

# Combined Assurance Status Report 2020/21



**City of Lincoln Council  
March 2021**

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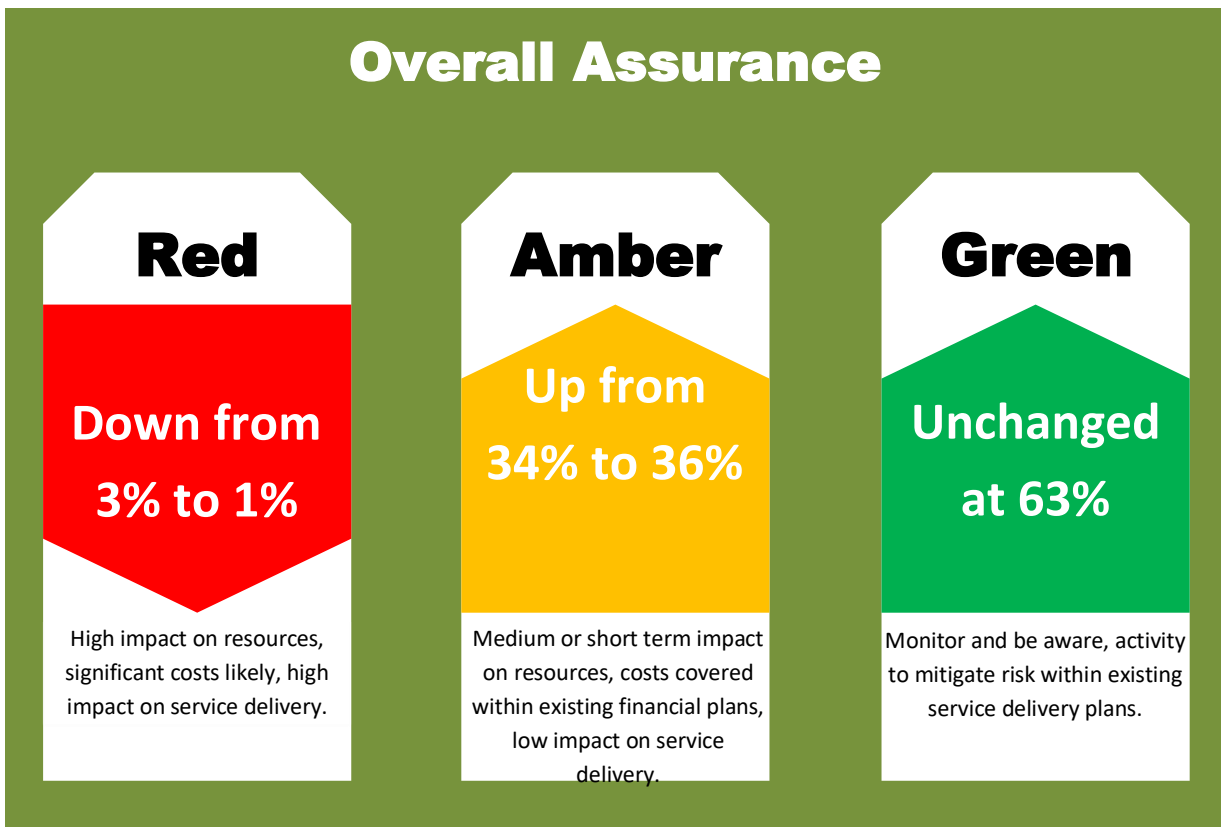
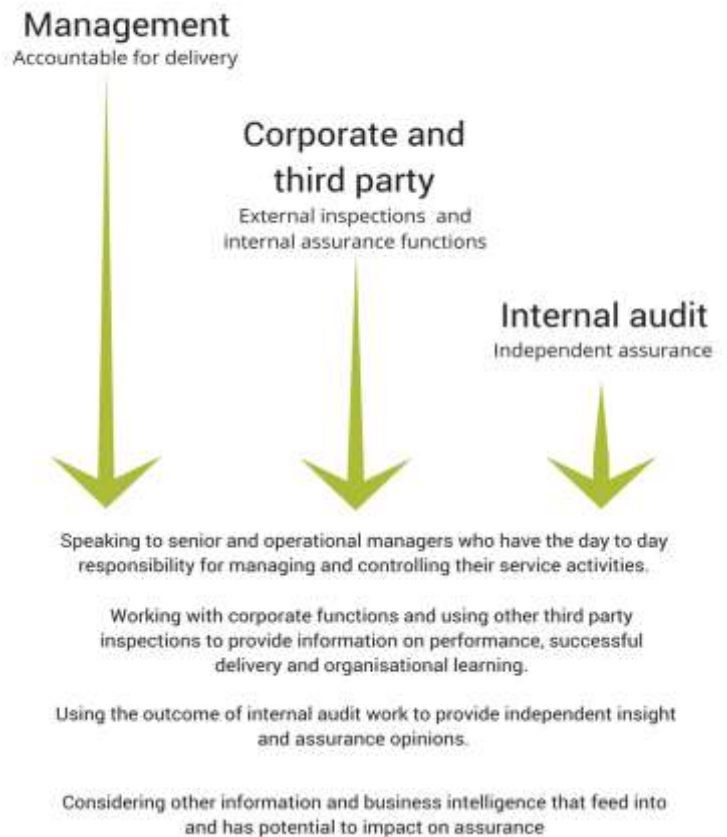
# Overview of Assurance

Combined assurance is a structured means of identifying and mapping the main sources and types of assurance in the council and coordinating them to best effect.

It enhances risk management by providing an effective and efficient framework of sufficient, regular and reliable evidence of assurance on organisational stewardship and management of major risks to the Council's success.

We do this using the 3 lines of defence model.

How do we assure ourselves about how the council is run?



# Chief Executive's Summary

City of Lincoln Council, like all other businesses, has had to make dramatic changes as a result of the lockdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, not only to ensure that we kept our critical services functioning, but also like councils across the country, to deliver a community leadership role for our city in this time of crisis.

We thank our internal audit team (part of Assurance Lincolnshire) for helping to facilitate the Council's latest Combined Assurance Report and also all the council's officers for providing their input into the process during these difficult times.

We acknowledge the benefit in having independent assurance to review our operations and as well as internal and external audit.

The report is valuable in highlighting aspects of Council business that are operating well, while also identifying other areas that require greater focus and/or some level of intervention. It also provides assurance to management that there are "no surprises" where further work is required.

Plans are in place to manage and mitigate any Amber or Red assurances. In terms of overall "combined" assurance there are 63% services designated green, 36% amber and 1% red.

The Council's key service functions and critical activities are generally operating well whilst some officers were redeployed elsewhere to support our communities and implement government guidelines during the pandemic. Where there are issues, we are, or have, proactively managed these risks and more detail is included within the body of the report under each Directorate.

The findings represent a comprehensive view of our assurance position across our services, critical systems, governance processes, ICT, key projects, and risk analysis.

The report illustrates that our three lines of defence governance model is operating effectively. There are a range of assurance

mechanisms in place to monitor finance, performance, projects, and risk.

There is effective financial control however ongoing pressures around Council funding and budgets has required a further increase in the level of savings/income to be achieved.

We have a good awareness of how their services are performing, are able to identify potential issues and most importantly, are proactive in implementing remedies. It is important to understand where performance is changing and take action at the right time and in the right way.

The Council has a range of partners and delivers many of its services and objectives through effective partnerships with appropriate governance arrangements.

During 2020-21 work commenced on the new Vision 2025 strategic plan covering 2025-2030. This sets the Council's vision for the future of the City, its strategic priorities and core values.

This new vision was to be launched at our Council's Growth Conference in March of last year but due to the pandemic, we have deferred this launch until a more suitable time.

Project monitoring and reporting continues to be aligned via our Vision theme strands.

The Council is responding positively to a range of challenges with greater efficiency, innovation in service delivery via use of technology, creativity in seeking new sources of income, and seeking to establish a "One Council" philosophy with the customer right at the heart of everything we do.

We have continued support via Assurance Lincolnshire for monitoring of risk management which continues to work well and helps to support our strategic and operational risk management as well as for projects.

# Strategic risks

Good risk management is part of the way we work. It is about taking the right risks when making decisions or where we need to encourage innovation in times of major change – balancing risk, quality, cost and affordability.

This put us in a stronger position to deliver our goals and provide excellent services.

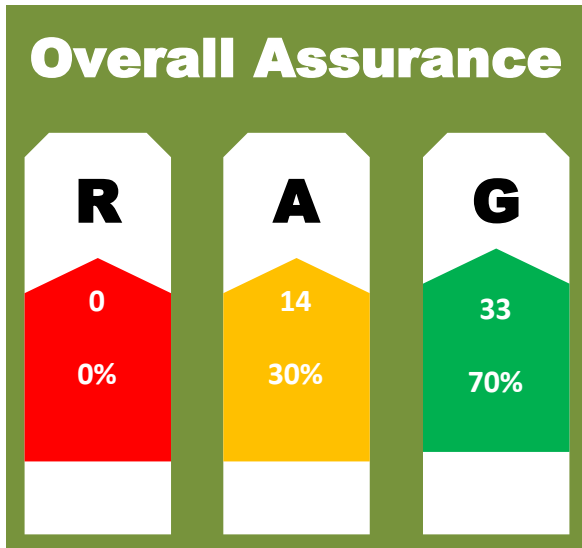
Our Strategic Risk Register is regularly reviewed, and our risks are being effectively managed.

Risk	Risk rating	Level of assurance	Direction Of Travel
1.Failure to engage & influence effectively the Council's strategic partners, council staff and all stakeholders to deliver against e.g. Council's Vision 2020/2025.	Amber	Substantial	=
2.Failure to deliver a sustainable Medium term Financial Strategy (that supports delivery of Vision 2020 (Council plan))	Red	Substantial	=
3.Failure to deliver the Towards Financial Sustainability Programme whilst ensuring the resilience of the Council	Red	Substantial	=
4.Failure to ensure compliance with statutory duties / functions and appropriate governance arrangements are in place,	Amber	Limited	=
5.Failure to protect the local authority's vision 2025 due to changing structures and relationships in local government and impact on size, scale and scope of the Council	Amber	Substantial	=
6.Unable to meet the emerging changes required in the Council's culture, behavior and skills to support the delivery of the council's future Vision and the transformational journey to one Council approach	Amber	Limited	=
7.Insufficient levels of resilience and capacity exist in order to deliver key strategic projects & services within the Council	Red	Limited	=
8.Decline in the economic prosperity within the City Centre	Red	Limited	=
9.Failure to mitigate against the implications for the Council following the outcome of Brexit	Amber	Substantial	=

## Strategic Risks

Risk	Risk rating	Level of assurance	Direction Of Travel
10.Failure to deliver key strategic projects.	Amber	Substantial	=
11.Failure of the Council's key partners and contractors to remain sustainable and continue to deliver value for money	Red	Substantial	New
12.Failure to work in partnership to sustain support to vulnerable residents' post COVID19.	Amber	Substantial	New
13.Failure to put in place safe working practices and social distancing measures to protect officers and service users.	Amber	Substantial	New
14.Failure to comply with current safeguarding legislation and procedures.	Red	Not scored	New
15.Failure to meet the Council's PREVENT duties.	Amber	Not scored	New
Key	Assurance		
High / Red	Low level of confidence over the design and operation of controls, performance, or management of risk		
Medium / Amber	Medium level of confidence over the design and operation of controls, performance or management of risk		
Low / Green	High level of confidence over the design and operation of controls, performance or management of risk		

# Chief Executive



Critical Activities
<b>Red</b>
None
<b>Amber</b>
Members / Member Development
Elections & Registration
Ethical governance (values, behaviours, ethics & culture)
Legal
Freedom of Information / Subject Access Requests
Work Based learning
Facilities Management
Corporate Asset Management
Business continuity
Financial Resilience
Partnership Governance
Internal Audit
Counter Fraud
Training & Employment

### Key service areas

#### City Solicitor

Legal; Electoral Services; Democratic Services Procurement; Human Resources; Work based Learning / Apprenticeship scheme; Civic and International partnerships

#### Chief Finance Officer

Finance and Accountancy; Exchequer; Risk Management; Internal Audit; Property Services Revenues and Benefits

#### Other

Communications; Customer Services

### Key Messages

CX Directorate has a mix of frontline and support services, all of which have been impacted by the Covid19 pandemic. Customer Services, including the Welfare Team, together with both the Revenues and Benefits teams have supported some of the City's most vulnerable residents, with Communications getting messages out to staff and residents about what the council is doing to provide help and support during the pandemic. At the start of lockdown new services had to be quickly established and back office staff from Democratic and Electoral Services, Policy, Central Support Services, Procurement, Civic and Twinning and Audit came forward to work with other teams to provide immediate help. Financial Services worked under difficult circumstances to successfully deliver the year end accounts as well as assisting in a time of severe financial strain. Working from home has been a big challenge for some, both physically and mentally, and the HR team have worked tirelessly to provide guidance to managers and support to staff to ensure their wellbeing, with additional remote support for apprentices from WBL. Throughout the year Property Services,

### Directorate Red Risks

Failure to provide capacity to service areas to respond to requirements of ongoing service delivery and support to the Towards Financial Sustainability Programme and major projects, whilst acknowledging impact of the Programme on the Services themselves

# Strategic Risks

including the Facilities Management team have ensured City Hall and Hamilton House are safe and 'Covid clean' environments to work in and Legal Services have continued their vital behind the scenes work to provide legal support, advice and guidance as required." All of this new and additional work has been undertaken whilst also trying to maintain the 'day job'. There has undoubtedly been some impact on service delivery, performance, and project delivery throughout the year however levels of assurance in the Directorate remain in line with previous years. Set out below are those 'Amber' areas of assurance where further work is required:

## Members / Member Development

Training and development are taking place but succession planning needs addressing.

## Elections and Registration

Staff resource and ensuring the safe delivery of the polls is a significant issue.

## Ethical Governance (values, behaviours, culture for Members & staff)

There are some areas for improvement.

## Legal

High demand with new areas of law has resulted in re-prioritisation at times and pressure on the team to ensure expectations are managed in the authority.

## Freedom of Information / Subject Access Requests

Not always able to meet performance requirements due to workload and priorities in service areas

## Work Based learning

Financial budget pressures continue and Covid impacted significantly on the work of the team.

## Facilities Management

Existing stock condition surveys for corporate assets are due for updating, these are scheduled to be undertaken during 2021/22.

## Corporate Asset Management

Existing Corporate Asset Management Plan is overdue for an update.

## Business continuity

BC plans require updating in light of the impact of Covid19 on working practices / processes as well as to reflect the IT DR plan once completed.

## Financial Resilience

Whilst the Council has a balanced MTFS there still remains a significant level of financial risk and uncertainty to future income forecasts due to the ongoing financial impact of Covid19 and future national funding reforms.

## Partnership Governance

Whilst a governance assurance process has been developed this is not yet fully in place, with implementation delayed due to the impact of the Covid19 pandemic.

## Internal Audit

The Annual Audit Plan was reduced during 20/21 as officer resource was redirected towards priority Covid19 response work, primarily supporting the business support grants function. Whilst the number of days was reduced sufficient audit work has still been completed to allow the Internal Audit Manager to provide the required assurances for the year.

## Counter Fraud

As in previous years, limited resources inhibit the delivery of enhanced counter fraud work, however minimum levels of work are undertaken and partnership working with the LCFP is maximised.

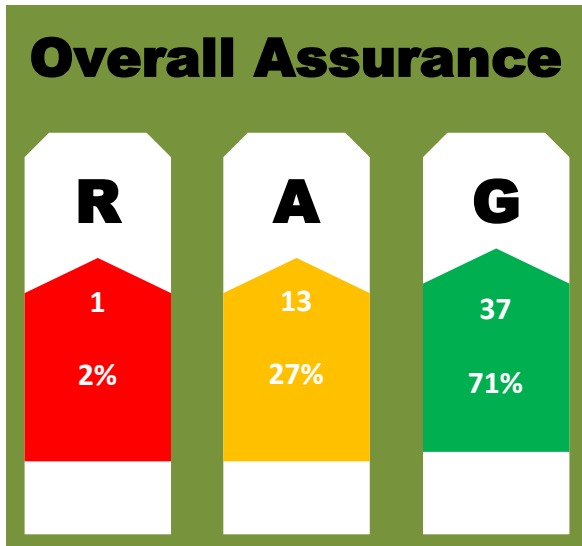
## Training & employment support

Lack of funding may impact on ability to deliver.



# Director's Key Messages

## Strategic Director - Communities and Environment



### Key service areas

#### AD Communities and Street Scene

CCTV; Parks & Open Spaces & Allotments; Street Cleansing, Grounds Maintenance, Waste collection and recycling; Car Parks; Bus Station; Allotments

#### AD Health and Environment Services

Environmental Protection; Food safety; Public Protection Anti-Social Behaviour; Licensing; Leisure Centres; Recreation; Bereavement Services; Events; Health & Safety DFG / Decent Homes; Private sector housing Regeneration; Emergency Planning

#### AD Planning

Planning; Building Control; Heritage

#### Other

Corporate Planning; Corporate Governance Performance management; Consultation and Community engagement

### Directorate Red Risks

Managing Member expectations
Impact on changes in Government legislation (Planning, Waste)
Staff redundancies – risk to skills gap
Impact of managing expectations as services are cut
Impact of Unitary bid on staff

### Critical Activities

<b>Red</b>
Leisure Centres
<b>Amber</b>
Performance Management Framework
Service Planning
V2025 Programme
Strategic Waste management
Public Protection Anti-Social Behaviour
Public Conveniences
CCTV
Non-Operational Land
Bus Station
Corporate Health & Safety
Vulnerable resident support networks
Central Market
Christmas Market
Place Based Marketing

### Key Messages

In line with authority overall, the impact of Covid 19 has been fundamental within the directorate. Staff have been amazingly flexible and been redeployed to support the wider city's response to the pandemic – be it supporting Covid testing centres, supporting the befriending service, or modifying services so they can still be delivered in some form.

As the directorate with many of the key income generating streams, the impact of the pandemic has been significant. Whilst the Government's Income Compensation Scheme has assisted in meeting some of the deficit created, work is now on going to plan for 21/22 and ensuring income streams are maximised where possible, as the recovery commences.

# Strategic Risks

Given the financial challenges of the Council, some services will come under pressure to deliver savings, the requirement / levels of which are as yet unknown. Against that background, so as to take a cautious approach, several service areas have been listed as Amber, as they MAY either directly or indirectly be affected by saving requirements. As any requirements / impacts are not yet clear, and for this reason they have some element of risk attached, making them score Amber at this point.

And finally, we continue to maintain a very close dialogue with our contracted out service providers and are implementing innovative financial arrangements to not only safeguard the authority but also to safeguard their ongoing financial viability too. This has been appreciated and recognised particularly by our Leisure provider who has been especially hit by the multiple lockdowns.

## Leisure Centres

Covid has severely impacted on operations and the financial health of the operator, although there are no specific concerns on the immediate viability of the operator.

## Performance Management Framework

Covid impacted on planned improvements.

## Service Planning

Suspended due to Covid but to restart in 21/22.

## V20205 Programme

Due to Covid the new programme wasn't progressed as resources were diverted to tackling Covid19.

## Strategic Waste management

Resource issues may impact on the ability to meet changes required by the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership and the Government. Timetable remains uncertain. If / when food waste or green waste changes are formally requested by government this will need strategic and operational work. We will need to review resources required as the government timetable is clarified.

## Public Protection Anti-Social Behaviour

Covid has impacted on performance as resources have been diverted.

## Public Conveniences

Service review requires some significant changes in service.

## Bus Station

Possible risks caused by transition of day to day operational management contract having just been let. It will require settlement to make this a Green. However, from the tender proposal, the service meets our requirements.

## Corporate Health & Safety

The additional workload created by Covid has impacted on normal work streams.

## Vulnerable Resident Support Networks

Capacity within the team to deliver

## Central Market

Covid has impacted on income and with the proposed re-modelling of the market, ongoing engagement with stall holders is essential.

## Christmas Market

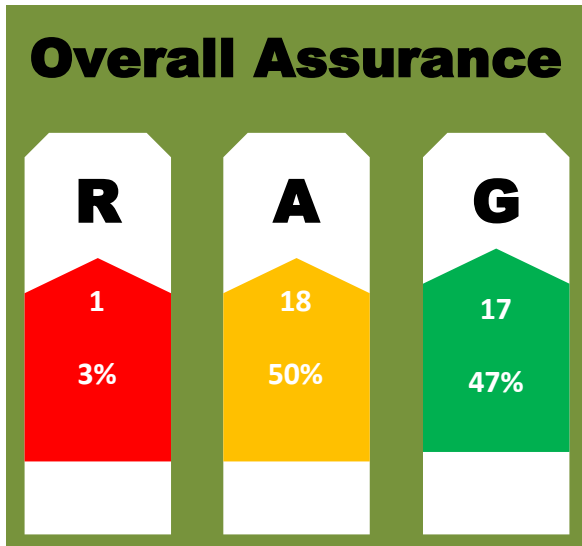
Covid has caused the cancellation of the 2020 Market.

## Place Based Marketing

Covid may impact on delivery by the Visitor Information Centre and Visit Lincoln (under a service level agreement).

# Director's Key Messages

## Strategic Director - Housing and Investment



### Key service areas

#### AD Housing

Tenancy Management; Homelessness / Rough Sleeping; Housing Solutions; Housing Business Support Services, Elderly Services, LINCARE, Voids, Leaseholder

#### AD Investment

Housing Repairs; Planned Maintenance; Fleet management, Housing Investment, contract management, Stores

#### AD Housing Investment and Strategy

Housing Strategy & new build, Sincil Bank Regeneration; Safety Assurance, Next Steps Programme, Resident Involvement, Buyback programme

#### Other

ICT, Information Governance, Business Development, Web Services, Data Security, Safeguarding

### Directorate Red Risks

Failure to maintain and support IT systems for the Housing service

### Critical Activities

#### Red

Lincare / Emergency Control Centre

#### Amber

Information Management

Council House Rent Collection

Resident Involvement

Sincil Bank Regeneration

Void Management

Safeguarding

Housing Finance & 30 year Business Plan

De Wint Court

Planned Maintenance

Safety Assurance

Gas Servicing

Electrical Testing

Stores

ICT Infrastructure & Assets

IT Security

ICT Maintenance / System Administration

ICT Application implementation & business development

IT Support

### Key Messages

The Directorate continues to provide vital housing services despite the issues created by the pandemic. As we move into the recovery phase these services will become even more vital as the government's support packages unwind and the impact on the economy begins to be revealed. We will continue to try and improve the quality of our stock and to be the landlord of choice, we will focus on sustaining tenancies and providing shelter to the most vulnerable in our community. We will add to our stock where we can, to try and mitigate the impact of the Right to Buy regime which has a profound impact on our ability to provide people family homes at affordable rent. We have now developed a new housing strategy which details how the council aims to respond to the housing pressures in the city and to ensure the housing needs of the community are met. We will continue to improve our repairs and investment

## Director's Key Messages

processes and try and improve the environment that our tenants live in. We will work alongside colleagues in DCE to respond to anti-social behaviour and make our estates safe places. Working alongside Corporate H&S our Safety Assurance team will ensure our workforce operate safely and that our tenants are afforded the highest standards of health and safety whilst enjoying their homes.

### Lincare / Emergency Control Centre

The service is delivering but there are significant financial uncertainties.

### Information Management

Work is continually required to maintain and improve awareness and resource is limited.

### Council House Rent Collection

Arrears are increasing because of a freeze on enforcement action.

### Resident Involvement

The housing white paper calls for increased resident involvement. We will review and implement changes to our resident engagement structures to ensure compliance and best practice.

### Sincil bank Regeneration

The restrictions resulting from covid-19 have affected engagement delivery. Staff have continued to engage on a wider basis delivering befriending services and Covid testing sites with community promotion.

### Void Management

Improvements required to process properties quicker.

### Safeguarding / Protecting Vulnerable People

Training is completed but still developing and embedding some new procedures, close to green.

### Housing Finance & 30 year Business Plan

Following stock condition profiling Business Plan will need to be reviewed. The Housing White Paper indicated a review of the decent homes standard which will be reflected in the Business Plan review.

### De Wint Court Project

The rebuilding of De Wint Court as a new Extra Care facility is progressing well. Potential effects

of covid have not emerged yet but may have a future impact. Delivery is controlled through the Lincoln Project Management Model.

### Planned Maintenance

Long term contract is ending, and works will be suspended prior to new contractors being appointed. Targets are not being achieved.

### Safety Assurance

Good progress has been made in Asbestos Asset Register. The upcoming Building Safety Bill and Fire Safety Bill will require changes to processes. Wider programme of Fire Risk Assessments to be implemented

### Gas Servicing

Covid has impacted on access to properties.

### Electrical Testing

Covid has impacted on access to properties.

### Stores

Current contractor being replaced which may cause some disruption

### ICT Infrastructure & Assets

Infrastructure refresh at HH nearing completion. Asset database and licensing control require further work.

### IT Security

PSN outstanding. IT Security policies require finalising. IT Security training to develop and roll out.

### ICT Maintenance / System Administration / Support

The team is currently engaged in many projects across a number of areas. Capacity is therefore somewhat stretched and options to alleviate this will be considered.

### ICT Application implementation & business development

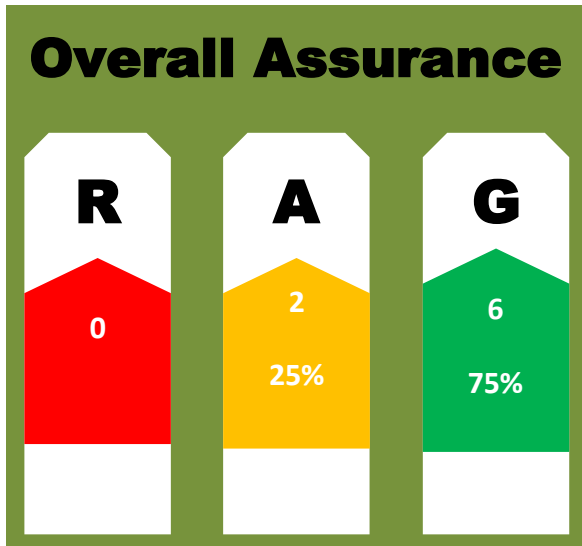
The ICT and Application Strategies are currently being reviewed, to help future strategic direction.

### ICT Resources

As with all Local Government, resources for replacement infrastructure and desktop equipment are currently under pressure.

# Director's Key Messages

## Strategic Director - Major Developments



### Key Services and delivery areas

#### AD Growth

New Build / New homes; Town Deal; Economic Recovery; Infrastructure; Place Based Marketing; Western Growth Corridor; Energy / Climate; Funding; Tourism

### Directorate Red Risks

There are none.

### Critical Activities

#### Red

None

#### Amber

New build / new homes  
 Economic Recovery  
 Infrastructure  
 Western Growth Corridor  
 Energy / Climate  
 Tourism

### Overview/Commentary

The Directorate is leading on a major programme of work to support economic recovery and the long-term growth of the City. This is in addition to leading on the covid-19 business response.

This is a broad programme of work which ranges from economic development to the delivery of major housing and commercial development. The scale of the programme, relative to resource is a key challenge for a small Directorate. To help manage this challenge, the team is working to maximise external funding opportunities as well as collaborating with external partners and other internal services.

### Delivery Detail

Alongside a major programme of regeneration and development, the Major Development Directorate continues to lead on the Covid Business Support response through a 'One Council approach' with Business Services, Revenues and Benefits, Audit, Policy, Finance and Environmental Health. This work is to administer the Government's Business Support Grant schemes and ensure businesses receive the grants they are entitled to, to enable them to continue and be in a good position during the recovery period. Remote working has largely worked well for the team and will provide a strong basis for working in the future.

The Team has continued to develop the following Council's Vision 2025 priority 'Let's Drive Inclusive Economic Growth' Projects. 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.

Delivery of Western Growth Corridor – work has progressed to support the requirement of the planning process and future delivery (subject to consent). This includes detailed design to support the required infrastructure work to unlock Phase 1a, technical work to support a green delivery plan and future funding proposals.

Growth Strategy and Lincoln Investment Plan This has been developed over the last twelve months through the Town Board to support the

## Director's Key Messages

Town Fund Bid and was completed and a bid submitted for £25m at the end of October 2020. Lincoln Town Deal Board – City of Lincoln Council sets out the potential projects to support economic growth proposed for delivery by a range of partners including the City Council. A decision is expected on 3rd March 2021. We will then have a further period of 12 months to develop detailed business cases to unlock funds for specific projects within this Plan. This is a positive programme for the City but resource to deliver is currently constrained due to the ongoing requirement to lead on the Covid business response. As part of the Economic Recovery Plan and in addition to Town Fund, the team is working on a programme of support, utilising 'Additional Restrictions Funding' to provide additional help to businesses and the high street more generally. The team is working with external partners to support delivery, maximise efficiency and release the internal team to manage the Town Deal.

Centre Vibrancy: Cornhill Square. Phase 1 has been completed with removal of the old visitor information kiosk. Funding has been secured for the wider public realm works through the Town Deal (Accelerated Fund) and this second phase of work commenced on 11 Jan and is due for completion in the summer.

City Centre Vibrancy: Central Market & City Square and Tentercroft Street. Both projects are part of the Town Fund bid. Detailed survey and design works have been undertaken in support of the Central Market proposals, with consultation now underway. Further market analysis and design work are being undertaken to support the Tentercroft Street proposals, with support from Homes England.

Becoming a Digital City; Initial work was commissioned in March 2020 for consultants to work with local partners to identify the opportunities and priorities for driving the digital agenda in Lincoln. This has informed the objectives and priorities within the Lincoln Investment Plan and wider infrastructure and investment opportunities.

Transport Task Force and Transport Strategy - Lincoln Transport Strategy has been adopted for the period 2020-2036 and will inform the current review of the County Transport Plan.

In addition to the Economy 2025 projects the team have also supported delivery of the 'Lets delivery quality Housing' aspirations in terms of increasing net Council house numbers and provision of new homes. This includes the provision of 5 new affordable homes at Swift Gardens, the demolition of the Views in preparation for longer-term redevelopment at Queen Elizabeth Road and detailed proposals for the development of 42 affordable homes at Rookery Lane, to commence in summer 2021 (subject to planning consent).

The Directorate also continues to lead on the administering the Climate Change Commission partnership and development of a Carbon reduction road map in support of the 'Lets address the Challenge of Climate Change' objective.

### New Build / New Homes

Some projects are off target.

### Economic Recovery

Capacity issues to deliver work required.

### Infrastructure

Capacity issues to deliver work required.

### Western Growth Corridor

Planning process may delay the delivery of Phase 1a.

### Energy / Climate

Challenging programme of works to deliver.

### Tourism

Partnership working requires improvement.

## Key Messages

### Key Projects

The Council's Project Management framework was updated in 2019/20 and a further review planned for 2020/21 was postponed.

Projects continue to be delivered but the corporate monitoring and assurance framework has not been operating during 2020/21.

Large projects will have a project board and all projects will have finance input as required.

Formal monitoring and reporting will resume in 2021/22.

### Key Partnerships

The Partnership register and guidance was updated in 2019/20.

The corporate monitoring and assurance framework was not operating during 2020/21.

The register and assurance process will be reviewed again in early 2021/22.