



CITY OF
Lincoln
COUNCIL

Service delivery during our COVID-19 response

Heather Grover
Principal Policy Officer
February 2021

Contents

- ▶ Introduction - Page 3
- ▶ Key Themes Identified - Page 4
- ▶ Temporary New Services – Pages 5-7
- ▶ Temporarily Closed Services – Pages 7-8
- ▶ Temporarily Limited Services – Pages 8-12
- ▶ Fully Operational Services – Pages 12-22
- ▶ Temporarily Enhanced Services - Pages 22-23
- ▶ Looking forward – our targets for next year – Page 23

Introduction

During the whole of the current financial year measuring performance has been a challenge for the majority of service areas – some services have little or no data to report as they have been closed e.g. Leisure Centres, whilst others have been under extreme pressure to deliver a markedly different service and existing measures have not been applicable, such as Food Health and Safety. It has therefore been agreed to delay Quarter 3 reporting, as was done in Quarter 1, and produce a combined Quarter 3 and Quarter 4 report to capture performance for the second half of the financial year, subject to performance data being available.

Instead of the usual Quarter 3 performance report, this report provides an overview of how services across the council have been operating during the pandemic, with a



focus on the period from October, just before the second lockdown. It reports not only on how services have adapted to changes during the ongoing restrictions, but also provides an insight into how services are planning for an easing of restrictions and return to a 'new normal' in the months ahead. Depending on the service offered this might mean a continuance of remote working and ongoing focus on electronic engagement with customers, whilst others will return to something more like the pre-COVID-19 service.

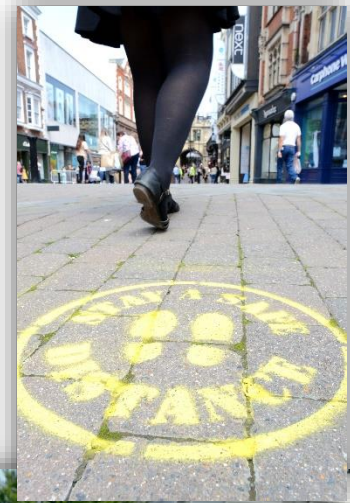
The report has been divided not by directorate, but by the impact of COVID-19 on delivery of the service. It should be noted the sections are only an indication of the impact on service delivery, and for the majority there will be some elements which have continued or been enhanced, whilst other areas have been reduced or closed.



Key Themes Identified

Opportunities

- Virtual and remote working has worked well for most teams
- One Council approach has supported the development of new services in response to COVID-19
- Improvements to processes including new online procedures benefitting both customers and staff
- Efficiencies identified such as virtual meetings reducing travel time and costs.
- More flexibility to include a larger number of people in meetings, from a larger area without constraints typically associated with a physical venue



Challenges

- Virtual and remote working has presented difficulties in training staff in new areas of work, such as Customer Services
- Staff sometimes face difficulties with remote working, such as internet connections and isolation
- The future of services is hard to predict due to the unknown length of restrictions and what impact these may have ongoing



Temporary New Services

Four new temporary services have been set up with the sole purpose of addressing issues relating to the pandemic and looking beyond to the recovery period. All four services have had significant input from several service areas and had been delivered by staff from multiple services across the council, reflecting our One Council approach to the work we do.

Business Support Service

The 'One Council' approach to providing the Business Support Service has involved a dedicated team of staff from across the council. The service was developed at the start of the pandemic to administer the Government's Business Support Grant schemes and to ensure businesses have access to the support and grants they are entitled to, and to enable them to survive. Over the summer grants of £21,315,000 were paid to 1,700 businesses.

Since November the city council has been allocated a further series of funds to support businesses during the national and local restriction period and has now issued 4,235 grants to 935 businesses totalling just over £8.4 million in addition to that paid over the summer.. These grants fall broadly into two categories. The first is mandatory grants for rate-paying businesses mandated to close because of local or national restrictions. These grants are paid on a regular and ongoing basis while restrictions are in place. The second category is discretionary grants which the council is able to administer at its discretion, with a total of £2,868,060 awarded to the city council to administer up to March 2022. Grants must be focussed on providing direct support to businesses and cannot be used for wage top-up. In Lincoln, we have used this funding to support businesses which 'fall through the gaps' of mandatory funding schemes, e.g. closed businesses that do not pay business rates such as B&Bs, or businesses not been mandated to close but which have been severely impacted by the restrictions. We plan to continue to deploy this funding for as long as lockdown or restrictions continue, which will be at least until April 2021.

The service is continuing and is now looking towards providing support to businesses to enable them to be in a good position during the recovery period. In addition to offering continued support with running costs, officers are working on a package of further support to help economic recovery. This is being informed by feedback from businesses and interviews with a wide range of partners and stakeholders. Ideas being considered include a business 'kick-start/revival' scheme to help businesses cover the costs associated diversifying or operating in a Covid-safe way, additional support for the visitor economy sector and high street recovery and opportunities to support start-ups/self-employed, e.g. in the digital sector.

We have also created a dedicated page on our website which provides full details of what each grant is for, as well as links to enable businesses to find the support they need.

Community Help and Befriending Services

Led by the Neighbourhood Team, working closely with colleagues from Corporate Policy, Housing and Democratic Services, with nearly 50 staff right across the council, this new virtual service was set up in March 2020. At the start of the pandemic we engaged with nearly 500 people who required a regular call from a member of staff, this number reduced as restrictions started to ease. Some wished to continue receiving support, so we were able to connect them with existing charitable organisations to continue providing this service. Over 200 positive comments were received in relation to the service.

As a team, we were conscious that many would be struggling following further restrictions introduced towards the end of the year. During December, we contacted those who had chosen not to be connected to an alternative service. Four members of staff made calls to around 80 people to check on their wellbeing and to offer a further call in January as we recognised that this is traditionally a difficult time of year for many people. It was made clear to customers that we were only able to offer this service in December and January.

There are no plans to extend the befriending service and Community Help Signposting is now available through our normal customer services number. We are also organising for useful information on community help to be included in the next edition of Your Lincoln. The team delivering the befriending service no longer meet; however, an evaluation report was completed as we believe that there were many powerful lessons to be learnt from delivering this support. Supporting this service, the Neighbourhood team have also been involved in setting up a Crisis Fund, raising and allocating over £25,000 to help vulnerable residents in need.

Community Testing Service

Using the 'One Council' approach the new Community Testing Team, with staff from Environmental Health, the Neighbourhood Team and Events, as well as the Director for Communities and Environment, have been involved in setting up two testing sites within the city. Whilst the test sites are operated by SERCO everything to do with setting up the sites has been undertaken by the city council involving everything from co-ordinating

stewards, signage and leaflet distribution to door knocking. The team has worked hard to engage with members of the local community to promote the community testing sites in Sincil Bank and then Monks Road. This has included working with minority ethnic groups and local organisations including schools. The local knowledge of the Neighbourhood Team was used to identify locations for testing sites and to assist with publicity and the team have also delivered Home Testing Kits to those that are symptomatic who are not able to attend the testing site.



City Centre Recovery Group

This group brings together partners and other sectors to ensure plans are in place to ensure a Covid-compliant city remobilise both the daytime and night-time economies when the time comes. Chaired by the Director of Communities and Environment, it comprises the Police, Lincoln BIG and City of Lincoln Council and includes five representatives from the city council, with a much wider group of services feeding into, and being informed by discussions at, meetings being a further example of our 'One Council' approach to service delivery. Alongside the City Centre Recovery Group, other groups involving specific issues or businesses also meet to progress plans for re-opening. Pubwatch meetings continue to take place enabling landlords to discuss and plan what they need to do for safe re-opening, there are regular meetings of the Healthy High Street Group attended by businesses with discussion on anything which might be helpful to support the recovery of high street businesses, such as provision of signage and guidance. Other discussions include helping with the planning and promotion of city centre events, e.g. the Farmers Market, to attract people back into the city centre and discussions with the universities on managing the safe return of students.

Work continues to ensure businesses are compliant with government legislation and guidance, e.g. regarding takeaway food outlets, and we continue to work hard to tackle issues such as rough sleeping in the city centre, and we provide advice, guidance and support where necessary to businesses. In the autumn we installed footfall counters at four locations in the city centre, to monitor footfall in the high street. This enables us to put out communications to alert people to quieter times in the city to try and encourage shoppers to stagger their visits and avoid overcrowding. We are currently awaiting a further announcement from central government on 23 February. The work being done now by the City Centre Recovery Group, partners and other sectors will ensure we are in the best position possible to act on whatever is announced to enable recovery in our city centre.

Temporarily Closed Services

The services under this heading are those which have had to close all their facilities to the public during periods of lockdown. However, as will be seen from the reports below, that does not mean that no service at all has been provided with some online alternatives on offer. Also, staff have been working to ensure they are ready to open once re-opening.

Events and Culture (including Visitor Information Centre) There have been no events during the current financial year. However, the City Safety Advisory Group, a multi-agency group offering advice and guidance to those putting on events in the city continues to meet and is helping ensure any events organised by external partners which are taking place are COVID-19-secure. Looking forwards to events in 2021, the team is currently



planning for the 2021 Christmas Market and the Safety Advisory Group is liaising with organisers of other events planned for the spring and summer to ensure they go ahead in line with Central Government advice.

The Visitor Information Centre is currently closed in line with government requirements. However, work has been continuing behind the scenes with the centre manager providing online support for tourism. The building continues to be checked and maintained so it can re-open as soon as restrictions are lifted, there is an online micro-site dedicated to the Visitor Information Centre and the team is looking at branding. In addition, members of the team have helped support both the Business Support and Community Testing services.

Sport and Leisure

Leisure Centres are currently closed, having briefly re-opened after the second lockdown. All Active Nation staff are currently furloughed apart from the manager who is available to open buildings if necessary (e.g. for weekly Legionella testing). Plans are now being put in place to enable re-opening from the beginning of April or when the lockdown is lifted.



This will involve a phased re-opening, firstly of outdoor facilities, i.e. tracks and pitches, followed by gym and swimming facilities and finally full re-opening which will include classes etc. Currently a number of online activities are being offered, which are proving very popular and 5,340 individuals signed up to Active Nation “On Demand” between 4th and 25th January. During this period 2,867 people took part in live online classes with 3,346 participating in On Demand activities, 3,346 through Facebook, 5,287 in Facebook PE lessons and 3,882 accessing recorded On Demand classes.

Temporarily Limited Services

These are services which have had to make significant changes to the way they deliver their service, but which nevertheless have been able to continue to deliver elements of the service with little change. This includes offering a reduced service or delivering the service in a different way.

Civic and International Partnerships

The three months to the end of December would have been extremely busy under normal circumstances and throughout most of the national and local restrictions, we have continued to carry out as much as we can with the full Civic Party, via Zoom meetings. We hosted the Christmas Lights switch on, Christmas messages to care homes, Twin Town meetings, Church Services and School events. The Mayor has always been available to take part in anything that could be done in this format. We have continued to accept all invitations where the Mayor was available to take part using video connections. The Guildhall has also been monitored regularly by the Mayor’s Officer with Contractors undertaking any essential work/inspections as normal. Looking ahead, we aim to start organising events that have been ‘put on hold’,

trying to spread them where possible. We are in regular contact with our various partners, e.g. military, Lincoln BIG, local businesses, etc. with the intention of picking up where we left off.

Customer Services

The team is still managing to interact with customers very effectively despite the obvious obstacle that lockdown presents with a mostly customer facing service. Since March last year, we have always offered physical appointments, provided they were essential. Currently, we are seeing an average of around five to ten people per week use our essential appointment slots. COVID-19 has of course forced a change in how our customers interact with us, and we are seeing a massive shift from physical communication to our online and telephone services. This is all while our customer service staff are working from home. Our phone system and other software used by customer service agents has facilitated full working capabilities as they would in the office and as a result our Team Leaders and management have also been able to monitor performance just as effectively. This has allowed them to make sure our customers are still receiving the best service possible, despite the change in working environment for our staff. When restrictions are lifted it is not anticipated this will change the workload but will allow a gradual process of the criteria for face to face appointments to be relaxed.

The essential booking system has allowed us to work much more efficiently, as it has lessened the need for staff to support drop-in appointments. It has enabled many specialist staff who have been trained in areas such as council tax, housing and benefits to be used on the telephone system, allowing their skills to reach more residents who need trusted and reliable advice. We recognise that some people may want to return to face to face appointments either through preference or necessity. However, the booking system has worked well and increased efficiency and therefore moving forwards we are looking at permanently reducing face to face interactions by promoting the appointment system. Microsoft Teams has helped in keeping morale high, but remote working has presented challenges for the service, as it has been more difficult to train customer services agents in new areas of the service. Customer Services, from the very beginning, has had to be alert to changing government guidance, to make sure that agents can support customers in any way they need us.

Grounds Maintenance, Parks and Open Spaces

Parks and open spaces have been extremely popular throughout. Managing these assets whilst ensuring a safe workspace for staff and encouraging adherence to restrictions amongst visitors has been a challenge at times. We have made changes as government requirements have changed, and in the current lockdown tennis courts and outdoor gym equipment are out of use. Play areas have remained open. We are very aware of the importance of well managed green space for



the benefit of the physical and mental wellbeing of Lincoln residents, particularly for people who may otherwise feel lonely, and for children to play in open spaces. We continue to monitor adherence to restrictions, working with colleagues in Communications to get key messages out to the public. We also monitor government legal restrictions and requirements and adapt quickly to stay open where we can and be as safe as possible to use.

Currently it is the 'closed season' for the campsite at Hartsholme Country Park, and preparations for reopening are underway once restrictions allow, post March. The Visitor Centre at Hartsholme Country Park is also currently closed to visitors, and activities in the park have stopped.



Boultham Park Lake restoration work - The capital works phase of the project began on site in early January. Whilst COVID-19 has impacted on the timetable, at present it is not delaying works on site. As well as the usual site health and safety arrangements there are additional COVID-19 safe risk assessments which are enforced on site. COVID-19 circumstances have severely impacted activities, events and volunteering which had been due to start in late summer 2020. However, some activities continue to take place including those online and self-led activities for individuals and families. Looking forwards, the activity plan for the project period to spring 2023 has been reviewed and pared back, although some volunteering work is planned to take place alongside contractors.

Housing Repairs

The Housing Repairs Service (HRS) has carried out its usual work in line with government guidelines which provide clear guidance on tradesmen entering people's properties. HRS continued to carry out all repairs until a corporate decision was made to carry out urgent and essential work only to further protect our staff and customers. This has restricted the amount of work being done, although non-urgent repairs already scheduled to take place will be undertaken when restrictions are lifted.

With the unknown length of this current lockdown it is difficult to predict future HRS workload, but from a day to day perspective the service is introducing a scheduled repair pilot which is currently under review. Due to the nature of the work HRS undertakes there will be no long-term effects on the service or the type of work it carries out. Learning points from operation during lockdown will be reviewed as part of the pilot scheme and HRS will ensure lessons learned from the impact of COVID-19 on the service will be implemented as standard practice.

Internal Audit

The Audit team has continued where possible with the planned workload for 2020-2021, which was reduced in the first and second lockdown. A new workload plan is currently being developed for 2021-2022. Auditing remotely has presented its challenges and is of course different to what the team is used to. It is expected that after COVID-19 restrictions are lifted and physical meetings permitted, there will be a

return to more face to face meetings. We will continue to build on the use of video conferencing and other tools that have been vital in being able to work remotely. Some of the team's workload is with Boston Borough Council and remote auditing has provided some great efficiencies through not having to travel or print large packs of documents. The team is also continuing to provide support with business grants. COVID-19 is of course affecting the planned work in some areas as expected, and we are working flexibly to accommodate pressures faced by other teams

Neighbourhood Team

Many of the interventions planned in Sincil Bank have been delayed, and most of the focus of the Neighbourhood Team over the past 10 months has been on COVID-19 support with the team answering calls during the evenings and weekends. Looking forwards, alongside remobilising we know that the Sincil Bank community will have many changing priorities. Work will commence on the development of a Mental Health Hub at Bridge Church. We are also anticipating that the team will be busy offering advice and guidance to residents at the Community Hub as this has been closed to the public for the majority of 2020. COVID-19 has changed the way we have been working in the community, and therefore work will continue this year to re-connect with our community partners, to ensure that important activity can still take place as planned.

Parking

Whilst the number of people using car parks has dramatically reduced during the pandemic, and during the periods of lockdown, all our car parks have remained open. However, from the end of January the Rosemary Lane car park is being used as a testing site. Special offers have been made to try and encourage people to use the car parks during periods when restrictions have been eased, and we have prepared a recovery plan including budget profiles, and possible parking offers to further encourage safe parking. We will also be embarking on a car parking strategy once the High Street starts to recover, when we expect to see new patterns of parking emerge in a post COVID-19 world. It is hoped once restrictions are lifted demand will gradually increase to a new sustainable level.

Tenancy Services

During the third lockdown, restrictions have had no extra impact on our services, as our processes changed at the first lockdown and will stay that way until restrictions are lifted, as our staff were already prepared. The service's caretaking service is continuing to operate during this period and with updated guidance, we are now offering a limited cleaning facility to low rise and high-rise blocks. The night-time service is still not operational, and we are not spending as much time on the estates e.g. litter picking. We are of course still focusing on fire safety as that is a statutory requirement.



We are also continuing to sign properties up and manage income collection and anti-social behaviour in our housing stock remotely. As part of service continuity, processes for our services have been revisited and amended where needed to accommodate changes in guidance from Central Government. Specifically, the income collection process has been amended as approved by the courts, as well as bans on evictions until the 21st February. The team is still only carrying out essential visits and this is no change compared to previous lockdowns, but when restrictions are eased, the plan is for visits to be reinstated. Our interaction with customers is our number one priority and is something we are keen to start again as restrictions are lifted. Whilst there are no permanent effects on the team's structure, we are now more flexible and a hub at City Hall is no longer essential for the service to operate. As expected, rent collection and arrears, are of course taking an impact and will likely take some time to recover as we adapt to our residents needs financially.

Fully Operational Services

These service areas have been providing most of their service as normal, although in some cases the focus of the work has changed to support needs arising from COVID-19 activities and restrictions.

Allotments

At the end of March 2020, 892 allotment plots were let across the city (around 85% of plots available) and there were 19 people on the waiting list. By the end of quarter 3, 1,032 plots were let across the city (around 96% of plots available) and there were 121 people on the waiting list. This reflects the continued increase in allotment gardening throughout COVID-19 which we hope will continue beyond. People have seen the benefits of the exercise, fresh and satisfaction of gardening in this way, and have found it a safe way to get out and about, and to be a part of a community, whilst still maintaining COVID-19-safe practices.

Bereavement Services

Bereavement Services have been busy for much of the period from initial lockdown in March and adapted to ensure continuity of this much needed service and compliance with government legislation and guidance. The team is split in two, with each 'bubble' alternating to provide the front-line service and the other on standby. The number of ceremonies has been manageable with 124 cremations in October, 151 in November and 185 in December. January has been very busy with 226 cremations. A vigorous cleaning regime is in place between services, and changes to the service offered have included the offer of Saturday slots and free webcasting. Looking forwards proposals for improvements to replace the cremators, provide a new car park and create a second chapel, are being submitted to Executive in February for approval, for a potential start in late summer.

Business Development and IT

As discussed in previous reports, the response from our IT service has been vital to enabling a robust and reliable home working capability for members of staff, acting as

the backbone for the organisation's service delivery. We are also mid-way through a rollout of new technology to allow members of staff to be even more agile and work more effectively remotely, including new desktop devices and mobile phones. This will be the new way for working for many people, and we have learned many valuable insights to support the development of the organisation's 'One Council' approach.

Our Business Development Team has been fundamental in ensuring the digital facilities are in place to support the payment, monitoring and reporting of grants allocated to businesses across the city. This is on top of our business as usual workload such as maintaining our electronic services to the public. Whilst COVID-19 has added a big pressure to the workload we usually complete, when restrictions are lifted and the pandemic ceases to have the current impact it does, it is anticipated that our workload will resume to pre COVID-19 levels.

Corporate Health and Safety

This service has been busy supporting services with risk assessments, in particular for staff working from home. This is likely to continue, certainly in the medium, if not longer term.

CCTV

CCTV has continued to work 24/7 throughout the pandemic and has been the 'eyes and ears' for other services including Environmental Health, Licensing, Public Protection and Anti-Social Behaviour, Homelessness and Parks as well as Lincolnshire Police. The nature of the work has continued to be different in response to COVID-19 and varies dependant on current restrictions/lockdown rules. For example the



city centre is used in different ways, and the issues that require monitoring are different. The number and nature of incidents dealt with also vary dependant on the nature of restrictions. For example, with more shops closed there are fewer shoplifting incidents. When pubs are closed there are fewer evening economy disorder issues. Many businesses have relied on CCTV more than ever as their premises were closed and therefore at higher risk of break-ins or vandalism. The control room rota has continued to operate single staffed as it has since the start of COVID-19, for staff safety.

Democratic Services

Our response to COVID-19 lies in two sections of the team. From a Committee point of view, all our meetings are remote now using Zoom. Whilst initially in 2020 this was a large learning curve for both staff and members, it is working very well, and has presented its own benefits that at first were not expected. In terms of our Elections side of the team, canvassing took place as normal, with a stringent focus on making sure those staff who were door knocking had access to full PPE, ensuring the process was COVID-19 safe. The May elections, which involve the county council elections as

well as the postponed 2021 Police and Crime Commissioner and local elections, are currently going ahead as planned, unless instructed otherwise by Central Government. One significant piece of work that we are planning, is ensuring all voting sites and processes are safe and COVID-19 secure. This is expected to be a very time and resource heavy task, as our Chief Executive has responsibility for ensuring all sites and processes are safe across the County, and not just in the City, and this is likely to require the sign off of numerous separate risk assessments. When restrictions are lifted, and physical meetings are permitted, meetings are expected to return to a physical format, as there seems to be no indication presently from the Government that the legislation permitting remote meetings is likely to be extended beyond May. Whilst both sides of the team we were redeployed at the beginning of the first lockdown to support the delivery of the Befriending Service and Community Signposting Helpline, our usual workload has now resumed and the team, whilst still operating remotely, is working as normal.

Development Planning

Development Planning is one of the functions that government specifically said should carry on when we initially went into lockdown, so there have been relatively few changes to the service. There have been a few changes in processes and procedures, the key one being relating to site visits. In the initial lockdown these were not permitted and have been temporarily replaced by using a combination of photographs, Google earth and street view. Where site notices are required (e.g. for development in Conservation Areas) applicants have been asked to put up notices and provide evidence this has been done. Whilst this has worked quite well, it is unlikely the approach will be adopted in the long term with a return to site visits once it is appropriate to do so. Almost all meetings (with developers, applicants, objectors, and members) are now virtual, making use video conferencing, and this includes Planning Committee. Virtual meetings have generally worked well, including Planning Committee, it is likely these will be more frequent than before COVID-19 although there will be a return to some face to face meetings. There has been a reduction in the volume of work, though it has increased slightly and has now stabilised. Initially it was the larger applications which slowed down with an increase in householder applications, but there are signs of more optimism with some big pre-applications in the pipeline and the hope that as the vaccine is rolled out things will begin to return to some normality later in the year as confidence increases. A Heritage Action Zone officer is now in post, but it is proving to be quite challenging with the restrictions in place, closed businesses, and the current economic situation, but it is hoped this will ease once lockdown is eased.

Financial Services

All day to day workload has maintained since March last year, and the team have done a fantastic job at balancing the day job on top of supporting other service areas in delivering grant payments to small businesses, test and trace payments as well as the calculation of all furlough payments and government income allocation payments. As with many other areas, the team's workload and priorities will depend on the direction we are given from central government. As expected from a service where most of the

work is a legal requirement, we will respond as flexibly as we can to changes in legislation and requests from central government. Whilst the team is the same in terms of the structure and roles members of staff have, how we work with our customers, e.g. Committee members, budget holders and project managers is completely different, currently working remotely to communicate.

HR and Work Based Learning

HR continues to act as a vital health and wellbeing hub for staff across the organisation. As updated in the quarter one and two report in November 2020, the team have produced a whole range of new procedures and guidance, focussing heavily on supporting both the mental and physical health and wellbeing of employees. The team have also implemented updated recruitment procedures, including Teams interviews, annual leave procedures, flexi time procedures and working from home.

Several surveys have also been completed focussing on staff health and wellbeing, training required by managers, and a working from home survey. This work has allowed the team to tailor the guidance it offers better to staff who need it most. Our direct response to COVID-19, in just the last three months, has been a reactive process of continuously updating and amending our guidance as it is released from central government.

Human Resources have developed and maintained a tracker for those employees who report symptoms either for themselves or a household member to self-isolate and/or tested positive for COVID-19. Whilst the long term effects of COVID-19 are not likely to permanently change the teams service delivery, remote working and using new devices and software which allow this is something the team will continue to embrace, ensuring the guidance and advice offered is relevant and above all else, accurate. Work Based Learning have had to develop remote support for apprentices including training, reviews, planning and feedback, resulting in reduced progress and achievement of targets.

Homelessness

All services for people presenting themselves at risk of homelessness are available as normal, with provision for temporary accommodation, assistance for those fleeing domestic violence, advice and guidance on homelessness, supporting people acquiring private accommodation and supporting people securing deposit guarantee so people can access private accommodation. All usual customer interaction avenues are still open, and the only major change for both staff and customers alike is the lack of physical appointments, which will be reinstated when restrictions are lifted.

We are incredibly proud of the team for minimising the impact of COVID-19 for our customers and ensuring a smooth transition to changes in processes. When physical appointments are permitted, they will be on an essential basis only. Central Government protections for those at risk of homelessness have meant we have seen a reduction in those people presenting themselves at risk, because evictions and

mortgage payments have been paused. We are however now seeing a different type of applicant with an increase in single people.

Housing Investment

As government guidance has changed during the pandemic, we have continually reviewed what work is permitted to take place in customers' homes. We have reassurance that our contractors have the appropriate risk assessments and method statements in place, in accordance with the latest government guidance to protect everyone during work activity within customers' homes. In the current lockdown we have reduced the level of planned works and the number of properties that we are working in at any one time to limit the level disruption to our customers. Some customers have refused access for both planned works and gas servicing, mostly due to households shielding or self-isolating.



A key priority is to address the backlog of outstanding gas services and arrange appointments with our customers at the earliest opportunity as soon as restrictions are eased. The introduction of home and site working with only essential use of Council offices has given us the opportunity to review our service delivery. Our front-line officers are now spending more time on site than prior to lockdown. This enables us to manage and monitor work on site more frequently. The learning that the service has experienced over the last ten months, will enable the team and our customers to benefit from the efficiencies that remote working has allowed. We have had the opportunity within the maintenance and investment teams to be involved in the introduction and roll out of "HouseMark" photobook. This product (mobile app and web platform) will enable us to work smarter on site and complete reports, surveys and inspections using electronic forms.

Intervention Team

We have continued to operate throughout the COVID-19 pandemic ensuring the most vulnerable still have access to support and signposting. The team has worked collaboratively with a range of partners to keep this client group safe and to make sure that Anti-Social behaviour is addressed within the city.

Lincare (Control Centre)

The workload in our Lincare service has not been affected by any of the restrictions as a result of the pandemic and calls to customers are continuing as normal. The team are also continuing to sign up new customers. The level of new connections is not any higher than in previous years, so the impact of COVID-19 on the service has been minimal and workload is unlikely to be impacted moving out of lockdown. The one change we have seen, is our team working on an alternative shift pattern, with half the team working remotely and the other half working from the office. As is the case with most other services, the digital shift to remote working has allowed the team to work with no impact on their ability to carry out the job.

Legal Services

Legal services have reacted to substantial requests for support and advice for front line services from the outset, providing a legal gateway at times and framework for officers for example in Food Health and Safety, Licensing and Public Protection and Anti-Social Behaviour. Urgent advice has been sought relating to businesses to ensure that the ever-changing government guidance and law is implemented appropriately. In addition, the team has played an important role in the delivery of temporary accommodation to alleviate the effects of homelessness in the city, as well as supporting the growth agenda for the local economy in a COVID-19 secure way.

Meanwhile, the team has continued to aid all other areas of the council to ensure that statutory functions are delivered, as well as all other areas. Looking forward, we will continue to provide comprehensive support to all officers and members for the safe delivery of work as restrictions are lifted. The team has also embraced the digital transition, as expected when working from home, which has included remote court hearings and digital bundles of legal documents being prepared and submitted as well as online resource tools, which is likely to continue, delivering efficiencies as well.

Licensing

Licensing have continued to provide services to our customers throughout the pandemic, adapting to how we respond to enquiries and how we deliver our service, this has involved remote working, where some checks would normally be done in person we have moved to posting out applications and forms which adds in time but has allowed the service to continue. Unfortunately, some areas of the service, namely new driver applications, have been affected more than others due to the level of checks requiring close contact with us or partners. The changing circumstances have required careful navigation to ensure that we keep businesses operating as best we can but without compromising on public safety. The team have also had to respond to new and changing legislation and have been on the front line working with a range of partners to support licence holders and the city centre with the reopening of retail and hospitality. We will be looking to implement the best bits of how we deliver our service going forwards.

Major Developments Directorate

The Directorate is involved in a wide range of projects which are vital to planning for the city's future and in meeting the objectives in Vision 2025. Progress and delivery are viewed as even more relevant and necessary to support the city's economic recovery, as well as supporting the Greater Lincolnshire and County Economy Recovery Plan objectives. Work has continued over much of the period since the easing of the first lockdown, and the team also led on the Business Support Service, set up to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. Remote working has largely worked well for the team and will provide a strong basis for working in the future. The service is therefore very much up and running and working hard on plans to ensure the city makes a strong recovery. With this objective, the team has been working on a wide range of key projects including delivery of Western Growth Corridor, Lincoln Transport Strategy, Cornhill Square public realm improvements, Central Market & City Square and Tentercroft Street improvements, commissioning work on 'Becoming a Digital

City', development of a Growth Strategy and £25m Town Deal Programme, outlined in the Lincoln Investment Plan and a range of housing projects including former Markham House (five new homes completed), Queen Elizabeth Road (demolition and site clearance) and land off Rookery Lane (proposals for 42 new homes).

Further projects will be progressed once the outcome of the Town Deal bid is known in March 2021. The Lincoln Investment Plan sets out the potential projects to support economic growth proposed for delivery by a range of partners including the City Council. The Directorate also continues to lead on the administering the Climate Change Commission, with the appointment of a new Climate Change Manager to drive this agenda forward, with the focus on developing an action plan to enable the delivery of the road map and net zero objective by 2030.

Procurement

COVID-19 hasn't impacted directly on the procurement service area over the last two lockdowns. This is mostly because many businesses the service area works with are now in a position to work with us to complete procurement exercises. In comparison to the first lockdown, many businesses had to re-prioritise their own service delivery and operation. Of course, impact of the current lockdown is still being felt due to a number of procurement exercises still having to be put on hold and now requiring re-procuring in the future.

Policy

The Corporate Policy team has completed a range of activities since the quarter one/two report and has once again been involved in befriending. It has been agreed that the usual quarterly performance report be merged with quarter four, producing one report at year end due to the current lockdown and restrictions in place. The team continues to work remotely with no negative effect on its ability to do the job, and whilst we are currently categorised as "Fully Operational", the team has been able to respond to multiple different needs.

One change since the first lockdown in March 2020 is the increase in surveys our team is asked to support, perhaps due to this being the most practicable way to collect representative views in a COVID-19 safe manner. In May 2020 an allocation of £5,000 was made to the Crisis Fund from the Lincoln Lottery Community Fund. This was supported with a further allocation of £6,500 from the lottery fund in August 2020.



As mentioned in previous reports, Policy was an early adopter of Teams and mobile working, and we have now introduced new software, replacing some which is unable to be used remotely. This has supported the development of our team's skills and has

helped keep staff morale high. As of writing, the expectation is that the team will continue to work mostly remotely when restrictions are lifted.

Property Services

In terms of how property services have responded, they have adapted with ease to the new arrangements that COVID-19 has presented, but that is not to say there have been no impacts. Property Services covers three areas: Facilities Management, Small Business Support and Estates/Surveying.

Our Facilities Management Team, which includes the maintenance of City Hall, have had to make several changes to how to manage the building to ensure COVID-19 secure status as well as changing things such as the cleaning regimes, likely to remain in place for the foreseeable future. Moving forward, our use of City Hall and how we better manage that with our changing work patterns will need to be considered as we move closer to a post COVID-19 world. The Facilities Management team also cover the maintenance of the council's corporate assets and this has continued during the lockdowns to ensure we meet our legal responsibilities to ensure our buildings safe.

Our Small Business Support Team, based at the Terrace and Greetwell Place, worked from home during the first lockdown, but have remained in the workplace during subsequent lockdowns to support businesses based at the premises. The role of the team has been vital in providing support and advice to small businesses in the city at a time of need. The team has also played a key role in supporting the business grant payments. The Estates and Surveying Team are largely working remotely. Their work has been impacted as a result of the council's diverse range of tenants with some leases not renewed, rent reductions sought and lease terms being re-negotiated.

Private Sector Housing

The Private Sector Housing Team have had to change the way in which they undertake their work to minimise risk both to tenants and to staff. All intelligence relating to private rented property likely to give rise to health and safety issues is responded to, and if necessary, inspections are undertaken. However, where possible complaints are being dealt with remotely requiring evidence such as photographs to be supplied and contacting the landlord to see if they will make good anything deemed to be requiring attention. Those that can't be dealt with remotely are then visited and improvements notices continue to be issued if required. Whilst remote working can work in some cases investigations tend to take longer, particularly where landlords don't engage.



Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) – the team is still receiving recommendations and progressing in the same way i.e. getting contractors on site. Some applicants want to delay works and wait until there is less risk because of their situation, e.g. shielding, even though all contractors are COVID-19 safe and even bring their own toilets. It is hoped that concerns will ease once vaccinations have been fully rolled out

The licensing of unlicensed Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) following a recent change in the law is now being proactively tackled in the city. Around 90 unlicensed HMOs have been identified and the team is starting to investigate these. In December landlords thought to be operating an unlicensed HMO were written to and invited to make an application. They were given six weeks to respond with action being taken at the end of January where no response has been received. This could mean serving a civil penalty notice or prosecution whichever is most appropriate. In summary therefore, Private Sector Housing has remained busy throughout the periods of lockdown with some temporary changes to procedures introduced which are unlikely to be retained in the longer term.

Public Toilets

The bus station and Castle Square toilets have remained open during this period, as well as those in our main parks. Looking forward we are reviewing provision of public toilets, which will be submitted to and discussed by Policy Scrutiny Committee ahead of consideration by Executive.

Public Protection and Anti-Social Behaviour

The team has continued to offer services to the public in the best way they can throughout the pandemic with the various challenges this has presented. They have mainly been working from home and have worked hard to adapt processes and procedures to help those who need us during this difficult time. The team are still on hand to assist and are still making visits where its safe and necessary to do so. Longer term it is likely some procedures will be permanently adapted, combining the best bits of what we did before and what we have done in lockdown to make the best use of resources and provide a great service to customers.

Revenues and Benefits Administration

Revenues & Benefits has operated successfully in a largely homeworking environment, with facilities in place to accept and respond to a variety of e-forms, e-mails and telephone channels. Face-to-face services have been offered on an 'essential by appointment only' basis, however these have been minimal and only taken up by Welfare Team customers, to date. Despite an increase in Benefit claims due to the impact of COVID-19, the service has continued to process claims in an improved average number of days.

Revenues collection has, understandably, been a real challenge due to taxpayers and businesses financial circumstances, however the service has continued to collect monies, with a real focus on welfare, support and maximisation of incomes and business grants. Revenues visits were withdrawn at various points during lockdowns, including the national lockdown we are currently in. Staff wellbeing has been a key focus, with a variety of communication channels and support mechanisms in place.

It is envisaged that the service will still be able work remotely and on an agile basis. Availability for customers on a face-to-face basis, also working in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, is a feature of the service that will need to be considered moving

forward. Because customers have not been accessing face-to-face services to any significant degree, the concern is that there is latent demand for this from vulnerable customers.

Revenues visits and Welfare surgeries/home visits are key moving forward, in a COVID-19-secure, safe environment, to ensure we can help those residents who need our help most. Staff wellbeing will also remain key, with a need to ensure the 'One Council' approach, our Revenues and Benefits Shared Service has strived to achieve, will not be compromised – and a mix of homeworking, agile working and office-based presence will help to achieve this – with electronic methods of communication part of the solution.

Supported Housing

Like that in Tenancy Services, physical visits are temporarily not in place as per the guidance distributed by central government. To ensure we are still offering a helpful and valuable service, telephone “visits” are now the new normal until restrictions are lifted further. The team is permitted to physically visit customer in cases of an emergency and whilst some customers have struggled without the physical visits, most have adapted well to our new telephone service. We are keen to reintroduce visits physically when we are advised it is safe to do so but this of course depends on the guidance given by central government. The team worked at home during lockdown one, but they have returned to the office during the second and third lockdowns to better support the businesses that are based at the premises. The role of the team has been vital in providing support and advice to small businesses in the city at a time of increasing need. The team have also played a key role in supporting the business grant payments.

Street Cleansing

These services have continued throughout the COVID-19 period. Collection crews continue to work to their strict risk assessments to minimise the risk of transmission between colleagues and beyond. COVID-19 risk assessments in relation to our own staff continue to be used, for the safety of our staff and the public who they might come in to contact with. Since the latest lockdown, staff are avoiding door knocking and entering homes and are doing all they can to respond to complaints and enquiries without personal contact.

Waste and Recycling

We have continued to run all waste collection services throughout the period. We have experienced delayed collections on one occasion when a collection crew were isolating due to one-member testing positive for COVID-19. On that occasion we focussed on ensuring that refuse was collected, and garden waste was slightly delayed. All affected collections were caught up within two days. We have plans in place in case we have further occasions when collection crews are not fully staffed, but of course it isn't possible to predict exactly what the impact would be until that happens – for example, how many staff are affected. Collection crews continue to work to their strict risk assessments to minimise the risk of transmission between colleagues

and beyond. We have worked closely with Communications throughout, in relation to COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 waste messages, keeping people informed. If collections are affected, communication of any changes will be key. COVID-19 risk assessments in relation to our own staff continue to be used, for the safety of our staff and the public who they might come in to contact with. Since the latest lockdown, staff are avoiding door knocking and entering homes and are doing all they can to respond to complaints and enquiries without personal contact.

Temporarily Enhanced Services

These services have seen significant increases in their workload, and well as changes to the work required of the service, throughout the period of the pandemic

Communications

Throughout the pandemic, we have looked at different ways to engage with our residents and businesses. We have continued with what we knew would be successful and delivered multiple messages to the public on social media enabling a wider reach. We are a responsive service, so in addition to our usual workload, we have continued to operate in the same way to ensure messages are communicated in the right way, to the right people. This has included information on business grants, advice from government, keeping people safe, work with universities, community testing videos, debunking myths, and other COVID-19 related messages. The main impact on the service has been adapting to different media to get quick and simple messages across, increasing the use of video and social media and no longer relying on press releases to engage with businesses and residents. As a trusted and reliable source people turn to us as an organisation for information, so our priority as a team is to ensure we get the message out and, during 2020/21, we reached 169% more people on Facebook, increasing from an average reach of 2,058 to 5,532.



Food Health and Safety

The impact of the pandemic has had a huge impact on the Food Health and Safety service. The team has continued throughout with much of their usual business, responding to complaints from the public about food businesses. Whilst restaurants and pubs have been closed for much of the time over the past months, many are now operating takeaway services and supermarkets have been open as usual so the

workload has not significantly diminished – regular inspections have been suspended, but responding to allegations of premises operating giving rise to a risk to public health continue to be investigated. The team is also responsible for enforcing COVID-19 related complaints which has dramatically increase the workload. This includes complaints from the public relating to people not wearing face covering and businesses opening when they should be closed, all requiring extra visits.

In October COVID-19 Ambassadors were introduced into the city. Their role is to patrol business areas of the city helping and advising businesses on how to be COVID-19 compliant. In last three months the infection rate in Lincoln became a national concern and therefore the team, together with others have been involved in setting up two community testing stations – more detail is provided in the section on new services. Looking forwards the high workload will continue whilst restrictions remain in place and beyond in order to catch up on regular workload such as routine inspections.

Rough Sleeping

The Rough Sleeping Team has always remained working out in the field and their work has not been impacted. However, the team has been able to offer more services to more people due to the allocation of funding from Central Government. This has included offering accommodation for everyone who presents themselves at risk of rough sleeping as well as funding for severe weather placements. Team members are currently working in bubbles to protect the continuity of the workforce, and ensuring the team is always available. The only changes for the team, similar to some other services, is that half the team is working remotely with the other half working from the office as well as team members working in pairs (rather than the usual 3) when out in the field to be COVID-19 secure. This has not affected the service the customer gets and is testament to the hard work of the team, minimising the impact they may feel from changes in process behind the scene. One impact has been that Hostels have not always been able to admit new rough sleepers. Little is expected to change as lockdown eases.

Looking forward – our targets for next year

As part of looking forward to the coming year, with the hope that restrictions will be eased or lifted and there will be a return to a 'new normal' we are once again considering performance targets. These have not yet been finalised, but generally those responsible for measures have said it is difficult to properly review what targets should look like, due to 2020/21 being such an unrepresentative year, as well as the ongoing uncertainty likely to continue into at least the early part of 2021/22. Therefore, most targets are likely to remain unchanged. Whilst there may be some impact on measures, either through difficulties with collection or the data itself it is hoped this will settle down as the year progresses and will help us to better understand the impact of COVID-19. We are looking at how we present data to reflect the inevitable fluctuations that have occurred over the past year and will continue for some measures well into 2021/22. Further information on targets will be included as part of Quarter 4 reporting.