deals with the monitoring of expenditure against budgets which have been approved previously. There will be no differential impact as a result of the report on people with protected characteristics.

- 4.6 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:

- Budget Pressures ([Corporate Risk Register](#)) – the Council's budget will be under increasing pressure due to rising inflation, energy prices and the ongoing pandemic recovery. This risk has been mitigated during the budget setting process by consultation with directorates to identify and incorporate pressures into the proposed budget to ensure services are adequately funded. This will be monitored throughout the year, with regular reporting to policy committees and

Council. This will enable any in year pressure to be identified timeously to ensure action can be taken at an early stage.

4.7 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:

- We live within our means and use public money to maximise outcomes for our communities ([Business Services Directorate Risk Register](#)). This budget sets out the means to which the Council can deliver its services. The deliverability of the budget will be monitored regularly as detailed above.
- Our assets, property and land are managed to the best financial effect, supporting delivery of our priorities and service ambition in the medium to long term ([Business Services Directorate Risk Register](#)). This will be monitored throughout the year, with regular reporting to policy committees and to Council.

## 5 Scheme of Governance

5.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and had no comments to make and are satisfied that the report complies with the [Scheme of Governance](#) and relevant legislation.

5.2 The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of Sections C1.1 and 2 of the [List of Committee Powers in Part 2A](#) of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to the scrutiny of financial performance information in respect of functions that have been delegated to the Committee.

**Rob Simpson**  
**Director of Business Services**

Report prepared by Shirley-Ann Gordon, Finance Business Partner  
Date: 7 December 2023

### List of Appendices:

Appendix A - Financial Performance 2023/24  
Appendix A1 - Budget Risk Register 2023/24  
Appendix A2 - Revenue Budget Savings  
Appendix A3 - Reserves at 30 November 2023  
Appendix A4 - Capital Budget Forecast at 30 November 2023  
Appendix B - Revenue Budget Virements

## Appendix A

### Business Services Financial Performance 2023/24

#### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Council approved the 2023/24 Revenue and Capital budgets on 9 March 2023 as part of agreeing the wider Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The MTFS supports the delivery of the Council Plan and associated priorities by setting out the framework within which resources are available over the medium term and the financial challenges facing the Council, in doing so, it incorporates all revenue and capital funding and use of reserves.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide Business Services Committee with an update of the financial performance for the services for which it has responsibility, to highlight recognised pressures which are impacting on these budgets and provide updates on how the Service is managing pressures overall, including identifying possible use of Reserves.

#### 2. Forecast Revenue Position 2023/24

- 2.1 The revenue budget for Business Services Committee was developed through consultation with services and members to identify the resources required to deliver on the Council's priorities. As set out in **Table 1**, the original total revenue budget for 2023/24 was **£49.429m**, rising to **£50.865m** due to the draw down from reserves and application of budget virements. The Service is projecting to be **£0.700m under budget** at the end of the financial year.

**Table 1: Revenue Position to 30 November 2023**

<b>Budget Page</b>	<b>Original Budget 2023/24 £000</b>	<b>Revised Budget 2023/24 £000</b>	<b>Actual to 30 Nov 2023 £000</b>	<b>Forecast 2023/24 £000</b>	<b>Forecast Under/ (over) Budget £000</b>
74.Chief Executive	321	335	227	335	-
75.Councillors' Remuneration & Expenses	2,268	2,265	1,507	2,265	-
76.Business Services Directorate	1,254	1,240	974	1,340	(100)
77.Finance	14,382	15,041	11,065	14,041	1,000
78.Internal Audit	444	444	446	414	30
79.Customer & Digital	13,316	13,695	10,010	13,445	250
80.Legal & People	7,689	7,745	5,252	7,705	40
81.Miscellaneous Licensing	(64)	(64)	(48)	11	(75)
82.Grampian Valuation Joint Board	2,209	2,209	1,624	2,034	175
83.Printing	715	715	301	600	115
84.Procurement	905	891	409	1,011	(120)
85.Woodhill House	1,752	1,720	1,249	1,700	20
86.Office Accommodation	1,974	1,904	1,356	1,904	-
87.Building Cleaning	-	-	-	-	-
88.Public Conveniences	658	648	362	563	85
89.Operational Buildings	-	-	-	-	-
90.Estates	(2,897)	(2,809)	(2,384)	(2,409)	(400)
91.Property Construction Services	(1,514)	(1,515)	503	(1,215)	(300)
92.Building Repairs & Maintenance Fund	9,385	8,985	4,445	9,005	(20)
93.Area Managers – Buchan & Formartine	848	866	530	866	-
94.Charges to HRA	(3,450)	(3,450)	(2,292)	(3,450)	-
95.Procurement Efficiencies – Business Services Committee	(766)	-	-	-	-
<b>Total Business Services Committee</b>	<b>49,429</b>	<b>50,865</b>	<b>35,536</b>	<b>50,165</b>	<b>700</b>

## 2.2 Business Services Directorate - £100,000 over budget

Business Services Directorate is forecast to be over budget by £100,000. This is due to one-off voluntary severance costs of £150,000. The service is currently projecting to be under budget on staffing by £50,000 through vacancies, taking the net forecast position to £100,000 over budget. At present service delivery is not being impacted by the vacancies.

## 2.3 Finance - £1,000,000 under budget

In the 2023/24 fiscal year, the Scottish Government allocated funding to empower Local Authorities to decide on Business Rates relief measures for vacant properties, £2.881 million to Aberdeenshire. The estimated cost for offering relief and exemptions to empty properties in Aberdeenshire is around £2.4 million. However, this figure is subject to change as property occupancy fluctuates throughout the year. Currently, there is an under-budget position due to lower-than-expected expenses for property relief, amounting to approximately £481,000, however this will change as the year progresses.



Current levels of demand for Housing Benefit expenditure are showing a projected underspend of £255,000. Corresponding Housing Benefit Subsidy income projections based on subsidy trend patterns in previous years and the Mid-Year Estimate return are showing to be over budget by £290,000. Housing Benefit is demand led therefore these figures could fluctuate as we progress through the financial year.

Grant income levels are showing to be around £150,000 less than budget. Income previously received for administration of the Scottish Welfare Fund is no longer receivable into Finance and instead is included in the overall Revenue Support Grant budget. In previous years other one-off funding was offsetting this reduction but the one-off funding is not expected to be as high this financial year.

Additionally, Finance has a number of unfilled vacancies and is expected to be £300,000 under budget for staffing if current staffing levels persist.

External Audit Fees are determined on a national level. As part of the budget planning for 2023/24, the Finance Service agreed to investigate options for mitigating the pressure arising from the increased fees during the 2023/24 Financial Year. This will be pursued by identifying efficiencies within the broader Finance Service. The current over budget position for this area of expenditure is £50,000. This may rise due to additional work the Auditors have undertaken on valuations of Council properties. Finance is currently in discussion with the Auditors on an agreed amount. An update will be provided in the next financial performance report.

Bad Debts incurred throughout the financial year are charged against the Provision for Bad Debts. The provision balance is reviewed at the end of the financial year and replenished to the agreed level. Based on Bad Debts arising from Housing Benefit last year the amount to be replenished was £45,000. An assumption has been included for the same level to be replenished this financial year which will create a budget pressure.

Software costs are anticipated to be £40,000 over budget. This includes new software expenditure required to satisfy new accounting requirements.

Printing costs are forecast to be £25,000 over budget due to a higher number of bills being issued together with an increase in recovery notices as debts increase. The service would anticipate this reducing in future years as more self-service is implemented.

The net budget position for Finance is £1m under budget.

#### 2.4 Customer & Digital - £250,000 under budget

Customer & Digital is forecasting to be £150,000 over budget on supplies and services due to rising Microsoft costs and number of licences for the organisation. Work is ongoing with other Services to try to reduce costs without adversely impacting Service delivery. Budgets for Customer and Digital are being closely managed to ensure there is no overspend on the Service at the end of the financial year. Staffing is forecast to be under budget by £400,000 based on current levels and vacancies to be filled. This is likely to fluctuate throughout the year depending on any new vacancies arising.

#### 2.5 Printing - £115,000 under budget

In accordance with the current contract, printing contract costs have reduced in 2023/24. The new printing contract is currently going through the tender process, for implementation from 1 April 2024. There may be some set up costs to be incurred ahead of this, therefore the underspend may reduce to accommodate these costs.

#### 2.6 Procurement £120,000 over budget

The Service has insufficient budget to cover contract costs. This has been a historic issue for a number of years which has in the past been offset by rebates receivable from suppliers. The pressure is being addressed as part of the 2024/25 budget work.

#### 2.7 Estates £400,000 over budget

Expenditure budgets are projecting to be overspent by £670,000. This is largely due to dilapidations payments due when exiting premises, demand-led repairs and maintenance costs and property fees associated with asset management and other works. The projected overspend also includes an assumption that £140,000 of the £250,000 estate rationalisation saving included in the budget for 2023/24 will not be delivered until next financial year. Delivery of the savings is dependent on properties going through formal title checks, and reporting to Committees if capital receipts are above the £100,000 threshold, prior to finalising sales.

Conversely, income levels have seen an increase this financial year due to a large dilapidation settlement being recovered from a previous tenant. Income is expected to be £270,000 over budget.

#### 2.8 Property Construction Services £300,000 over budget

Income from property fees is expected to be £700,000 under budget this year with the income target not being achievable as it was set too high. This has

been factored into the budget for 2024/25. The 2023/24 pressure has been offset in part by reductions in staffing, with an under-budget position of £400,000 expected.

- 2.9 Whilst Business Services is currently projecting to be underspent at the end of the financial year, the position may fluctuate and as such the Service continues working to manage resources in terms of people and ancillary costs.

### 3. The Risks

- 3.1 As set out in the [Medium Term Financial Strategy](#) the Council is facing unprecedented financial challenges due to events out with our control, all of which have contributed to rising inflation and interest rates, volatility in our supply chains and the Cost of Living crisis. Rising costs, increased demand for local services and reducing real term financial settlements from Scottish Government has created a challenging operating environment for 2023/24.
- 3.2 To respond to these challenges, the budget agreed by Council included significant assumptions and acceptance of risk to enable a balanced position, as well as agreement of a range of savings and efficiencies.
- 3.3 Budget risks refer to potential threats or uncertainties that could impact on the Council's ability to meet its objectives within the constraints of the budget. Should some or all these risks materialise during the year, they may create a budgetary pressure which will require to be addressed, either through efficiencies elsewhere within the Service or the Council, a policy change or the use of reserves.
- 3.4 The budget risks relating to the services within Business Services Committee are set out in [Appendix A1](#).
- 3.5 Local Government Pay Awards continue to be a significant risk to the Council's budget as a whole. Scottish Government have provided funding of £155m towards a revised pay offer, of which Aberdeenshire Council anticipate receiving £7.088m. £4.6m of this funding was assumed in the budget setting process and was transferred to an earmarked reserve. Once received, the balance of this will be transferred to the reserve pending payment to staff. In September 2023 the Scottish Government identified a further £80m to fund an improved offer, with Councils contributing an additional £10m. This offer consisted of a two stage uplift to pay from April 2023 and January 2024.
- 3.6 In November 2023, Leaders agreed to a further enhancement, which sees the full offer back dated to April 2023 at an additional cost to Aberdeenshire of around £0.691m (£0.509m General Fund, £0.132m IJB and £0.05m HRA). The first stage of the pay award has been paid to employees through the November

salaries. The second stage of the pay award (the November enhancement) will be paid in the January salaries. Once the pay award has been fully paid to staff, any unfunded element will require to be funded from the Councils reserves in 2023/24. Councils will be reimbursed for this in the LG Finance Settlement for 2024/25 although the exact arrangements for this reimbursement are still to be confirmed.

3.7 Future financial performance reports will provide further updates on the management of these risks and any envisaged impacts and mitigations.

#### 4. Savings

4.1 Savings of **£2.077m** were agreed by Council in relation to services under Business Services Committee. **Appendix A2** sets out the details of these savings and the progress being made against them.

4.2 £0.766m of savings relate to procurement efficiencies which will result from a reduction in off contract expenditure, the Directorate are working with the Procurement Service to achieve these efficiencies.

4.3 A saving of £0.2m was agreed in relation to Vacancy Management which means that when vacancies arise, they may not be filled. Services will consider operational efficiencies and changes to service delivery and only recruit where necessary. Staff costs to date indicate that this saving is on target to being achieved.

4.4 At present, the estate rationalisation saving of £250,000 is not likely to be fully achieved in 2023/24, with £140,000 expected to be delayed until 2024/25. This is being mitigated by the wider underspend within Business Services. All other savings have been achieved or remain on track to be achieved. These savings will be managed throughout the year and should they show indications of being delayed or unachievable, this will be highlighted to Committee with the options to mitigate against any resultant pressure.

4.5 Corporate savings of £2m were also agreed in relation to Voluntary Severance. Savings in relation to staff leaving the organisation under this scheme were to be removed from the relevant budgets throughout the year as they were identified. This savings goal will not be achieved this financial year. As a result, services are actively seeking alternative means to realise these savings from within other budgets.

#### 5 Reserves

5.1 Reserves are an important resource for the Council and the level, purpose and planned use of these reserves was set out in the Medium-Term Financial

Strategy. **Appendix A3** details the Earmarked Reserves which specifically relate to the services which fall under Business Services Committee. These are summarised in Table 2 below:

**Table 2: Reserves to 30 November 2023**

	Balance at 1 April 2023 £000	Balance at 30 Nov 2023 £000
<b>Revenue Earmarked Reserves</b>		
Local Authority Continued Economic Recovery Fund (LACER)	372	372
Repairs & Maintenance Fund	500	500
Digital Strategy Reserve	1,493	1,117
<b>Total Revenue Earmarked Reserves</b>	<b>2,365</b>	<b>1,989</b>

5.2 It should be noted that the balances available in reserves are provisional and may be subject to change until the annual accounts for 2022/23 have been reviewed by External Audit. Any changes will be reflected in future financial performance monitoring reports together with updates on the use of these reserves throughout 2023/24.

## 6 Capital

6.1 The Capital Plan forms part of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and reflects the Council's capital priorities. The capital projects identified in the 2023/24 budget were agreed as part of the Council's Capital Plan on 9 March 2023 and those that specifically relate to Business Services Committee are detailed in **Appendix A4** and summarised in **Table 3**:

**Table 3: Capital Plan Forecast vs Revised Budget 2023/24**

	Revised Budget 2023/24 £000	Actual to 30 Nov 2023 £000	Forecast at 30 Nov 2023 £000	Under/ (over) budget £000
General Capital Expenditure	19,283	4,107	12,910	6,373
<b>Total Capital Expenditure</b>	<b>19,283</b>	<b>4,107</b>	<b>12,910</b>	<b>6,373</b>

6.2 The Capital Plan for Business Services Committee is forecast to be under budget by **£6.373m**. The major variances are detailed below:

### **New Council Office (previously on Plan as Workspace – Inverurie)**

The forecast for the Ellon Offices and the refurbishment of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of Woodhill House now reflects the new start onsite dates for the main contractors,

resulting in an underbudget position of £4.479m. The remainder of the expenditure for these projects will occur in 2024/25.

#### Depots

The underspend of £0.697m is due to site start dates being pushed back to 1 April 2024 due to scope changing following a review of client requirements.

#### Development of Industrial Portfolio

The underspend of £0.892m is due to site start dates being pushed back to 1 April 2024 due to the scope changing following a review of client requirements.

#### Carbon Reduction – Council Wide Objectives

Works under the Non-Domestic Energy Efficiency (NDEE) Framework, at a number of sites, were initially expected to be completed in 2023/24. Due to delays resulting from a number of factors including availability of parts, site access and asbestos surveys, this project will now be completed in 2024/25. This will result in an underbudget position of £0.289m.

- 6.3 Whilst the general services capital plan for 2023/24 was presented in detail on 9 March 2023, a detailed review of the Capital Plan is being undertaken during 2023/24 to allow a comprehensive, affordable, and deliverable Capital Plan to be developed for the financial years 2024 to 2028.
- 6.4 The level of borrowing required to support the capital investments presents an ongoing challenge to the Council's financial sustainability. The repayment of borrowing used to fund capital expenditure incurred today, creates a future revenue budget commitment over the entirety of the anticipated life span of the new asset.

### 7. Treasury Management

- 7.1 Since our Mid Term report at 30th September 2023 the Bank Rate has remained at 5.25%. Market Forecasters believe this to be the peak of the rate rise cycle with many speculating that the next movement may be a cut in June 2024. The Bank of England continue to state that although inflation has started to fall it will not reach its target rate until late 2025. If inflationary pressures persist over that timeframe they will act accordingly.

An opportunity arose in late November to secure some longer term borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board to replace some of our maturing debt and meet our borrowing requirements as follows:

£5M	6 years	4.82%
£10M	7 years	4.82%
£5M	8 years	4.85%
£10M	9 years	4.90%

In Early October one of our Market Debt providers exercised their option to request a rate increase from 4.40% to 6.40%. The provider had indicated prior to this that they were looking to exit from these products. We decided therefore to use our option to repay the lender with no breakage costs. This avoided being locked in with additional revenue costs for a further 43 years and look to replace when rates are more favourable.

Investment Income at the end of November is now £0.988m

## Appendix A1 Budget Risk Register

Risk Type	Threat to achievement of objectives	Potential Consequences of Risk	Controls/Mitigations in place	Likelihood	Service	Budget Page
Vacancy Management	Additional Vacancy Management included for 23/24; Non-filling of vacancies may have impacts on service delivery and staff wellbeing	Service Delivery requirements may limit the vacancies that can remain unfilled, resulting in pressures on staffing budgets	Vacancies are closely monitored and managed to ensure that appropriate capacity is in place across our teams. The Business Services Leadership Team will continue to oversee vacancy management in order that an appropriate balance is maintained between meeting service delivery demands, wellbeing of our staff and budget management.	MEDIUM	BS	ALL
Pay Award - Local Government	Pay Awards being agreed in excess of those assumed in the budget; Ongoing pay negotiations with Teaching Unions may influence the 23/24 negotiations for SJC staff taking the pay award above the 3% included in the budget assumptions. Every 1% increase will create a budgetary pressure of around £2.5m (General Fund incl IJB)	The Pay Award Reserve will be exhausted. Budget pressures will be required to be met through service savings and/or efficiencies	£4.6 million has been set aside in a Local Government Pay Award Reserve which would ensure funding available for a pay award 2.5% above budget. The base budget for 2024/25 has been increased to reflect this. Any additional award will need to be covered by Transformational savings and efficiencies. Update - the resolution of the SNCT pay award negotiations may result in a corresponding increase sought after by Non-Teaching Unions in 23/24.	MEDIUM	ALL	ALL
Additional Rental Income	Delays to tenants commencing new leases.	Additional income not achieved	Financial monitoring throughout the year to compare against assumptions made.	MEDIUM	Business Services	Woodhill House
Scottish Welfare Fund	Demand increases for crisis and welfare grants	Pressure on budgets in current and future years	Close financial monitoring to identify pressures at an early stage. Signposting to alternative sources of welfare funds.	MEDIUM	Business Services	Finance



<b>Risk Type</b>	<b>Threat to achievement of objectives</b>	<b>Potential Consequences of Risk</b>	<b>Controls/Mitigations in place</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Service</b>	<b>Budget Page</b>
Estate Rationalisation	Delays in buildings being sold/released	Estate rationalisation savings not achieved in year.	Close financial monitoring to identify issues at an early stage.	MEDIUM	Business Services	Estates
Inflation	Rising general inflation in the UK Economy.	Increase in cost of supplies and services. Areas that could be impacted include ICT contracts, energy and Insurance premiums	Financial Monitoring throughout the year to identify where spend is required to be reduced	MEDIUM	Business Services	ALL
Procurement Savings	Risk of procurement savings being allocated against incorrect Service or not being achievable.	Pressure on budgets in current and future years	Review procurement savings to ensure allocated against correct Service - vire if not. Close monitoring of savings to flag if not likely to be achieved in year.	HIGH	Business Services	ALL
Settlement	Reduction in Scottish Government funding to Local Authorities in real terms	Less funding from Scottish Government will reduce resources available to deliver Council services and priorities	Assumption of flat cash settlement for future years; Transformation and Savings/Efficiencies to be identified across the Council to reduce any impact of future reductions in funding	MEDIUM	RSG	Revenue Support Grant
Energy Prices	The impact of the conflict in Ukraine on rising gas and electricity prices	Budget pressure on energy budgets across the Council	Forward procurement pricing to be carried out along with regular monitoring by the Energy Management Team. £5.5m built in to the 23/24 budget. 17% Electricity, 10% Gas, 3% other energy built into future years	MEDIUM	ALL	ALL
Achievement of Service Savings	Inability to achieve budgeted savings due to service pressures	Pressure on budgets in current and future years	Proactive monitoring of savings by services, with any issues in achieving these being reported timeously through the relevant policy committee	HIGH	ALL	ALL
Achievement of Voluntary Severance Savings	£2m of Voluntary Severance savings budgeted for in 23/24. Risk that insufficient numbers of employees will apply and be selected for the scheme within year; impact of reduced staff numbers on service delivery	Pressure on budgets in current and future years	This is a corporate target that will be kept under review throughout the year with updates being reported accordingly.	HIGH	ALL	ALL
Reserves	Reserves have been utilised in 23/24 to balance the budget. Should budget risks materialise in 23/24 and beyond, this may require further draw down from these reserves.	Depletion of Reserves will reduce the financial sustainability of the Council in future years unless these can be replenished.	Budget control and financial monitoring throughout the year	HIGH	ALL	ALL
Income Generation	Risk that income will not achieve budgeted levels due to price increases and/or number of service users/demand being below anticipated	Pressure on budgets in current and future years	Active monitoring of income during the year to identify if the drivers are not at the levels assumed in the budget;	HIGH	ALL	ALL

## Appendix A2 – Revenue Budget Savings

Budget Page	Saving 2023/24 £000	Savings detail	RAG	Progress Update
Councillors Remuneration and Expenses	(15)	Reduction in Hospitality Budget		On target
Finance	(20)	Reduction in Printing and Postages Budgets		On target
Finance	(39)	Reduction in licence holders and increase in prompt payment discounts		On target
Finance	(57)	Hold the Risk and Resilience Manager post vacant		On target
Customer and Digital	(70)	Reduction in staff posts resulting from increased levels of IT user self service		On target
Woodhill House	(30)	Reduction in Postages Budgets		On target
Woodhill House	(6)	Savings from newly agreed refuse contract		On target
Office Accommodation	(30)	Reduction in Postages Budgets		On target
Office Accommodation	(40)	Additional tenant income at Buchan House		On target
Public Conveniences	(220)	Removal of additional cleans required due to Covid-19		On target
Customer and Digital	(61)	Increase use of self-service to support reduction in staff costs		On target
Business Services Directorate	(30)	Increase in staff turnovers savings		On target
Legal and People	(50)	Savings arising from Employee Assistance Provider and Occupational Health Contract		On target
Finance	(152)	Additional income from Scottish Water		On target
Cross Council	(250)	Estate Rationalisation across all Council properties		Estimated £110,000 of the saving will be delivered in 2023/24, with the remaining £140,000 to be delayed until 2024/25.
Vacancy Management	(200)	Proactive management of all vacant posts through the year.		On target
Procurement Savings	(766)	Procurement efficiencies from Review of off-contract spend and existing contract arrangements		Savings allocated and services working with procurement to achieve
Cross Council	(41)	Savings from Digital Transformation		On target
<b>Total Savings</b>	<b>(2,077)</b>			

## Appendix A3 – Business Services Reserves

Revenue Earmarked Reserves	**Balance at 1 April 2023 £'000	Balance at 30 Nov 2023 £'000	Reserve Purpose
Local Authority Continued Economic Recovery Fund (LACER)	372	372	LACER Funding was received from Scottish Government in 2021/22 to be utilised to support economic recovery from the pandemic. £400,000 was allocated to Business Services for discretionary Business Rates Relief.
Repairs and Maintenance Fund	500	500	Reserve created to provide for any unexpected pressures on the Repairs and Maintenance budgets. If this reserve is drawn down to fund in year pressures, consideration would be required as to whether the reserve should be replenished as part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy to mitigate against the risk of future pressures.
Digital Strategy Reserve	1,493	1,117	Funding set aside aimed at improving efficiencies, making Council services more accessible to customers, removing barriers which impact on ability to transform service delivery, building digital confidence through the workforce and supporting capacity building/strengthening resilience and recovery from Covid in the long term. A programme of work is underway to utilise this funding.
<b>Total Revenue Earmarked Reserves</b>	<b>2,365</b>	<b>1,989</b>	

*\*\*Note: These figures are provisional pending completion of External Audit review of 2022/23 outturn*

## Appendix A4 – Capital Budget Forecast as at 30 November 2023

<u>DETAIL</u>	<b>Approved Budget Mar '23 2023/24 £'000</b>	<b>Revised Budget Sep'23 2023/24 £'000</b>	<b>Actual Nov '23 2023/24 £'000</b>	<b>Revised Forecast 2023/24 £'000</b>	<b>Projected Variance (Over)/Under 2023/24 £'000</b>
<b>BUSINESS SERVICES</b>					
Carbon Reduction - Council Wide Objectives	2,080	2,080	568	1,791	289
Depots	1,980	2,029	411	1,332	697
Development of Industrial Portfolio & Factory Units	1,098	1,539	117	647	892
Fraserburgh Lighthouse Museum	0	250	34	250	0
Health and Safety - Council Wide Objectives	380	380	185	380	0
Information Communications Technology	1,450	1,450	200	1,434	16
Legal and Governance System Software	0	26	0	26	0
Lifecycle Maintenance - Council Wide Objectives	2,418	3,040	1,621	3,040	0
New Council Office	12,072	8,489	971	4,010	4,479
<b>Business Services Total</b>	<b>21,478</b>	<b>19,283</b>	<b>4,107</b>	<b>12,910</b>	<b>6,373</b>

## Appendix B – Virements

### Director Approved Budget Virements

Cross Service	Service Pages		Reason for Movement	Amount	Approver	Committee	Committee Date
	From	To					
No	Procurement	Woodhill House	Removal of internal transaction between Procurement and Woodhill House budget pages for rent and services charges to reflect reduced office space occupied by Procurement Team.	92,600	Rob Simpson	Business Services	11/01/2024

### Head of Finance Virements

Cross Service	Service Pages		Reason for Movement	Amount	Approver	Committee	Committee Date
	From	To					
Yes	Community Planning	Area Managers (Formartine)	Transfer of budget (one-off) as agreed by Aberdeenshire Community Planning Partnership Board for the development of Place Planning in Formartine	13,500	Mary Beattie	Business Services	11/01/2024

### Transfers to/from Reserves

Cross Service	Reserve	Service Page	Reason for Movement	Amount £	Approver	Committee	Committee Date
No	Digital Strategy	Customer & Digital	Drawdown to fund expenditure incurred to date	375,719	Committee	Business Services	11/01/2024

## REPORT TO BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE – 11 JANUARY 2024

### REQUEST TO WRITE-OFF OF IRRECOVERABLE DEBT ARISING FROM SALARY OVERPAYMENTS

#### 1. Executive Summary/Recommendations

1.1 To seek the approval from the Committee for the write-off of irrecoverable debts associated with salary overpayments that occurred during the financial years 2004/05 to 2017/18 inclusive.

#### 1.2 The Committee is recommended to:

**1.2.1 Approve the write-off of £273,728 of irrecoverable debts associated with salary overpayments that occurred during the 14 financial years comprising 2004/05 to 2017/18 inclusive, which will be met from the Payroll Overpayments Provision; and**

**1.2.2 Note the ongoing review of the overpayments process and that any current debt deemed irrecoverable each year at 31 March will be recharged back to the service/budget page the employee was part of, thus avoiding any build-up of payroll overpayments sitting in the accounts.**

#### 2. Decision Making Route

2.1 This item has not previously been considered by this or another committee. Under the Scheme of Governance Part 2A – List of Committee Powers, the Business Services Committee has specific powers to write-off irrecoverable debts of £10,000 or more.

#### 3. Discussion

3.1 Salary overpayments generally arise due to the late submission of paperwork from services advising of an employee's change of circumstances e.g., a reduction in hours of work, the commencement of maternity leave or leaving a job. Where possible, overpayments are recovered from an employee's future salary payments, however, in cases where they have left the employment of the Council, an invoice is issued.

3.2 Approximately £160,000 of salary overpayments (net amount excluding employer on costs) are identified annually, which equates to around 0.03% of the overall staffing pay bill (£479.8m in 2022/23). Based on a recent benchmarking exercise, the above percentage figure was found to be lower than the Scottish council average of 0.07%, which was calculated using data provided by 20 councils.

3.3 While the recovery process is initiated for all identified overpayments, there are cases where it is not possible to recover some or all the outstanding

monies. This may occur where former employees cannot be contacted, repayment plans are not fulfilled, or due to extenuating circumstances it may be agreed by the Heads of Finance and Legal & People that all or a proportion of the overpayment is not to be recovered.

- 3.4 Where a salary overpayment is not recovered (or only partially recovered), this also means that the associated employer on costs i.e., employer National Insurance Contributions and pension contributions, where applicable, will not be recovered.
- 3.5 The irrecoverable debt proposed to be written-off in relation to outstanding salary overpayments for the 14 financial years comprising 2004/05 to 2017/18 inclusive is £273,728, which equates to an average of £19,552 per annum. This will be met from the Payroll Overpayments Provision of £483,000 created in the accounts at 31/03/2022, and will therefore not impact on the current financial year's forecast position.
- 3.6 The process for recovering salary overpayments is currently being reviewed by the relevant teams within Finance, with the aim of establishing a more responsive and less-time consuming approach. As part of this process, any current debt that is deemed irrecoverable each year at 31 March will be recharged back to the service budget responsible for the management of the employee costs.
- 3.7 To reduce the likelihood of future salary overpayments arising, services are being provided with regular reports on the number, reason and value of such overpayments which will allow officers to identify and implement any improvements required to internal processes. Following the recent rollout of the online Manager's Portal, line managers also have access to a wide range of staffing data held within the HR/Payroll system, which will assist them with the ongoing management and administration of their subordinates.

#### **4 Council Priorities**

- 4.1 This report helps deliver all six of the Council's Strategic Priorities and the key principle that underpins them of responsible financial planning and management.

4.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial	X		
Staffing		X	
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland			X
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing			X
Climate Change and Sustainability			X
Health and Wellbeing			X
Town Centre First			X

4.3 There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report while the financial implications associated with the proposed write-off of irrecoverable debts are detailed in paragraph 3.5 above.

4.4 The screening section as part of Stage One of the Integrated Impact Assessment process has not identified the requirement for any further detailed assessments to be undertaken. This report deals with the write-off of irrecoverable debt only. There will be no differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.

4.5 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:

- ACOPR001 - Budget Pressures (link: [Corporate Risk Register](#)). The Council's budget is under increasing pressure and therefore it is important that salary overpayments, and the associated irrecoverable debt arising, are minimised. Regular reporting on salary overpayments to services and the provision of a wide range of staffing data to managers will assist in increasing awareness of such overpayments and allow internal processes to be improved to minimise further occurrences.

The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:

- BSSR003 - We live within our means and use public money to maximise outcomes for our communities (link: [Business Services Directorate Risk Register](#)). The provision of advice and guidance to services on managing their staff and the associated budgets will assist in reducing salary overpayments thus ensuring the proper use of public funds by services.



## 5 Scheme of Governance

- 5.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and had no comments to make and are satisfied that the report complies with the [Scheme of Governance](#) and relevant legislation.
- 5.2 The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of Section C.2.3 of [the Scheme of Governance, Part 2A – List of Committee Powers](#), as it has specific powers to write-off irrecoverable debt of £10,000 or more.

**Rob Simpson**  
**Director of Business Services**

Report prepared by: Euan Proudfoot, Pay & Reward Manager and Alison Tennant,  
Strategic Finance Manager

Date: 19 December 2023



## REPORT TO BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE – 11 JANUARY 2024

### CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

#### 1 Executive Summary/Recommendations

1.1 Aberdeenshire Council's Customer Service Strategy details how we plan to deliver customer service across the organisation, in line with our Customer Service Charter.

#### 1.2 The Committee is recommended to:

1.2.1 **Comment and approve the draft Customer Service Strategy provided as Appendix 1 to this report.**

#### 2 Decision Making Route

2.1 The Strategy and supporting analysis from the Customer Service Survey has been considered by all Directorate Management Teams. Feedback received has been incorporated into the Strategy.

2.2 The Strategy and supporting analysis from the Customer Service Survey were presented to all Area Committees for comment. Feedback received has been incorporated into the Strategy. This is provided as **Appendix 2** to this report.

#### 3 Discussion

3.1 The Strategy sets out the customer service vision and outlines the organisation's commitment to delivering exceptional service to its customers. To achieve the customer service vision, the Strategy identifies specific areas of focus such as, ensuring a seamless customer experience across all contact channels and the transformation of existing service delivery.

3.2 Incorporating customer feedback from a survey conducted earlier in 2023 into the Strategy demonstrates a customer-centric approach. Using this feedback supports the development of a Strategy that is not only well-informed but also tailored to meet customer priorities.

3.3 Clear communication of the strategy across the organisation is vital to ensure that everyone understands their role in delivering the envisioned customer service.

3.4 A successful customer service strategy is not static; it evolves with changing customer needs and organisational transformation. Continuous improvement ensures that the organisation remains responsive to customer expectations and maintains a high level of customer satisfaction.

## 4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

4.1 The report supports the delivery of all Council Priorities:-

Pillar	Priority
People	Learning for Life Health and Wellbeing
Environment	Resilient Communities Climate Change
Economy	Economic Growth Infrastructure and public assets

4.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation is agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial			x
Staffing			x
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland	x		
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing			x
Climate Change and Sustainability	x		
Health and Wellbeing			x
Town Centre First	x		

4.3 An integrated impact assessment (IIA) has been completed, fully identifying the potential impacts of the Strategy. This is provided as **Appendix 4** to this report. The IIA will be reviewed as the work of the Strategy progresses.

4.4 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:

- ACORP004: Business & organisational transformation – controlled through project management process and by Internal Audit.
- ACORP006: Reputation management – controlled through general policy & procedures and assured by external scrutiny bodies through the annual shared risk assessment and by Internal Audit.

[Corporate Risk Register](#)

4.5 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Strategic Level:

- BSSR004: Support and enable delivery of major change (efficiency, process and transformational) projects through appropriate governance, culture and improvement activity

[Business Services Directorate Risk Register \(aberdeenshire.gov.uk\)](#)

## **5 Scheme of Governance**

- 5.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments have been incorporated. They are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.
- 5.2 The Committee is able to consider this item in terms of Section B. 1.2 of the List of Committee Powers (Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance) – “to consider, comment on, make recommendations to Services and or any other appropriate Committee on any matter or policy which impacts its Area.”

**Rob Simpson**  
**Director of Business Services**

Report prepared by Michelle Milne (Customer Service Manager)  
Date: 1 December 2023

### **List of Appendices:**

- Appendix 1 - Customer Service Strategy
- Appendix 2 - Decision-making Route – Comments on Customer Service Strategy
- Appendix 3 - Customer Service Survey Results
- Appendix 4 - Integrated Impact Assessment



From mountain to sea

# Customer Service Strategy

December 2023

DRAFT



## Introduction

Customer service is of utmost importance as it holds great value for our organisation, communities, and customers. It cuts across all services and influences how customers experience Council services at all levels.

Customer service is the responsibility of all employees within an organisation. Regardless of their specific roles or departments, every employee plays a crucial role in delivering a positive customer experience. Whether they are directly interacting with customers or not, every action and decision can impact the overall perception of the organisation and its service delivery.

By recognising that customer service is a shared responsibility, employees become more invested in the organisation's success and in meeting customer needs. When all team members prioritise excellent customer service, it promotes a customer-centric culture that resonates throughout the organisation.

The Council is committed to delivering top quality customer service, across all services, to all residents and businesses ensuring customers can contact us in a way, and at a time, convenient to them. Our aim is to provide efficient and effective services meeting the needs and expectations of our customers. By prioritising customer satisfaction, we aim to build trust, foster positive relationships and enhance the overall experience of engaging with Aberdeenshire Council.

Aberdeenshire Council's Customer Service Strategy details how we plan to deliver customer service across the organisation, in line with our Customer Service Charter.

The Strategy is underpinned by a set of principles to support us in achieving the Customer Service Vision. We want to ensure we continue to improve service delivery, build resilience, and increase capacity for customer enquiries and to support our more vulnerable citizens. This document is written in alignment with our Council Plan and Digital Strategy to ensure a cohesive approach to service delivery.

This Strategy recognises the ongoing transformational change via the Future Aberdeenshire programme, which will influence operations and service delivery, presenting both opportunities and challenges that will shape customer service as it progresses.

Customer Services regularly collects feedback from customers, which confirms their preference for flexible contact options. On contacting us, customer priorities are: -

- Resolve issues on first contact
- Keep them informed of progress
- Provide clear timescales for requests
- Complete requests within timescales provided
- Treat them fairly and listen to their concerns

## Customer Service Vision

Customer service you can trust.

## Our Principles

Our Customer Service Strategy will put customers at the heart of everything we do, delivering services that meet customers' needs. Our principles underpin our approach and form the basis upon which our customer service delivery decisions should be made.

### 1 Customer-focused

Service delivery designed around the needs of the customer. Ensuring we do what we say we will do, when we said we would do it and explaining when we can't.

Giving customers choice in the way they contact us and resolving queries at the first point of contact, wherever possible, recognising and considering the diversity of our customer base.

### 2 Digitally Enabled

Using technology effectively to improve efficiency, accessibility, and customer experiences.

### 3 Open and transparent

Being clear about what we can deliver, timescales for delivery and keeping customers informed of progress.

### 4 Predictable/Reliable

Ensuring we do what we say we will do, within specified timescales.

### 5 Accountable

Taking responsibility for our actions and quickly resolving issues that arise.

### 6 Responsive

Reacting quickly, acknowledging customer requests and dealing with them effectively.

### 7 Building Trust

Upholding commitments, keeping our promises and acting with integrity.

## Transforming Services

Incorporating a transformative approach to service delivery is essential to our Customer Service Strategy. There is a need to understand why we deliver services the way we do, what works well and what can be improved.

In partnership with customers and other services, we will review existing customer processes as part of the organisational Transformation Programme, aiming to improve service delivery to meet customer needs. This will be a rolling programme of improvement which is evidence-driven, based on customer feedback. Efficient processes will resolve queries on the first contact, reducing the need for customers to contact us again. Keeping customers informed of progress plays a vital role in achieving this goal.

Digital improvement continues to be a critical element in developing service delivery models to support how, and when, our customers want to interact with us. Through innovative solutions and a customer-centric approach, we'll gain customer trust, and reduce repeat contacts for the same queries. We want to continue to improve, seek

## Appendix 1

customer feedback, and build a stronger, resilient customer service framework to increase capacity to meet rising customer demand.

Reviewing current systems used and ensuring a holistic view of the customer journey is paramount for delivering exceptional customer service. Centralising customer data, where possible, and assigning tasks efficiently can minimise query duplication and ensure timely responses. Adhering to response deadlines is crucial to reduce repeat customer contacts, emphasising the importance of managing queries effectively.

Additionally, the strategy will prioritise redesigning our services to strengthen community resilience and offer customer support through our various contact channels.

We will continue to engage with our customers to ensure service delivery meets their needs. This Strategy should be fluid and adaptable, aligned with the Council Plan, Transformation Programme and Digital Strategy.

Our Strategy will:-

- Make it easier for customers to access the services they need in a way and at a time that suits them;
- Use technology where appropriate to make our service delivery better for customers;
- Make it easier for customers to access information online;
- Support us to train our staff to better help our customers at the first point of contact;
- Help us to work with customers to build the services they want and need.

### **Customer Contact Service Delivery**

Customer service delivery includes various contact channels to accommodate different communication preferences and provide seamless support. By offering a variety of contact channels, we continue to support customer preferences, improve accessibility and provide a more satisfying customer service experience.

As mounting financial pressures impact the public sector, it becomes crucial to consistently review and innovate our customer service channels. The available options should align with customer demand, while maintaining a strong focus on delivering the best possible customer service experience throughout all customer service journeys. Embracing innovation and adapting to changing needs will enable us to optimise resources effectively and ensure that our customers continue to receive exceptional service and support. Face-to-face and telephone options are expensive to deliver. To reduce costs, we must consider technology-driven self-service alternatives. Although we will continue to offer telephone and face-to-face options, it is likely their utilisation will gradually reduce over time.

### **Telephony**

The organisation currently provides various telephony service delivery options. Each month, approximately 55,000 external calls are made to all Council locations, which include schools, care homes, sheltered housing complexes, community centres and corporate teams, among others. However, only about 16,000 of these calls are managed by Customer Services. This situation makes it challenging to ensure consistency in call handling and accurately evaluate the quality of these interactions.



## Appendix 1

Our goal is to provide centralised telephony across all Council services, wherever this is appropriate. We will also determine if it is appropriate to rationalise the number of existing telephone lines, to make things simpler for customers to contact us.

Providing a centralised customer service telephony streamlines communication, providing a single point of contact for residents' enquiries, concerns and support needs. We can efficiently resolve multiple queries and ensure a consistent and effective customer experience. This approach improves resource allocation and greater satisfaction among residents by delivering prompt and reliable assistance.

Working collaboratively with customers and other services, we will identify how best to deliver an effective first point of contact telephony service for better customer service outcomes.

### **Face-to-Face**

Customers can access council services conveniently from multiple locations. Our commitment is to provide responsive assistance to all customer queries, regardless of the location they choose to visit. In collaboration with the Transformation Programme, we will use service design to guarantee the delivery of necessary services in the right locations.

To achieve this, we will review the current face-to-face provision across Aberdeenshire and collaborate with other services to determine the most suitable solutions, and locations, for service delivery within individual communities. The adoption of a community hub approach will offer a more comprehensive range of support and facilities to address the diverse needs and interests of residents in local areas. This will provide additional opportunities for partnership working in specific locations.

Our decisions will be demand-led, considering the specific requirements and needs of each place. By working together, we aim to ensure that customer service remains efficient and accessible across all areas.

### **Online/Mobile App Access**

Aberdeenshire Council offers customers the opportunity to contact us via our website or mobile app. Digital access enables customers to access assistance, information, and solutions in a way and at a time, that suits them.

Offering online access enhances accessibility, provides faster response times, and accommodates the preferences of individuals, contributing to a more satisfying customer experience.

Online processes for customers need to be seamless, encompassing the entire customer journey, from initial engagement to final transaction or service delivery, without assistance or repeat contact. We aim to encourage customers to transact online confidently, ensuring they receive immediate outcomes or a clear status update throughout the transaction. By doing so, we remove the need for them to chase their enquiries through calls or visits to service points.

Working with customers and other services, we will assess processes that contribute to the customer journey, enhance areas where current processes do not align with customer needs, and prioritise the implementation of new online services based on customer demand. Online processes need to ensure the customer is at the heart of what we do and transactions are quick and simple to complete.

### **First Point of Contact Resolution**

First point of contact resolution is a metric used to measure the percentage of customer enquiries or issues that are resolved during the initial interaction with customer service representatives, without the need for the customer to follow up or make subsequent contacts.

A high first point of contact resolution rate indicates efficient and effective customer service, as customers' needs are addressed and resolved in a single interaction, leading to higher levels of customer satisfaction and reduced operational costs for the organisation.

To determine what our customers want as first point of contact resolution, we will prioritise collecting feedback from them through surveys, feedback forms, or customer interactions. Listening to their preferences, understanding their needs, and analysing common enquiries or issues will provide valuable insights into the most desired and effective resolution methods.

By actively engaging with our customers and other services, we can align our first point of contact resolution strategies with their expectations and continuously improve our customer service experience.

### **Measuring Outcomes**

The success of our Customer Service Strategy will be measured by its ability to deliver excellent customer experiences, evident through positive customer satisfaction surveys, reduced repeat contacts, and a decrease in customer complaints. By analysing the strategy's impact, we will identify areas for improvement and ensure we consistently meet customer needs.

**Decision-Making Route – Comments on CS Strategy**

<b>Report Presented To</b>	<b>Comments Received</b>	<b>Action Taken/To be Taken</b>
Formartine Area Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We need to put ourselves in our customers' shoes and it's helpful to note that we want to make it easier for them to access the services they need in a way and at a time that suits them</li> <li>• The current preferred method of contact is speaking to a person, but cost may dictate otherwise. How often do we carry out these reviews?</li> <li>• Is there any education or assistance for customers in supporting them to use online methods of communication, such as the mobile app, and</li> <li>• In noting that 50,000 devices have signed up to the mobile app, it would be useful to know how many people were actually using it.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreed. The results of the Customer Service survey informed the Strategy. Customers will also be involved in the Service Design programme following on from implementation of Customer Service Strategy</li> <li>• Clarified contact figures are reviewed monthly and reported quarterly</li> <li>• Engagement Officer visited Service Points/Libraries to support customers' using app</li> <li>• Passed to IT to determine if this can be quantified</li> </ul>
Kincardine & Mearns Area Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website search function poor, acknowledged that ICT are looking to improve, ongoing commitment to keep customer service phone lines noted</li> <li>• Staffing issues noted, commitment to reviewing the service and looking at different delivery options</li> <li>• Customer service survey results to influence and shape the service review moving forward</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback passed to Web Design team</li> <li>• Agreed. Requirements will be reviewed as work of the Strategy progresses</li> <li>• Agreed. The results of the Customer Service survey informed the Strategy and customers will continue to be consulted throughout the implementation of</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IIA – lack of information in some areas, commitment given to reviewing the IIA as the service design moves forward</li> <li>• Diversity of customers to be acknowledged and included in the principles section of the strategy</li> <li>• Community resilience and dedicated contact to be included in the strategy</li> </ul>	<p>the Customer Service Strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreed to review throughout implementation of the Strategy</li> <li>• Principles updated to reflect this</li> <li>• Strategy updated to include this</li> </ul>
Banff & Buchan Area Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Important to ensure that community hubs should be suitable for each location</li> <li>• Rural communities must have access- aware of issues with transportation</li> <li>• To stress the importance of retaining face to face meeting options</li> <li>• To confirm that Service Points remain necessary and important.</li> <li>• Landscape Services contacts to be identified as distinct from those under Roads</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreed. The results of the Customer Service survey informed the Strategy. Customers will also be involved in the Service Design programme following on from implementation of Customer Service Strategy</li> <li>• Agreed to report separately in future</li> </ul>
Garioch Area Committee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feedback and keeping people up to date with progress on their issues is vital</li> <li>• There should be a standardisation of timescale for responding to the public that is adhered to by all services</li> <li>• There needs to be a way to advise residents when bins are going to be picked up, if they haven't been picked up in the normal routine day</li> <li>• Public transport can be an issue so we need to support them to use digital services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreed. The results of the Customer Service survey informed the Strategy. Customers will also be involved in the Service Design programme following on from implementation of Customer Service Strategy</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Strategy is an excellent piece of work and pleased to see the One Aberdeenshire approach</li> <li>• The phone numbers need to be more accessible on the website</li> <li>• My Aberdeenshire needs to be promoted more</li> <li>• Question whether IIAs are appropriate and needed at this stage</li> <li>• There is a contradiction in the strategy around the focus on digital and face-to-face</li> <li>• There is a contradiction in the strategy between the extension of co-location of staff and the focus on resolution of issues at first point of contact as it will spread the expertise available to enable resolution to take place</li> <li>• Not sure that the strategy is clear enough regarding the direction of travel</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noted and discussed with Web Design team</li> <li>• Promotion via Engagement Officer at Service Points and Libraries</li> <li>• Will review as work of Strategy progresses</li> <li>• Noted. Various contact channels for customers are to be retained. Customers will be involved in the Service Design programme following on from implementation of the Customer Service Strategy, which will inform the detail of how customer service will be delivered</li> </ul>
<p>Buchan Area Committee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To highlight that digital access is not available to everyone and that, generally, the public prefer to speak with someone although there can be difficulty in getting through to the general numbers</li> <li>• That AI needs to be easily accessed and on-point</li> <li>• To highlight how important the 'first point of contact' and 'face to face contact' is, and</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreed. The results of the Customer Service survey informed the Strategy. Customers will also be involved in the Service Design programme following on from implementation of Customer Service Strategy</li> <li>• Additional improvements to web chat are included in a programme of work with IT</li> <li>• Noted and will be highlighted during</li> </ul>

	<p>to question if the increasing number of staff working from home is to the detriment of the service that the general public are now receiving</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To highlight the increasing use of QR codes</li> <li>• In acknowledging that the Service Desk in Peterhead is well used and that there can be a wait to speak with someone, to request that consideration be given to this</li> </ul>	<p>consultation with other Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively promoted by Customer Services</li> <li>• Noted and will be highlighted during consultation with other Services</li> </ul>
<p>Marr Area Committee</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noted the challenge of reconciling differences between customer expectations and what services could deliver</li> <li>• In relation to the customer feedback survey, welcomed the number of people reporting no issues experienced</li> <li>• Queried impact of staff working from home on repeat calls for the same issue</li> <li>• Suggested making use of libraries where there were no service points.</li> <li>• Would like to see a system developed, particularly for reporting roads issues, whereby Councillors could better input/escalate issues raised by constituents</li> <li>• Suggested further communication of myAberdeenshire app</li> <li>• Queried reasons for long waiting times in relation to Benefit calls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreed. The results of the Customer Service survey informed the Strategy. Customers will also be involved in the Service Design programme following on from implementation of Customer Service Strategy</li> <li>• Noted and will be highlighted during consultation with other Services</li> <li>• Will form part of work on community hubs</li> <li>• Roads improvement programme ongoing</li> <li>• Promotion via Engagement Officer at Service Points and Libraries</li> <li>• Calls taken direct by Service – information fed back to Team Leader</li> </ul>



From mountain to sea

# Customer Service Strategy

Engagement Plan



From mountain to sea



## The purpose of this engagement:

To gather meaningful information to support the development of the Customer Service Strategy, ensuring consistent Customer Service delivery across Aberdeenshire Council.

A survey was live on our Engage platform. As many customers as possible were encouraged to complete it to capture their views and experiences when dealing with Aberdeenshire Council. The survey was issued via social media, advertised within Service Points, shared throughout the Council, as well as with community groups, forums and councils.





From mountain to sea



## Who we engaged with:

The survey was live throughout the month of April, with 461 responses

As part of our engagement, we reached out to different groups and forums such as:

- Tenant Participation
- Syrian/Ukrainian Refugees
- Adult Learning
- Gypsy Travellers
- Lived Experience Network
- Community Councils
- Elected Members

We also engaged directly with customers at all our Service Points to capture the views of those who do not normally use online services.

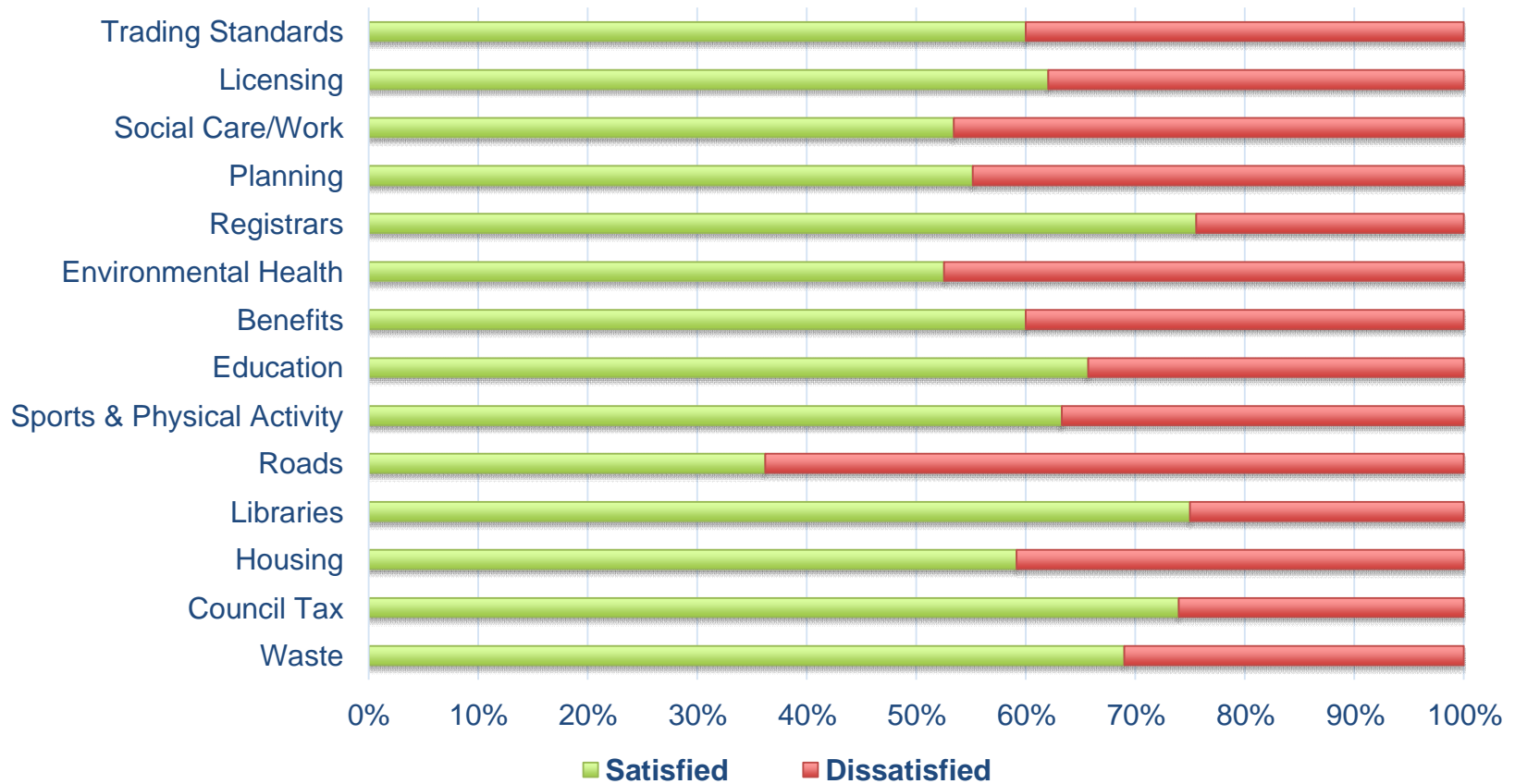


From mountain to sea



# Customer Service Survey

## Service Satisfaction





From mountain to sea

## Dissatisfied respondents by area:

Department Contacted	Totals	Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied %	Banff & Buchan	Buchan	Formartine	Garioch	Kincardine & Mearns	Marr	Other
Benefits	72	28	39%	7	5	1	3	5	2	5
Council Tax	146	38	26%	6	5	3	6	7	6	5
Education	70	24	34%	4	1	2	4	4	1	8
Environmental Health	78	37	47%	8	4	5	6	4	6	4
Housing	120	49	41%	9	5	4	10	9	6	6
Libraires	88	22	25%	4	2	2	2	6	2	4
Licensing	28	11	39%	2	2	0	1	1	1	4
Planning	58	26	45%	3	4	3	1	4	6	5
Registrars	45	11	24%	4	1	1	1	1	0	3
Roads	179	111	62%	16	14	16	27	23	10	5
Social Care/Work	58	27	47%	5	3	1	7	3	5	3
Sports & Physical Activity	79	29	37%	5	5	3	5	2	5	4
Trading Standards	20	8	40%	3	1	1	0	0	0	2
Waste	229	71	31%	13	9	5	14	15	5	10



From mountain to sea



## Highlight comments – Positive

**Council Tax** “Helped me immediately in my query and understood their area.”

**Libraries** “Staff in the actual library very friendly, polite and helpful.”

**Registrars** “The staff dealt with my queries competently and in a sensitive way as they related to bereavement.”

**Waste** “the waste crew and staff were very helpful and went above and beyond what was expected of them.”

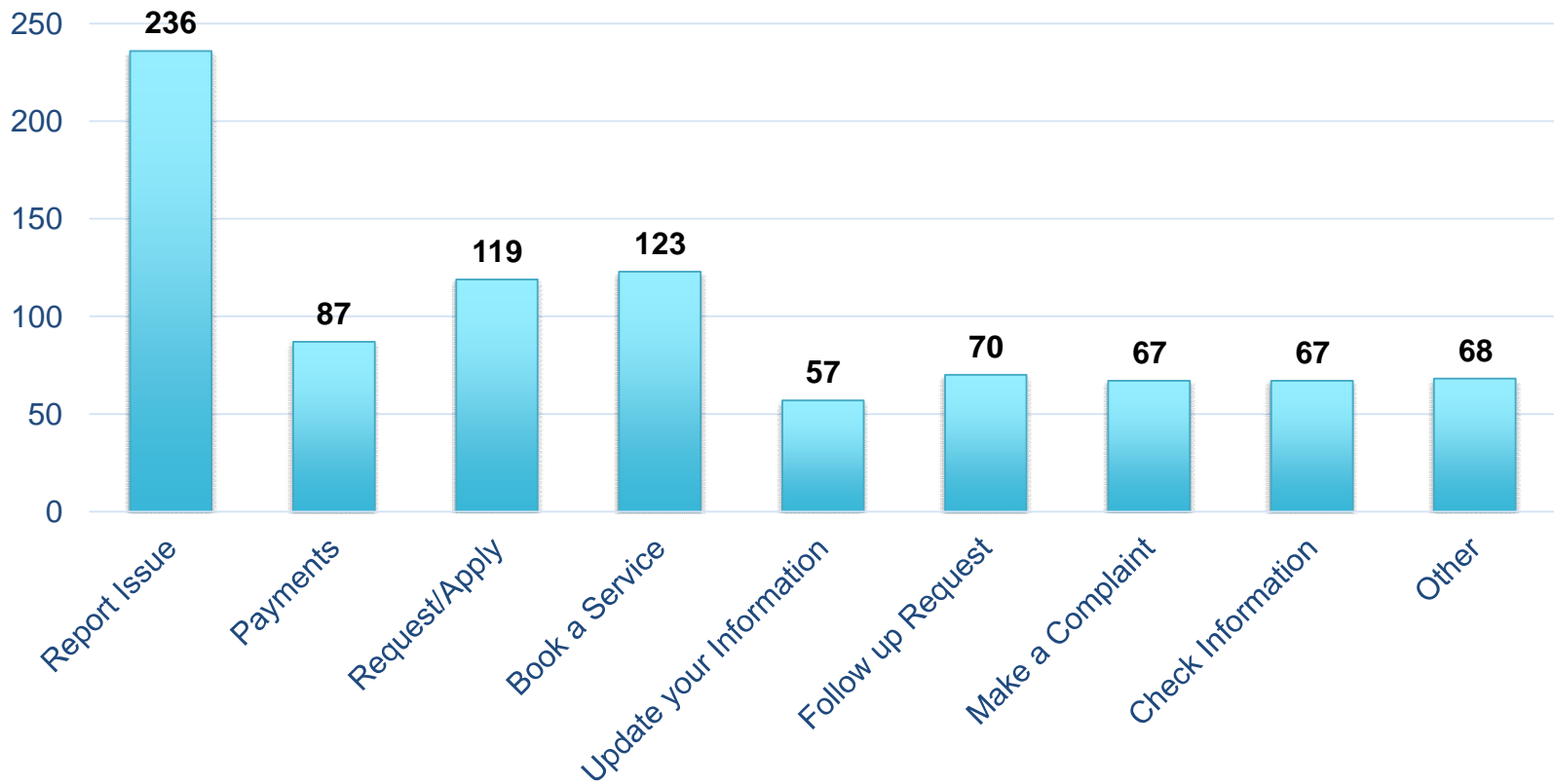
**Customer Services** “When speaking to an Advisor, issues are resolved a lot quicker as the staff are always so helpful.”



From mountain to sea



## Reason for Contact

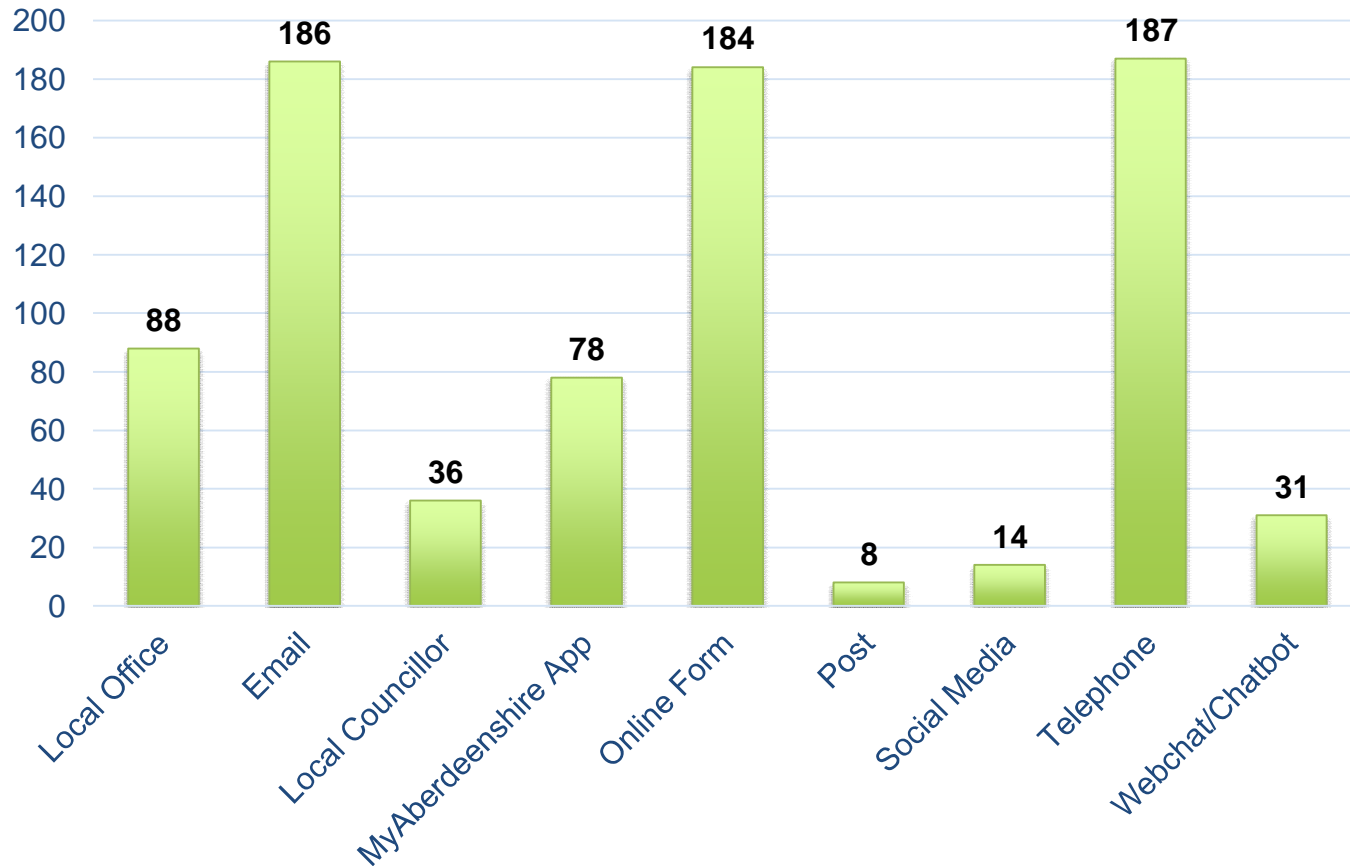




From mountain to sea



## How they contacted us

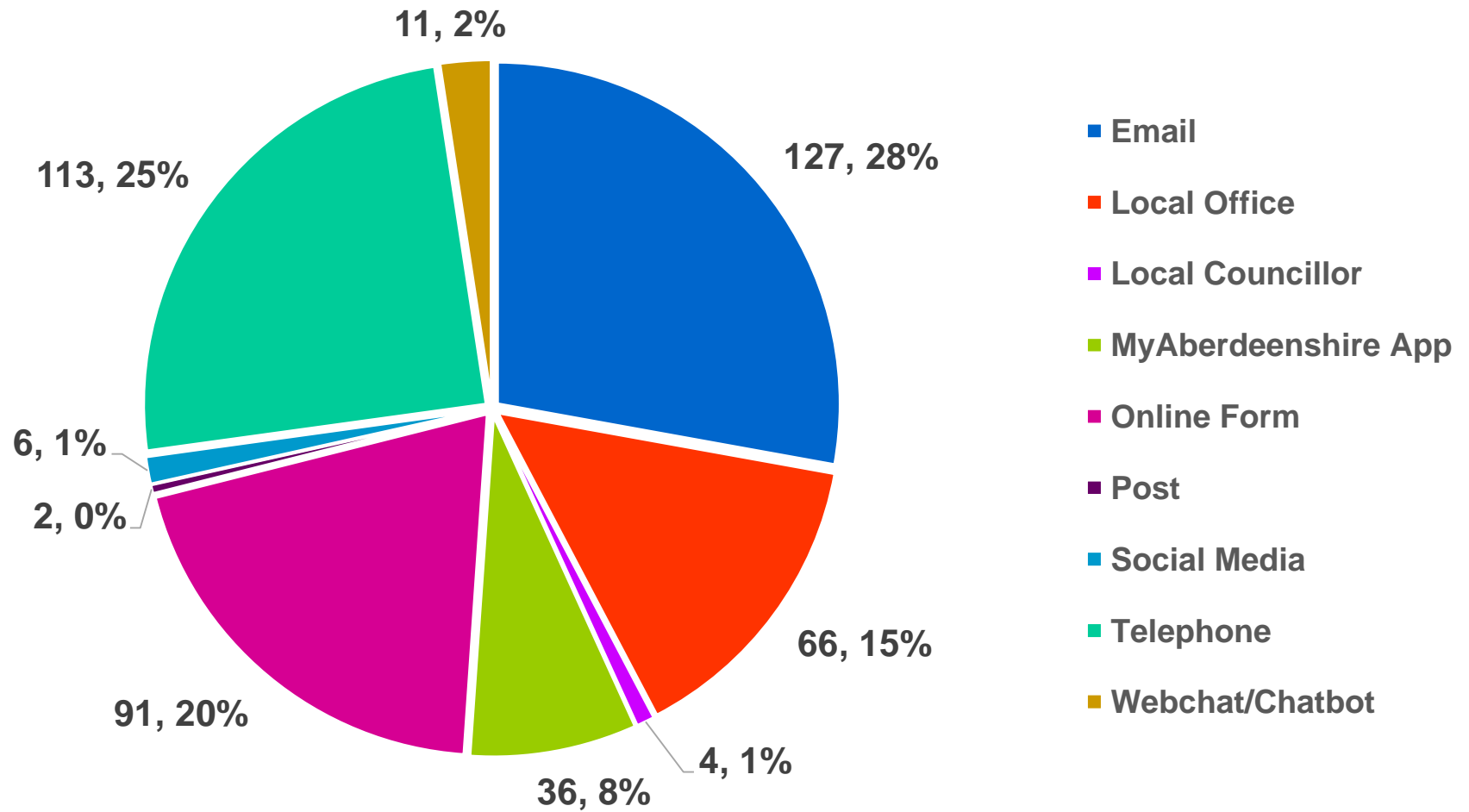




From mountain to sea



### Preferred Method of Contact

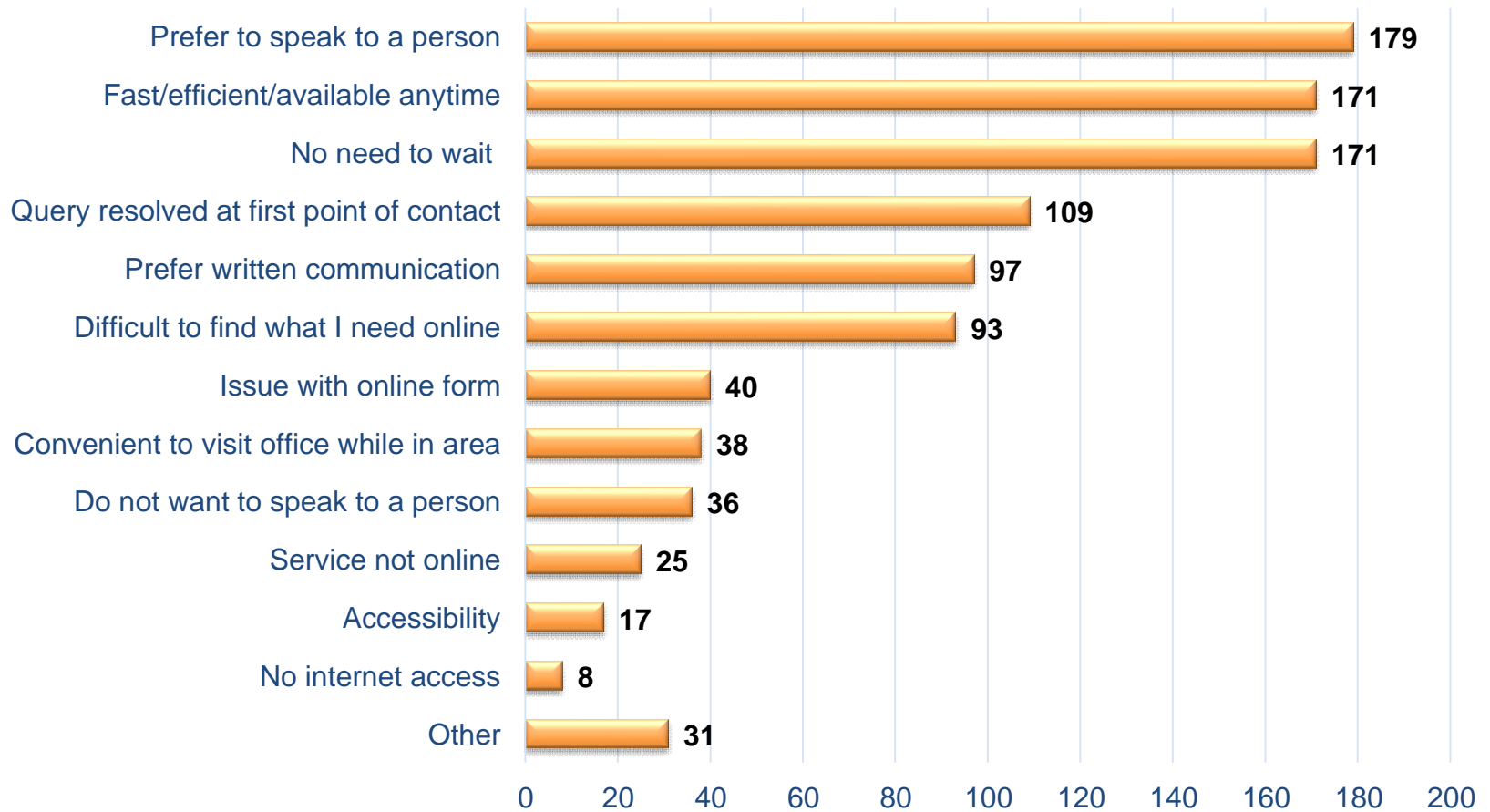




From mountain to sea



## Why it is the preferred method of contact







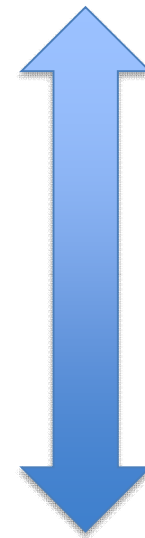
From mountain to sea



## Most important when contacting us:

Resolve issues the first time you contact us
Keep you informed of progress
Provide clear timescales when you make a request
Complete requests within the timescales provided
Treat you fairly and listen to your concerns
Provide consistent information when you contact us
Keep wait times to a minimum
Tell us once about changes
Provide access to more services online

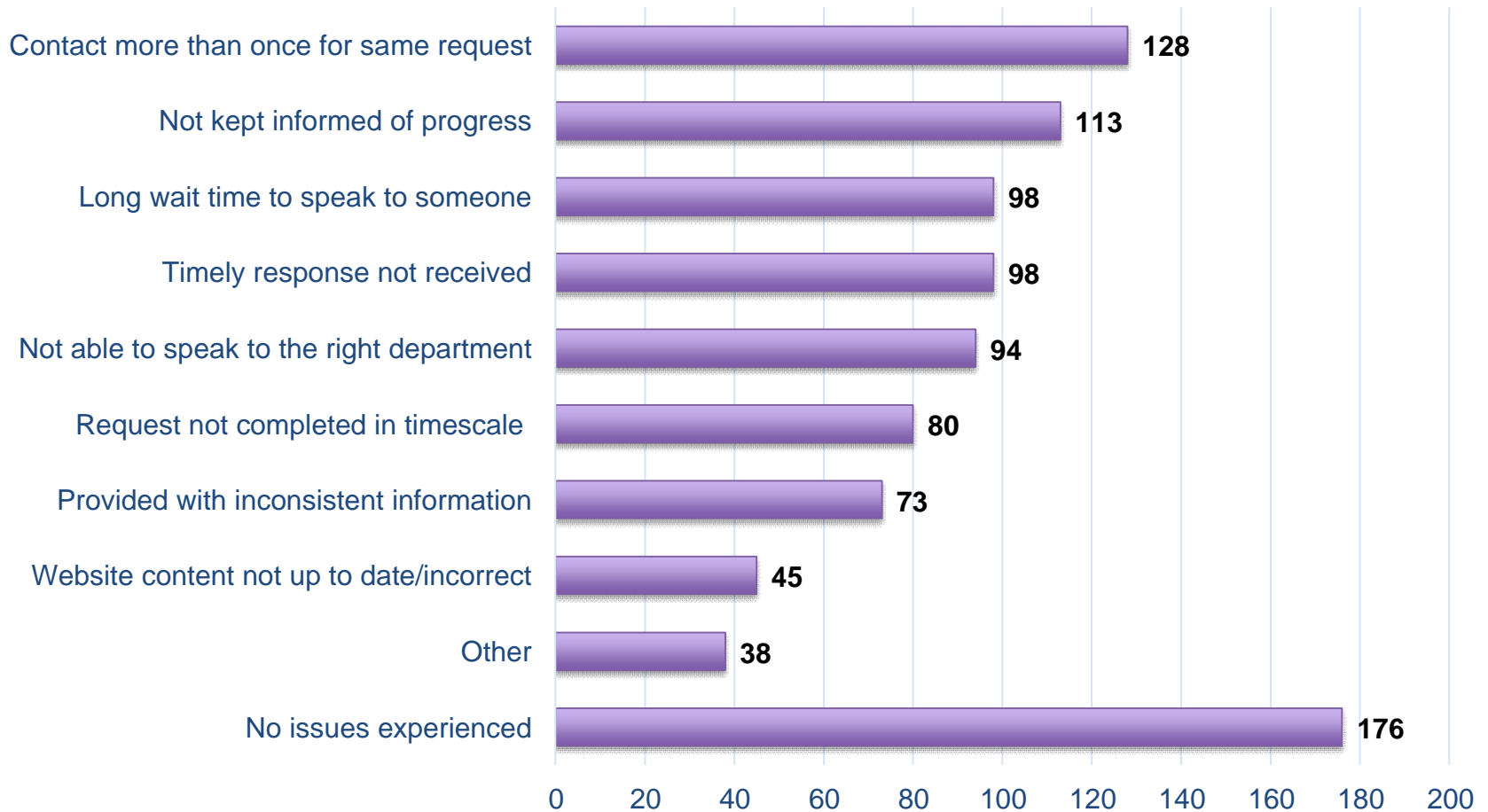
Most important



Least important



## Negative impact on experience





From mountain to sea



<u>Responses not received within timely manner</u>		<u>Request/Issue not completed in the timescale provided</u>	
Benefits	6	Benefits	11
Council Tax	15	Council Tax	13
Education	11	Education	7
Environmental Health	16	Environmental Health	14
Housing	15	Housing	17
Libraires	7	Libraires	6
Licensing	3	Licensing	3
Planning	15	Planning	13
Registrars	3	Registrars	2
Roads	47	Roads	45
Social Care/Work	9	Social Care/Work	9
Sports & Physical Activity	12	Sports & Physical Activity	7
Trading Standards	2	Trading Standards	3
Waste	31	Waste	31



From mountain to sea



<u>Website content not up to date or incorrect</u>		<u>Having to contact us more than once for the same request/issue</u>	
Benefits	5	Benefits	12
Council Tax	7	Council Tax	19
Education	5	Education	11
Environmental Health	7	Environmental Health	20
Housing	5	Housing	29
Libraires	4	Libraires	5
Licensing	3	Licensing	4
Planning	3	Planning	16
Registrars	3	Registrars	4
Roads	11	Roads	53
Social Care/Work	5	Social Care/Work	17
Sports & Physical Activity	7	Sports & Physical Activity	15
Trading Standards	3	Trading Standards	3
Waste	21	Waste	34



From mountain to sea



<u>Not able to speak to the right person/department</u>		<u>Not kept informed of progress</u>	
Benefits	14	Benefits	10
Council Tax	16	Council Tax	13
Education	12	Education	8
Environmental Health	14	Environmental Health	15
Housing	17	Housing	23
Libraires	6	Libraires	7
Licensing	5	Licensing	2
Planning	12	Planning	16
Registrars	5	Registrars	2
Roads	31	Roads	54
Social Care/Work	12	Social Care/Work	10
Sports & Physical Activity	12	Sports & Physical Activity	7
Trading Standards	4	Trading Standards	1
Waste	22	Waste	29



From mountain to sea

<b><u>Being provided with inconsistent/incorrect information</u></b>		<b><u>Long wait time to speak to someone</u></b>	
Benefits	11	Benefits	29
Council Tax	15	Council Tax	15
Education	8	Education	8
Environmental Health	15	Environmental Health	15
Housing	13	Housing	23
Libraires	7	Libraires	10
Licensing	4	Licensing	5
Planning	10	Planning	11
Registrars	4	Registrars	6
Roads	38	Roads	41
Social Care/Work	8	Social Care/Work	16
Sports & Physical Activity	9	Sports & Physical Activity	10
Trading Standards	4	Trading Standards	6
Waste	21	Waste	33



From mountain to sea

## Comments made in relation to issues experienced

### Contacted more than once:

Respondents had to follow up requests for **Environmental Health, Housing Repairs, Roads** and **Social Care/Work**.

### Not kept informed:

Respondents advised they felt there was very little communication from **Housing Repairs, Roads** and **Environmental Health**.

### Timely responses not received:

**Roads** and **Housing Repairs** not completed within timescale provided and had not been receiving responses when contacting the service.



From mountain to sea



## Continued

### Request not completed in timescale:

There was a large number of respondents who highlighted their requests for **Roads** and **Housing Repairs** were still outstanding.

### Not being able to speak to right department:

Some respondents mentioned they had been unable to speak to their Housing Officer in an office or through other methods of contact. A number of people also stated they had trouble getting in touch with **Benefits**.

### Long wait times to speak to someone:

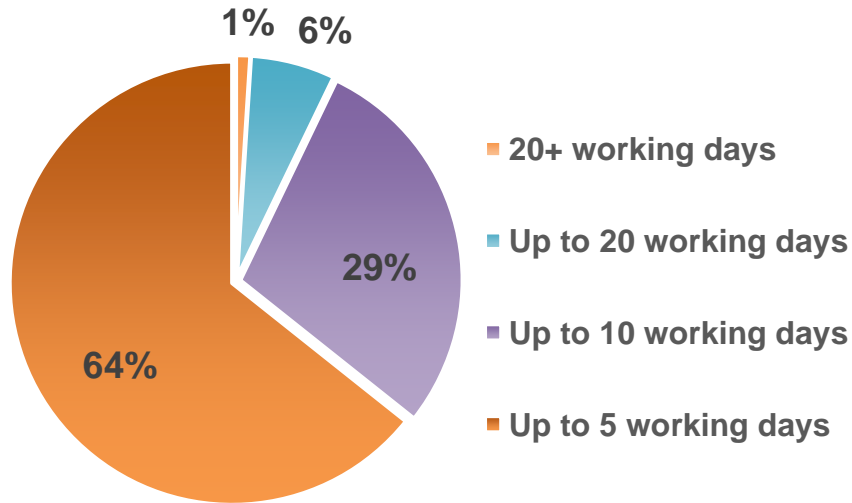
Some respondents suggested that wait times to reach **Customer Services** were longer than expected and some mentioned being cut-off after waiting to speak to **Benefits**.



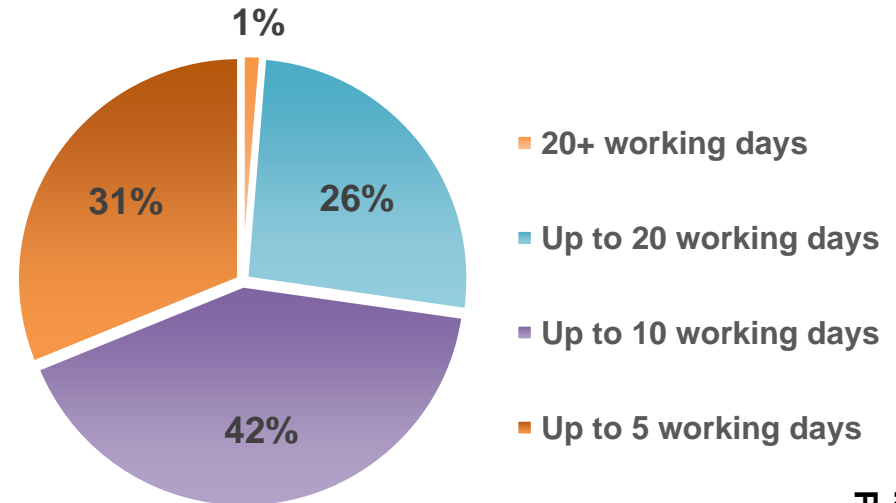


## What the customer considers an adequate timescale:

### To receive a response



### Request to be completed





From mountain to sea



## Timescales

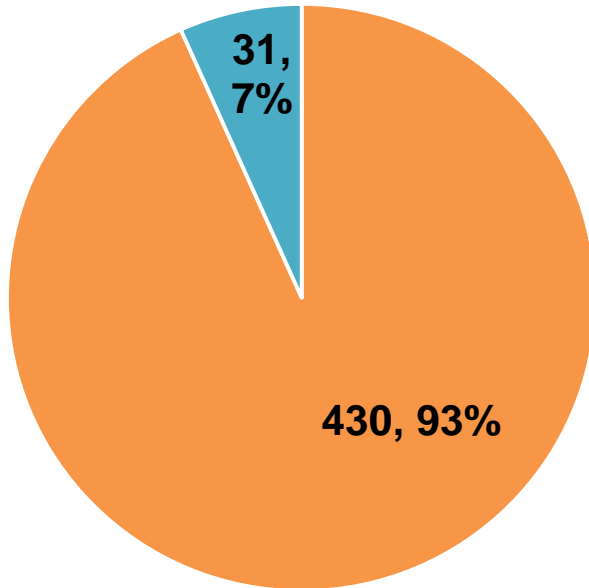
- Waiting for staff to contact them back or not being available anytime they contact us
- Not contacted back within timescale provided
- Incorrect information given
- Timescale longer than they expected



From mountain to sea

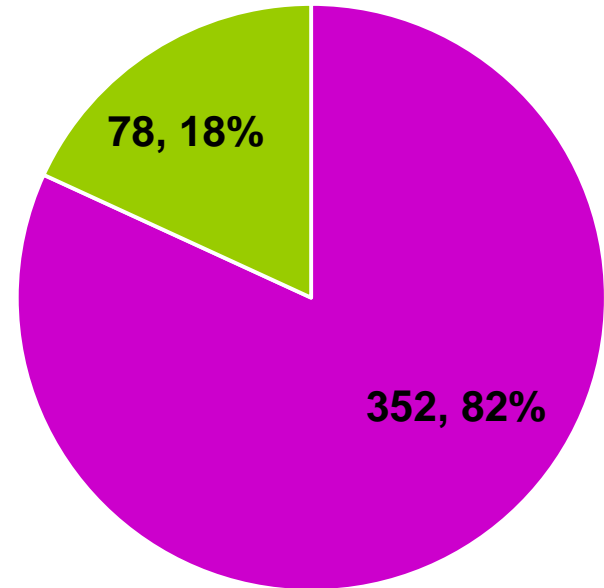


### Have you used the Aberdeenshire Council Website?



■ Yes ■ No

### Able to do what you needed online?



■ Yes ■ No



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## Comments for website

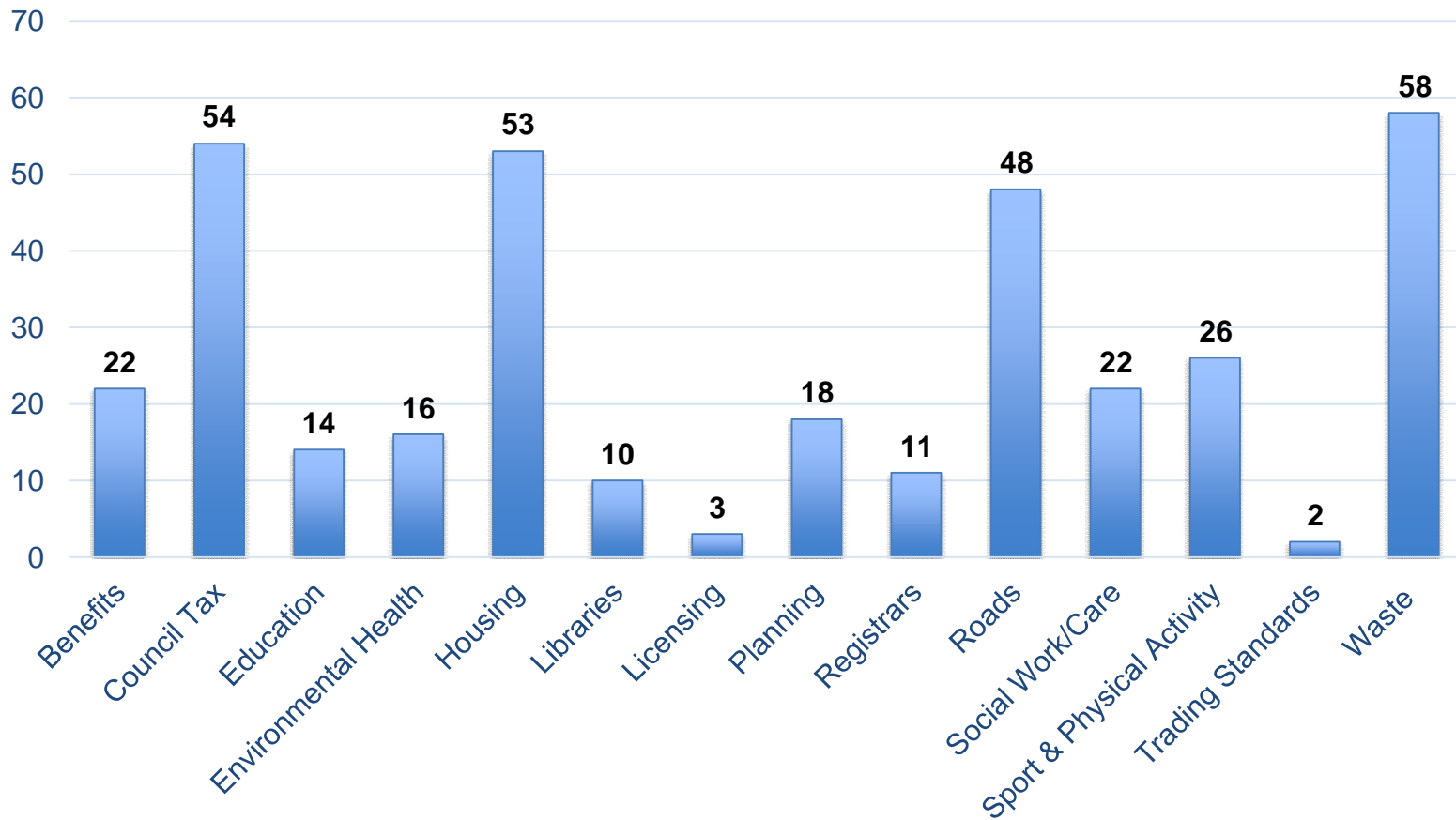
- Make the design/layout clearer
- Make services more accessible online (e.g. council tax balances)
- To improve/make more user friendly
- Easier search function
- More quick query buttons



From mountain to sea



## 77% of online transactions resulted in a follow-up phone call

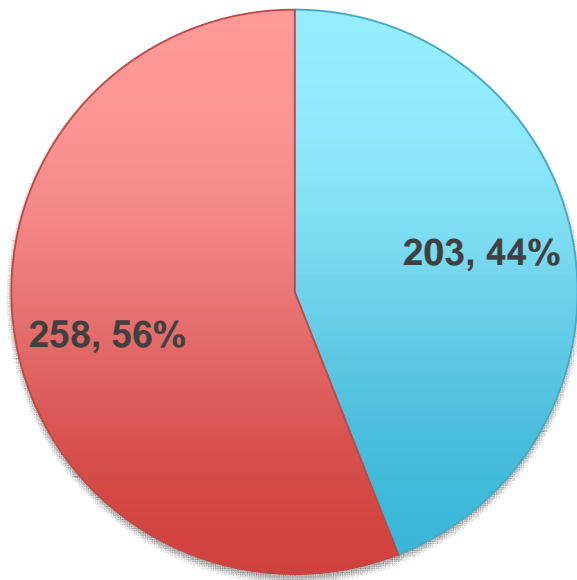




From mountain to sea

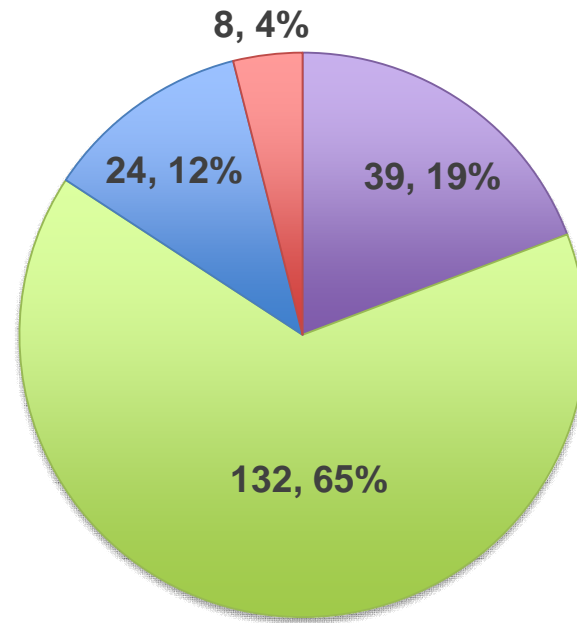


### Do you use MyAberdeenshire App?



Yes No

### App Satisfaction



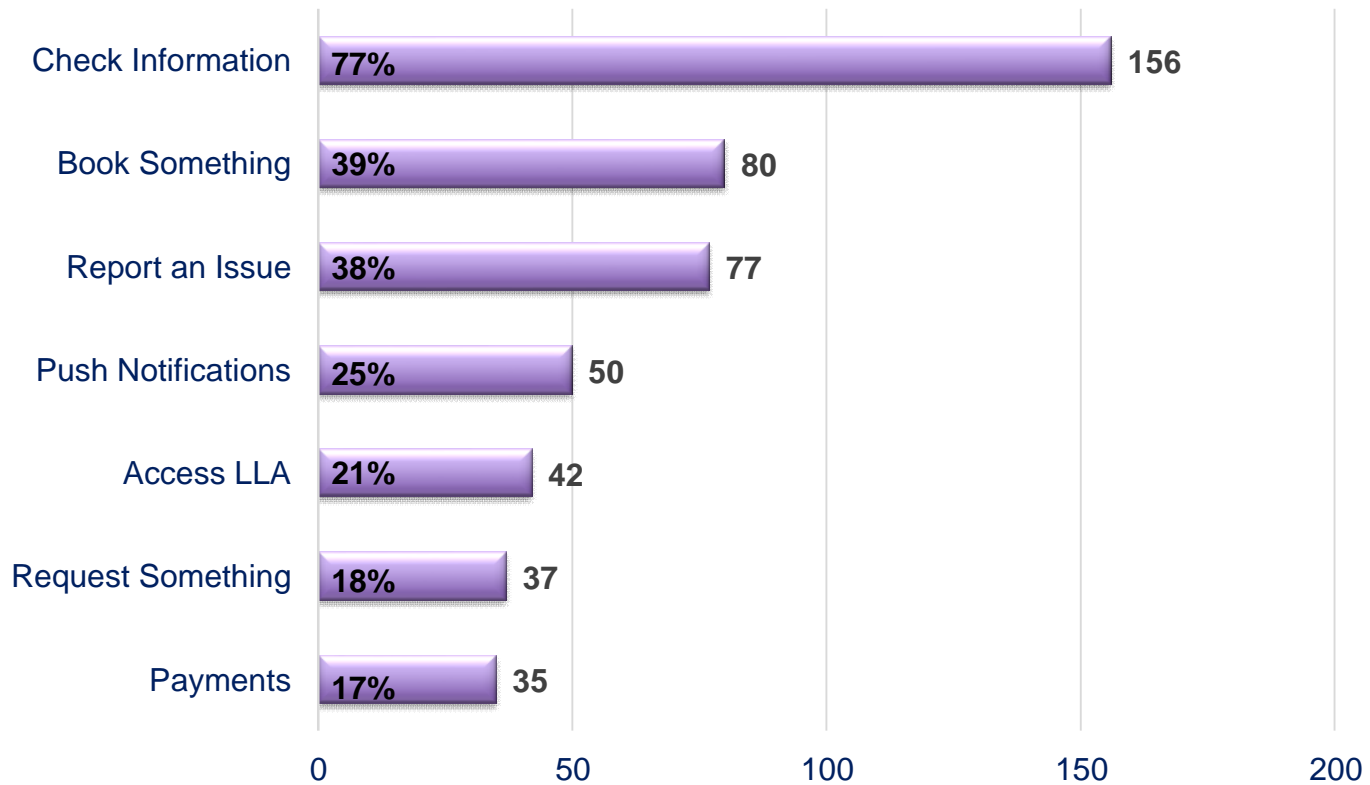
Very Satisfied Satisfied Dissatisfied Very Dissatisfied



From mountain to sea



## App Usage





From mountain to sea



## Comments received relating to the App:

Overall, of the 203 people that confirmed they use the app, the majority of responses were positive in regards to the App being easy to use and find the information they required.

As you will see from the app usage, many customers like to use the app to check information such as bins dates, roadworks, school closures etc.

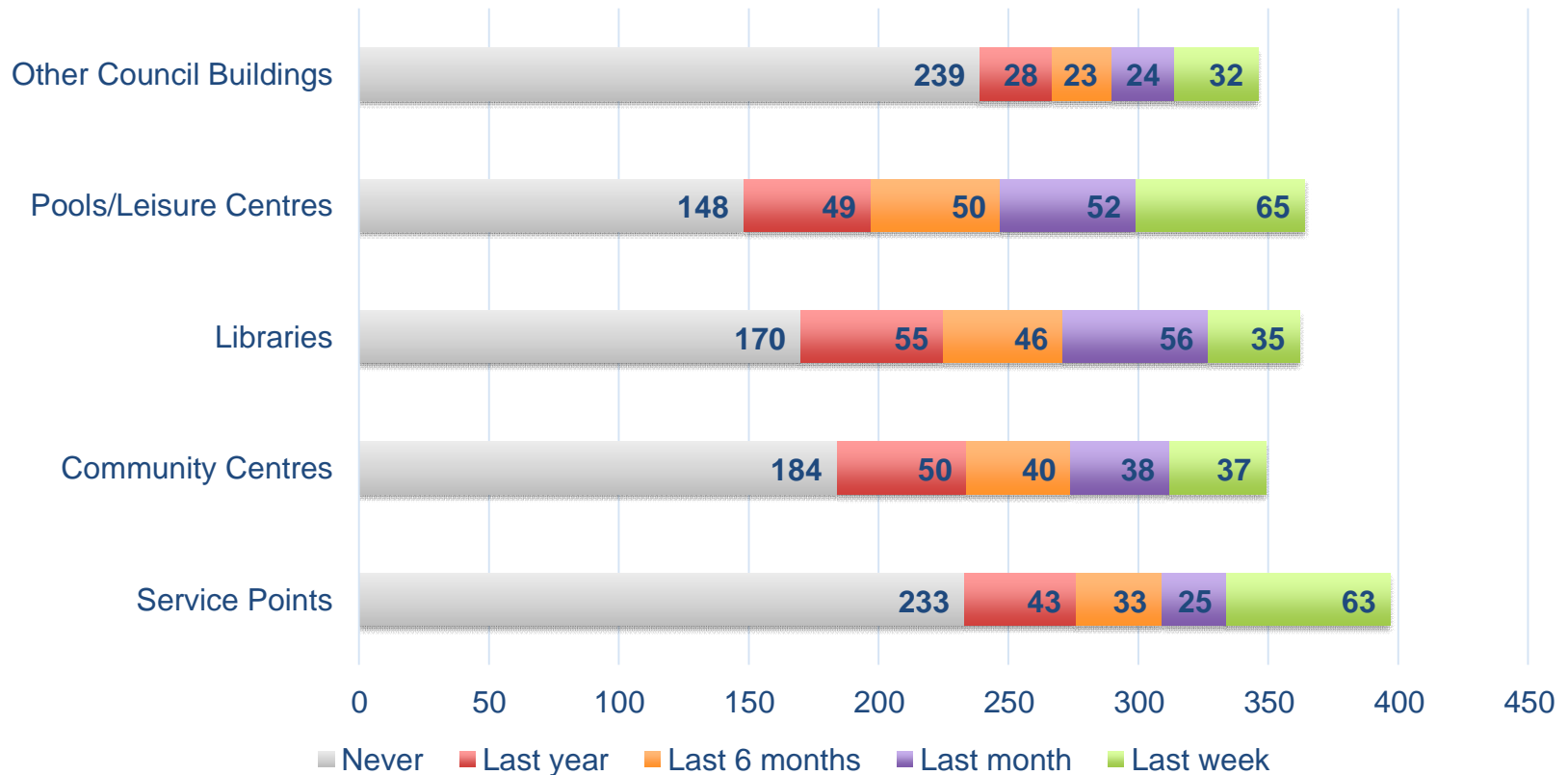




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# Which buildings do you visit and how often

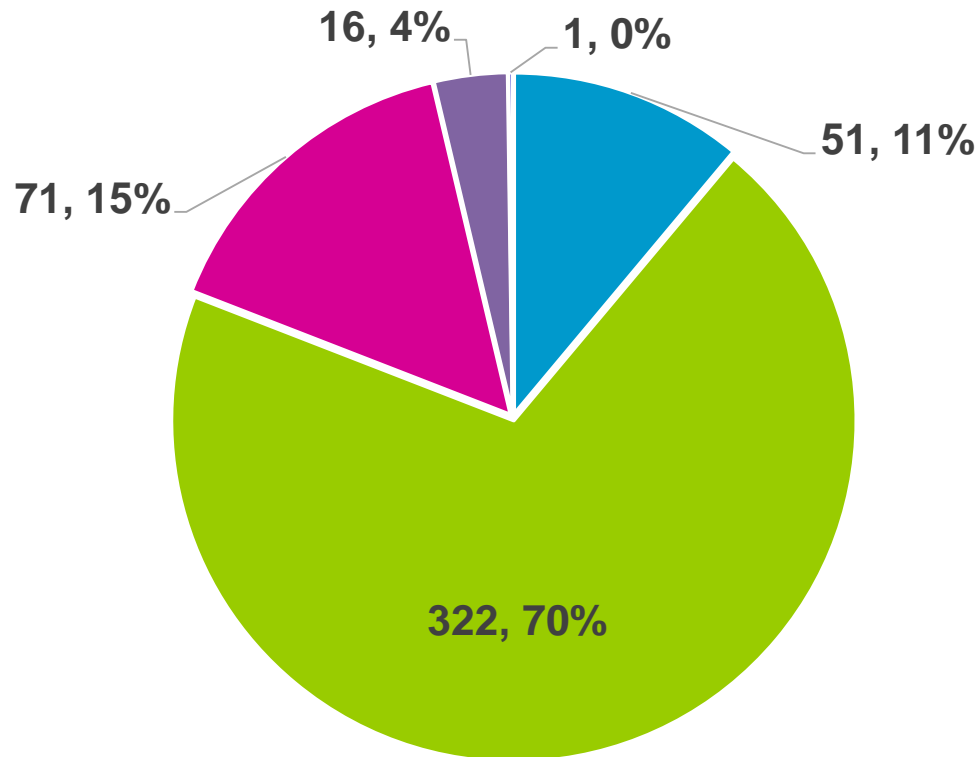




From mountain to sea



## Willing/able to travel to a council building



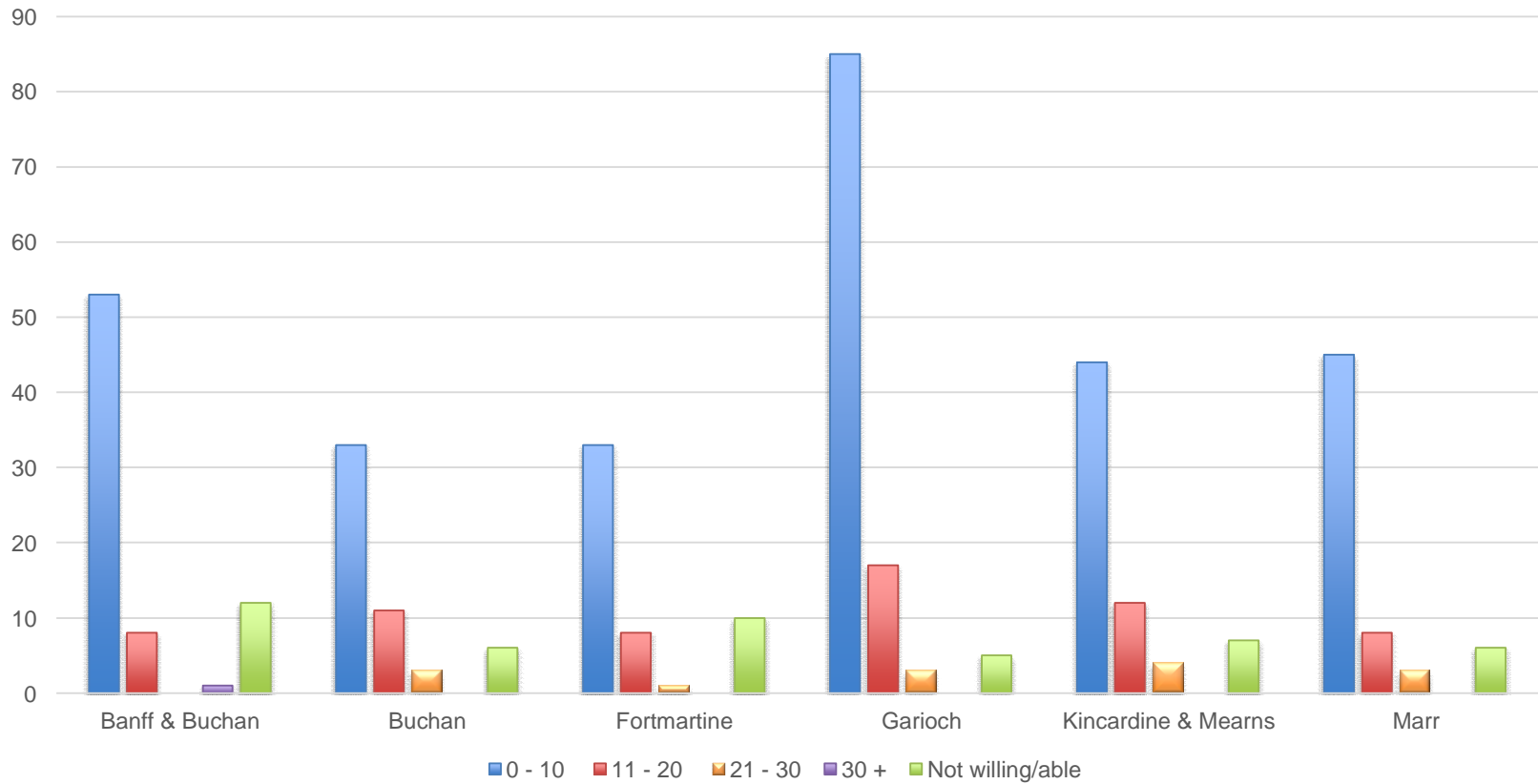
■ Not willing/able ■ 0 - 10 miles ■ 11 - 20 miles ■ 21 - 30 miles ■ Over 30 miles



From mountain to sea



### Willing to travel





From mountain to sea



## Reason people are not willing/able to travel:

Mobility issues were a big factor when respondents indicated they could not, or would not, attend an office.

Respondents indicated they do not drive or do not have access to a car. Some highlighted that due to staying in remote locations, they find access through public transport difficult or impossible.

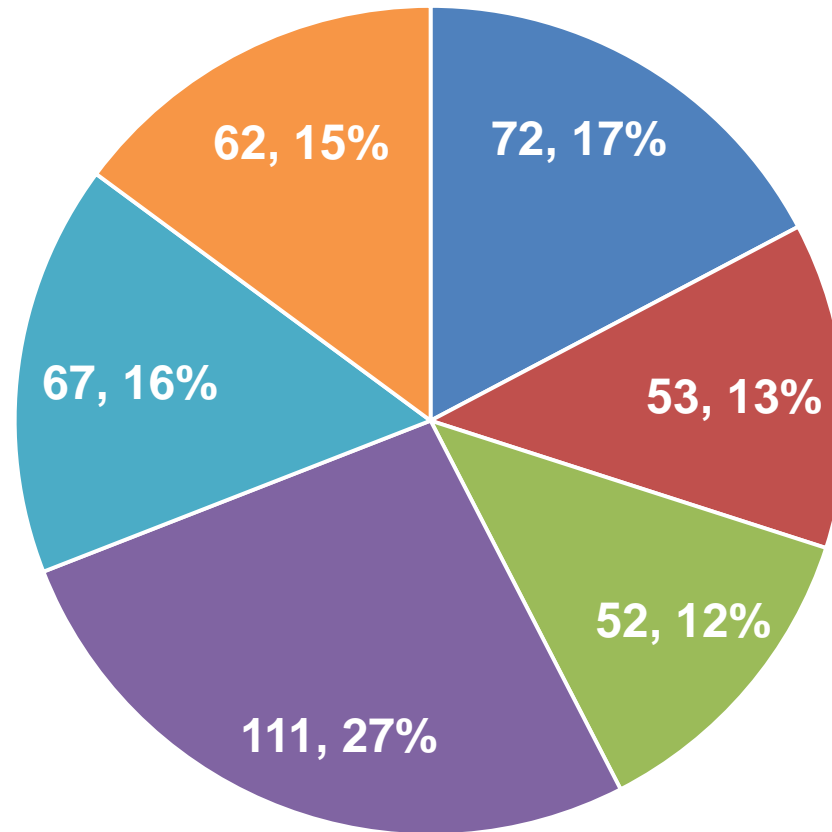
However, a number of respondents said they did not need to visit an office as all services they required were available online.



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### Area of responses



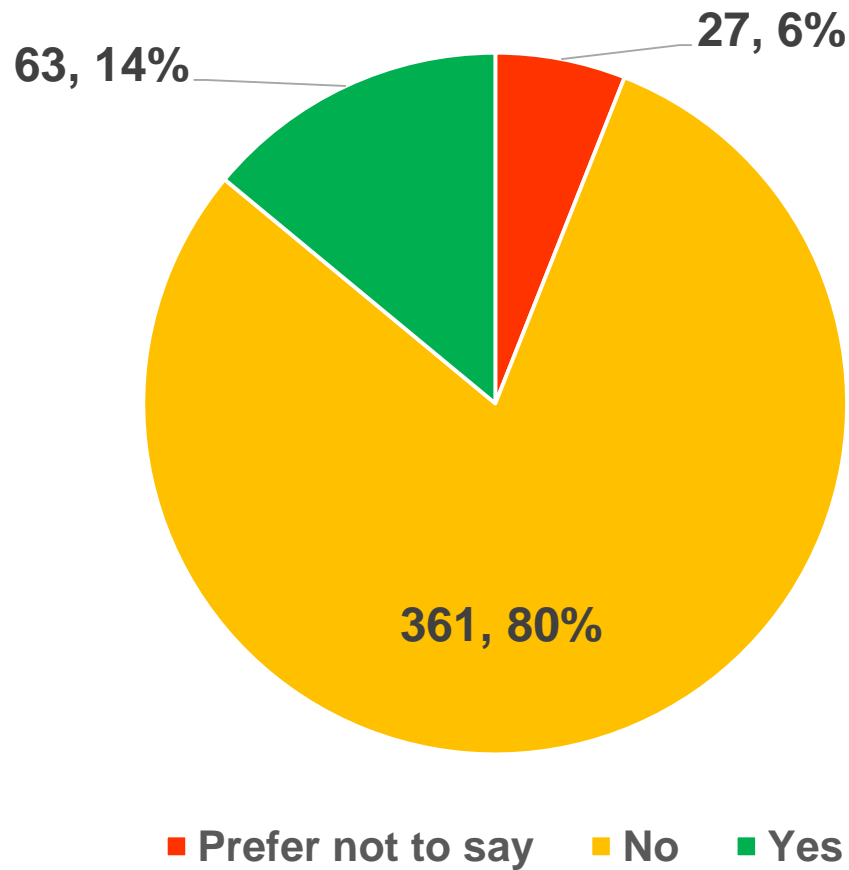
■ Banff & Buchan ■ Buchan ■ Formartine ■ Garioch ■ Kincardine & Mearns ■ Marr



From mountain to sea



## Consider themselves to be a disabled person

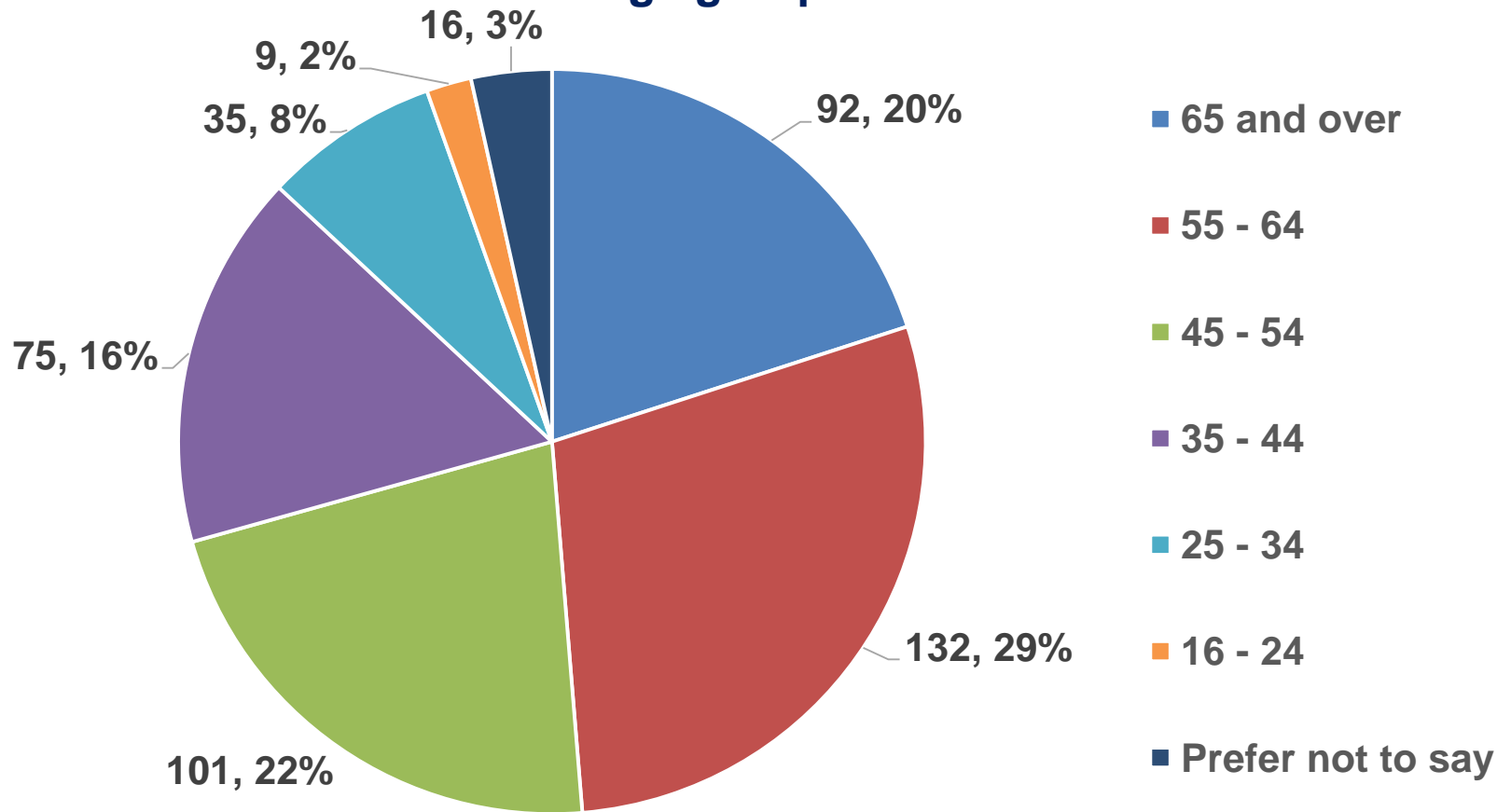




From mountain to sea



### Age groups





From mountain to sea

# Thank you

Lyn Esslemont, Engagement Officer

[aberdeenshire.gov.uk](http://aberdeenshire.gov.uk)



# Aberdeenshire Council

## Integrated Impact Assessment

### Customer Service Strategy

Assessment ID	IIA-001418
Lead Author	Michelle Milne
Additional Authors	David Leslie
Service Reviewers	Fiona McCallum, Jane Wilkinson
Subject Matter Experts	Suzanne Rhind, Claudia Cowie, Kakuen Mo, Caroline Hastings, Annette Johnston
Approved By	Kate Bond
Approved On	Thursday October 19, 2023
Publication Date	Thursday October 19, 2023

# 1. Overview

This document has been generated from information entered into the Integrated Impact Assessment system.

The implementation of a Customer Service Strategy across the organisation, detailing how we plan to deliver customer service in line with our Customer Service Charter

During screening 5 of 10 questions indicated that detailed assessments were required, the screening questions and their answers are listed in the next section. This led to 3 out of 5 detailed impact assessments being completed. The assessments required are:

- Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty
- Sustainability and Climate Change
- Town Centres First

In total there are 28 positive impacts as part of this activity. There are 16 negative impacts, all impacts have been mitigated.

A detailed action plan with 3 points has been provided.

This assessment has been approved by [kate.bond@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:kate.bond@aberdeenshire.gov.uk).

The remainder of this document sets out the details of all completed impact assessments.

## 2. Screening

Could your activity / proposal / policy cause an impact in one (or more) of the identified town centres?	Yes
Would this activity / proposal / policy have consequences for the health and wellbeing of the population in the affected communities?	No
Does the activity / proposal / policy have the potential to affect greenhouse gas emissions (CO2e) in the Council or community and / or the procurement, use or disposal of physical resources?	Yes
Does the activity / proposal / policy have the potential to affect the resilience to extreme weather events and/or a changing climate of Aberdeenshire Council or community?	No
Does the activity / proposal / policy have the potential to affect the environment, wildlife or biodiversity?	No
Does the activity / proposal / policy have an impact on people and / or groups with protected characteristics?	Yes
Is this activity / proposal / policy of strategic importance for the council?	Yes
Does this activity / proposal / policy impact on inequality of outcome?	Yes
Does this activity / proposal / policy have an impact on children / young people's rights?	No
Does this activity / proposal / policy have an impact on children / young people's wellbeing?	No

## 3. Impact Assessments

Children's Rights and Wellbeing	Not Required
Climate Change and Sustainability	All Negative Impacts Can Be Mitigated
Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty	All Negative Impacts Can Be Mitigated
Health Inequalities	Not Required
Town Centre's First	No Negative Impacts Identified

## 4. Equalities and Fairer Scotland Duty Impact Assessment

### 4.1. Protected Groups

Indicator	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unknown
Age (Younger)	Yes		Yes	
Age (Older)	Yes		Yes	
Disability	Yes		Yes	
Race	Yes		Yes	
Religion or Belief	Yes		Yes	
Sex	Yes		Yes	
Pregnancy and Maternity	Yes		Yes	
Sexual Orientation	Yes		Yes	
Gender Reassignment	Yes		Yes	
Marriage or Civil Partnership	Yes		Yes	

### 4.2. Socio-economic Groups

Indicator	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unknown
Low income	Yes		Yes	
Low wealth	Yes		Yes	
Material deprivation	Yes		Yes	
Area deprivation	Yes		Yes	
Socioeconomic background	Yes		Yes	

### 4.3. Positive Impacts

Impact Area	Impact
Age (Older)	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Age (Older)	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Age (Younger)	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Age (Younger)	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Disability	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.

Impact Area	Impact
Disability	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Gender Reassignment	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Gender Reassignment	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Marriage or Civil Partnership	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Marriage or Civil Partnership	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Pregnancy and Maternity	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Pregnancy and Maternity	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Race	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Race	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Religion or Belief	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Religion or Belief	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Sexual Orientation	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Sexual Orientation	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Sex	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Sex	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.

Impact Area	Impact
Area deprivation	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Low income	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Low wealth	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Material deprivation	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.
Socioeconomic background	Successful implementation of the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation will result in improved customer service delivery for all and increased customer satisfaction.

#### 4.4. Negative Impacts and Mitigations

Impact Area	Details and Mitigation
Age (Older)	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>
Age (Younger)	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>

Impact Area	Details and Mitigation
<p><b>Disability</b></p>	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>
<p><b>Gender Reassignment</b></p>	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>
<p><b>Marriage or Civil Partnership</b></p>	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>
<p><b>Pregnancy and Maternity</b></p>	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>

Impact Area	Details and Mitigation
<b>Race</b>	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>
<b>Religion or Belief</b>	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>
<b>Sex</b>	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>



Impact Area	Details and Mitigation
<p><b>Area deprivation</b></p>	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>
<p><b>Low income</b></p>	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>
<p><b>Low wealth</b></p>	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>
<p><b>Material deprivation</b></p>	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>

Impact Area	Details and Mitigation
Socioeconomic background	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                      Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access.</p> <p>Timescale                      12 months</p>

#### 4.5. Evidence

Type	Source	It says?	It Means?
External Consultation	Engage - Customer Services Survey	Survey results highlighted where customers are satisfied with current service delivery and the areas where they felt improvements were required, due to previous issues experienced on contacting the Council. It detailed how customers currently contact us and how they would prefer to contact us in future. It highlighted where means of contact is working well and also where it is not.	Improvements required to communicate with customers, advising progress on queries submitted, timescales for completion of work and a consistent approach to delivering customer service across the organisation.
Internal Consultation	Consultation with Elected Members	Area Committees in Banff & Buchan, Buchan, Formartine, Garioch, Kindardine & Mears and Marr were all consulted. The results of the Engage survey and external consultation were shared with Elected Members. Opinions and views of the external consultation were in line with those of Elected Members. The same areas of focus for the CS Strategy were highlighted.	Improvements required to communicate with customers, advising progress on queries submitted, timescales for completion of work and a consistent approach to delivering customer service across the organisation.
Internal Consultation	Attendance at Directorate Management Teams	Positive comments received.	Comments incorporated in Strategy.

Type	Source	It says?	It Means?
Internal Data	Customer Services Satisfaction Surveys and Feedback Team Information	Regular satisfaction surveys and corporate Feedback Team data is consistent with the results of the Customer Services Survey undertaken in April 2023.	We are aware of the issues faced by customers and what their priorities are.
External Consultation	Consultation with community groups and community councils	Consultation was undertaken with customers visiting our existing 8 Service Points; Tenants' Participation Group; Syrian/Ukrainian Refugees; Adult Learning; Gypsy Travellers; Lived Experience Network; Mid-Deeside and Buchan Community Councils. Consultation events highlighted where customers are satisfied with current service delivery and the areas where they felt improvements were required, due to previous issues experienced on contacting the Council. It detailed how customers currently contact us and how they would prefer to contact us in future. It highlighted where means of contact is working well and also where it is not.	Improvements required to communicate with customers, advising progress on queries submitted, timescales for completion of work and a consistent approach to delivering customer service across the organisation.

#### 4.6. Engagement with affected groups

Online Engage survey; face-to-face consultation at 8 Service Points across Aberdeenshire; consultation events held with groups as detailed previously; face-to-face consultation with Elected Members and with Directorate Management Teams.

#### 4.7. Ensuring engagement with protected groups

All existing groups representing those with protected characteristics have been contacted to consult on their views/opinions.

#### 4.8. Evidence of engagement

Evidence is available in terms of submitted Engage surveys, as well as detailed notes taken at all consultation events attended. Email communication with various groups representing those with protected characteristics and responses given. Contact with the Tackling Inequalities & Poverty Coordinator was made to obtain the views of those with lived experience. Comments relevant to the Strategy were included.

#### 4.9. Overall Outcome

## All Negative Impacts Can Be Mitigated.

All information obtained whilst undertaking consultation/engagement has been used to inform the content of the Customer Service Strategy. The aim of the Strategy is to improve customer experience of service delivery across the board within the organisation; ensure consistency of approach and encourage good practice. Doing this will support the organisation to meet customer priorities which were identified in the recent Customer Service Survey undertaken. Customers advised their priorities were for us to resolve enquiries at first point of contact; provide timescales for resolution of requests; meet timescales provided for resolution; keep them informed of progress; and to treat them fairly and listen to their concerns. Improved customer service delivery should be organisational-wide and cover all forms of customer contact eg. telephone, face-to-face, email, website contact etc. The action plan will take account of the negative impacts and work with other Services/customers to ensure improved community hub facilities and access to alternative contact channels.

### **4.10. Improving Relations**

All work undertaken as a result of the Customer Service Strategy will be fully inclusive with Services, customers, partnership organisations and existing forums involved.

### **4.11. Opportunities of Equality**

Implementing the Customer Service Strategy across the organisation should ensure consistency of approach and service delivery, regardless of which Service or which role. The Customer Service Charter details how, we as an organisation, will deal with customers. The Strategy will support the Charter and buy-in for the Strategy will ensure accountability of approach.

## 5. Sustainability and Climate Change Impact Assessment

### 5.1. Emissions and Resources

Indicator	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unknown
Consumption of energy		Yes		
Energy efficiency		Yes		
Energy source		Yes		
Low carbon transition			Yes	
Consumption of physical resources	Yes			
Waste and circularity		Yes		
Circular economy transition		Yes		
Economic and social transition		Yes		

### 5.2. Biodiversity and Resilience

Indicator	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unknown
Quality of environment		Yes		
Quantity of environment		Yes		
Wildlife and biodiversity		Yes		
Infrastructure resilience		Yes		
Council resilience		Yes		
Community resilience		Yes		
Adaptation		Yes		

### 5.3. Positive Impacts

Impact Area	Impact
Consumption of physical resources	The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. This may have an impact on our existing asset management portfolio and will provide the opportunity to co-locate community hubs with other Services.

### 5.4. Negative Impacts and Mitigations

Impact Area	Details and Mitigation
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Impact Area	Details and Mitigation
Low carbon transition	<p>The implementation of the Customer Service Strategy will cause a review of current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services. For some customers, this may increase travel time/distance to access face-to-face services, which may impact low carbon transition.</p> <p>Can be mitigated                      Yes</p> <p>Mitigation                              Work will be undertaken to increase community hub facilities across areas. In addition, online services will be reviewed to improve options for customer access, resulting in the need for customers to travel less.</p> <p>Timescale                              12 months</p>

## 5.5. Evidence

Type	Source	It says?	It Means?
Internal Data	Customer Satisfaction Surveys	Customers want to be able to access council services at a time and place that suits their needs.	Improving community hub facilities at additional locations across Aberdeenshire will improve options available to our customers. In addition, improving alternative contact channels will support what our customers want. Both improvements will potentially reduce customer travel to access services face-to-face and support low emission transition.

## 5.6. Overall Outcome

All Negative Impacts Can Be Mitigated.

All information obtained whilst undertaking consultation/engagement has been used to inform the content of the Customer Service Strategy. The aim of the Strategy is to improve customer experience of service delivery across the board within the organisation; ensure consistency of approach and encourage good practice. Doing this will support the organisation to meet customer priorities which were identified in the recent Customer Service Survey undertaken. Customers advised their priorities were for us to resolve enquiries at first point of contact; provide timescales for resolution of requests; meet timescales provided for resolution; keep them informed of progress; and to treat them fairly and listen to their concerns. Improved customer service delivery should be organisational-wide and cover all forms of customer contact eg. telephone, face-to-face, email, website contact etc. The action plan will take account of the negative impacts and work with other Services/customers to ensure improved community hub facilities and access to alternative contact channels.

## 6. Town Centre's First Impact Assessment

### 6.1. Local Factors

Indicator	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Unknown
Town centre assets		Yes		
Footfall	Yes			
Changes to road layouts		Yes		
Parking		Yes		
Infrastructure changes		Yes		
Aesthetics of the town centre		Yes		
Tourism		Yes		
Public safety		Yes		
Town centre business	Yes			
Cultural heritage and identity		Yes		
Social and cultural aspects		Yes		

### 6.2. Positive Impacts

Impact Area	Impact
Footfall	Improving our ways of working and offering access to Council Services in local areas, based on what our customers tell us they want, will improve our service delivery. As a result, through word of mouth in local areas we could potentially increase footfall to locations in certain places and in turn, Town Centres and local businesses.
Town centre business	Improving our ways of working and offering access to Council Services in local areas, based on what our customers tell us they want, will improve our service delivery. As a result, through word of mouth in local areas we could potentially increase footfall to locations in certain places and in turn, Town Centres and local businesses.

### 6.3. Evidence

Type	Source	It says?	It Means?
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Type	Source	It says?	It Means?
External Consultation	Consultation at Existing 8 Service Points	Customers advised that on visiting local locations, they have not always been able to access the required information.	Improving our ways of working, ensuring customers can access required information at an appropriate local community hub will improve our service delivery. As a result, through word of mouth in local areas we could potentially increase footfall to some local locations and in turn, Town Centres and local businesses.
External Consultation	Engage - Customer Service Survey	Customers advised that on visiting Council locations, they have not always been able to access the relevant information.	Improving our ways of working, ensuring customers can access required information at an appropriate local community hub will improve our service delivery. As a result, through word of mouth in local areas we could potentially increase footfall to some local locations and in turn, Town Centres and local businesses.
Internal Data	Feedback Team Data	Complaints from local residents following visits to local locations, where they have been unable to access the required information at the time of visiting. Resulting in customers having to contact us again, either by a second visit to an office, or via telephone/web chat/online etc.	Improving our ways of working, ensuring customers can access required information at an appropriate local community hub will improve our service delivery. As a result, through word of mouth in local areas we could potentially increase footfall to some local locations and in turn, Town Centres and local businesses.

## 6.4. Overall Outcome

No Negative Impacts Identified.

All information obtained whilst undertaking consultation/engagement has been used to inform the content of the Customer Service Strategy. The aim of the Strategy is to improve customer experience of service delivery across the board within the organisation; ensure consistency of approach and encourage good practice.



## 7. Action Plan

Planned Action	Details	
Review current service delivery, which may impact the locations at where customers can access Council services	<b>Lead Officer</b> <b>Repeating Activity</b> <b>Planned Start</b> <b>Planned Finish</b> <b>Expected Outcome</b> <b>Resource Implications</b>	Michelle Milne No Thursday February 01, 2024 Monday March 31, 2025 Increased community hub provision across Aberdeenshire Resources will be managed within the Customer Service team and the wider Customer and Digital Services Service, in conjunction with the Transformation Programme.
Work with LLA to identify appropriate locations for community hubs.	<b>Lead Officer</b> <b>Repeating Activity</b> <b>Planned Start</b> <b>Planned Finish</b> <b>Expected Outcome</b> <b>Resource Implications</b>	Michelle Milne No Thursday February 01, 2024 Monday March 31, 2025 Increased community hub provision across areas. Resources will be managed within the Customer Service team and the wider Customer and Digital Services Service, in conjunction with the Transformation Programme.
Review of all contact channel delivery.	<b>Lead Officer</b> <b>Repeating Activity</b> <b>Planned Start</b> <b>Planned Finish</b> <b>Expected Outcome</b> <b>Resource Implications</b>	Michelle Milne No Thursday February 01, 2024 Monday March 31, 2025 Ensure our customer service delivery is fit for purpose and meets the needs/ priorities of our customers as identified in the Customer Service survey undertaken. Resources will be managed within the Customer Service team and the wider Customer and Digital Services Service, in conjunction with the Transformation Programme.

## REPORT TO BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE – 11 JANUARY 2024

### ABERDEENSHIRE'S DIGITAL STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

#### 1 Executive Summary/Recommendations

This report provides an update on the progress of [Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy](#) which was previously reported to Business Services Committee on 8 June 2023, 12 January 2023, 23 June 2022, 6 January 2022 and 7 January 2021. An update report was also considered by Area Committees in September 2022, and previously a Bulletin was circulated to Area and Policy Committees during August/September 2021. This report details the holistic approach to delivering Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy, setting out progress across the suite of projects which received funding under the Digital Strategy package of support approved by Council and delegated to the Business Services Committee in June 2021.

#### 1.2 The Committee is recommended to:

**1.2.1 Consider and make comment on the update report; and**

**1.2.2 Note that an update will be issued to area committees via a briefing note.**

#### 2 Decision Making Route

2.1 Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy 2020-2025 builds on the achievements resulting from the 'Innovate Aberdeenshire' 2015-2020 Strategy.

2.2 Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy 2020-2025 was approved by the Business Services Committee on 7 January 2021.

2.3 A progress update was previously circulated to all Area and Policy Committees during August/September 2021 and Area Committees during September 2022.

2.4 The most recent [progress update](#) was considered by Business Services Committee on 8th June 2023.

#### 3 Discussion

3.1 Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy sets out the priorities and continuing commitment to embedding our digital approach for Aberdeenshire contributing to delivering the council's strategic priorities.

3.2 Cross service engagement identified the digital enablers and interdependencies considered to have the greatest impact to strengthening the council's resilience and supporting communities. These formed the basis for developing an overarching business case securing £2m funding, approved by Council (24 June 2021), providing investment in those digital solutions contributing to removing barriers to providing citizens with increased choice in the way services are

accessed and increased the potential for improvements. An overview of each project, expected broad benefits and current progress is provided at **Appendix 1a**, along with an overview of the current Priority 1 Major Projects underway, to help illustrate the breadth of further activity ongoing at present. Although not funded by the Digital Strategy, these projects contribute to achieving the outcomes of the Digital Strategy for Aberdeenshire.

- 3.3 The digital strategy programme delivery is the responsibility of the Business Change Team. The team ensures the programmes are investigated, defined and technically accurate in addition to identifying and managing key risks, dependencies and issues. The Business Change team manage the delivery of the project resources (across IT technical teams and project stakeholders) and ensure that projects are delivered to scope including time, cost and quality. The Digital Programme colleagues work together with Change Team and project stakeholders to ensure critical change readiness, benefits plans and adoption of new technology are embedded to ensure project success. Business Change report to the Digital Strategy Board on programme progress, issues or where key strategic decisions are required.

The strategy is well into its delivery, and we are now seeing the conclusion of several projects, with all others moving through their final Discovery or Delivery stages (see appendix 1B for a visual breakdown of project status). The programme continues to receive broad support as it seeks to deliver meaningful efficiency or effectiveness change through its suite of projects.

As part of the transformation programme (agreed by full council in November 2023) a Data, Digital and Technology workstream was agreed. Officers will use the learning from the delivery of the Digital Strategy to inform activity and over time will consider how to transition into the new workstream to ensure there is no duplication or crossover of effort.

- 3.4 The programme includes three pilot style projects which were intended to test concepts for further investment. These are the review of a Master Data Management solution, a pilot around digital enablement for our front line colleagues and Internet of Things sensor network

#### Internet Of Things

Following conclusion of the trials it was found that sensors in some areas were providing meaningful and important data which helped real-time decisions to be made. A report is currently being drafted to detail findings with consideration of the associated risks and costs.

One of the successful trials focused on monitoring damp levels in properties and Housing having seen benefit from these sensors. They are keen to continue with sensors in all housing stock to monitor for damp and mould. The Service are investigating alternative solutions to identify best value for the council and decide on how to move forward.

### Master Data Management

Following a successful implementation of data sharing between the first two core systems the pilot has received approval to begin reviewing the next core business system to bring on board.

This first stage assures customer data contained in our Council Tax system and our Customer Services system remains consistent and flags changes between the two. The next system to investigate joining the MDM solution will be Housing.

The more systems brought in to share data with each other the more accurate and joined up our data will be, meaning data starts to be viewed as a powerful asset that can be trusted.

Benefits for this piece of work are centered around two main themes, benefits for our customers and benefits for our organisation. Having accurate and trusted data ensures we are communicating between services when changes happen, such as changes of name or address reducing the need to contact us more than once with any changes. It also reduces administration within the council, allowing us to proceed with data we trust rather than check for changes in alternative systems.

### Digital Solutions for Frontline Colleagues

Recommendations from the pilot surfaced some opportunity for the use of digital tools such as Office 365 and specifically we saw real potential benefit within Live Life Aberdeenshire through the use of Microsoft Shifts.

The decision to add these capabilities to our IT Service Catalogue to allow services to purchase licenses for their staff concluded the pilot and we continue to investigate solutions for time booking and timesheets through other project channels.

- 3.5 A maturing benefits profile continues to emerge across the programme, with Return on Investment ROI identified across Webchat, Process Automation and Online Services indicating potential ROI by 2025.

Process Automation has delivered eight live processes to date and achieved cash benefits with the potential for these savings to grow with further opportunities for the project pipeline. Having delivered these processes we will now conduct a review of our delivered capability so far, assess what we have learned and ask for recommendations on future direction from Digital Strategy Board.

Two further streams are producing tangible financial savings. One of these streams have concluded - Webchat – where a reduction in posts translates to 4 FTE saving with the potential for this number to grow with further refinement of the chat solution. The other is our Online Services Programme – aiming to digitise processes bringing them online and improving those which already exist. Currently the programme is preparing for online council tax billing and reviewing Road Fault Reporting.

Table 1 highlights the financial value associated with these savings:

Project	Budget	Return on Investment to date
Webchat	£91,643	£144,982
Process Automation	£667,000	£74,760
Online Services- My Aberdeenshire	£162,750	£51,548

Wider benefits exist as these projects support the organisation in its transformation journey supporting Aberdeenshire to become more efficient and streamlined in its processes and maximising the transaction channel choice for both internal and external stakeholders.

We also have several projects which do not offer measurable ROI benefits profiles due to their nature, eg, Cyber security and compliance and Building Digital Skills, but have wider benefits in terms of offsetting potential significant financial and operational impact through cyber-attack and ensuring our workforce has the right level of skills and capability to leverage existing and emerging technology (**Appendix 1D**).

- 3.6 The potential for benefits realisation is one predicated on full support from services, to ensure the delivery of digital capability is properly and consistently adopted, embedded and exploited. In addition to supporting the realisation of process change and efficiency directly, the digital strategy is supporting the pathway to change more broadly. The opportunity for change enabled by leveraging digital technology should be embedded into service workforce plans as the organisation evolves its roles and service delivery models. Recent conversations in one service for example, have highlighted that a decision to support VS applications was directly enabled by the impact of the online services project, however, this was not originally attributed to the digital strategy and the challenge remains of how to identify and report on such changes in the wider organisation.

Further examples of this are

- Online Services supporting Short Term Lets applications avoiding the need for recruitment of 3 FTE
- Online Chat providing time saving opportunities in order to provide swifter response times
- Automating time consuming processes which allow staff to focus on additional more complex responsibilities

The digital strategy is a key enabler of the workforce planning approach at Aberdeenshire and several of the projects are helping the organisation to evolve, becoming more effective in its processes and service delivery, freeing up resource to focus on identified priorities. The impact these projects have can be seen in **Appendix 1C**.

Our non digital strategy funded Major projects we continue to report on to Board for information which include the replacement of the LLA service's management system Gladstone, which has a significant emerging benefits profile, and the Council Tax Online Billing Module which is being managed as part of Online Services and is due to be launched early 2024 and has a separate emerging benefits profile.

- 3.7 The projected spend profile for the programme (**Appendix 1E**) helps to illustrate that as projects are now moving through the last 1.5 years of the 5 year plan. With this increase in spend we have seen clear evidence of increasing effectiveness throughout our services making processes such as creating and managing shift, committee reporting, communicating with our customers and improving our data quality. Increasing spend also means the projections for ROI continue to increase in forecasting reports (**Appendix 1F**).
- 3.8 Digital access and inclusion plays an important role in the success of our Digital Strategy. The Digital Inclusion workstream continues to make progress with the cross-service group, including representation from Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership. This continues to build a shared understanding of those amongst our communities who are experiencing digital exclusion. A shared Communications Strategy and Plan is being developed to ensure a planned approach to communicating and engaging with communities. The group continue to jointly develop and deliver an action plan to address the 4 key areas of digital inclusion:
- Digital Connectivity – infrastructure and/or access to connectivity
  - Digital Access – Equipment and affordability of digital access
  - Digital confidence – Developing skills and opportunities
  - Hybrid Solutions – Support and alternative solutions for excluded groups
- 3.9 The Digital Engagement Team within Economic Development continues to deliver activity and projects to improve digital connectivity in Aberdeenshire. The team is leading work on behalf of the Aberdeenshire Council and the Aberdeen City Region Deal to lobby for further intervention to improve broadband infrastructure from UK Government through Project Gigabit, which is expected to open procurement lots in Scotland by the end of the calendar year 2023. Engagement with stakeholders is also being focused on for the Shared Rural Network programme which will increase 4G mobile coverage across the Region. Work with Scottish Government continues to promote and stimulate demand in the Reaching 100% Programme and Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme, with Aberdeenshire continuing to see the highest number of interventions and deployment of voucher projects in Scotland. Additionally, Aberdeenshire will have some of the highest level of deployment of full-fibre through the Reaching 100% Programme in the coming year. Further information and statistics on the R100 Programme in Aberdeenshire is provided at **Appendix 2**.
- 3.10 In financial year 2023/24, the Digital Engagement Team has directly supported nearly 2,000 premises to date in matters relating to digital connectivity, including both residential and commercial premises. Over 90% of enquiries have been resolved with a positive outcome, improving digital connectivity. The team has

held 12 public events and sessions to support communities and stakeholders in digital connectivity improvements. The team also continues to publish the monthly Digital Engagement Newsletter, promoting the work being done across all streams of work.

- 3.11 Since the appointment of Aberdeenshire’s first Service Designer in January 2022 Service Design embedding activities have continued with the design and delivery of a Service Design Awareness Training course now available through ALDO with courses running monthly. By the end of 2023 we will have trained 68 colleagues. A Systems Thinking Course has also been designed and is ready for testing with participants in 2024 before adding to ALDO, all linked and referenced within a refreshed Service Design Sharepoint site. Service Design has been used to support interventions and co-design activities within Environment & Infrastructure Support Services, ECS/Children Services, Property and Facilities, Live Life Aberdeenshire, Finance and Customer Services. Service Design methods and the Service Designer himself has actively supported the shaping of the Transformation Programme through the design and delivery of the 6 summer workshops - including Elected Members and lately in the review of cost saving opportunities with Chief Officers.
- 3.12 The Digital Skills team have been making significant progress. Monthly Digital Champions meetings resumed at the beginning in May focusing on innovation, skills development and engagement between champions. The Digital Workforce Sharepoint site was launched and the first annual Digital Maturity Assessment survey (DMA) was carried out (report expected Jan 2024).

The Digital skills 'Learning Pathways' site is now in testing (in partnership with NHS & Digital Office), offering a range of digital learning & training opportunities. A Digital Training Needs Analysis tool is being developed supporting staff to identify the appropriate MS tool for their work; estimated Go Live is March 2024. An ALDO 'managers passport' course is being developed, emphasising digital tools and leadership expectations. Digital Skills clinics will launch early 2024, with ALDO courses on relevant topics. An MS partner to support Digital Champions is being procured (anticipated award Dec 2023). A Digital Champions recruitment campaign is planned (training beginning early 2024. The team is liaising with IT/Microsoft in reviewing Centre of Excellence platform; reviewing governance of citizen development guidelines and protocols.

#### 4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 4.1 Aberdeenshire’s Digital Strategy impacts across all pillars and priorities:

Pillar	Priority
Our People	Learning for Life Health & Wellbeing
Our Environment	Climate Change Resilient Communities
Our Economy	Economic Growth Infrastructure and public assets

The Strategy promotes the key principles that underpin the Pillars and Priorities tackling poverty and inequalities and digital infrastructure and economy.

- 4.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		X	
Staffing		X	
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland			X
Children and Young People's Rights and Wellbeing			X
Climate Change and Sustainability			X
Health and Wellbeing			X
Town Centre First			X

- 4.3 There are no financial or staffing implications arising directly from the content of this update report. £2m was allocated to Digital Strategy and Officers will ensure this is not exceeded through careful financial management. Savings are being realised by services as a result of the investment being made.
- 4.4 The screening section as part of Stage One of the Integrated Impact Assessment process has not identified the requirement for any further detailed assessments to be undertaken because the Committee is only being asked to note the progress to date and there will be no differential impact as a result of this update.
- 4.5 No additional risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level as the purpose of the report is only to inform the Committee of the actions being taken forward since Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy was approved on 7 January 2021.

## 5 Scheme of Governance

- 5.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments have been incorporated into this report. They are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.
- 5.2 The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of Section C 1.1b and g of the [List of Committee Powers in Part 2A](#) of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to matters within the remit of Customer Communication and Improvement and Information and Communication Technology.

**Rob Simpson**  
**Director of Business Services**

Report prepared by Kerry Thorneycroft, Digital Programme Team Leader  
Date: 6<sup>h</sup> December 2023



**List of Appendices:**

- Appendix 1A - Digital Strategy and Priority 1 Major Project progress
- Appendix 1B - Digital Strategy Programme - status update at a glance
- Appendix 1C - The Impact of the Digital Strategy on people
- Appendix 1D - Effectiveness V Efficiency
- Appendix 1E - Digital Strategy Spend Forecast
- Appendix 1F - Digital Strategy Measurable Benefit Forecast
- Appendix 2 - R100 Information & Statistics

## Appendix 1A - Aberdeenshire's Digital Strategy Investment – Digital Strategy Projects Progress update December 2023

Project Name	Sponsor	Lead (BA/PL)	Overview	Budget	Programme Benefits	Projected Savings	Latest update
<b>Our Citizens and Communities</b>							
Online Services via MyAccount	Kate Bond	Dylan Nelson  Nikki Sandhu	<p>Enabling our citizens to access online services through Aberdeenshire Council's website and myAberdeenshire.</p> <p>By registering for myAberdeenshire, users can access a growing range of services using a single sign-on.</p> <p>To minimise unnecessary interaction both existing and new Council processes are considered for integration online, these are prioritised, using data to make informed decisions about which services should come first.</p>	£162,750	<p><b>Benefits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Customer - All identified front facing Online Services will have enabled online interaction for the end-to-end process – Response time by Services is quicker – access to services are quicker and can be accessed at any time.</li> <li>● Financial - With less admin time required, balanced with self-service available 24/7 each Online Service developed in the MyAberdeenshire Mobile App or Aberdeenshire Website, in a rolling program estimated each online service will fund itself through savings within 12 months.</li> <li>● Employee - Reduced operational costs associated with online service offering.</li> </ul>	<p>Projected £108,918 per annum Savings from streamlining administrative and operational tasks associated with supporting paper based / existing non online processes.</p> <p>These savings will come in the main from process and time efficiency for staff.</p> <p>More detailed financial efficiency is being explored on a case-by-case basis and will form an important part of prioritising the back log of processes.</p>	<p><u>Council Tax</u> All training and technical setup has been completed and the finance team are now determining how long they need to configure the portal. The Go Live date will be determined at a planning meeting 1st December.</p> <p><u>Harbour Payments</u> Harbour Payments Form has been completed and is ready to Go Live on 30.11</p> <p><u>Improvement To Road Faults</u> The improvements to Road Faults process have now been proposed and the business analyst and user experience team are finalising how they want the user journey to look before handing over to technical team to commence.</p> <p>The programme awaits strategic direction from the Customer Service Strategy, there is also a need for Service to review their current request and determine if there are any potential areas that would benefit more from online services</p>
AI Webchat	Kate Bond	Dylan Nelson	Improving our current online chat offering with Artificial Intelligence (AI), which will allow	£91,643	<p><b>Benefits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Customer - Improved customer service via reduction in call volumes and resulting wait times.</li> </ul>	Projected financial savings related to the introduction of corporate webchat are based upon the reduction of enquiries directly to our staff,	The project has been delivered and has moved across to Service ownership. Project Completion activities have been taking place to ensure a smooth transition to "business as usual" operations, to record any Lessons Learned, and to identify any remaining tasks.

		Nikki Sandhu	<p>more customer enquiries to be dealt with securely without human intervention, 24 hours a day throughout the year.</p> <p>Enhancement such as providing information about council services, answering progress of applications, queries, or concerns.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Demographic Demand - Introduction of a highly requested communication channel, members of the public increasingly expect to be able to contact Local Authorities via chat.</li> <li>● Employee - Reduction in incoming calls to the Contact Centre which is currently a significant staffing pressure.</li> <li>● Innovation – Provide a means to answer the large amount of “common” queries the Council receives (e.g. bin collections) which frees up staff time to focus on resolving more complex issues.</li> <li>● Financial - Reduction in operating costs as chat is far cheaper than fielding phone queries.</li> </ul>	enabling teams to do more with less numbers, and redirecting attention to more cost-effective tasks.
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## Our Employees

Building Digital Skills			We maximise investment in Microsoft 365 by building the digital skills of council employees with targeted support that develops user capability. We harness the resource and knowledge of our employees by developing the Digital Champion programme.	£112,038	<p>Organisational Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● A digitally confident workforce able to leverage the functionality of the digital tools at their disposal</li> <li>● A modern workforce helping the organisation prepare for the future</li> <li>● Employees feel valued and part of a digital culture they identify with</li> </ul>	Quantifiable savings not part of the remit here- but benefits will lead to better ways of working, efficient and supported employees using digital tools to maximise service delivery and capacity.	<p>Monthly Digital Champions meetings began in May</p> <p>Creation and launch of Digital Workforce Sharepoint site.</p> <p>Launch of first annual Digital Maturity Assessment survey (DMA) ran to Dec 5th 2023; report anticipated Jan 2024.</p> <p>Digital skills 'Learning Pathways' site now in testing (in partnership with NHS &amp; Digital Office), accessible to all public sector staff.</p> <p>Digital Training Needs Analysis tool in active development.</p> <p>Procurement of MS partner to support Digital Champions community development ongoing; anticipated award Dec 2023.</p> <p>Service engagement &amp; campaign to recruit additional Digital Champions and begin training planned for early 2024.</p> <p>Collaboration in development of ALDO 'managers passport' course, emphasising digital tools and leadership expectations</p> <p>Active development of 'digital skills' clinics (launching early 2024) and ALDO courses on relevant topics.</p> <p>Liaison with IT/Microsoft in reviewing Centre of Excellence platform; reviewing governance of citizen development guidelines and protocols.</p>
Front Line Colleagues	Phil McKay	Andy Wilkins	Provision of mobile digital solutions (e.g. devices) to front-	£208,562	<p>Organisational Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Customer - Improved reputation with employees and service users</li> </ul>	Potential financial benefits are being assessed as part of the pilot. Participants will be	The project concluded at the end of the pilot phase and it was agreed that lower cost F1 licences and Shared Managed Devices (when available) would be added to the IT Service Catalogue to enable frontline colleagues to have access to some

			<p>line employees in areas such as waste, roads and cleaning, who currently have no digital access to Aberdeenshire Council systems. This initiative could provide the ability to schedule jobs, communicate across widespread teams, and provide live data.</p> <p>With an appropriate M365 license this will also give access to some M365 tools such as Teams, Yammer and SharePoint, this will support flexible working reduce avoidable travel and paper processes.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Innovation – improved governance due to the move away from paper processes and information to digital methods</li> <li>• Sustainability - Reduced carbon footprint</li> <li>• Employee - Staff that no longer feel digitally and technologically excluded</li> <li>• Financial - Reduction in transport costs – fuel, maintenance, and CO2</li> </ul>	<p>recording any avoided travel as a result of digital access/tools - indicative time/cost/carbon footprint savings will be calculated.</p> <p>There is potential for savings in current paper-based time and attendance management processes through use of Microsoft Shifts, which is being trialled by an LLA team - baselining of full 'as is' process to be undertaken and compared with digitised process. Initial assessment of savings potential for this element of the project to be undertaken by end of March 2023.</p> <p>Potential financial benefits may be through removing paper-based requests which in some cases involve travel to hand in and transport forms and re-keying of information.</p> <p>There are related potential efficiencies by considering whether a lower cost F1 licence is sufficient for users who currently have more expensive licences - the pilot will help to assess viability of the F1 licence for business needs</p>	<p>Microsoft tools.</p> <p>It was also agreed that there would be further investigation into the development opportunities of digitising paper processes that affect frontline colleagues. A Lessons Learned workshop will take place shortly to identify successes and potential improvements arising as a result of the project.</p>
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**Our information**

Information security and	Chris Clell and	Lars Frevert	Additional investment in cyber security service, to help us achieve our goals,	£50,000	Enhanced cyber security leads to increased compliance with key cyber security standards, improved information governance, increased threat avoidance, faster and more	Savings here are to mitigate the potentially costly circumstances of a security breach, and potential damage to	Discussions are underway with MS partners on an engagement programme for implementation of Data Loss Prevention policies/procedures and the 20k remaining against Information & Security compliance will be used to fund that work. The team is awaiting statement of works and further clarity around the cost.
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compliance			in line with the Cyber Resilience Public Sector Action Plan (PSAP).		<p>efficient incident management and response, reduced corporate risk and fewer information security breaches.</p> <p>Technologies will be piloted which will enhance control and backup of cloud service use, automate threat investigation and response, enhance Data Loss Prevention through enhanced licensing of high-risk users, removal of suspect emails and high-risk web links and the ability to simulate common attacks.</p>	Aberdeenshire Council's reputation should there be a lack of compliance.	
Master Data Management (MDM)	Rob Simpson	Michelle Simmons	<p>MDM is the process of linking key business data, held in relation to a citizen, to a single point of reference across all of the council's core systems which store this information, such as Name, Address, Telephone Number etc</p> <p>It allows Council systems to be interconnected, saving time and ensuring that our data is accurate and up to date and avoids costly errors.</p>	£128,386	<p>Anticipated Savings</p> <p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer - Assist with homelessness eligibility instantly. Improved customer service, allowing our service users to feel reassured we are managing data efficiently.</li> <li>• Tell Us Once – Our commitment to joined up One Aberdeenshire approach, when customers contact us about a change of address, a death or a change in circumstance.</li> <li>• Innovation - more efficient processes. Improvements in Universal Credit monitoring and management</li> <li>• Financial - Identification of fraud, e.g., Single Person Discount; Tracing unrecovered debt.</li> </ul>	<p>Projected financial savings over the next five years achieved via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More efficient processes</li> <li>• Improved data quality</li> <li>• Better joined up way of working</li> <li>• Identification of fraud e.g., Single Person Discount</li> <li>• Early intervention in terms of debt</li> <li>• Analysis of propensity to pay by direct debit</li> <li>• Provision of more targeted advice to sustain tenancies</li> <li>• Reduction in evictions</li> <li>• Reduction in management costs</li> <li>• Improvements in Universal Credit monitoring and management</li> <li>• Identification of under occupation</li> <li>• Combating cuckooing</li> <li>• Tracing unrecovered debt</li> </ul>	<p>myAccount integration has now ceased as agreed at digital strategy board. The third integration with housing service is being investigated as the replacement for myAccount. Discussions are ongoing with the service and supplier to determine feasibility and requirements.</p>

						<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification of those in fuel poverty via algorithms in system</li> <li>• Improved levels of tenancy sustainment through enhanced pre-tenancy checks</li> </ul>	
Data Hub	Paul Macari	Fiona McCallum	This project enables the development of Aberdeenshire's data analytics capabilities and is fundamental to the delivery of the Digital Strategy. It allows us to link the information we hold with external data to improve decision making and help us provide better services.	£400,000	<p>Benefits</p> <p>A data analytics capability that links our internal data sets with selected external data sets for real-time analytics will enable better citizen facing services, improved support to decision making for policy and operational matters, and insights to data that can create value-add or efficiencies in services.</p> <p>We recognise that implementing a data analytics capability is a change programme that will involve people, processes and technology. The proposed delivery methodology will create tranches of activity that will be directly linked to user needs, and enable governance decisions for investment in each tranche, rather than a 'big bang' approach.</p>	Savings to be determined through the development of the Full Business case	Critical council datasets, linking to council plan metrics in process of being identified and Data cataloguing and Dictionaries of these critical datasets underway. Have met with technical providers and data experts to discover solutions and expertise available and potential costs. Project board met on 26/10/23 where Data and Analytics TL provided overview of project work to date and shared 2 year roadmap. Immediate priorities are standardisation of data quality/dictionary documentation and identification of existing data skills training within Council.
e-Committee System	Karen Wiles	Ruth Lias	Source an improved e-Committee management system, which enables and facilitates committee activities such as publishing Councillor information, scheduling meetings, and preparing and publishing Committee paperwork using	£124,103	<p>Benefits</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Customer - Easy access to information (reports/agenda/reports) via online system and search function</li> <li>2. Employees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reduced admin staff time of 407hrs per year creating and publishing agenda packs</li> <li>- Providing report monitoring process that will reduce staff time to go through the approval process manually</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Finance - Less waste – reduction in paper copies of committee papers</li> <li>4. Innovation - More efficient storage of documentation by</li> </ol>	<p>Projected £36,000</p> <p>Opportunity for savings on manual processes such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Automating the creation of committee report packs.</li> <li>- Providing report monitoring process which saves staff time on going through different levels of approval process manually</li> <li>- Provide the visibility of how to create a</li> </ul>	<p>Phase 2 (Report Author) planned for trial period during November - January committee cycle. There had been a couple of technical issues which were resolved with the support of Civica, however this caused a delay to trial period which had previously been scheduled for an earlier committee cycle.</p> <p>Currently there is not enough data to reliably report on Phase 1 time saved benefit.</p>

			a streamlined process.		using single copy where possible	committee report from end to end.	
<b>Our Services</b>							
Innovation Fund / Enterprise Architecture	Kate Bond	Colleen Henderson	Managing a ringfenced pot that is available for digital innovation projects/ pathfinders to support transformational business cases as determined by the Digital Strategy Board.	£100,000	Services feel inspired and encouraged to innovate on key areas for development in line with the drivers of the digital strategy.	Potential for efficiencies and financial savings which can be built into the application of a priority scheme.	The Society for Innovation Technology and Modernisation (SOCITM) has been running an eight-week discovery project to support development of our Enterprise Architecture function (following agreement for funding from the Digital Strategy Board).
Processes Automation (Robotic Processes Automation RPA)	Paul Macari	Michelle Simmons  Bethsabe Sanchez	Using Process Automation to transform repetitive manual processes, freeing up staff time and redirecting it to higher priority tasks, enabling efficiencies and reducing the likelihood of human error.	£547,000	<p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customers - Increased transaction speed leading to better customer service for customer facing processes.</li> <li>Employees - Frees staff to concentrate on customer-based activities rather than process based, leading to improved citizen and staff experience.</li> <li>Finance – Reduction in business costs</li> <li>Innovation/scalability - Ability to add further and more complex types of automation in the future.</li> </ul>	<p>Annual staff costs of delivering 7 processes of varying complexity was calculated.</p> <p>The cost of carrying out the same processes with automation was then calculated.</p> <p>Current costs of processes = £521,044 Costs after automation = £154,986 Saving = £366,058</p> <p>Next, the cost of automation over 4 years, assuming 7 new processes per year onboarded, a total of 28 processes.</p> <p>Current staff cost = £2,084,180 =£74,435 per process New RPA cost = £619,944 = £22,141 per process</p>	<p>Operational issues during last period mostly due to systems getting updates, changes in User Interfaces and Microsoft Teams update. The processes that were more affected are "Flexiroute invoicing" and "New employee" but issues not limited to these processes.</p> <p>Two new IT resources are now assigned to the project team, they are involved in discussions and troubleshooting of issues to familiarise themselves with day to day support.</p> <p>"New customer in Oracle" process went live, hypercare is in progress.</p> <p>The Project Board approved expenditure for extension of supplier services from December to support and maintain existing automations. It is expected that the new internal resources will be able to develop automations after this extension.</p> <p>"Bodet annual leave " process will be re-used this year for Business and Infrastructure services for employees who have the most common working pattern.</p> <p>The project team has been working directly with services where returns are below expectations to overcome challenges and increase returns.</p>

						<p>Savings = £1,464,236  System costs = £530,000  Final total = £934,236 / or  £233,599pa  NB. Working Model for supporting RPA currently being discussed, giving consideration to lessons learned from colleagues in other Local Authorities. This may impact actual financial ROI</p>	
Internet of things (IoT)	Phil Mckay	Amy Stott  Craig Roberts	<p>IoT uses smart technology (devices connected to the Internet and/or to each other) such as sensors and wearable devices to tell us about different situations. They allow us to remotely monitor or manage assets, to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of our services.</p> <p>The set-up of the network is funded by Scottish Government and the network provider North, however full Council have approved funding through the digital strategy business case for six sensor trials on the network. Three trials will be</p>	£70,348	<p>Benefits</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Customer - Provide a better service to the public (proactive rather than reactive)</li> <li>2. Demographic Demand - Social inclusion, tackling inequalities</li> <li>3. Employee - To modernise the working environment and conditions for employees</li> <li>4. Sustainability - Improved Carbon Footprint</li> <li>5. Innovation - Provide a more efficient and effective operation</li> <li>6. Financial - Monetary savings</li> </ol>	<p>By implementing the trials, it will enable the Council to identify the potential cost savings around efficiencies that these sensors may offer and plan to make best use of further investment in the technology should the tests of change be successful.</p> <p>3 trials received for free has saved the Council £40,360</p>	<p>Trials are due to end in December. Discussions are taking place as to whether any of the trials will continue (if funding available).</p> <p>Continuing meetings with trial leads and North SV Ltd the supplier to collate findings. Information being collated will be used to prepare a report for digital strategy to aid in decision of whether to continue with IoT network and any trials.</p>



		<p>paid for and three will be provided free by the supplier 'North' as part of our agreement for access to our building stock.</p> <p>The first three are funded by IoT Scotland Project -</p> <p>1 Building Health sensors - looking at CO2 saturation in classrooms</p> <p>2 Water monitoring sensors - monitor water temperature to help prevent legionella.</p> <p>3 Road Surface temperature – for detecting ice issues</p> <p>The following three trials are funded by Aberdeenshire Council Digital Strategy funding -</p> <p>1 Air Quality – sensors that monitor for air pollutants</p> <p>2 Social Housing – sensors that</p>			
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		monitor for damp and mould				
		3 Waste management – sensors that monitor waste bin/grit bin fill levels.				

## Appendix 1a Part 2 - Digital Programme (non Digital Strategy Funded)

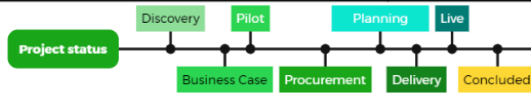
Project Name	Sponsor	Business Analyst/ Lead	Overview	Budget	Programme Benefits	ROI	How these Savings will be achieved	Latest update
<b>Our Citizens and Communities</b>								
Carefirst Replacement	Chris Smith	Amy Stott/Leanne Smith	Project to replace current on premise Carefirst environment with hosted solution followed by implementation of new version of software - Eclipse	£1,500,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cloud based solution 24/7 access with minimal downtime – stats can monitor up time</li> <li>• New solution will assist with Health and Social Care Integration – measured by NHS getting access</li> <li>• New system will open up more opportunities for mobile working – ability to work offline – can be measured by user feedback</li> <li>• Move system to modern technology, which will be more reliable and better supported – downtime can be measured</li> <li>• More efficient system to improve system usage but also reduce paperwork and allow more time to be spent with clients – can be measure by user</li> </ul>		Through efficiency and process redesign.	<p>Revised go live date for Phase 1 of project anticipated to be end of October 2024 following discussions with AHSCP and approval of extension to secondment contracts for project team resources and recruitment for CareFirst Support team resources.</p> <p>Project timeline has factored in Aberdeenshire resource availability, vendor availability and sufficient time for appropriate levels of testing by Services and project team staff.</p> <p>Pursuing agreed funding from Children's Services for percentage of project implementation and resource costs and support and maintenance.</p> <p>Work still continuing on CareFirst data tidy up activities and also activities required to be completed before next Trial data migration. Project anticipated to come off of hold from the vendor's perspective early January 2024 and engagement will start with Aberdeenshire project resources again.</p>

					<p>feedback and amount of paperwork</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow current processes to be modernised and streamlined to create efficiencies. – measured on new processes created and how they are working - service user waiting times reduced.</li> </ul> <p>More effective reporting will allow for community benefit to be measured in terms of monitoring any waiting times for assessments, whether service users outcomes are met, support managers to ensure work performance of staff etc</p>			
Live Life Aberdeen shire System Replacement	Avril Nicol	Gayle Sheed	Reviewing business processes, issues and problems experienced by the LLA Digital Team to find a suitable replacement which will meet modern demands, customer	Unknown	<p>Currently being discussed / gathered. TBC:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing revenue</li> <li>• Collecting missed revenue</li> <li>• Monitoring attendance at sports venues / classes</li> <li>• Seamless integration with finance systems</li> </ul>	Unknown	TBC - Collection of potential and missed revenue, better service design and provision, therefore efficiencies gained from there.	Contract and DPIA is being finalised between the service and the supplier. Upon contract sign off the kick off meeting and planning meetings will be scheduled to determine scope and implementation dates. This is projected to take place week commencing 4th December.

			expectations and provide a more seamless service between LLA sports, libraries and museums.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enhanced customer experience</li><li>• Better communication with the customer</li><li>• Marketing facilities to increase footfall and therefore revenue.</li></ul>			
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Appendix 1B - Digital Strategy Programme - status update at a glance

Programme status	
Webchat	Concluded
Data and Information Security and Compliance	Delivery
Building Digital Skills	Delivery
Process Automation	Delivery
Online Services	Delivery
Committee Management	Concluded
Master Data Management	Delivery
Internet of Things	Live
Digital Solutions for Frontline Colleagues	Concluded
Data Hub	Business Case
Innovation/Enterprise Architecture	Planning



## Appendix 1C - The Impact of the Digital Strategy on people

### Impact of Digital Strategy projects

**PROCESS AUTOMATION**  
Automating administrative processes to reduce time, cost and errors, while speeding up response times.

Applications for Council leisure clubs are complex. They bring in revenue, but need to be checked and validated. Automation provides the team with time to promote the scheme and increase the money being brought in.

**INTERNET OF THINGS**  
We install Smart Sensors to monitor things like CO2 levels in classrooms or damp in social housing.

Real time information enables Services to take quick actions to keep our citizens safe and increase efficiency i.e turning down heating temps

**MASTER DATA MANAGEMENT**  
The creation of a single customer record linked across systems so any changes are replicated across them all.

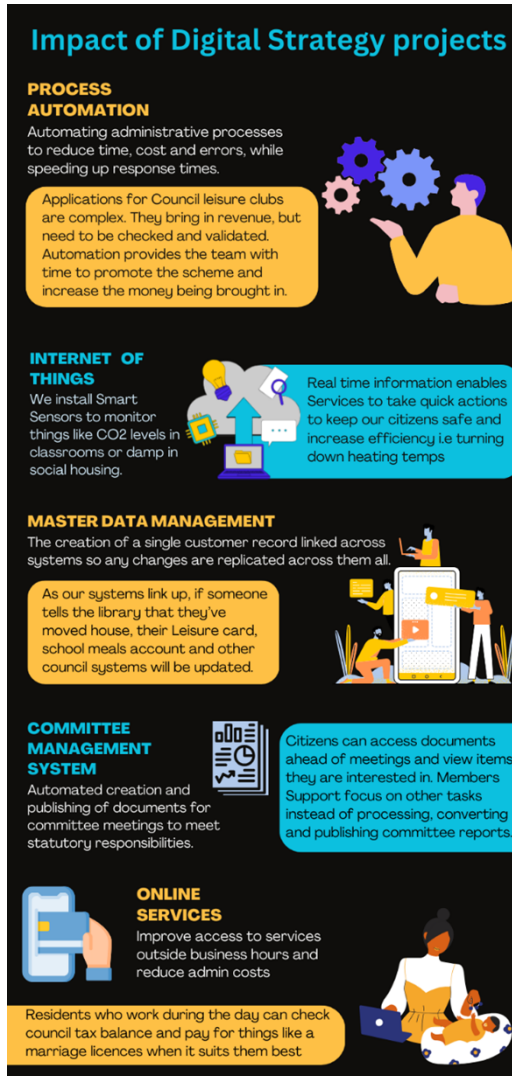
As our systems link up, if someone tells the library that they've moved house, their Leisure card, school meals account and other council systems will be updated.

**COMMITTEE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM**  
Automated creation and publishing of documents for committee meetings to meet statutory responsibilities.

Citizens can access documents ahead of meetings and view items they are interested in. Members Support focus on other tasks instead of processing, converting and publishing committee reports.

**ONLINE SERVICES**  
Improve access to services outside business hours and reduce admin costs

Residents who work during the day can check council tax balance and pay for things like a marriage licences when it suits them best.



# Effectiveness v efficiency

## Effectiveness

Arising from outcomes that enable the organisation to create better results now or increase the likelihood of future effectiveness in a fast moving context by improving adaptability

### Benefits



Higher standards  
Improved satisfaction  
Reduced waste

Improved ability to respond to  
changing environment



Quicker delivery of new services  
Workforce open to change

## Efficiency

Arising from outcome that enable the organisation to create results with fewer resources

### Benefits



Cost reduction  
Cost avoidance

Reduced working capital

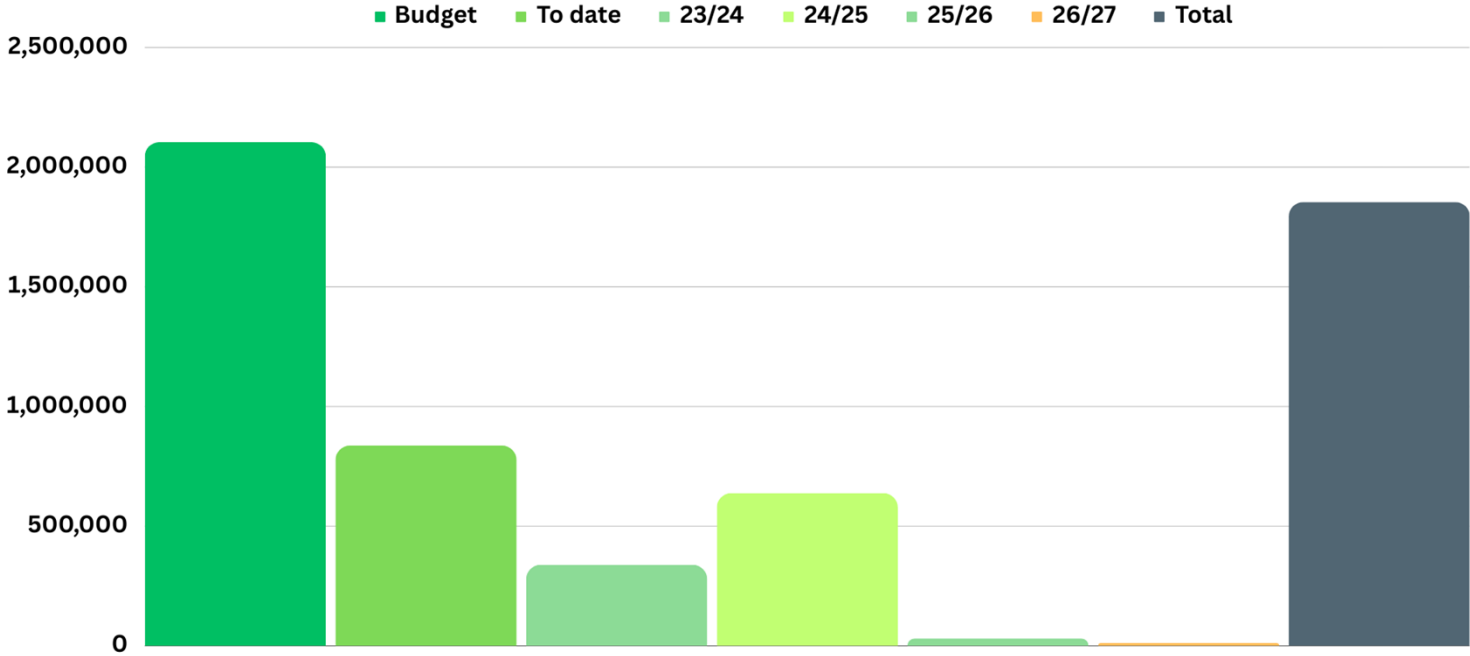


Doing more for the same or the same for less  
Processing more applications with same people



Appendix 1E - Digital Strategy Spend Forecast

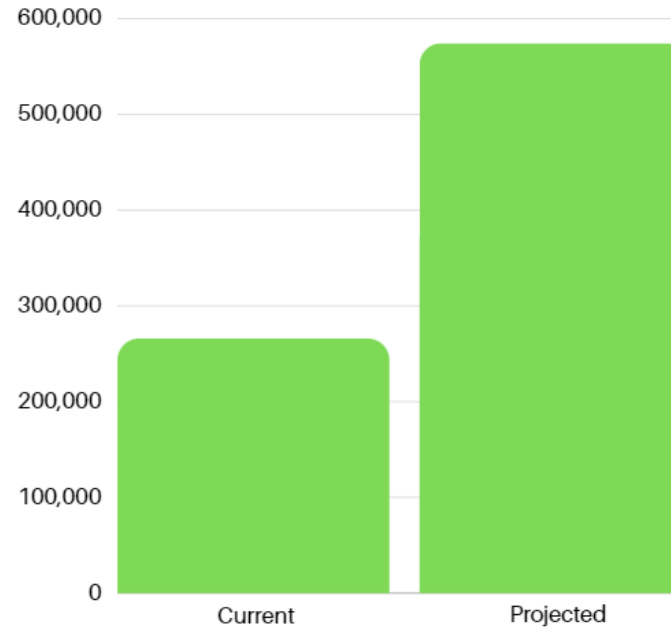
### Digital Strategy Current and Predicted Spend



## Appendix 1F - Digital Strategy Measurable Benefit Forecast

### Measurable benefits

For projects where measurable benefits are being realised



Numbers shown under current are actual benefits achieved to date.

Total shown in projected are projections based on current information.

## Appendix 2 - R100 Information & Statistics

### Reaching 100% December 2023 Update

The Scottish Government has committed to providing superfast broadband access - speeds of at least 30 Megabits per second (Mbps) - to every home and business in Scotland. Unique in the UK, the Reaching 100% (R100) programme builds upon the success of the Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband (DSSB) programme and will ensure universal superfast broadband access. The 100% target will be met through three strands of activity:

1. The R100 contracts, under which Openreach will deliver full fibre broadband (FTTP) to nearly 16,000 premises in Aberdeenshire, between 2022 and 2028.
2. The R100 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme, which will grant a further 6,000 premises a £5,000 voucher to obtain a superfast broadband solution.
3. Further commercial expansion by telecoms operators in the region is being promoted and encouraged through local and national intervention.

More information on the R100 programme can be found at [www.scotlandsuperfast.com](http://www.scotlandsuperfast.com).

#### 1. The R100 Contracts

As of December 2023, 3,160 premises in Aberdeenshire have been connected to full-fibre broadband as part of the R100 contract. Another 13,159 properties are included in ongoing and future deployment plans, with different areas being reached in phases, with expected completion of the programme in 2028. This means the programme is 21% complete. Fig. 1.1 is a map showing how the deployment phases take shape between 2023 and 2028. Fig. 1.2 is a map showing location of premises which have been connected to full-fibre through the R100 contract

At this time, a further 1,596 premises in Aberdeenshire are currently 'in build' and in process of being connected to full-fibre, with a further 4,492 premises having had surveying completed, awaiting full-fibre build happening in the coming year. These figures show that Aberdeenshire is seeing some of the highest level of activity in Scotland in the Reaching 100% Programme in the coming year.

In addition to the planned deployment, Openreach have been encouraged to complete 'Overspill' connections as they deploy full-fibre across the country. 'Overspill' is the term given to additional properties being connected to FTTP that were not included in deployment plans. Openreach look to complete these additional connections to neighbouring properties, community clusters, and passed premises. In Aberdeenshire, the Overspill rate currently sits at 16%, with an additional 594 premises benefitting from FTTP infrastructure, offering speeds of up to 1000Mbps.

Approximately 6 months prior to each deployment phase, Openreach will complete additional surveying, and provide more specific timescales for completion. This is why 2025 and beyond are only in years, and 2024 is in smaller windows.

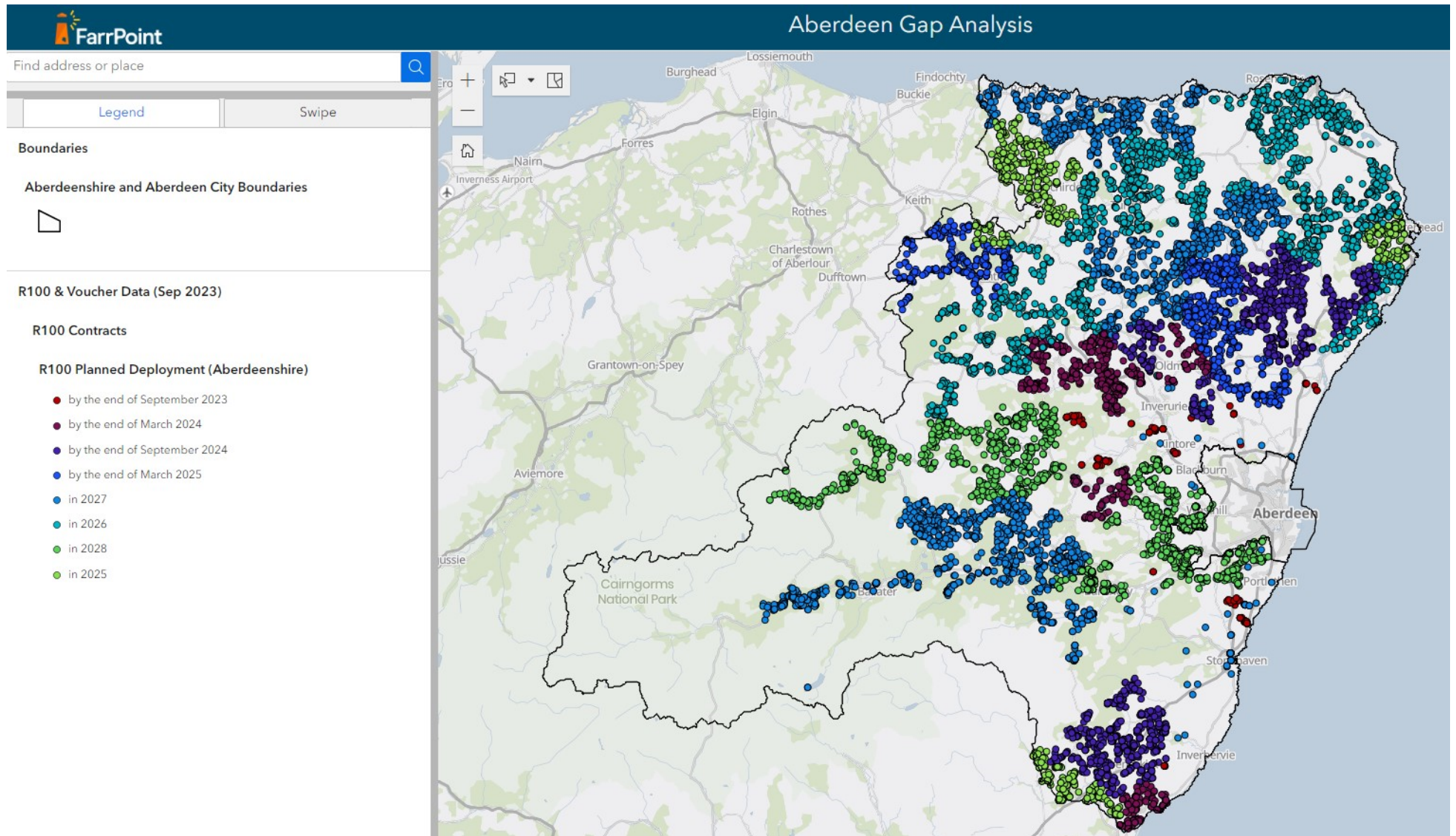


Fig. 1.1

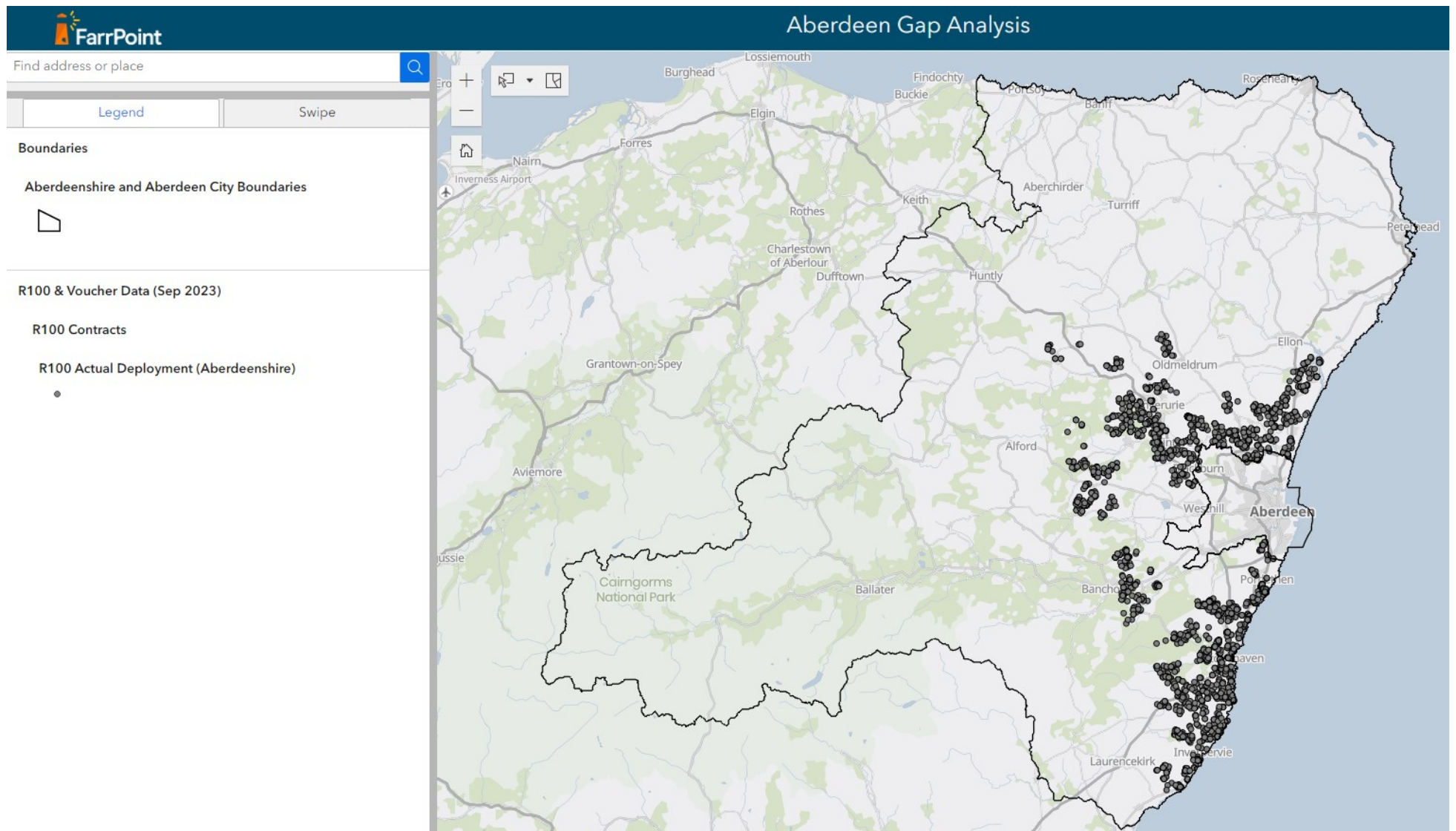


Fig. 1.2

## 2. The R100 Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme

In addition to the deployment of FTTP infrastructure with the R100 Contracts, there are still a number of premises in Aberdeenshire which will not be met by these plans. These properties were not included in fibre broadband build plans for one or more reasons, including: New build property which did not exist at initial survey and planning stage; Out-of-Scope because at initial survey and planning these properties were either included in other commercial plans, or data suggested these properties already had access to superfast speeds; No-Build because the property was deemed to be too remote / complex / costly to deploy a full-fibre solution to.

In order to fulfil the R100 objective, each of these premises is eligible to utilise the Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme (SBVS), which can provide up to £5,000 worth of subsidy for residents to purchase the installation of a superfast broadband solution. This is an operator-led subsidy voucher, meaning telecoms operators use the voucher on the residents' behalf, to cover the costs of installation, up to £5,000.

As of December 2023, 6,297 premises in Aberdeenshire are eligible for the Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme. Fig. 2.1 shows the locations of these premises on a map. The number of properties eligible to utilise the Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme is subject to change, as updated data is provided by Scottish Government. Where a property is added in to other commercial expansion plans by telecoms operators, their eligibility for the voucher scheme is removed, as these premises will benefit from FTTP installation through other means. Alternatively, some properties can be added into voucher eligibility where their connectivity speeds are found to be lower than 30Mbps, which contradicted initial surveying.

Aberdeenshire has the highest uptake of the Scottish Broadband Voucher Scheme out of all 32 Local Authorities in Scotland, both by volume and percentage available. This has been achieved partially through the work of the Digital Engagement Team within Aberdeenshire Council, which aims to stimulate demand in the R100 programme through targeted community engagement, and close working with operators who can provide bespoke solutions in key areas of Aberdeenshire.

811 properties have now utilised available SBVS vouchers to obtain a superfast broadband solution, with a further 18 known residents in the process of activating their voucher. This equates to a 13% uptake in the voucher scheme.

Usage of the vouchers has resulted in a range of infrastructure installations taking place in Aberdeenshire, including:

- Full-Fibre Community Solutions, where residents have been supported to aggregate their vouchers together, to fund the installation of FTTP infrastructure.
- Satellite Broadband Solutions, which have allowed even the most remote and rural premises get access to superfast, reliable broadband.
- Fixed Wireless Broadband Solutions, which have been deployed by local Wireless Internet Service Providers via networks of radio masts and relay sites across the region.
- 4G Mobile Broadband Solutions, utilising the Mobile 4G network via SIM enabled routers, and more powerful Externally Mounted 4G Modems.

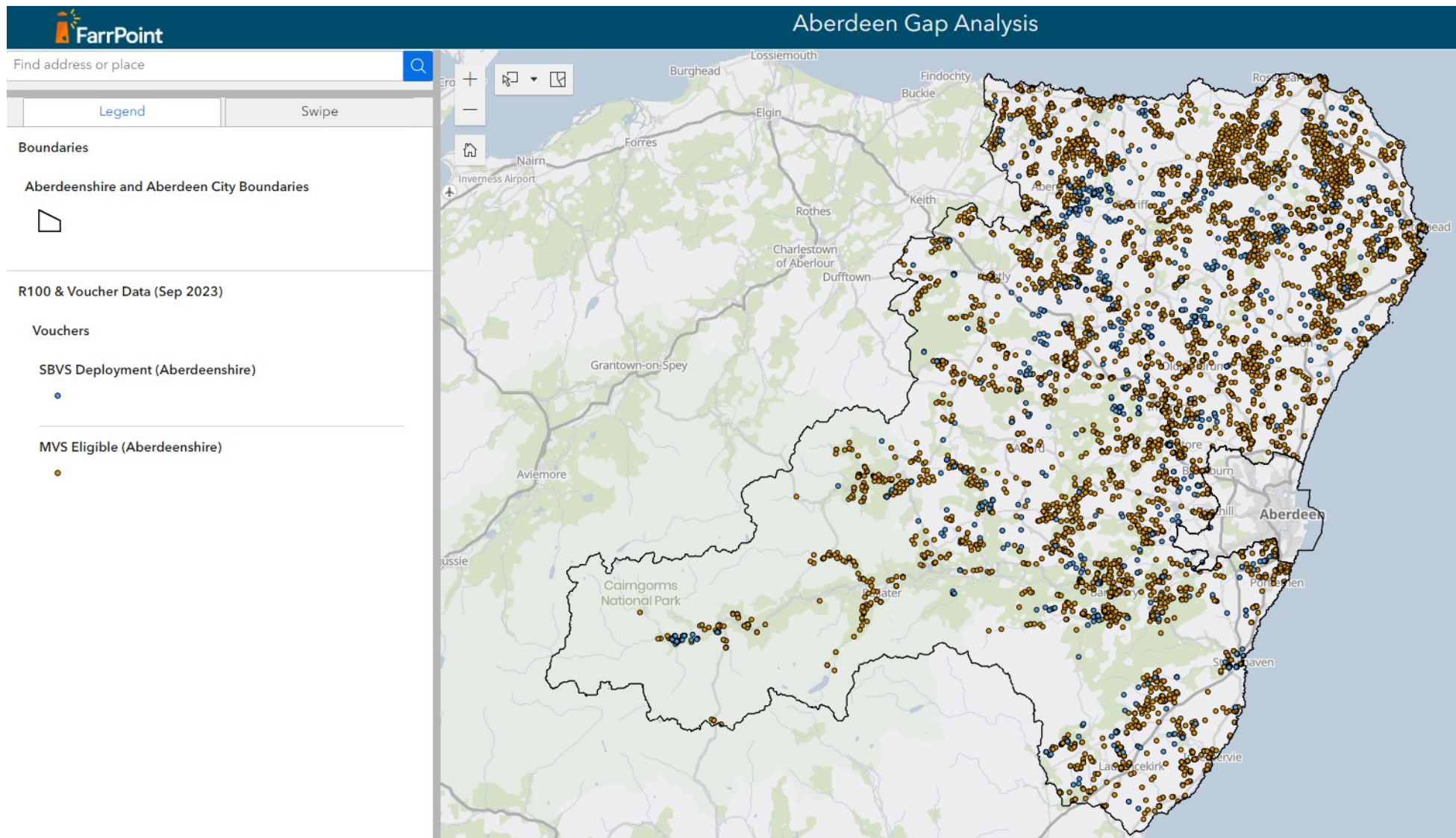


Fig. 2.1

## REPORT TO BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE – 11 JANUARY 2024

### COMMITTEE REVIEW PROCESS STAGE 3: INVESTIGATION - PROCUREMENT COMPLIANCE

#### 1 Executive Summary/Recommendations

1.1 This report offers the investigation report (**Appendix 1**) for formal approval, which contains the information presented at the evidence gathering session of the Stage 3 Committee Review Process on Procurement Compliance held on 16 November 2023.

#### 1.2 The Committee is recommended to:

**1.2.1 Formally approve the investigation report for the Committee Review Process (Appendix 1) and determine whether the Committee are now assured on the matter;**

**1.2.2 Consider any improvement action or policy review recommendations;**

**1.2.3 Consider any ongoing monitoring required; and**

**1.2.4 Advise the Audit Committee of the outcome of Committee Review Process Stage 3.**

#### 2 Decision-Making Route

##### 2.1 Stage Two Report

Members decided following consideration of the Stage 2 report on 15 September 2022 to consider a further report on progress on planned actions after a period of 6 months.

Exert from the Business Services Committee Minute (15 September 2022):

*With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 24 February, 2022 (Item 10), when it had been agreed to arrange a Stage Two Workshop of the Committee Review Process for further exploration of the issue and identification of potential actions, there was circulated a report dated 19 August, 2022 by the Director of Business Services, which (1) presented a detailed assessment of Procurement Compliance and an overview of the information presented at the workshop held on 18 August, 2022, and (2) sought Members' consideration and agreement of future improvement actions.*

*It was reported that the workshop had offered an overview of the background and issues relating to procurement compliance, actions*



*implemented and scrutiny to date. It had allowed Members to consider the planned actions and how the planned actions would be implemented through collaborative working across Services. The information presented had been intended to provide assurance to Members that the effectiveness and the robustness of procedures were in place to ensure procurement compliance.*

*The Committee agreed: -*

- (1) to note the information presented during the Workshop, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;*
- (2) to defer consideration of the next stage of the Committee Review Process to obtain further information and assurance;*
- (3) that a report would be brought back to the Committee in 6 months with additional information; and*
- (4) that a report would be presented to the next meeting of the Audit Committee to advise the decision made in respect of the Committee Review Process.*

## 2.2 Stage Two Update Report

Members following consideration of a report updating on the progress of planned actions and future actions determined at the Business Services committee on 20 April 2023 to progress to Stage 3 of the Committee Review Process.

*Exert from the Business Services Committee Minute (20 April 2023):*

*With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Business Services Committee of 28 September 2023 (Item 10), when it was agreed that a report would be brought back to the Committee in 6 months with additional information, there was circulated a report dated 20 March 2023, by the Director of Business Services, which provided an Page 8 Item 3 update on progress on actions to improve procurement compliance and detailed future planned actions.*

*Members were informed that procurement compliance trends from Quarter 1 to Quarter 3 of the last financial year had improved. On-contract spend across the Council had been consistent with an average of 88% compliance, which was significantly above targets. There were reductions in other compliance issues such as contract award notices not being published, and contract register date gaps. Members raised concerns that 4 of the 7 actions outlined in the report were still in progress and had been delayed. Members commented that the report lacked sufficient evidence and data for complete assurance and that the implications for the Council were too high.*

*After due consideration, the Committee agreed: -*

- (1) to note the progress made on actions and the further actions to be implemented over the next 6 months;*
- (2) that the Committee was not assured by the progress update and that there was a requirement to proceed to Stage 3 of the Committee Review Process;*
- (3) that a report be presented to the next meeting of the Audit Committee to update on the Committee Review Process; and*
- (4) to delegate to the Director of Business Services to develop the Stage 3 investigation process and procedure, following consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair, and Opposition Spokesperson.*

### 2.3 Stage 3 Process

The development of the Stage 3 Process was delegated to the Director of Business Services, following consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair, and Opposition Spokesperson. The Stage 3 process was agreed in June 2023, with the information gathering commencing in August 2023 following the summer recess.

### 2.4 Evidence Gathering Session

The evidence gathering session was held on 16 November 2023 with members determining that sufficient assurance had been provided and the Committee Review Process - Procurement Compliance would be concluded.

## 3 **Discussion**

### 3.1 The detailed evidence gathered from the evidence gathering session held on 16 November 2023 is as detailed in the investigation report at **Appendix 1**.

The agenda for the session held on 16 November 2023 was structured as per below:

1. Introduction/Background
2. Sources of Assurance
3. Causes of Breaches (Feedback)
4. Actions taken/Impact
5. Further Actions
6. Witnesses & Investigation Group Questions
7. Outcome/Next Steps

During the evidence gathering session the Strategic Commercial Manager provided members with detail around sources of assurance for procurement activities, information on measurement against other local authorities (best practice), feedback on sources of assurance, an update on action taken and an update on further actions. Members were then

provided the opportunity to ask questions of the Service and witnesses in attendance.

Service Representatives/Witnesses in attendance for the evidence gathering session were the Head of Commercial & Procurement, the Head of Finance, the Chief Internal Auditor, the Head of Property & Facilities Management and Strategic Commercial Manager (Commercial & Procurement).

Members agreed after consideration of the presentation and responses to questions during the evidence gathering session confirmed that sufficient assurance had been provided to conclude the Committee Review Process, the Chair confirmed that the next step would be a report to the next meeting of the Business Services committee on the 11th of January 2024.

- 3.2 Quarterly compliance reports are now prepared circulated to Chief Officers with any exceptions highlighted to delegated procurers in the preparation of the compliance report.

#### 4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 4.1 This report helps deliver the Strategic Priority “Our People” and the underpinning principle of “responsible finances”.

Pillar	Priority
Our People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Health &amp; Wellbeing</li> </ul>
Our Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrastructure</li> <li>• Resilient Communities</li> </ul>
Our Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economy &amp; Enterprise</li> <li>• Estate Modernisation</li> </ul>

- 4.2 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		x	
Staffing		x	
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland		x	
Children and Young People’s Rights and Wellbeing		x	
Climate Change and Sustainability		x	
Health and Wellbeing		x	
Town Centre First		x	

- 4.3 The screening section as part of Stage One of the Integrated Impact Assessment process has not identified the requirement for any further detailed assessments to be undertaken. The report is asking the Committee

to discuss and comment on Internal Audit recommendations and no impact has been identified through the screening process.

## **5 Scheme of Governance**

- 5.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and their comments are incorporated within the report. They are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.
- 5.2 The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of Section C. 6.3 of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance, as the report relates to the Committee Review Process.
- 5.3 This scrutiny report originated from a referral from the Audit Committee and, therefore, it will be updated on the progress and outcomes from this Committee.

**Rob Simpson**  
**Director of Business Services**

Report prepared by Mel Mackenzie, Strategic Commercial Manager  
Date: 11 December 2023

### **List of Appendices:**

Appendix 1 - Stage 3 CRP Procurement Compliance Investigation Report



## COMMITTEE REVIEW PROCESS STAGE 3

### INVESTIGATION REPORT: PROCUREMENT COMPLIANCE

#### 1 Background

##### 1.1 Referral

A scrutiny referral was made by Audit Committee following consideration of compliance issues in Audit Report (Rep2127 Procurement Compliance August 2021) which was considered by Business Services Committee on 11 November 2021, where members agreed to initiate the Committee Review Process.

*Exert from Audit Committee Minute (16 September 2021):*

*In respect of Audit No. 2127, the Interim Chief Internal Auditor advised that whilst 16 of 20 procurements reviewed had been procured appropriately in general, areas of non-compliance with the Council's Scheme of Governance were identified, including procurements which had been awarded without adequate planning or advertisement or had been undertaken by officers who had not completed the necessary training.*

*The Committee heard from the Head of Commercial and Procurement that Services were working with the Commercial and Procurement Shared Service (C&PSS) to ensure training was undertaken by Procuring Officers and purchase order approvers and to work to adequately plan procurements and develop systems of control. Services had also agreed to remind Procuring Officers of the requirements to maintain the Contract Register system with accurate contract data and related documentation.*

*A one-off exercise to review all existing contract entries and documentation was being undertaken with a completion date of 31 December 2021. Discussion took place on procurement training requirements, the need for compliance with the Council's Scheme of Governance and Financial Regulations, and the need to consider improvements which could be made to ensure that non-compliance issues were addressed.*

##### 1.2 Stage One Report

Business Services committee then received a Stage 1 scrutiny report on 24 February 2022 relating to Procurement Compliance and requested that, in terms of the Committee Review process, a Stage 2 Workshop be held allowing for further exploration of the issue and identification of potential actions.

*Exert from Business Services Committee Minute (24 February 2022):*

*With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 11 November, 2021 (Item 8) consideration was given to the report dated 31 January, 2022 by the Director of Business Services which was a response to the decision of the Committee at that meeting to conduct the Committee Review Process (CRP) into Procurement Compliance (with reference to Internal Audit Report No. 2127 Procurement Compliance) and for a Stage One report to be submitted to the Committee meeting on 24 February, 2022. The report included proposals for*

*moving forward with a plan as to how improvements would be achieved. The report reminded members that in respect of Internal Audit Report No. 2127, it was found that whilst 16 of 20 procurements reviewed across the Council had been procured appropriately in general, areas of non-compliance with the Council's Scheme of Governance were identified, including procurements which had been awarded without adequate planning or advertisement or had been undertaken by officers who had not completed the necessary training. Reasons for failing to comply with the Scheme of Governance varied but generally it was due to a lack of understanding of the requirements of the Scheme of Governance and the processes to follow to ensure Best Value and compliance with Procurement Legislation. The report highlighted that the Commercial and Procurement Service would consider improvements which could be made to support increased understanding of the requirements to ensure compliance and would also review processes to identify process improvements with a view to simplifying processes where this was possible; and a review of the Procurement Manual would be conducted to ensure that guidance and templates were considered from the point of view of not only ensuring compliance but ease of following the processes.*

*Following discussion, the Committee agreed: -*

- (1) that the report did not provide sufficient assurance on actions to be taken with regard to Procurement Compliance; and*
- (2) to a Stage Two Workshop of the Committee Review Process being arranged.*

### **1.3 Stage Two Workshop**

A Stage 2 workshop was scheduled for 26 April 2022, but this was postponed due to the availability of members on that date. A workshop took place on 18 August 2022 and brought together key officers and elected members from the Business Services Committee to consider improvement actions already implemented and consider planned actions in relation to Procurement Compliance.

### **1.4 Stage Two Report**

Members decided following consideration of the Stage 2 report on 15 September 2022 to consider a further report on progress on planned actions after a period of 6 months.

*Exert from Business Services Committee Minute (15 September 2022)*

*With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Committee of 24 February, 2022 (Item 10), when it had been agreed to arrange a Stage Two Workshop of the Committee Review Process for further exploration of the issue and identification of potential actions, there was circulated a report dated 19 August, 2022 by the Director of Business Services, which (1) presented a detailed assessment of Procurement Compliance and an overview of the information presented at the workshop held on 18 August, 2022, and (2) sought Members' consideration and agreement of future improvement actions.*

*It was reported that the workshop had offered an overview of the background and issues relating to procurement compliance, actions implemented and*

*scrutiny to date. It had allowed Members to consider the planned actions and how the planned actions would be implemented through collaborative working across Services. The information presented had been intended to provide assurance to Members that the effectiveness and the robustness of procedures were in place to ensure procurement compliance.*

*The Committee agreed: -*

- (1) to note the information presented during the Workshop, as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report;*
- (2) to defer consideration of the next stage of the Committee Review Process to obtain further information and assurance;*
- (3) that a report would be brought back to the Committee in 6 months with additional information; and*
- (4) that a report would be presented to the next meeting of the Audit Committee to advise the decision made in respect of the Committee Review Process.*

## **1.5 Stage Two Update Report**

Members following consideration of a report updating on the progress of planned actions and future actions determined at the Business Services committee on 20 April 2023 to progress to Stage 3 of the Committee Review Process.

*Exert from Business Services Committee Minute (20 April 2023):*

*With reference to the Minute of Meeting of the Business Services Committee of 28 September 2023 (Item 10), when it was agreed that a report would be brought back to the Committee in 6 months with additional information, there was circulated a report dated 20 March 2023, by the Director of Business Services, which provided an Page 8 Item 3 update on progress on actions to improve procurement compliance and detailed future planned actions.*

*Members were informed that procurement compliance trends from Quarter 1 to Quarter 3 of the last financial year had improved. On-contract spend across the Council had been consistent with an average of 88% compliance, which was significantly above targets. There were reductions in other compliance issues such as contract award notices not being published, and contract register date gaps. Members raised concerns that 4 of the 7 actions outlined in the report were still in progress and had been delayed. Members commented that the report lacked sufficient evidence and data for complete assurance and that the implications for the Council were too high.*

*After due consideration, the Committee agreed: -*

- (1) to note the progress made on actions and the further actions to be implemented over the next 6 months;*
- (2) that the Committee was not assured by the progress update and that there was a requirement to proceed to Stage 3 of the Committee Review Process;*
- (3) that a report be presented to the next meeting of the Audit Committee to update on the Committee Review Process; and*

*(4) to delegate to the Director of Business Services to develop the Stage 3 investigation process and procedure, following consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair, and Opposition Spokesperson.*

## **1.6 Stage 3 Process**

The development of the Stage 3 Process was delegated to the Director of Business Services, following consultation with the Chair, Vice Chair, and Opposition Spokesperson. The Stage 3 process was agreed in June 2023, with the information gathering commencing in August following summer recess.

## **1.7 Evidence Gathering Session**

The evidence gathering session was held on 16 November 2023 with the agenda structured as per below:

1. Introduction/Background
2. Sources of Assurance
3. Causes of Breaches (Feedback)
4. Actions taken/Impact
5. Further Actions
6. Witnesses & Investigation Group Questions
7. Outcome/Next Steps

During the evidence gathering session the Strategic Commercial Manager provided members with detail around sources of assurance for procurement activities, information on measurement against other local authorities (best practice), feedback on sources of assurance, an update on action taken and an update on further actions. Members were then provided the opportunity to ask questions of the Service and witnesses in attendance.

Service Representatives/Witnesses in attendance for the evidence gathering session were the Head of Commercial & Procurement, the Head of Finance, the Chief Internal Auditor, the Head of Property & Facilities Management and Strategic Commercial Manager (Commercial & Procurement).

Members agreed after consideration of the presentation and responses to questions during the evidence gathering session confirmed that sufficient assurance had been provided to conclude the Committee Review Process, the Chair confirmed that the next step would be a report to the next meeting of Business Services committee on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2024.

## **2 Discussion**

### **2.1 Procurement Strategy, Policy, Guidance and Training**

Procurement across the Council is overseen by the Commercial & Procurement Shared Service (C&PSS) with C&PSS having responsibility for developing strategy, policy, guidance and training for procurement establishing the framework within the Council to ensure compliance with relevant procurement legislation. The policies and procedures set out within this framework provides the assurance over the standards set for compliance across all procurement activity and currently comprised of the below:



- Joint Procurement Strategy (covering the three partner Councils) incorporating Strategic outcomes for each Council to meet national and local priorities and Public Procurement priorities as set by the Scottish Government (refreshed strategy went live 01 October 2023)
- Scheme of Governance Part 3 - Financial Regulations (specifically Section 5)
- Procurement Policy i.e., Commercial Sponsorship, Sustainable Procurement
- Procurement Manual and template documentation for procurements across thresholds/types
- Delegated Procurer Training (E-Learning Modules)

## 2.2 Delegated Procurement Authority

Responsibility for individual procurements is delegated to Services and specifically officers within each Service who are designated as a delegated procurer (DPA). This approach is consistent with other local authorities and other areas of the Council i.e. Finance/Risk Management. Delegated Procurement Authority provides the authority to procure and manage contracts for goods, services and works on behalf of the Council. A Delegated Procurer will oversee the process leading up to and including the procurement or award of a contract, as well as having the responsibility for managing elements of any resulting contract. This also applies to the raising of purchase orders, any member of staff who will purchase goods, works or services on behalf of the Council must undertake Procurement training and receive DPA approval prior to any purchase order being raised. The only exception to this is in respect of Social Care where a dedicated team within C&PSS manage around two hundred contracts with a total value of more than £300M (over £80M annually).

Levels of Delegated Procurement Authority with applicable thresholds and training modules are as shown below. All DPA forms received requesting authority are checked against training records on ALDO prior to the form being authorised and DPA being added to the register held/maintained by C&PSS. DPA training is required to be refreshed once every three years and reminders are issued by C&PSS to this effect.

<b>Delegated Procurement Authority (DPA) Levels</b>	
Level 1	<p><b>Goods, Services &amp; Works: &lt; £10k</b></p> <p><b>Training for Completion:</b> Module 1 - Level 1 DPA</p>
Level 2	<p><b>Goods, Services &amp; Works: £10k - £50k</b></p> <p><b>Training for Completion:</b> Module 1 - Level 1 DPA Module 2 - Level 2 DPA Module 4 - Sustainable procurement Module 5 - Introduction to contract and supplier management Module 7 – Evaluation &amp; Award</p>

Level 3	<p><b>Goods, Services &amp; Works: £&gt; £50k</b></p> <p><b>Training for Completion:</b>  Module 1 - Level 1 DPA  Module 2 - Level 2 DPA  Module 3 - Level 3 DPA  Module 4 - Sustainable procurement  Module 5 - Introduction to contract and supplier management  Module 6 - Advanced contract and supplier management  Module 7 – Evaluation &amp; Award</p>
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All DPA's when registered are sent a document containing sources of information/guidance to support carrying out procurement activity this includes (this was introduced in financial year 2022/23 to provide DPA's with further guidance):

- Contact information for C&PSS to seek support
- Link for C&PSS intranet page and details of what can be found via the page for example Procurement Manual/Contract Register System User Guides/Contracted Supplier List
- Information on Procurement Manual/Scheme of Governance
- Information on how to access Public Contracts Scotland to access contract notices
- Information on how to access the Contract Register system (with details on when a DPA should record and update contracts)
- Information on framework agreements
- Purpose of Contract Management and role of Contract Manager
- Information on Data Protection and Information Security (highlight importance of DPIA particularly in procuring software of IT system)

C&PSS have also introduced a Communication Planner with a plan for each financial year with key communications for DPA's, the plan will be updated throughout the year as we are made aware of any national guidance or legislation changes, see links to examples of recent communications below (when any news item is published the link is also e-mailed to DPA's directly).

[C&PSS Procurement Blog – Update for Delegated Procurers on the Use of the Single Procurement Document \(SPD\) \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

[C&PSS PROCUREMENT BLOG - Procurement Threshold Update \(Effective 1.1.24\) \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

## 2.3 Feedback/Causes of Compliance Issues

As part of the Information Gathering stage to prepare for the Evidence Gathering Session feedback has been analysed from a questionnaire issued on Financial Regulations/Procurement Guidance to identify any key points which may be causes of non-compliance. Many respondents to the questionnaire identified complexities in the Scheme of Governance, Financial Regulations and Procurement Processes, some examples are below. The

complexity of the processes and paperwork required (particularly for procurement below legislative thresholds) would be a significant factor in non-compliance.

- “Remove the need for PAF and award reports for under £50K for goods, services and works. Also PAF threshold for Works should be much higher. There should also not be a need to complete a PAF for Hard FM or minor works. Values have been approved at committee as part of the procurement, why do we then need to complete another procurement approval form, should be a simpler way, e.g. IT purchases that have workflow approval from the budget holder, can this not be put in place. Causes a lot of unnecessary extra work for all involved”.
- “Much of the process is unnecessarily complex and could be simplified significantly”.
- “The governance requirements for £10-£50K procurements is overly bureaucratic. A streamlined process would ease the burden on staff when gaining approvals for what are often routine purchases which 'nudge' over the £10K threshold. The PAF is too complex for an unregulated procurement and a simplified form could be used to gain CO approval”.
- “The requirement to obtain a minimum number of quotes for a level 2 procurement is onerous and the need for exemption forms basically stating 'not enough suppliers submitted a bid' adds to staff workload unnecessarily. A requirement to request (rather than obtain) a minimum number of quotes may streamline this process, and where the minimum number of quotes cannot be requested (for example from a niche or small market) then the exemption form could be required to justify this and prove Best Value is still being obtained”.

The feedback given will be considered in finalising the review of the financial regulations and the refresh of Procurement Guidance to ensure that the requirements and the processes behind these requirements are simplified but still ensure compliance with legislative requirements.

## **2.4 Best Practice (Measurement against other Local Authorities)**

Internal Audit supported the information gathering stage by issuing a request through the Chief Internal Auditor’s group, the purpose of the request was to identify whether other Councils had similar issues around non-compliance. Several responses were received with some just giving a general update and others sharing audit reports across a range of areas the reports shared included some with negatives and some with positives around procurement compliance issues. The overall view of Aberdeenshire in comparison to other Council’s it was felt that the issues raised in reports in relation to Procurement Compliance were not dissimilar to other local authorities, however whilst the position of other councils has been sought, the priority internally has not been diminished.

Most responses were shared in confidence, so comments have been anonymised and a sample shared below:

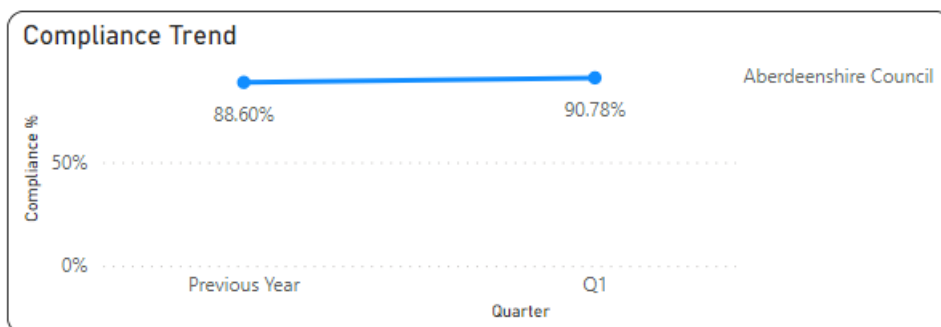
- “We haven’t carried out any specific audits in this area recently, but we have identified similar issues when completing audits in other areas. I think there appears to be a general lack of proper understanding of the Financial Regulations by some Services, perhaps because most officers have multiple responsibilities and finance/procurement tasks are just seen as a small add on to their main operational role or they are promoted/given additional duties without proper training (although this is just my opinion)”.
- “From an audit report shared on the exemption process to Financial Regulations -Internal Audit has completed a review of the processes and arrangements in place for the authorisation of contract exemptions to comply with the Council’s Financial Regulations and in terms of legal compliance. The overall level of assurance given for this report is ‘Limited’. The level of assurance will be reviewed and redefined once the plans to improve the exemptions process are in place”.
- “Generally, though I have been highlighting to my Chief Exec that there is a distinct downward dip in controls and the compliance with controls, I think it’s a lot to do with the loss of some very experienced people over the last few years and new people in posts, recent promotions and a bit of covid fall out”.
- “There have been some issues within specific services in the past. This related to using companies who were on a framework and in accordance with that framework. There were also training and awareness issues in that service. I understand these issues have been addressed but further audit work later this financial year will hopefully confirm this”.

## 2.5 Compliance Data/Processes

Monitoring compliance is linked to Key Performance Indicators for Procurement, the data is analysed quarterly across all Council services and reported to the Strategic Procurement Board (board comprising Senior Leaders across the three partner Councils and currently chaired by the Chief Executive for Aberdeenshire Council). Key compliance metrics and performance against these is as shown below:

### On Contract Spend

Shown below is the trend for the percentage of on contract spend, the target figure for on contract is 80% where 88.6% was achieved in the last full financial year, with performance in Q1 2023-24 at over 90%.



### Contract Register Issues

Each month the contract register is checked for any omissions in contract records primarily where contract start date, contract end date, supplier name or value has been omitted.

Where any omission has been found a member of C&PSS will e-mail the listed contract owner to highlight the omission and request that they update the contract record.

It has been identified that there is an issue in contacts not being updated in the Contract Register system BOrganised, services are to be asked to identify key contacts with responsibility for Contract Management who can support rectification of future issues. An action is contained within the planned actions at Appendix 2 of this report relating to future improvements to the Contract Register system which includes the system having improved functionality to mandate entry of key pieces of information in future.

### Publication of Award Notices on Public Contracts Scotland

Public Contracts Scotland is the online portal used by all Public Sector bodies in Scotland to advertise procurement opportunities. Each month any outstanding awards (still showing as live on website) are noted and e-mails sent to the owner of each contract to enquire as to status.

Responses are received, via email, from contract owners either advising of delays or that they are about to publish accordingly. A link to guidance on the process for them to publish is outlined in the e-mail sent. The contact(s) for contract management (to be identified for each Service) will also be asked to support this process in future.

## **2.6 Actions (Completed/Planned)**

At the time of the last update there were 7 actions in total with 3 having been completed and 4 at planning stage. Further improvements have been identified in the period since the last update to a total of 13 of which 8 are complete and 5 are at planning stage.

The actions are a combination of improvements identified through the audit process and incorporation of best practice/changes to statutory legislation and guidance.

**Appendix 1** shows the completed actions and **Appendix 2** shows the planned actions.

## **3 Outcome/Next Steps**

Members agreed after consideration of the presentation and responses to questions during the evidence gathering session confirmed that sufficient assurance had been provided to conclude the Committee Review Process, the Chair confirmed that the next step would be a report to the next meeting of Business Services committee on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 2024.

Following consideration of the report by Business Services Committee a report will be prepared for Audit Committee.

**Rob Simpson**  
**Director of Business Services**

Report prepared by Mel Mackenzie, Strategic Commercial Manager  
11 December 2023

## Appendix 1 – Completed Actions

No.	Action	Status	Update
1	Further Review of DPA's (Delegated Procurers) with Services	Complete	Further review concluded by end January 2023, the purpose of the review was to ensure that all employees involved in either purchasing or procurement activity have completed the required training and are listed on the register of Delegated Procurers. Any users on iProcurement system who did not appear on the DPA register had system access removed following issue of several communications advising of the process to complete training and be registered as a delegated procurer. System access will only then be reactivated after completion of the required training and submission of the signed DPA form.
2	Ongoing consultation with Services (Procurement Planning)	Complete	Planned reviews are now ongoing with Chief Officers/Service Managers with the last review completed at the beginning of March, the review focussed on both on contract and off contract spend. The review allowed for identification of potential saving opportunity areas and looking at longer term contract needs. Reviews will be scheduled in April for next financial year, this will ensure ongoing consultation with Services/Procurement on current contracts and future needs and ensure procurement is appropriately planned for.
3	C&PSS and Internal Audit ("IA") Collaboration on Compliance Improvement	Ongoing	IA engaged to support procurement compliance reporting on a quarterly basis, sample of suppliers to be assessed for compliance in each quarter and results on the sample included in the reports circulated to Chief Officers. Where breaches occur and are identified through compliance processes these will continue to be raised both within the report and with delegated procurers directly and data retained to allow for identification of patterns and escalation as required.
4	Interim Updates to Procurement Manual	Complete	<p>Whilst the revision of the Procurement Manual is in progress there have been several changes made to ensure that available guidance is up to date and fosters compliance, updated guidance has been made available via the Intranet on the Procurement and Governance pages:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Procurement Approval Form updated to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Requirement to conduct a Procurement Fraud Risk Assessment</li> <li>ii. Requirement to conduct a DPIA Assessment (if required)</li> <li>iii. Reference to consideration of Fair Work Practices, Environmental Outcomes in Procurement Activity</li> <li>iv. Additional requirements on consideration of contract management</li> </ul> </li> <li>b) IR35 Guidance added to the Procurement Manual</li> </ul>

			<p>c) Software Cost Analysis Tool added to the Procurement Manual</p> <p>d) Revised Terms &amp; Conditions for Goods and Services added to the Procurement Manual</p> <p>e) Delegated Procurer Guidance document drafted to ensure clarity on responsibilities with links to relevant guidance, this was shared with all current DPA's in February 2023 and going forward will be sent to any new DPA registered.</p>
5	Review of Contract Register Platform (Phase 1)	<b>Complete</b>	<p>A review of the Contract Register system has been undertaken with key considerations including ensuring the system is user friendly and easy to use and feedback has been sought/collated from current users to inform the review.</p> <p>The provider of our current system (Brodis) has developed a new platform based on feedback provided by Aberdeenshire Council and other clients (Amelior), a review of the platform has identified that it would resolve a number of the issues previously identified in audits and would provide improved reporting capability through inclusion of dashboards within the platform.</p> <p>In addition we have looked at reducing the number of fields that users are required to complete with a number of fields being made mandatory to ensure compliance in terms of the contract register and information that we must publish to comply with legislation.</p>
6	C&PSS Communication Planner	<b>Complete</b>	<p>A series of news items on procurement are planned to be published in each financial year, the items will be aimed at increasing awareness of need for compliance with information on how to ensure compliance or to advise on changes to reflect procurement best practice and how to incorporate into procurement activity. It is planned that news items will be published monthly via the intranet, with a communication sent to DPA's to highlight and yammer will be utilised to ensure items are widely circulated (where appropriate).</p>
7	Updates to Framework Adoption Process	<b>Complete</b>	<p>A register of frameworks is now maintained by the C&amp;PSS team and the framework adoption report has been updated to include a section on contract management and a revised version added to the Procurement Manual. This is intended to ensure that roles &amp; responsibilities for Contract Management are considered at the adoption stage of any framework agreement.</p>
8	Review of Joint Procurement Strategy	<b>Complete</b>	<p>The Joint Procurement Strategy has recently been refreshed (live 01 October), adherence to this strategy with strong engagement and robust governance arrangements pre-procurement coupled with effective contract and supplier management throughout the duration of any contract will ensure the Councils deliver innovative, consistent, compliant and collaborative market solutions demonstrating value for money and return on investment to meet or exceed challenging commercial performance targets.</p>



9	Compliance Reporting & Processes	<b>Complete</b>	Compliance reporting in place each quarter to Strategic Procurement Board, compliance processes established for Contract Register and Public Contracts Scotland Award Notices.
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### **Appendix 2 – Planned Actions**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Update</b>
1	Review of Procurement Manual and Guidance	<b>In Progress</b>	The refresh of the guidance and templates is near completion, expected date for completion end of the calendar year with roll out early new year.
2	Review of DPA E-Learning	<b>In Progress</b>	DPA E-Learning will be refreshed upon completion of the Procurement Manual review and incorporation of changes to reflect the update to the guidance and templates, this will include any best practice/changes identified through the contract management audit, it is anticipated that this will be complete by end September 2024.
3	Further Contract Management Training	<b>In Progress</b>	Additional Contract Management training sessions to be offered to delegated procurers following the relaunch of the guidance, this will include information on changes to guidance and templates and include any best practice/changes identified through the contract management audit.
4	Review of Financial Regulations	<b>In Progress</b>	Financial Regulations review group with representation from across services established, work commenced on review of breaches and feedback sought from across each service to feed into the process. Due to the need for a focus on budget setting further work was put on hold but technical input has been sought in the review of the regulations by C&PSS, the technical review has been concluded and the group will be reconvened to progress this work estimated to be completed by end June 2024.
5	Review of Contract Register Platform (Phase 2)	<b>In Progress</b>	The migration to the new Contract Register Platform is planned to be complete by end Dec 2023. Training sessions will be held with users and the Contract Register guidance will be refreshed.

## REPORT TO BUSINESS SERVICES COMMITTEE – 11 JANUARY 2024

### ANNUAL REPORT OF ACTIVITY UNDER THE REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS (SCOTLAND) ACT 2000 POLICY

#### 1 Executive Summary/Recommendations

1.1 To advise the Committee on the use of surveillance by Aberdeenshire Council under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 (RIPSA) over the previous twelve months, to note there have been no changes in legislation or notable cases on RIPSA during this period and to seek approval of the revised Policy for use in the coming year.

#### 1.2 The Committee is recommended to:

**1.2.1 Consider and comment on the annual report of activity under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 (RIPSA) Policy at Appendix 1;**

**1.2.2 Note the Office of the Surveillance Commissioner Inspector's report at Appendix 2; and**

**1.2.3 Approve the revised Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 Policy at Appendix 3.**

#### 2 Decision Making Route

2.1 On 22 June 2017 following the outcome of an inspection by the Office of the Surveillance Commissioner (now, the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office) the Committee approved a revised Policy on the authorisation of surveillance under RIPSA.

2.2 The Scottish Government Code of Practice for Covert Surveillance and Property Interference calls for local authorities to have elected member oversight of any activity in connection with RIPSA. Accordingly, at its meeting on 16 November 2017 the Committee agreed to receive annual reports on RIPSA activity under the Policy in order to scrutinise the Council's use of surveillance powers and ensure compliance with the Code of Practice. Annual reports were presented and noted at the Business Services Committees on 15 November 2018, 14 November 2019, 7 January 2021, 6 January 2022 and 12 January 2023.

#### 3 Discussion

3.1 The annual report for 2022/2023 forms **Appendix 1**. It summarises the use of surveillance over the previous twelve months and details any changes in legislation or notable cases on the use of RIPSA and ensure compliance with the Code of Practice.

- 3.2 The Investigatory Powers Commissioner’s Office inspects local authorities every 3 years as part of their regular inspection cycle. This year, the Inspector reviewed the Council’s current policy, training programmes and use of the legislation since May 2020. The Report, produced at **Appendix 2**, identifies an amendment that requires to be made to the policy to clarify the procedure to be followed on cancellation of an authorisation.
- 3.3 The revised Policy is produced at **Appendix 3**. The changes from the previous policy are the change set out at 3.2 above, and an update to the list of authorised officers.
- 3.4 This Committee will continue to receive quarterly bulletins which will alert Members to any issues surrounding the policy and a further annual report will follow in January 2025.

#### 4 Council Priorities, Implications and Risk

- 4.1 This report helps deliver the Strategic Priority “Economy Growth” within the Pillar “Our Economy”, by supporting a strong, sustainable, diverse and successful economy by scrutinising the use of surveillance by council officers of various business trading activities to ensure that they comply with the law.
- 4.2 This report helps to ensure compliance with the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 and The Scottish Government Code of Practice for Covert Surveillance and Property Interference.
- 4.3 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendations are agreed.

Subject	Yes	No	N/A
Financial		X	
Staffing		X	
Equalities and Fairer Duty Scotland		X	
Children and Young People’s Rights and Wellbeing		X	
Climate Change and Sustainability		X	
Health and Wellbeing		X	
Town Centre First		X	

- 4.4 There are no staffing/financial/sustainability/children and young people’s rights and wellbeing implications arising from this report.
- 4.5 The screening section as part of Stage One of the Integrated Impact Assessment process has not identified the requirement for any further detailed assessments to be undertaken. There are no direct material outcomes from this report and the proposals do not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics.
- 4.6 The following Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate Level:

- 4.6.1 ACORP002 – Regular reporting of activity will ensure Members are advised timeously of any changes to national policy, legislation and regulation that may impact on Council policy, enabling appropriate action to be taken.
- 4.6.2 ACORP006 – Reputation Management: Failure to take action to comply with the Code of Practice and recommendations by the Office of the Surveillance Commissioner could result in the Council being criticised in future inspection reports.

## **5 Scheme of Governance**

- 5.1 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this report and had no comments to make and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.
- 5.2 The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of Section C.1.1.g of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as it has responsibility for Legal and Governance which in turn has responsibility for the policy on Authorisation of Surveillance under RIPSA.
- 5.3 Section 11 of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance refers to Area Committees considering and commenting on proposals to amend Council policy and/or develop Council policy in line with the Policy Development and Review Framework and make recommendations to the relevant Policy Committee. However, it is suggested that no formal consultation is required to Area Committees in this case as the proposed changes to Council policy are very minor and arise from the Inspection Report. There are no impacts on communities from the changes to justify wider consultation.

**Rob Simpson**  
**Director of Business Services**

Report prepared by Robin Taylor, Senior Solicitor (Representation)  
Date: 20 December 2023

### **List of Appendices:**

- Appendix 1 – Annual Report on the use of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act (RIPSA) 2000
- Appendix 2 – Inspection Report from Investigatory Powers Commissioner’s Office dated 30 June 2023
- Appendix 3 – Revised Policy on the use of Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000

APPENDIX 1

ANNUAL REPORT  
ON THE USE OF THE REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS  
(SCOTLAND) ACT (RIPSA) 2000

1. Between 1 October 2022 and 1 October 2023, Aberdeenshire Council granted one authorisation for the use of directed surveillance under the 2000 Act. The authorisation granted related to the sale of counterfeit goods.
2. Between 1 October 2022 and 1 October 2023, Aberdeenshire Council did not grant any authorisations for the use of a covert human intelligence source (CHIS).
3. During the period 1 October 2022 to 1 October 2023, there have been no reported cases on the operation of RIPSA and there have been no legislative changes to the Act.
4. A virtual training course for Authorising Officers took place on 23 May 2023.

# IPCO

Investigatory Powers  
Commissioner's Office

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30 June 2023

Dear Chief Executive,

Thank you for providing IPCO with your response to the matters identified at points 1 to 9 of my Inspector's letter dated 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2023.

My Inspector has reviewed the authorisations, concurring with the findings of Ms. Wiles, your Head of Legal and Policy, that the process of allowing authorisations to lapse does not replace the requirement made out within the Covert Surveillance and Property Interference Code of Practice (Scotland) 2017 at the following chapters.

- 5.20 the applicant is to maintain a constant review the authorisation and to bring to the attention of the Authorising Officer when it is no longer required.
- 5.19 the Authorising Officer must cancel when they consider that the directed surveillance no longer meets the criteria.
- 5.21 the date of cancellation to be recorded within a central register.

All elements described requires active, rather than passive management of an authorisation.

My Inspector offers further specific feedback on authorisation TS68RIPSA, which was authorised for eight weeks. The codes at 5.11 describes the duration for directed surveillance as 3 months. It is advisable to permit for 3 months and cancel when the objectives are met, or no longer apply. Authorisation TS62RIPSA was authorised between 22/07/2020 and 21/10/2020, yet the review conducted on 21/08/20 stated the next review would take place on 02/11/2020, after the date of expiry. Finally, Chapter 8 of the codes describes responsibilities in relation to data safeguards. Whilst there is good policy in place, it is good practice for the Authorising Officer to give specific direction around the handling and destruction of material at the point of cancellation.

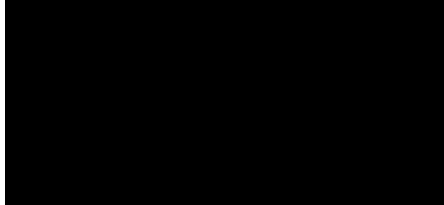
I am satisfied that your reply and oversight by Ms. Wiles provides assurance that ongoing compliance with RIPA 2000 and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 will be maintained. As such, your Council will not require further inspection this year.

I would ask that you ensure that the key compliance issues continue to receive the necessary internal governance and oversight through yourself and your Senior Responsible Officer: policy refreshes; annual

updates to your Elected Members; ongoing training and awareness raising; internal compliance monitoring by lead managers within their business areas; and the retention, review and destruction (RRD) of any product obtained through the use of covert powers (Records and Product Management in accordance with the Safeguards Chapters of the relevant Codes of Practice). My Inspector has provided guidance on further improvements to your existing RIPA policy in order to better reflect these safeguards.

Your Council will be due its next inspection in 2026, but please do not hesitate to contact my Office if IPCO can be of assistance in the intervening period.

Yours sincerely,



**The Rt. Hon. Sir Brian Leveson**  
The Investigatory Powers Commissioner



**Policy on the Authorisation of Surveillance under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000.**



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Version	Notes	Date
1.00	Policy approved by Business Services Committee (BSC)	14/11/19
1.01	Reformatting and Update to Appendix III ( <i>additional details added re: Service Manager of Environmental Health and Trading Standards</i> ) (L&G)	04/03/20
1.02	Minor amendments to update to “Legal & People” service & amend some authorising officers	14/12/21
1.03	Minor amendments to update the address of the Stonehaven office, appendix descriptions & adding of hyperlinks.	13/01/23

## Introduction

1. In some circumstances it may be necessary for Council employees in the course of their duties to make observations of a person or persons in a covert manner i.e. without that person's knowledge. By their nature actions of this sort are potentially intrusive (in the ordinary sense of the word) and may give rise to legal challenge as a potential breach of Article 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights and the Human Rights Act 1998 ("the right to respect for private and family life").
2. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 [RIPA] and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Scotland) Act 2000 [RIP(S)A] ("the Acts") together provide a legal framework for covert surveillance by Public Authorities and an independent inspection regime to monitor these activities. The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 provides for the acquisition of communications data by local authorities in Scotland. Its provisions regarding covert surveillance apply only to England.
3. The Scottish Executive have produced codes of practice on Covert Surveillance and the use of Covert Human Intelligence Sources ("the Codes of Practice"). This document should be read in conjunction with the Codes of Practice to ensure that all covert surveillance by Council employees is carried out effectively while remaining in accordance with the law.
4. This procedure only applies where surveillance is covert. It does not apply to observations or surveillance that is not carried out covertly nor does it apply to unplanned observations made as an immediate response to events. Surveillance using CCTV cameras which are visible and which are accompanied by notices advising of their presence is overt and will not require authorisation whereas using hidden cameras or in circumstances where the presence of CCTV is not made clear to those who might be affected is covert and will require authorisation.
5. This procedure and the Acts do not permit authorisation by Aberdeenshire Council Officials of intrusive surveillance i.e. covert surveillance carried out in relation to anything taking place on residential premises or in any private vehicle which involves the presence of an individual on the premises or in the vehicle or which is carried out by means of a surveillance device.
6. This procedure applies where directed surveillance or use of a covert human intelligence source is to be used.

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## Directed Surveillance

7. This is covert but not intrusive and is undertaken for the purpose of a specific investigation or specific operation in such a manner as is likely to result in the obtaining of private information about a person. Private information includes any information relating to the person's private or family life and may include personal data such as names, phone numbers and address details.

## Covert Human Intelligence Source

8. This is a person who establishes or maintains a personal or other relationship with another person for the covert purpose of either using the relationship to obtain information or to provide access to any information to another person or disclosing information obtained by the use of such a relationship or as a consequence of the

existence of such a relationship. It would be unusual for the Council to use a Covert Human Intelligence Source.

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## Principles of Surveillance

9. In planning and carrying out covert surveillance Aberdeenshire Council employees shall comply with the following principles: -
10. **Lawful purposes** – covert surveillance shall only be carried out where necessary to achieve one or more of the permitted purposes (as defined in the Acts) i.e. it must be:-
  - for the purpose of preventing or detecting crime or the prevention of disorder
  - in the interests of public safety
  - for the purpose of protecting public health.
11. **Necessity** – Covert Surveillance shall only be undertaken where there is no other reasonable and effective way of achieving the desired objective(s). It is necessary for the applicant for a surveillance authorisation to set out who is to carry out the surveillance, when it will be done, how it will be done, what is being investigated and the grounds on which the surveillance is being carried out, including, where known, the identities of those subject to the surveillance. This must be considered on a case by case basis.
12. **Effectiveness** – planned covert surveillance shall be undertaken only by suitably trained or experienced employees or under their direct supervision.
13. **Proportionality** – the use and extent of covert surveillance shall not be excessive i.e. it shall be in proportion to the significance of the matter being investigated. The least invasive method of investigation that will enable the aim of the surveillance to be achieved should be adopted. All other practicable, less intrusive steps should have been taken and surveillance authorised only as a last resort.
14. **Collateral intrusion** – reasonable steps shall be taken to minimise the acquisition of personal information that is not directly necessary for the purposes of the investigation or operation being carried out. Employees carrying out surveillance shall not cause damage to any property or harass any person. This should be considered as part of the proportionality principle. Employees should not carry out surveillance from private property without the consent of the occupier.
15. **Authorisation** – all surveillance shall be authorised in accordance with the procedures described below.
16. **Confidential Material** – includes matters subject to legal privilege, confidential personal information and confidential journalistic material. Personal information includes information relating to a person's physical or mental health, or spiritual or other counselling received by a person. Information is held in confidence if it is held under an express or implied undertaking to hold it in confidence, or if it is subject to a restriction on disclosure or obligation of secrecy contained in existing or future legislation. Such material should not be copied or retained unless it is necessary for a specific purpose. Such material should be disseminated only where an appropriate officer, having taken legal advice, is satisfied that it is necessary for a specific purpose. Any retention or dissemination of such material should be accompanied by a clear

warning of its confidential nature. Reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that there is no possibility of it becoming available, or its contents becoming known, to any person whose possession of it may prejudice any related criminal or civil proceedings. Such material should be destroyed as soon as it is no longer necessary to retain it for a specified purpose. If there is any doubt about the status of the material, legal advice should be sought before further dissemination.

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## The Authorisation Process

### Directed Surveillance

17. The persons who may authorise applications are detailed in Appendix III. Authorisation levels are prescribed by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Prescription of Offices, Ranks and Positions) (Scotland) Order 2000. In relation to Local Authorities, the Regulations refer to Assistant Head of Service and Investigation Manager, titles which are little used within Councils. The Authorisation levels set by the Council are equivalent to or above those, and also reflect best practice that there should be at least two organisational tiers of separation between the Applicant and the Authorising Officer. Applicants should apply within their own line management structure unless other arrangements have been agreed or it is unreasonable or impractical in the circumstances
18. Applications will normally be made in writing using the approved form. The Applicant must provide information about the investigation or operation to be carried out and must state who is to be carrying out the surveillance, when it will be done, how it will be done, against whom and what is being investigated and the offence being prevented/detected. In urgent cases, oral or written applications may be approved by any Authorising Officer. Where an urgent application is made this should be supplemented by a normal written application as soon as practicable and in any event within 72 hours failing which the authorisation will expire.
19. Before the Application can be granted, the Authorising Officer must be satisfied that the grant is in accordance with the Principles of Surveillance as detailed above, that it is necessary, that the action is proportionate to what it seeks to achieve and that the aim could not have been achieved by other means. The Authorising Officer must state explicitly and in his/her own words what is being authorised, and against which subjects, property or location. Mere reference to the terms of the application is inadequate. The Authorising Officer must also note the time and date of the grant/refusal of the Application on the relevant form.
20. Where there is a significant risk of confidential material being recovered, the Application shall require the approval of the Chief Executive or in his absence, a Director. Where the majority of the information likely to be recovered could be confidential, the Application should only be granted in exceptional and compelling circumstances.
21. An authorisation for Directed Surveillance runs for a period of three months from the date of grant of the authorisation but should be issued only for the period in which it is expected the surveillance operation will take place.
22. All authorisations shall be reviewed by the Authorising Officer at intervals of not more than four weeks. Details of said review and the decision reached shall be noted on the original application.

23. An application for renewal of the authorisation of directed surveillance can be made at any stage using the appropriate form. The authorisation must be cancelled at any stage if the person who granted or last renewed an authorisation is satisfied that the authorised conduct no longer satisfies the purpose for which it was granted or the requirements regarding necessity, proportionality and collateral intrusion are no longer met.
24. The cancellation of the authorisation **MUST** be recorded on the appropriate form.
25. When cancelling an authorisation, the Authorising Officer **must**:
  - Record the date and times (if at all) that surveillance took place and the order to cease the activity was made
  - The reason for cancellation.
  - Ensure that surveillance equipment has been removed and returned.
  - Provide directions for the management of the product.
  - Ensure that detail of property interfered with, or persons subjected to surveillance, since the last review or renewal is properly recorded.
  - Record the value of the surveillance or interference (i.e. whether the objectives as set in the authorisation were met).

### **Covert Human Intelligence Source**

26. The process for the grant of authorisation for the use or conduct of a Covert Human Intelligence source is the same as for Directed Surveillance. The Authorising Officer must state explicitly and in his/her own words what is being authorised, and against which subjects, property or location. Mere reference to the terms of the application is inadequate. The application for use or conduct of a Covert Human Intelligence Source must specify who the controller and who the handler is to be for each Source. In addition, authorisation for use of a Covert Human Intelligence Source can only be granted after a risk assessment on the use of a Covert Human Intelligence Source and if sufficient arrangements are in place for handling the source's case the risk assessment should determine the risk to the Source of carrying out actions and the likely consequences should the role of the source be known. The ongoing security and welfare of the Source after the cancellation of the Authorisation should also be considered prior to granting the Application. The arrangements that are considered necessary are that:-
27. There will at all times be a person holding the requisite office, rank or position with the relevant investigating authority who will have day to day responsibility for dealing with the source on behalf of that authority and for the source's security and welfare – this should be the source's line manager (the Handler).
28. That there will at all times be another person holding the requisite office, rank or position with the relevant investigating authority who will have general oversight of the use made of that source – this should be the handler's line manager (the Controller).
29. That the identity of the Handler and the Controller for each Source will be set out in the Application.
30. That there will be at all times a person holding the requisite office, rank or position with

the relevant investigating authority who will have responsibility for maintaining a record of the use made of that source – this should be the Authorising Officer

31. That the record relating to the use of that source are maintained by Aberdeenshire Council which will always contain particulars of such matters as may be specified in regulations made by the Scottish Ministers.
32. That the records maintained by Aberdeenshire Council that discloses the identity of the source will not be available to persons except to the extent that there is a need for access to them to be made available to those persons.
33. The persons who may authorise applications are detailed in Appendix III.
34. The Chief Internal Auditor is not an Authorising Officer for this type of surveillance.
35. Only the Chief Executive (or in his absence a Director) can authorise the use of a Covert Human Intelligence Source who is a vulnerable individual or a juvenile.
36. Authorisation for the conduct or use of a Covert Human Intelligence Source runs for 12 months beginning with the date the authorisation takes effect. Authorisation of the use of a Covert Human Intelligence Source who is a vulnerable individual or a juvenile runs for one month.
37. All authorisations shall be reviewed by the Authorising Officer at intervals of not more than four weeks. Details of said review and the decision reached shall be noted on the original application.
38. Applications for the renewal of the conduct or use of a covert human intelligence source shall not be granted unless the officer is satisfied that a review has been carried out of the use made of the source in the period since the grant, the task given to the source during that period and the information obtained from the conduct or use of the source and has considered the results of such a review. The authorisation must be cancelled if the person who granted or last renewed an authorisation is satisfied that the authorised conduct no longer satisfies the purpose for which it is granted.
39. The cancellation of the authorisation **MUST** be recorded on the appropriate form
40. When cancelling an authorisation, the Authorising Officer **must**:
  - Record the date and times (if at all) that surveillance took place and the order to cease the activity was made.
  - The reason for cancellation.
  - Ensure that surveillance equipment has been removed and returned.
  - Provide directions for the management of the product.
  - Ensure that detail of property interfered with, or persons subjected to surveillance, since the last review or renewal is properly recorded.
  - Record the value of the surveillance or interference (i.e. whether the objectives as set in the authorisation were met).

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## Documents

41. This procedure uses the following documents (list of forms detailed in Appendix II): -
42. Application for Authorisation to carry out Directed Surveillance [Form 1] - this should be completed by the applicant in all Directed Surveillance cases. The Authorisation is effective from the time that the approval was given, which should be noted on the Form by the Authorising Officer.
43. Review of a Directed Surveillance Authorisation [Form 2] - this should be used to

record the reviews specified in the initial Form 1.



44. Application for Renewal of Directed Surveillance Authorisation [Form 3] - this should be completed by the applicant in all cases where surveillance is required beyond the previously authorised period (including previous renewals).
45. Cancellation of a Directed Surveillance Authorisation [Form 4] - this **must** be completed either by the Applicant or the Authorising Officer when the authorisation ceases to be necessary or appropriate. The Authorising Officer must sign the Cancellation form.
46. Application for Authorisation for Use or Conduct of Covert Human Intelligence Source [Form 5] - this should be completed by the applicant in all CHIS cases not covered by oral authorisation (below). The Authorisation is effective from the time that the approval was given, which should be noted on the Form by the Authorising Officer.
47. Review of a Covert Human Intelligence Source Authorisation [Form 6] - this should be used to record the reviews specified in the initial Form 5.
48. Application for renewal of a Covert Human Intelligence Source Authorisation [Form 7] - this should be completed by the applicant in all cases where surveillance is required beyond the previously authorised period (including previous renewals).
49. Cancellation of Authorisation for Use or Conduct of Covert Human Intelligence Source [Form 8] - this **must** be completed either by the Applicant or the Authorising Officer when the authorisation ceases to be necessary or appropriate. The Authorising Officer must sign the Cancellation form.
50. Covert Surveillance – Oral Authorisation [Form 9] - this is a record of an oral authorisation which should be completed by the applicant. It should be used only where the urgency of the situation makes the submission of a written application prior to commencement of the surveillance impractical. It should be countersigned by the original authorising officer as soon as is practical. An Application in either Form 1 or Form 5 requires to follow within 72 hours.
51. Each form must be completed with a Service Identifier, a Location Identifier and a reference number unique to that application. The Service Identifiers to be used are contained in Appendix I. The reference number should start with the Service Identifier, thereafter it is up to each Service to decide how best to ensure that all documentation is readily available and identifiable. Each application will also be allocated with a Central reference number by the Head of Legal and People.

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## Review of Authorisations

52. All authorisations shall be reviewed by the Authorising Officer at intervals of not more than four weeks. Details of said review and the decision reached shall be noted on the original application.

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## Security and Retention of Documents

53. Documents created under this procedure are highly confidential and shall be treated as such. The Head of Legal and People shall maintain one Central Register of current and past Authorisations at Woodhill House. Where an application for Authorisation is granted renewed or cancelled, the Applicant officer shall telephone or e-mail the officer responsible for maintaining the Central Register, and also send a copy of the grant,

renewal or cancellation to the Head of Legal and People, both within 24 hours of same to keep the Central Register up to date. The Central Register shall contain the following information, namely :-

- the type of authorisation;
  - the date the authorisation was given;
  - name and rank/grade of the authorising officer;
  - the unique reference number (URN) of the investigation or operation;
  - the title of the investigation or operation, including a brief description and names of subjects, if known;
  - whether the urgency provisions were used, and if so why;
  - if the authorisation has been renewed, when it was renewed and who authorised the renewal, including the name and rank/grade of the authorising officer;
  - whether the investigation or operation is likely to result in obtaining confidential information;
  - whether the authorisation was granted by an individual directly involved in the investigation;
  - the date the authorisation was cancelled.
54. The principal Authorisation and Renewal forms shall be retained by the Authorising Officer while current. On cancellation, the principal Application, Renewal and Cancellation forms shall be forwarded to the Head of Legal and People with the Authorising Officer retaining a copy.
55. Said forms shall be retained by the Authorising Officer for at least one year after cancellation and by the Head of Legal and People for at least five years after cancellation.
56. All information recovered through the use of covert surveillance which is relevant to the investigation shall be retained for at least five years after the cancellation of the surveillance or the completion of any Court proceedings in which said information was used or referred to. All other information shall be destroyed as soon as the surveillance is cancelled.

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## Training

57. Each Service is responsible for ensuring that their staff receive adequate training to deal with applications and enquiries. The Director of each Service shall confirm to the Head of Legal and People that appropriate staff have received training in the interpretation of the legislation, codes and forms and provide details, including the date(s), of the training.

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## Public Access

58. Copies of the Policy and the Codes of Practice are available for public reference at the following offices:-
- Woodhill House, Westburn Road, Aberdeen.
  - Town House, 34 Low Street, Banff.
  - Gordon House, Blackhall Road, Inverurie.

- Viewmount, Arduthie Road, Stonehaven.

59. Copies of the Policy and the Codes of Practice will be made available to the public by post or e-mail if requested.

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## **Complaints**

60. In the event of any member of the public being unhappy or dissatisfied with the conduct of any covert surveillance, in addition to the Council's complaints procedure, they have the right to complain to the Investigatory Powers Tribunal
61. Details of the Complaints Procedure are available for public reference at the above offices. Copies of the Complaints Procedure will be made available to the public by post or e-mail if requested.

## APPENDIX I

### Service Identifiers:-

BS – Business Services

CE – Chief Executive

ECS -Education and Children’s Services

HSC – Health and Social Care

IS - Infrastructure Services

LP – Legal and People

## APPENDIX II

- Form 1** Application for Authorisation to carry out Directed Surveillance
- Form 2** Review of a Directed Surveillance Authorisation
- Form 3** Application for Renewal of Directed Surveillance Authorisation
- Form 4** Cancellation of Directed Surveillance Authorisation
- Form 5** Application for Authorisation for Use or Conduct of Covert Human Intelligence Source
- Form 6** Review of Covert Human Intelligence Source Authorisation
- Form 7** Renewal of Covert Human Intelligence Source Authorisation
- Form 8** Cancellation of an Authorisation for Use or Conduct of Covert Human Intelligence Source.
- Form 9** Covert Surveillance - Oral Authorisation

## APPENDIX III

### **Persons who may grant Authorisations:-**

1. James Savege – Chief Executive
2. Rob Simpson – Interim Director of Business Services
3. Jamie Dale – Chief Internal Auditor
4. Gordon Buchanan - Service Manager, Environmental Health and Trading Standards
5. Paul Macari – Head of Service, Planning & Environment

### **Officers responsible for maintaining Central Register:-**

1. Laura Bremner, Principal Solicitor (Representation), Legal & People
2. Robin Taylor, Senior Solicitor (Representation), Legal & People.

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## LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE

FRIDAY, 13TH OCTOBER, 2023

**Present:** Councillors A Stirling (Chair), M Ewenson (Vice-Chair), G Crowson, J Gifford, T Mason, L McWhinnie, R Menard and J Nicol.

**Apologies:** None.

**Officers:** Kelly Bissett (Trainee Solicitor), Nicole Chidester (Committee Officer), Lucas Duncan (Civic Licensing Standards Officer), Shirley Duthie (Senior Authorised Officer), Gordon McWilliam (Civic Licensing Standards Officer), and Fiona Stewart (Senior Solicitor).

**Also in attendance:** Sergeant Neil Grant (Police Scotland).

### **1 SEDERUNT AND DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

The Chair asked Members if they had any interests to declare, in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. There were no interests declared.

#### **2A PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY**

In taking decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010:-

- (1) To have due regard to the need to:-
  - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
  - (b) advance equality and opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
  - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and

to consider, where an Integrated Impact Assessment has been provided, its contents and to take those into consideration when reaching a decision.

#### **2B CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**

The Sub-Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 50A (2) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, as amended, to exclude the public and media representatives from the meeting for Items 6 - 8 of the business below on account of the likely disclosure of confidential information in breach of the obligation of confidence.

### **3 MINUTE OF THE MEETING OF 1 SEPTEMBER 2023**

There had been circulated and was **approved** as a correct record the Minute of the Meeting of the Licensing Sub-Committee of 1 September 2023.

### **4 APPLICATION FOR GRANT OF SHORT-TERM LET LICENCE - 33 COWIE PARK, STONEHAVEN, AB39 2PZ**

There had been circulated a report dated 29 September 2023, by the Director of Business Services, which (1) requested that consideration be given to an application for the grant of a Short-Term Let Licence for 33 Cowie Park, Stonehaven, AB39 2PZ, in respect of which objections from Members of the Public had been lodged in response to the display of the site notice, and (2) detailed information relevant to the application.

Members confirmed they had received and reviewed the supplementary pack.

Having heard from a representative of the Applicant Company, Mr Dave Hepworth, and from the following objectors: Ms Stacey Coull and Mr Ian Coull who was representing Mrs Sonia Coull, the Sub-Committee **agreed** that objections from Stacey Coull were competent/relevant; that the objection from Mr Bruce was partially relevant/competent in relation to stress and nuisance, but was not competent in relation to the title deed; and that the objection from Sonia Coull was not competent nor relevant and would not be taken into account.

Members **agreed** that there was sufficient evidence before them to allow a determination to be made; following which, Councillor Crowson, seconded by Councillor Ewenson moved that the licence be granted for a period of 1 year subject to local conditions, particularly those associated with anti-social behaviour and security/privacy and to encourage the applicant to improve welcome pack and signage for guests.

As an amendment, Councillor Mason, seconded by Councillor Gifford, moved that the application be refused on the grounds of legal test as it related to nuisance and public safety (Legal Test section C, Items i, iv and v).

Members of the Sub-Committee voted:

For the Motion:	(6)	Councillors Stirling, Crowson, Ewenson, Mason, McWhinnie and Nicol
For the Amendment:	(2)	Councillors Gifford and Mason

The Motion was therefore carried, and the Sub-Committee **agreed** to grant the licence for a period of 1 year subject to local conditions, particularly those associated with anti-social behaviour and security/privacy and to encourage the applicant to improve welcome pack and signage for guests.

**5 APPLICATION FOR GRANT OF SHORT-TERM LET LICENCE - 10 KIRK MEWS, WATSON STREET, BANCHORY, AB31 5NS**

There had been circulated a report dated 28 September 2023, by the Director of Environment and Infrastructure Services, which (1) requested that consideration be given to an application for the grant of a Short-Term Let Licence for 10 Kirk Mews, Watson Street, Banchory, AB31 5NS, in respect of which objections from Members of the Public had been lodged in response to the display of the site notice, and (2) detailed information relevant to the application.

Having heard from applicant, Mr Duncan Alexander Booth, and one objector, Mr David Alexander, the Sub-committee agreed that Mr David Alexander's objection was competent in part, but that the comments about title deed issues were not competent

nor relevant; that Randal and Kathleen McDonald's objections were partially relevant and competent, but the comments about the impact on the value and saleability of the properties and the restrictions in title deeds were not competent nor relevant; that Norman Adie's objection was partially relevant and competent, except for the comments on restrictions in title deeds; and that Isabell Roy's objection was partially relevant and competent, but the comments on the value and saleability of the property were not competent nor relevant.

Members confirmed they had received and reviewed the supplementary pack. At this point in the meeting, Members **agreed** to suspend standing order 2.1.4 to continue beyond 1pm.

Having considered the comments from the applicant and objectors, Members **agreed** that there was sufficient evidence before them to allow a determination to be made. Having encouraged the applicant to improve signage and welcome information, the Sub Committee unanimously **agreed:-**

- (1) to GRANT the application for Short-Term Let Licence for a period of 1 year for 10 Kirk Mews, Watson Street, Banchory, AB31 5NS subject to local conditions; and
- (2) to instruct Officers to provide both the applicant and objector with details about compliance mechanisms, and contact details for Licensing Standards Officers and relevant Services to lodge complaints.

## **6 APPLICATION FOR RENEWAL OF TAXI DRIVER'S LICENCE (CASE NO. 1088)**

There had been circulated a report dated 22 September 2023, by the Director of Business Services, which (1) requested that consideration be given to an application for the renewal of a taxi driver's licence (identified as Case No. 1088), in respect of which the Chief Constable had made a representation, and (2) detailed information relevant to the application.

Having heard from the applicant and the Chief Constable's representative, the Sub-Committee unanimously **agreed:-**

- (1) that there was sufficient evidence before them to allow a determination to be made; and
- (2) to GRANT the application for renewal of taxi driver's licence for a period of 3 years as none of the grounds for refusal were met.

## **7 APPLICATION FOR GRANT OF TAXI DRIVER'S LICENCE (CASE NO. 1089)**

There had been circulated a report dated 21 September 2023, by the Director of Business Services, which (1) requested that consideration be given to an application for the grant of a taxi driver's licence (identified as Case No. 1089), in respect of which the Chief Constable had made a representation, and (2) detailed information relevant to the application.

The Sub-Committee **agreed** to hear the contents of a letter provided by the applicant's representative. Having considered this information, and having heard from the applicant and the Chief Constable's representative, the Sub-Committee **agreed:-**

- (1) that there was not sufficient evidence before them to allow a determination to be made; and
- (2) to defer consideration of the application for one cycle to allow for further information to be supplied regarding the clarification of the class of drug involved with the charge and any other information that would assist the Sub-Committee in understanding what led to the charge.

## 8 APPLICATION FOR GRANT OF TAXI DRIVER'S LICENCE (CASE NO. 1090)

There had been circulated a report dated 28 September 2023, by the Director of Business Services, which (1) requested that consideration be given to an application for the grant of a taxi driver's licence (identified as Case No. 1090), in respect of which the Chief Constable had made a representation, and (2) detailed information relevant to the application.

There was a typographical error with one of the dates on the Chief Constable's representation which was listed erroneously as 2021 instead of 2012.

It was **noted** that the applicant was not available when dialled into the meeting, but the Sub-Committee **agreed** to proceed in his absence.

Having heard from the Chief Constable's representative, the Sub-Committee unanimously **agreed**:-

- (1) that there was sufficient evidence before them to allow a determination to be made; and
- (2) to REFUSE the application for a taxi driver's licence on the basis that the applicant was not a fit and proper person to hold a licence.