

ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL BEST VALUE OVERVIEW REPORT



Aberdeenshire Council

Best Value Overview

30 November 2019

Jim Savege, Chief Executive
Aberdeenshire Council

Version	Date	Originator	Details of Changes
1	3/10/2019	JF	Wide consultation has resulted in major changes across the document
2	2/12/2019	JF	Sent to SLT for endorsement
3	13/12/2019	JF	Final changes made based on feedback from SLT
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1. INTRODUCTION

Aberdeenshire is a wonderfully diverse and vibrant region in the North East of Scotland with a strong sense of identity. Our communities are welcoming, safe and culturally diverse. The economy is prosperous and attractive to investors, employers and employees. Our natural environment is the envy of the world, truly capturing the very best from mountain to sea. As a council, we are proud to serve our communities and provide best value for local needs. The council's vision sets out our high-level aspirations for the outcomes we wish to achieve with and for our communities. This vision, having stood the test of time, has been in place since 2007 and has been supported by each Administration since.

We are committed to adding value to our communities, by focusing on our priorities and utilising our key strengths. Our priorities are designed to provide clear direction, based on evidence and consultation that support the aspirations of communities. We are a people orientated organisation, that value our people first and foremost. This ethos is at the heart of our council and it enables us to contribute to the wellbeing and prosperity of people and communities, young and old, providing strength and stability in all that we do. We work effectively with a large number of partners and deliver positive outcomes better as a result of integrated and joined-up working. However, we are not complacent; we recognise that as the world around us changes, the needs and expectations on us also changes. As a council, we are continuously changing to meet the needs of our customers and residents and we acknowledge that there is always more to be done. There are many strengths in our performance, and we recognise that we must focus on prioritised areas where we need to make improvements. We reflect on our own performance and plan accordingly, demonstrating a keen capacity for self-improvement.

Aberdeenshire is the fourth largest geographic council area in Scotland, and fifth largest in terms of population. It is predominantly rural, with 16 towns and 147 settlements. Peterhead, the largest fishing port in Europe, is our largest settlement with over 19,000 residents. It is important that Aberdeenshire Council ensures the services that we and our partners deliver are tailored to support the changing needs of our communities - whether in larger towns or in the most remote glens of the Cairngorms National Park.

Aberdeenshire's population is expected to increase significantly in the next 20 years - the fifth highest increase in Scotland. Aberdeenshire households are expected to increase to 128,752 by 2041, from 111,156 in 2008. Currently 28% of households are home to at least one child and approximately 13% are occupied by a single person over 65. Although a growth in population offers opportunities, it is anticipated there will be challenges at both ends of the age spectrum in future years, affecting services including health and social care, education and childcare. Aberdeenshire Council are continuously taking the population changes into account and this can be as evidenced by the Housing Service in [The Housing Needs Demand Assessment](#) and the [Local Housing Strategy 2018-2023](#).

While Aberdeenshire's economy has a history of withstanding nationwide economic pressures, as a result of the downturn in the oil industry in 2014, the economic climate in Aberdeenshire has suffered. This has had a lasting effect on residents and as a result, the demand for public services has increased. By conducting strategic assessments and carrying out additional research, Aberdeenshire Council has worked to address this and renewed their Council Plan in 2017 - outlining priorities that reflect the needs of our communities, based on the current and foreseeable economic landscape.

Private sector rents and house prices remain unaffordable in most parts of the area for those on low or average incomes. This means the supply of affordable housing remains a challenge, as identified in Aberdeen City and Shire Housing Need and Demand Assessment (2017), and this has a tangible impact on attracting and retaining key workers, such as teachers, prison officers and health visitors. The council continues to work with partners, through a range of approaches, to ensure provision of quality, affordable, inclusive housing with recognition of the need for diverse housing provision, for a range of needs.

The challenges for the public sector are clear – diminishing resources and greater demands on services mean that public services are under pressure. The challenge is being met head on in Aberdeenshire through a focus on collaboration with partners and communities, a drive on service design, and a medium-term financial strategy that underpins all our activity.



POPULATION

Between 2016 and 2026, the population of Aberdeenshire is projected to increase from 262,190 to 280,779.

This is an increase of 7.1%, which compares to a projected increase of 3.2% for Scotland as a whole.



HOUSEHOLD

In 2018, the number of households in Aberdeenshire was 111,156. This is a 0.2% increase from 110,941 households in 2017. In comparison, the number of households in Scotland overall increased by 0.6%.

Aberdeenshire had the 6th highest number of households in 2018, out of all 32 council areas in Scotland. Between 2017 and 2018, 2 councils saw a decrease in the number of households and 30 councils saw an increase.



ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE

Between 2018 and 2017 employment in Aberdeenshire increased by 4.3% compared to the national increase 1.3%



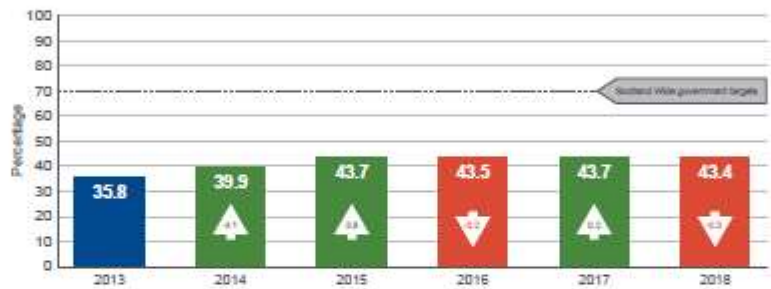
LIFE EXPECTANCY

In Aberdeenshire, life expectancy at birth was higher for females (82.6 years) than for males (79.1 years) in 2015-17.

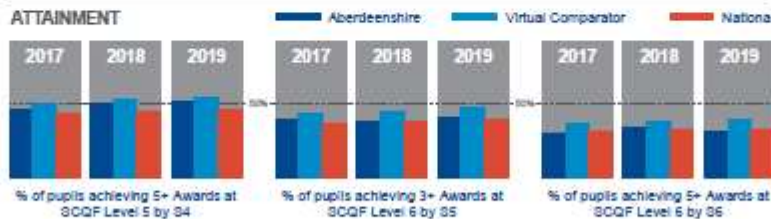
GREENER CO2 EMISSIONS



ABERDEENSHIRE RECYCLING RATE TRENDS 2013 - 2018



ATTAINMENT



CHILDREN EDUCATION AND LEARNING

IN 2018:



CRIME RATE

IN 2018/2019:



2. OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

2.1 Best Value findings 2008/2013

- *The council needs to be clearer what individual initiatives are trying to achieve and to follow through more rigorously to make sure that the expected outcomes and impact are achieved. Clearer choices need to be made about which proposals for improvement fit best with overall priorities and aims, to enable resources to be targeted more effectively.*
- *The council's leadership has been effective in establishing a culture of continuous improvement, motivating people and ensuring that there is increasing clarity about overall direction. Members and senior officers need to coordinate the different streams of activity better and target resources to best support overall improvements.*
- *The council's political structures work well and are increasingly effective in ensuring that policy decisions are responsive to local views. Council decision-making is open to public scrutiny.*
- *Senior management have a cohesive approach, and the management structure helps to provide capacity and resilience. However, it fosters an operational focus at the expense of strategic management, and there is scope to rationalise it.*
- *The council has set out its overall direction well, with a clear vision now supported by well-defined strategic priorities. In the past, service plans were well articulated, but they were not clearly linked to corporate and area priorities. The improved clarity of overall direction provides a more effective basis for planning, but it is too early to see how well the new planning and performance management framework will work.*
- *The council is committed to community engagement and is very active in seeking the views of the local community, making widespread use of surveys. However, this work could be more effective, with no systematic approach to consistently inform policy*

and service delivery. An opportunity is being missed to share experiences and best practice, and to improve coordination of all community engagement activity.

Where We Are Now

- Aberdeenshire Council has an agreed (2017) Council Plan in place which includes our 11 priorities based on the long term vision in 2007.
- We have developed a 15-year Medium Term Financial Plan and there is a clear link on how budget and resources support the delivery of our priorities.
- The importance of area and place is central to strategic thinking and operational management and locality/area working is at the heart of how the council functions.
- Stable and effective arrangements are in place for political governance.
- The council has continued to develop effective working relationships with a wide range of partners.
- Strategic leadership across the council provides direction for our priorities.

Challenges

We are in the midst of challenging times in the public sector. Leadership from both elected members and officers is crucial to provide stability and direction in an uncertain landscape. Leadership development, appropriate organisational governance and cultural growth will continue to be required to ensure we have a stable and well-performing council that adds value to the communities we serve. It is acknowledged that the council should build on the current visibility of strategic leadership in relation to supporting/embedding vision, values and aims.

Where are we going?

- The council's priorities will continue to provide the direction of travel but will be monitored and reviewed appropriately to ensure impact.
- The management and leadership of budget and resources will continue to be a key area of focus for the council.
- We will continue to ensure that communities are supported by effective partnership working.
- The scrutiny functions of political governance will continue to be developed.

- The council recognises from recent self-assessment and evaluation that there is a need to increase and enhance the visibility of strategic leadership in relation to supporting/embedding vision, values and aims.

2.2 Our Priorities

- Our vision of “being the very best of Scotland, area and council” is supported by the priorities identified in our [Council Plan 2017-2022](#) and Aberdeenshire’s [Local Outcomes Improvement Plan 2017-2027](#). These priorities were developed following extensive engagement with our communities, elected members, community planning partners and workforce, and based on a robust understanding of our area set out in the [Aberdeenshire Strategic Assessment](#).

● **Local Evidence Base**

● **Local Outcome Plans**

● **National Outcomes**

● **Strategic Links**

Aberdeenshire Strategic Assessment



Aberdeenshire Council Plan



11 Priorities

CPP Local Outcomes Improvement Plan



3 Priorities
Locality Plans



- Children and Young People
- Communities
- Culture
- Economy
- Education
- Environment
- Fair Work and Business
- Health
- Human Rights
- International
- Poverty



- Public service reform continues to be a driver for the council's strategic direction and when the [council worked with communities](#) to set its priorities, it was acknowledged that it must be underpinned by:
 - good communication;
 - community involvement;
 - real partnership working;
 - good governance and scrutiny.

- The Council Plan is supported by the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, which provides a structured approach to financial planning, setting out a complete view of the Revenue Budget, Capital Plan, Carbon Budget and Reserves. It is a key part of the council's budget setting process, which aims to ensure that resources are aligned to the priorities and outcomes.

- While the main decision-making lies with Policy Committees, there is a clear expectation that Area Committees are consulted on the development of policy, so their views are fully considered as part of the decision-making process. All local decisions are devolved to Area Committees, ensuring that decisions are made as close as possible to communities. The six area committees for Marr, Banff and Buchan, Garioch, Kincardine & Mearns, Buchan and Formartine:
 - advocate on behalf of local communities;
 - are accountable to their residents;
 - connect with localities and make decisions on matters exclusive to their area;
 - make the connection with Community Planning;
 - influence policies affecting all of Aberdeenshire from the ground upwards
 - monitor performance affecting their localities;
 - provide a cross-cutting approach and matrix management to focus on local rather than service led issues.

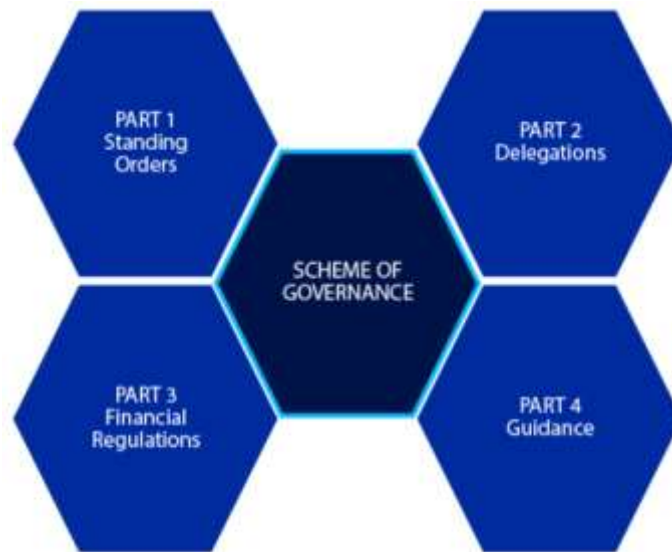
- In 2017/18, External Audit confirmed that Area Committees were *generally meeting the vision and influencing wider council policy* and confirmed *the area structure provides an important link between the council and communities*.

- The first [Strategic Plan](#) (2016-19) for the Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership (H&SCP) identified how the Partnership would enable the vision through four themes and fifteen priorities, to be progressed at a local level. The plan focused on areas where it was recognised that transformational change could be achieved. The new [Strategic Plan](#) 2020-2025 will build on previous engagement and consultation, learned experience across the HSCP, and reflecting national requirements as well as locality planning, focusing on five key strategic priorities: **Engagement; Prevention and Early Intervention; Tackling Inequalities and Public Protection; Reshaping Care; Effective Use of Resources**

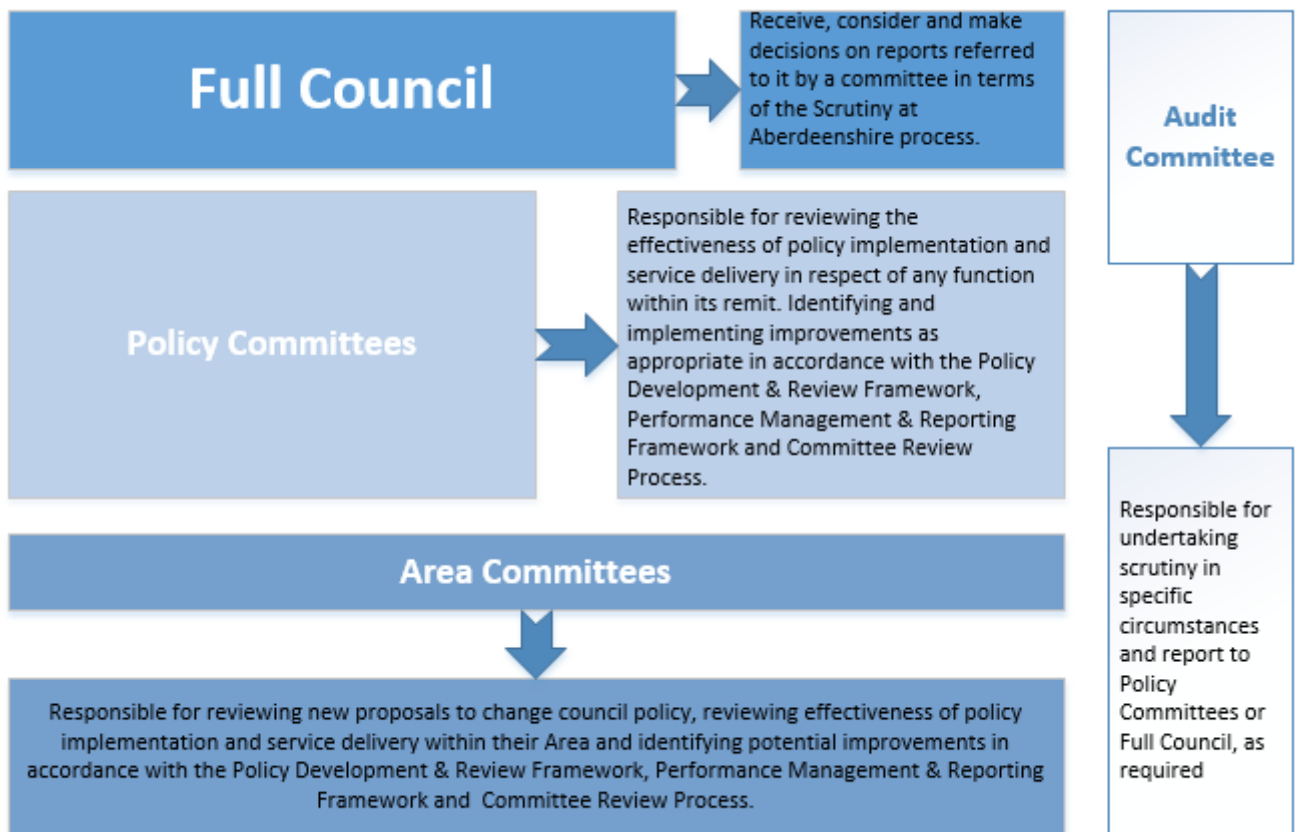
2.3 Political Governance

- As a result of the 2017 local government elections almost half of Aberdeenshire's elected members were new to the role (33/70). An Administration was formed by the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and a group of aligned Independents.
- In advance of the elections, a comprehensive induction programme, along with an [online portal](#) was prepared for all councillors, new or returning. Evaluation of the programme indicated 77% of elected members who responded to the survey felt that an online portal was useful. One other councillor commented "*Having worked in institutions where inductions were frequent and applied for every project or subcontract, I found the standard of induction presented and delivered by the executive and staff teams was of a very high standard.*"
- Follow up training and a CPD programme has been developed to support councillors in their role on an on-going basis.
- It had been highlighted in previous BV Audits that "Clearer choices need to be made about which proposals for improvement fit best with overall priorities and aims, to enable resources to be targeted more effectively". A comprehensive review on all aspects of the decision-making structure was undertaken with Full Council approving the [Scheme of Governance](#) in 2017. It provides a comprehensive suite of constitutional documents and guidance designed to meet current and future physical, social and

economic challenges. It also recognises the shift towards increased participation in decision-making.



- Additionally, the current Scheme of Governance explicitly shifted the active scrutiny and challenge of policy implementation, service delivery and performance improvement into the remit of all Policy and Area Committees - allowing for wider elected member involvement in scrutiny.
- Committee meetings are held in public and Policy Committees and Full Council are also webcast live and available to view for six months following the meeting. The 2018/19 Annual Audit confirms the council *demonstrates a commitment to transparency in the way it conducts its business*.
- In addition to 'routine' scrutiny, there is also the ability for committees to initiate scrutiny on any aspect of any function within the committee remit via a Committee Review Process designed to allow the committee to 'delve deeper'. This has not been used extensively by committees to date and further awareness raising for elected members and guidance for officers is being undertaken throughout 2019.



- Aberdeenshire elected members represent their communities and the organisation on a number of external local, regional and national boards and partnerships. The current President of COSLA is an Aberdeenshire Councillor (Cllr Alison Evison) and the Leader of Aberdeenshire Council (Cllr Jim Gifford) is the COSLA Political Group Leader for the Scottish Conservatives, ensuring Aberdeenshire’s voice is represented at a national level. All councillors are corporate parents and ambassadors for people with protected characteristics; they champion the Armed Forces, biodiversity and digital.
- Examples of other avenues available for communities and Members to bring items into public debate for scrutinising issues or decisions are:
 - through agreed arrangements for Petitions and requests to speak (public/communities);
 - and the Member Promoted Issue process (Members).
- The most recent [“How Good Is Our...?”](#) “self-assessment and evaluation focused on corporate governance (i.e. governance around aspects of the whole council’s service delivery) which highlighted the need to enhance the support in place for councillors to

help them in their leadership role. Group Leaders are acting on this, with support from the relevant officers, as and when required.

- Aberdeenshire has a well-established Youth Participation Structure, with Aberdeenshire Youth Council pulling together youth voices through our 7 elected Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs), Community Youth Platforms, Special Interest Groups and the Pupil Participation Forum. The Pupil Participation Forum recently received a COSLA Bronze Award in recognition of their successful youth volunteer award. The Aberdeenshire Youth Council were instrumental in the development of the Aberdeenshire Children & Young People's Charter – which is considered by Officers and Elected Members in decision making processes, service development and change. Education & Children's Services Policy Committee Chair shares forthcoming agenda and papers with MSYPs and ensures comments received are shared in Committee meetings. Young people developed and issued a survey for their peers in 2019. 2400 young people responded to the survey, the results of which have been widely shared within the Council and with Community Planning Partners. Representatives of the Youth Council meet quarterly with the Chief Executive and Strategic Leadership Team of the Council to discuss areas of mutual interest and concern. The Youth Council has produced a Manifesto for 2020, with three key issues which they want to work with the Council on, in addition to the further strengthening of Youth Voice. Culture, Heritage and Community Events; Drugs and Alcohol Awareness; Promoting Acceptance will be the focus for joint work in the coming year.

2.4 Community Planning

- The council is an effective partner and contributor within the Community Planning Partnership (CPP). The CPP structures were comprehensively reviewed in light of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. As part of the review, the Board made an explicit decision to focus on the Outcome Improvement Plans. Our Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) provides a vision (derived from local priorities) that partners work collaboratively to achieve to meet the needs of communities in Aberdeenshire. Arrangements were put in place to reduce duplication of reporting arrangements for other partnerships which already had effective governance arrangements such as GIRFEC. Board members continue to have a broad understanding of partnership arrangements and future developments through a series of workshops and policy

bulletins. Each LOIP priority is managed through a lead Strategic Partnership Group, with representatives from partners and the third sector such as, Scottish Fire and Rescue, Police Scotland and Aberdeenshire Youth Council. In March 2017, three LOIP priorities were agreed for Aberdeenshire:

- **Changing Aberdeenshire's Relationship with Alcohol**
 - **Reducing Child Poverty in Aberdeenshire**
 - **Connected and Cohesive Communities**
-
- Community planning in action happens at a local level. There are six local community planning partnership groups, reflecting our six administrative areas, which ensure the tactical and operational delivery of local priorities. With representatives from all partners, the communities and local elected members, these groups understand their local communities and have developed [community plans](#) that focus on the needs of the area. Currently there are six local community plans, however work is now underway to develop plans at a more localised level. Over the next two years, 17 community plans will be developed based on a Strategic Needs Assessment, community engagement, community developed settlement statements (based on the place standard) and professional knowledge. Ultimately, our collective aim is to harness the rich and manifold assets of Aberdeenshire's localities, enabling them to flourish through sustainable economic growth and community-orientated policies. The Strategic Needs Assessments, for example, document and analyse dozens of statistical datasets within the context of relatively small geographic areas. Datasets cover most aspects of residents' lives, including such things as income levels, travel to work patterns, broadband speed, educational attainment, the dynamics of population change, and over 25 health-related indicators. The statistical data is augmented by contextual information provided by local area practitioners who have a real understanding of local issues through their daily interactions with residents and community groups. The subsequent Action Plans seek to address the issues identified, thereby ensuring a systematic and unrelenting focus on place and speaks to our collective desire to engender healthy, vibrant and flourishing localities in light of all investment and de-investment decisions.

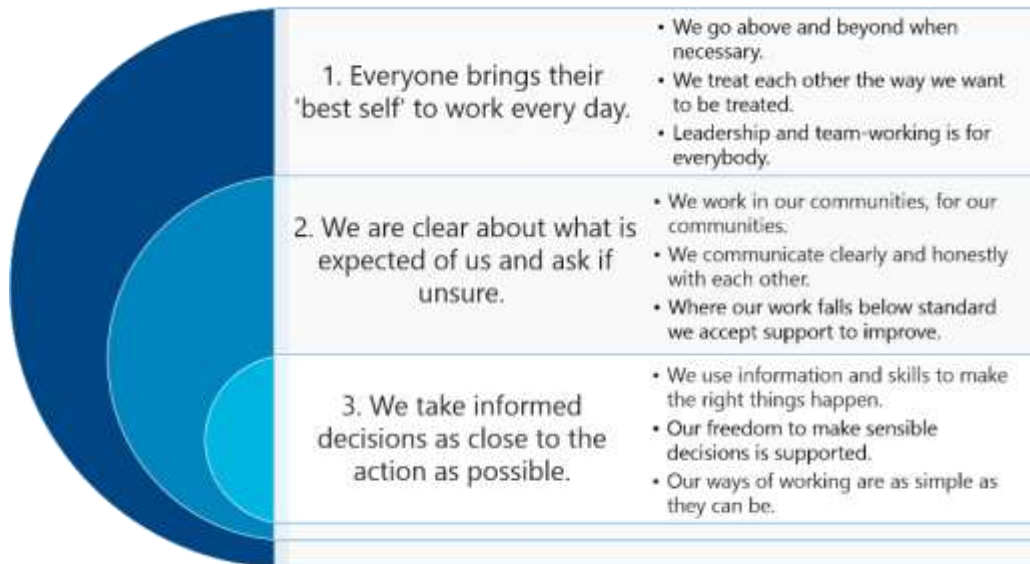
 - In response to the Part 2 Community Planning guidance, there are currently three locality planning arrangements in Aberdeenshire, which seek to enhance existing

actions already being taken to support improved outcomes. The three localities (Peterhead, Fraserburgh and Banff & Macduff) were identified using a range of evidence and data including Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, Community Planning Outcome Profiles and local professional knowledge.

2.5 Executive Leadership

- A [recent annual audit](#) confirmed *evidence of clear leadership by Strategic Leadership Team* – this team includes the Chief Executive, Directors, Chief Officer for the Integration Joint Board, Head of Legal & Governance, the Head of Finance and the Chief Social Work Officer (CSWO). The Head of Finance is the ‘Section 95’ officer and the Head of Legal is the statutory Monitoring Officer. They provide advice and assurance to the Leadership Team on key areas such as budget, governance and risk.
- A range of regular meetings take place from [Strategic Leadership Team, to Directorate and Chief Officers](#), with an expectation that messages are cascaded and opportunities taken for dialogue across all teams.
- Chief Officers are active in professional groups, Scottish Government and Cosla to influence and inform the setting of national policy, ensuring early understanding of developments and potential legislative change. For example, our Head of ICT was recently Chair of SOCITM, our Head of Planning was instrumental in the professional panel advising on the original drafting of the Planning (Scotland) Bill and our Head of Legal was previously President of SOLAR. Our Roads and Transportation colleagues are proactive in SCOTs, and our Chief Executive is currently chair of SOLACE. In addition to supporting to national professional leadership, it also ensures that Aberdeenshire is able to influence policy nationally, delivering tangible benefits both within the council and in our wider contribution to public services.
- Education and Children’s Services has responded to the national drive of the Head Teachers’ Charter and School Empowerment agenda to support local decision taking.
- In order to identify what makes Aberdeenshire Council work well as an organisation (from frontline to chief executive) more than 600 employees took part in workshops to discuss what is important to them in a successful workplace. The workshops led to the

creation of the One Aberdeenshire Principles. To ensure that the principles truly reflected the organisation as a whole, employees at all levels were asked to participate. The principles, implemented in 2017, are based on what we look like when we're operating at our best. They are our cultural aspirations, promoting an ethos that will help achieve the council's vision 'to be the best council, from mountain to sea' and delivery of the strategic priorities.



- A new approach to employee engagement is being introduced from Autumn 2019 to replace the more traditional employee surveys that were undertaken biannually. The approach will be based on the NHS model iMatter, a staff experience continuous improvement tool, and used at a team level to:
 - promote openness and transparency about each individual's experience at work;
 - support team development;
 - help line managers understand what it is like for individuals and teams;
 - measure staff experience and;
 - recognise good practice.

- The council's most recent self-assessment and evaluation indicated a need to further increase the visibility of our leadership in relation to embedding vision in support of the future council and One Aberdeenshire, with a focus on leadership development. An action plan is in development to progress this, and a Chief Officers [Change and Innovation Programme](#) will support personal development at all levels of the council.

3. PERFORMANCE

3.1 Best Value Findings 2008/2013

- *The council is improving customer service, making better use of technology and implementing a new system for customer complaints. However, the pace of change needs to increase, and greater senior commitment is required. It is not clear how new approaches to customer service will sit alongside the many existing over-the-counter facilities.*
- *Education, social work, housing services and transport are performing well and this provides a sound base to deal with the key strategic issues facing these services in the years ahead. Performance in other areas such as planning and leisure is more mixed. In areas covered by SPIs, overall performance is currently middling and at risk of falling behind other Scottish councils.*
- *The council has a clear performance management framework in place and has improved its approach to monitoring and reporting performance.*
- *Elected members have a greater focus in scrutinising the council's performance.*
- *The council does not systematically collect, monitor and report on benchmarking activity to help it identify where it needs to improve.*

Where we are now

- Aberdeenshire Council is developing a comprehensive range of performance information aligned to its Council Plan and Priorities. Performance is regularly

reported to and scrutinised by senior management, Policy Committees and Area Committees. The council has a robust approach to public performance reporting.

- Aberdeenshire Council has a Feedback Team in place who process comments, compliments and complaints from customers, in line with the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman's guidelines. Feedback data is reviewed by Chief Officers and used as a tool for continuous improvement.
- Aberdeenshire Council has a Customer Service Charter and a Customer Service Strategy that were revised in 2019. Customer Service Training framework is also currently being implemented. A programme of work is underway to automate many routine transactions, enabling the customer to interact with services directly via online channels.
- From the 2014/15 Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) reporting phase, Strategic Leadership Team (SLT) agreed its aim to achieve 50% or more indicators in the upper two quartiles of Scottish performance rankings.
- Revised committee reporting arrangements are currently in place and being implemented for Policy and Area committees, to reflect the new political priorities of the administration.
- We are committed to a comprehensive range of self-evaluation approaches including the 'How Good Is Our...' toolkits. Policy Committees are more engaged with utilising these approaches and services are making use of the service assessment methodology, which is focussed on continuous improvement.
- The Local Scrutiny Plan reflects a council that is performing with confidence whilst knowing the areas where improvement is required
- Local Government Benchmarking Framework (LGBF) is an important measure of our performance, along with a range of other measures that we use to recognise strengths and identify priorities for improvement.

Challenge

We must strive to be clearer in setting out what we are aiming to achieve against our outcomes, sharing that information widely and evidencing the difference we are making through our council priorities. We recognise the challenge of maintaining a focus on our priorities in the face of the financial challenges ahead. Building on our performance reporting process will continue to support local decision-making and provide local communities with appropriate support and services. Continued scrutiny

of our performance must be encouraged and welcomed by services as a way to drive continuous improvement.

Where we are going?

- We will continue to deliver the council outcome delivery plans which support council priorities
- We will maintain the focus on outcomes that we've developed in consultation with residents and findings from our strategic assessment;
- We will look to make better use of information and data both locally and nationally (including LGBF) to scrutinise, maintain and improve performance outcomes;
- We will continue to regularly review progress and performance, and emerging issues, to allow us to adjust our approach where necessary;
- We will proceed to use a range of qualitative and quantitative data to evaluate success;
- We will ensure that everyone understands the part they play in delivering better outcomes for Aberdeenshire
- We will remain accountable for performance at every level of the organisation;
- We will continue to work together with our partners and others to make best use of our resources and deliver on our outcomes;
- We will ensure we have robust and appropriate governance, scrutiny and decision-making arrangements in place and we will regularly review and publish our findings;
- We will continue to maintain an open and transparent approach to public performance reporting using a range of different tools;
- We will continue to use a range of self-assessment tools to help us identify relative strengths, potential areas for improvement and opportunities for service transformation.

3.2 Performance Management, Reporting and Scrutiny

- In November 2017 Full Council agreed 11 new council priorities for the duration of the [Council Plan 2017-2022](#) incorporating findings from the [Strategic Assessment 2018](#) and the views of Aberdeenshire residents. From these priorities, [outcome delivery](#)

[plans](#) were created in consultation with senior managers and elected members, with progress reported twice a year at Committee.

- Performance reports are published and available for the [LOIP](#) , [CJOIP](#), [Health & Social Care Partnership](#) and [Children's Services Plan](#). [The Housing Service reports](#) to the Scottish Housing Regulator annually on performance. Locally the performance of Local Community Plans and Locality Plans are considered by Local Community Planning Partnership Groups and Area Committees and also available [online](#). Health & Social Care Partnership ([H&SCP Strategic Plan 2016-2019](#)) reports annually to Communities Committee and Full Council and regularly to the Integrated Joint Board, Community Planning Partnership Board and Executive Group for Public Protection. The CPP Board structures its agendas around the performance of the LOIP with each meeting focusing in-depth on a specific priority whilst still considering overall progress, challenges and opportunities.
- Aberdeenshire Council have robust locality/area structures in place across all services (ensuring a focus on localities and communities) with six area management teams providing coordination and cohesion across all services. The area teams enable the Area Committee to make local decisions and to ensure that decisions are carried out. The Area Management structure is a crucial link between the central corporate and policy making of the council to deliver services locally
- The council's new performance reporting arrangements are intended to provide the wider public with an overview of progress against each council priority and to enable full detail for scrutiny by senior management and elected members of progress, challenges and areas for improvement. The Annual Audit Report for 18/19 noted that *the council had been slow to agree a performance framework to monitor progress in delivering outcomes* however it is intended that the approach in place does now assess performance against intended outcomes.
- Whilst it is recognised that it has taken longer than expected to develop the performance framework in support of the Council Plan 2017-2022, there has continued to be robust performance reporting and monitoring and committees regularly consider the performance of their delegated policy remit which also demonstrate progress towards delivery of the priorities. For example Communities Committee receives

quarterly reporting on the delivery of the Culture and Sports strategies and the Local Housing Strategy, Infrastructure Committee is updated six monthly on delivery of the Economic Development Action Plan, Education & Children's Services Committee considers detailed attainment data annually and Business Services Committee monitors delivery of aspects of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 such as Part 3 Participation Requests. A [performance calendar](#) identifies these performance reporting arrangements.

- Over the past 12 months, informal sessions between Directorates and area committees have provided an opportunity to consider local performance in greater detail. They have been useful in exploring some of the challenges facing services in a local context, and enabled area committees to question and scrutinise performance affecting the communities they represent on a service-by-service basis. Given the initial success of these sessions, and as part of our approach to continuous improvement, it is intended to incorporate them as part of the rolling programme of performance.
- There is flexibility in the arrangements either via formal scrutiny or informal briefing sessions for councillors to consider performance when they feel it is right to do so. The breadth of performance information reported allows effective governance of activities and resources. [Guidance](#) has been published for officers on the council's intranet.
- Aberdeenshire has a robust approach to public performance reporting (PPR) and central to this is the published annual performance report '[Aberdeenshire Performs](#)' and [accessible animations](#) and [videos](#) shared on social media. Bi-annual performance reporting to Policy and Area Committee is published together with Aberdeenshire's [Reputation Tracker](#) and a link to the [Local Government Benchmarking Framework](#) to enable residents to use the simple, effective comparison tool '[MyLocalCouncil](#)'.
- Additionally, the council have a Feedback Team who process complaints and other forms of feedback in line with the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman. The council publishes an [annual complaints report](#) and the council's Feedback team provide services and area teams with monthly performance statistics on customer complaints, query resolution and customer satisfaction. Monthly complaint reports are also sent to all management teams and quarterly reviews are undertaken by SLT to identify any

trends. These reviews and reports are used to assist in delivering continuous service improvement throughout the council.

- A revised Customer Service Charter was approved by the Business Services Committee in June 2019. This clearly sets out the Council's aim when dealing with customer enquiries. In addition, it clarifies what customers can expect from us regardless of the way in which they contact the Council. In addition to this, the Customer Service Strategy 2019-22 sets out the Council's commitment to our customers. It includes our vision for customer service delivery and reflects our aim to be a customer focused organisation which delivers a consistently good service, striving for excellence in everything we do. The strategy also clarifies how we will engage with customers and use their feedback to continually improve our performance. Customer Services have also developed a full in-house training framework to support employees in their roles and have engaged with all services around content of the framework and the positive impact the delivery of such.
- Aberdeenshire uses the performance and risk management system Pentana in line with the majority of other Scottish local authorities. The system is widely used across the council and shared with senior managers, internal audit and elected members.

3.4 Self-Assessment

- The council has adopted the How Good is Our...? (HGIO?) approach to self-assessment. Introduced in 2015, the model was refreshed in 2017 to more broadly meet corporate assessment needs. All council-wide assessments are published on the website.
- As part of our standard annual process, a self-assessment was undertaken as '[How Good is our Governance in Practice?](#)' This evaluation was undertaken as part of our statutory requirement to evaluate and assess our corporate governance in practice. The approach involved 45 senior managers and 10 elected members of the Audit Committee over a series of nine workshops. Following review and assessment of findings, an action plan was developed by the Corporate Leadership Group (CLG) and

agreed by Audit Committee and Strategic Leadership Team. The [HGIOG action plan](#) is in progress and Audit Committee will receive regular updates.

- In addition, a number of council services are subject to external scrutiny and systematically undertake self-assessment using the 'How Good is our? Framework in a number of professional areas, such as How Good Is Our School?

3.5 External Scrutiny and Risk

- To ensure the council is delivering Best Value and meeting both statutory requirements and the needs of the residents and communities of Aberdeenshire, it is essential that external, independent organisations scrutinise and inspect what we are doing and recommend actions we need to take to make improvements.
- Each year, the Local Area Network (LAN) of external scrutiny bodies undertakes a shared risk assessment on the council of the challenges likely to be faced by the council in achieving good outcomes for local people. The findings of the assessment are published as the council's [Local Scrutiny Plan](#). The 2018/19 Local Scrutiny Plan did not identify any risk areas where specific scrutiny was required, other than that which is nationally directed or part of a planned programme of work.
- Since the first shared risk assessment was undertaken in 2010, the LAN has consistently recognised Aberdeenshire Council as a low scrutiny risk and, once again, there is no risk-based scrutiny planned for the council during 2019/20. This continued positive assessment reflects the council's own awareness of strengths and areas for improvement and action to ensure this is the case.
- Each year the council is audited by Audit Scotland or an external auditor appointed by Audit Scotland. The external audit focuses on whether the council is managing its finances to the highest standards and achieving the best possible value for public money. Each [Annual Audit Report](#) is presented to Full Council and any action required by the council is monitored by the Audit Committee.

Managing risk is an important part of the work undertaken by services to support activity. The organisation is risk aware and has a rigorous process to ensure that

corporate risk is considered and managed effectively. All committee reports detail which risks apply, so these are considered in all strategic decision making. Risks are now also linked to the council priorities.

- The council has a [Corporate Risk Register](#) and a [Directorate Risk Register](#) available on the website. In addition, the council's Business Continuity and Emergency Plans are monitored and tested regularly to ensure that in the event of an incident causing severe disruption to the council we can continue to deliver the most critical activities.

A key area of risk for any public body is crime, fraud and corruption and the Corporate Integrity Group was established to monitor, review and continually improve the council's resilience to crime, fraud and corruption from internal and external sources. Through close liaison with Police Scotland, the council looks to identify and address vulnerabilities in systems and processes, and ensures robust policies are in place to protect the council from fraud or corruption.

3.6 Benchmarking

- From LGBF reporting in 2014/15 SLT agreed that the council would aim to achieve 50% or higher, of all LGBF performance indicators to report within the top two quartiles of national performance rankings. Trends over the 5-year period 2014/15 – 2018/19 can be found [here](#). The most recent set of LGBF data available (2018/19) shows that Aberdeenshire has 55% of its indicators in the top two quartiles of performance. (*15 indicators have yet to report for 2018/19 – this data will be available at end March 2020).
- Overall, Aberdeenshire's national performance has fluctuated over the top two quartiles: 2014/15 reporting 41%; 2015/16 reporting 49%; 2016/17 reporting 50%; and, 2017/18 reporting 57%.
- Currently, LGBF reporting is produced and scrutinised by SLT, Directorate Management Teams (DMTs) and published to elected members via Ward Pages. An overview of national versus local trends is produced to provide context. From 2018/19 onwards, LGBF indicators will be aligned against council priorities and for all actions sited within the lower two quartiles, and where they support council priorities, action

plans will be developed by DMTs, agreed by relevant Policy Committee and progress reported to Audit Committee, SLT and DMTs.

- Services regularly utilise the national benchmarking process for best practice. Housing have reviewed and refreshed their Rapid Re-housing Transition Plan: This approach ensures that those experiencing homelessness gain a settled housing outcome as quickly as possible and that appropriate support is available to enable this to be sustained. Temporary accommodation will be of good quality and time spent in it will be minimised. This will significantly increase the ability of people in the greatest need to access the housing they need as quickly as possible.
- The council has received numerous accolades for its work over the years through external endorsement by national industry leaders. A list of our award-winning achievements can be found [here](#).

4. MANAGING RESOURCES

4.1 Best Value Findings 2008/2013

- *The council demonstrates sound financial management. Budgets and service plans are considered together, but there is scope to link financial resources more effectively to council priorities and to introduce longer-term financial planning.*
- *The council is developing a formal approach to asset management planning. The council does not yet have a strategic plan for asset management, but it has a clear idea of the investment levels required, which are significant. Joint working takes place with other bodies, but more can be done to take a more joined-up approach across the council.*
- *Risk management has been slow to develop and is not effective. A start has been made but there is much to do before systematic risk management is embedded across council business.*

- *The council has a central procurement function operated in partnership with Aberdeen City Council, which has been identified as a centre of excellence for procurement by Scotland Excel. A clear procurement strategy remains to be established and staffing issues resolved.*
- *The council is making some efficiency savings, although slippage in improving procurement has meant that anticipated savings are taking longer than expected to achieve. Overall, a much more rigorous and systematic approach needs to be taken to identify, deliver and capture efficiencies on a continuing basis.*
- *The council has a comprehensive approach to people management through a workforce strategy and action plan. It is aware of the challenges it faces in recruiting and retaining staff and in maintaining a skilled and resilient workforce. The council works well with staff and their representatives to address these challenges through a variety of initiatives and can demonstrate progress in reducing sickness absence among staff and increasing the number of participants in the Worksmart programme.*

Where are we now

- Our most recent annual audit report confirms that our financial management is effective, enabling the council to take appropriate action as required
- Aberdeenshire Council has established a Strategic Change Board to monitor major programmes. Processes are in place to prioritise activity and track expenditure through financial monitoring and benefits realisation.
- Appropriate arrangements are in place for officers and elected members to scrutinise financial management and lead on strategic financial planning
- The financial monitoring and planning for the Health and Social Care Partnership is co-ordinated in line with overall council planning
- Procurement is based on a collaborative approach across three councils to support efficient resource management
- We have a [Corporate Asset Management Plan 2015-2020](#) and associated fifteen-year General Capital Fund which support our priorities
- We have significant assets supported by our Housing Revenue Account and the HRA Capital Plan

- WorkSMART and flexible working practices are effective in supporting the delivery of services and meeting customers' needs
- Workforce planning is a priority. Increased population and developments in areas such as Early Learning and Childcare have resulted in some staff increases. This is counter-balanced by a strategic approach to managing the workforce efficiently in line with budget and resources
- We are committed to providing appropriate training, development and support for the workforce
- Digital skills and approaches are an inherent part of our approach to delivering in an efficient and effective way
- We have an environment and climate change policy and a progressive commitment to ensuring that sustainability is at the core of our council.

Challenges

Finances and resources are coming under increasing pressure and our challenge is to ensure that we plan and deliver services effectively and efficiently within the budgets available to us. Decisions will need to be made which may result in services changing and it is imperative that we know and understand our communities and are able to clearly explain the impact of changes to them. On-going work is required on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy to ensure that there is a multi-year plan to support the delivery of services, planning for savings and co-ordinating the key resources available to us. Working through formal and informal partnership arrangements will be required to deliver in an increasingly joined-up and mature way.

Where we're going

- Continue to develop strategic and operational approaches to financial and resource planning which reflect the budget challenges that we face
- Develop further joined-up approaches to financial planning in partnership, for instance the Health and Social Care Partnership
- Ensure that shared and collaborative approaches to procurement lead to efficient and effective provision of resources to deliver services for communities
- Monitor and review our Corporate Asset Management Plan and General Capital Fund to support our priorities

- Plan and implement the office space strategy, WorkSMART and flexible working practices to deliver services in a modern and efficient way
- Ensure our workforce planning strategy reflects the needs of the council and the services we provide
- Continue to use and develop digital approaches to maximise effectiveness of services, customer access and workforce skills
- Keep sustainability and climate issues at the centre of our planning and delivery

4.2 FINANCE & PROCUREMENT

- On an annual basis financial resources of £1billion are accessible to deliver services across the activities of the General Fund and HRA, through revenue budgets, capital plans, reserves and the Integration Joint Board responsibilities. The council has robust arrangements in place to manage our financial resources, helping us achieve Best Value. Our most recent annual audit report confirms that our *financial management is effective, enabling the council to take appropriate action as required*.
- Our Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) aims to support elected members and Chief Officers respond effectively to the financial pressures on public services. Now in its third year, it is approved annually by Full Council for a rolling five-year period. The MTFS provides a holistic view of the Revenue Budget, Capital Plan, Carbon Budget and Reserves and includes the Housing Revenue Account.
- As part of considering the MTFS, Members also consider budget engagement outcomes, enabling them to make informed decisions when considering financial choices. This ensures that the council continues to deliver appropriate and prioritised local services to communities.
- The MTFS incorporates the council's policy on use of Reserves. Whilst Aberdeenshire Council's useable reserves (as a percentage of annual revenue) is low compared to most Scottish councils, the council has a robust and transparent process for dealing with Reserves. Elected members also review and agree the level of uncommitted and committed reserves, as part of the budget setting process each February.

- The Strategic Leadership Team provides direction to the council's response to continued pressures on finance, supported by the Budget Strategy Group (BSG), a cross service Chief Officer group, to provide a consistent and transparent approach for all budget activity within Services. SLT works closely with d members on all aspects of the Budget Process and considers future requirements to coordinate and monitor the delivery of the Budget Setting Programme.
- Aberdeenshire Council has Financial Regulations to support the transparent and efficient financial management of the council. The current Financial Regulations were agreed as part of the overall approval of the Scheme of Governance (January 2017) and have been considered in subsequent reviews.
- A Corporate Charging Framework has been developed using the principles agreed through the Scrutiny & Audit investigation titled 'Charging for Services – Are you getting it right?'. Originally approved in 2014 and currently under review, the policy allows for charges to be reviewed, set, collected and managed in a consistent and transparent manner.
- Aberdeenshire Council's sports and cultural services are delivered by the council, operating under the separate brand identity of Live Life Aberdeenshire (LLA). It was developed as an alternative delivery model based on an empowered approach. The Scheme of Governance enables a more flexible arrangement for LLA to deliver these services, with the learning being captured to inform other council services which may also benefit from greater flexibility in how they operate. While it is still too early to measure the impact of the implementation of the LLA, one of the aims is to use charging and fees to best support delivery of the council's sports and culture strategies, whilst contributing towards the council's Priorities.
- [The List of Committee Powers](#) confirms the role of Full Council to set the council budgets, including; revenue, capital, carbon and housing revenue accounts. Policy Committees have a role in the formulation of the revenue budget and capital plan and also decide on all policy issues and resource matters, within the delegated functions. Area committees have a role in determining matters that directly affect their areas and make recommendations to Policy Committees on strategic matters and council policy.

- Further revisions (introduced 2019/20) to the way in which officers and elected members review financial information, have strengthened monitoring arrangements. The approach links the in-year financial management of resources to the MTFs, by reporting financial performance information (revenue and capital), both to budget holders and to Committee. This means the council are moving away from forecasting the year end position, to the reporting of a phased budget versus actual expenditure to date, known as variance analysis. The scrutiny of financial performance is being undertaken in detail by Directorate teams and then Policy Committees. A summary position for the council is reported to Full Council.
- On a quarterly basis Policy Committees scrutinise, challenge and discuss emerging issues highlighted through the financial performance reporting, linking this to service delivery and then agreeing a course of action for the future. Updates are also provided on any savings accepted as part of the MTFs, with emerging issues highlighted.
- Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership developed a Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in 2017, covering five financial years. The HSCP budget for 2019/20 outlines how £9.7 million of new funding will be invested to sustain and improve services during the year as part of an overall budget of £317 million. There continues to be a risk of an overspend given demands and pressures on the partnership. The operation of the IJB's MTFs is fundamental in reducing this risk and securing a sound financial basis for IJB services over the coming years. The three-stage process in addressing a forecast over budget position for the IJB is:
 - Look to mitigate the position within existing resources, by preparing a recovery plan to reduce expenditure and / or generate income;
 - Utilise all reserve funds and;
 - Discuss a funding strategy with all partners.
- In order to ensure all Members are confident in their abilities to monitor the financial arrangements of the council, learning and development opportunities are in place. Financial responsibilities were introduced as part of the induction days following election and a follow-on seminar allows for in-depth discussion. There is online learning

available and the Finance Service delivers a range of seminars, workshops and briefings throughout the year.

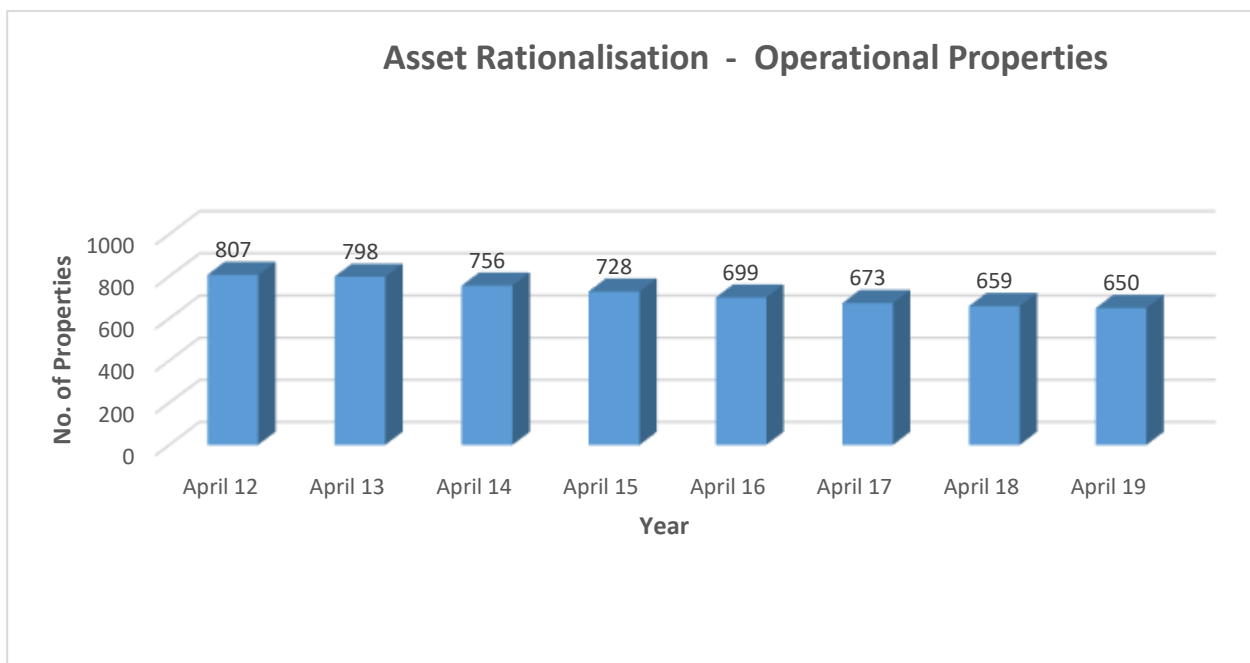
- A range of monitoring tools are available for budget-holders. New in 2019 is the development of a real time monitoring system that enables budgets and expenditure to be interrogated at both budget page/line and individual transaction levels through PowerBI. The implementation of a revised Strategic Finance structure will continue to develop the skills and responsibilities of managers as budget holders whilst ensuring expert, advisory support is available.
- Any emerging issues are highlighted in terms of achieving savings, identifying mitigating actions to address any potential overspends and the implications of any underspends when it comes to achieving the outcomes against the council's priorities. As this is the first year using this method, information is still being built up in the format required to allow accurate yearly comparisons and analysis. The robustness of comparing actual expenditure and income against phased budgets depends on the consistency of expenditure and income patterns from year to year and the risk around this not being the case is acknowledged. The revised reporting format is accessible with a range of graphs and charts to illustrate the data. The monitoring position is based on the most recent month end and on the date of Committee allowing for reporting to be closer to a 'real-time' position.
- The council is determined to protect itself and the public from fraud and is committed to the rigorous maintenance of a strategy for the prevention and detection of fraud. In 2019 there was a significant review of the council's Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy, reflecting CIPFA's Code of Practice on managing the Risk of Fraud and Corruption and the Local Government Fraud Strategy – Fighting Fraud Locally 2016-2019. The council's Corporate Integrity Group will be responsible for completing the Fighting Fraud and Corruption Checklist, monitoring the implementation of the Fraud Risk Response Plan and compiling an Annual Report for consideration by Business Services Committee on the outcome of the Strategy. The council is also an active participant in the National Fraud Initiative, and it is integral to the revised strategy as both a tool to 'prevent' and 'pursue'.

- The council procures in the region of £250 million (17/18) in the form of direct award contracts, framework arrangements, service level agreements and spot purchases. Around £73 million (29%) is with local trade suppliers and £46million is with local SMEs (18%). When considering the indicator ‘What percentage of my council’s procurement is spent on local enterprises?’, the council performs better than Scotland as a whole (29% vs 27% in 2017/18). A table of how the remainder of money is spent can be found [here](#).
- Through the Scheme of [Governance](#), the purchase of goods, services and works is managed effectively and with integrity. There is ‘frontloaded’ scrutiny by elected members for any proposed spend over £50,000, with Area and Policy Committees having the ability to ‘call-in’ the award of any contract between £50,000 and £1million or enable officers to proceed under delegated powers. Any proposed spend of £1m or over can only be considered and agreed by a policy committee, following rigorous management oversight supported by a detailed business case. There is currently an Expenditure Approval Process Project (EAPP) to further enhance arrangements, ensuring explicit connectivity with delivery of the council priorities.
- There is a range of specific [procurement](#) governance, guidance and support available for officers with authority to purchase. A comprehensive package of guidance is available online, along with access to Procurement Category Managers and Governance solicitors.

4.3 ASSETS

- The council’s [Corporate Asset Management Plan 2015-2020](#) and associated fifteen-year General Capital Fund are critical enablers for the realisation of the council’s priorities. It ensures assets are fit for purpose and cost efficient. It has a range of goals and outcomes that relate to both repairs and maintenance as well as provision of replacement or new assets. The Asset Management Plan will be reviewed in 2020 and work is already underway with a review of operational assets. The council’s Asset Condition databases underpin the Plan along with a range of strategies including the Roads Asset Management Plan and Historic Environment Strategy.

- There is also a Surplus Property policy linked to the Asset Management Plan with the aim of insuring that the council has the optimum number of assets at any given time to suit service requirements. New processes have been implemented to ensure the time between a property being declared surplus and being sold or transferred through a community asset transfer process is minimised, whilst ensuring full and robust community engagement on the future use of such assets.
- The following chart illustrates the reduction in operational property assets (there were 850 as of 2010; currently there are 649). Existing approved strategies will ensure that this number further reduces to 600.



- The Asset Disposal Group meets on a monthly basis to discuss progress in respect of various properties. The current focus at this time has been in respect of what has been highlighted within approved strategies such as WorkSPACE, Depots, Public Conveniences and the emerging Public Hall Strategy. The disposals are identified and categorised within each of the Aberdeenshire Council areas in line with their stage within the disposal process namely, Completed sales (15 in 2019) Under Offer (currently 8) , On Market (25 assets, 12 of which there is serious discussion with interested parties), In Disposal Pipeline (currently 40 with 5 about to be placed on the market), Potential Future Disposal, Asset Being Held for other purpose and Potential Demolitions.

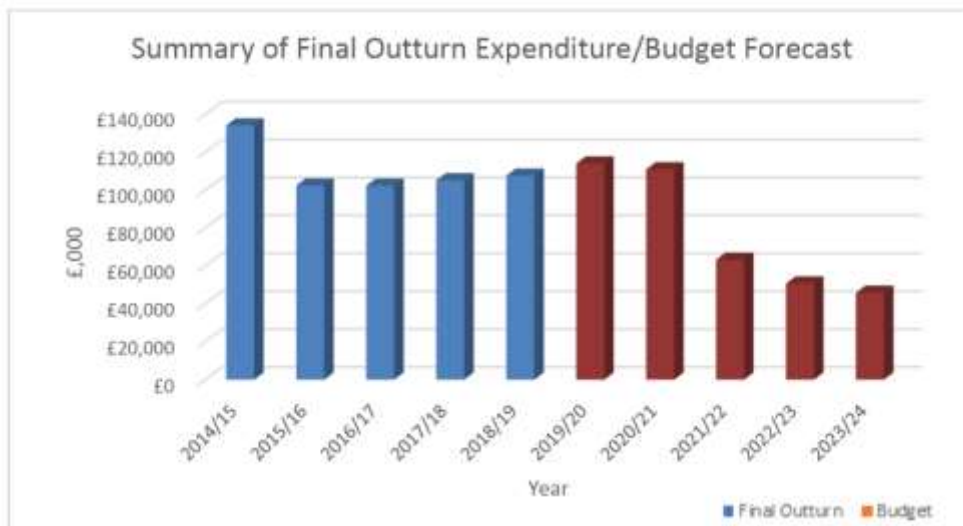
- It is acknowledged there are ongoing holding costs during the period from a property being made surplus to requirements and disposal, this also applies during asset transfer process as well. There is a financial allocation in capital plan for asset receipt. Therefore, the approach being taken is to increase disposals and reduce holding costs.
- To build on the progress of asset rationalisation, officers are currently establishing a cross-service Estate Review and Rationalisation Project Group which will report to the Capital Plan Group with procedures, and progress, between services and asset groups following different timelines. This review will continue to reflect the need to ensure the cost of running property assets is the second highest costs after salaries and that the asset base aligns to the service needs of the council and its communities.
- The council has adopted an ambitious initiative to reduce the size of the office estate, designed to provide modern and flexible spaces for our employees in the heart of our communities. Our modern approach to flexible working supports our recruitment and retention enabling effective and efficient work from office spaces, home and other locations to support our diverse communities.

The [workSPACE](#) (Smart Provision of Accommodation for the Customer Experience) strategy, agreed in 2012 is delivering savings on office running costs and realising capital receipts from assets that are no longer required. workSPACE has enabled us to reduce our office assets from 94 to 63. This was achieved with the introduction of a 7:10 desk ratio and reliant on the implementation of the WorkSmart programme increasing our efficient use of modernised, fit for purpose offices. This programme has continued to evolve and through the implementation of our Office Space Strategy agreed in 2017, we continue to drive an ambitious programme that will result in a further reduction in assets by 2021. Several main office bases are being refurbished or replaced consolidating services into new or refurbished area offices that allow for co-location with public sector partners such as the Health & Social Care Partnership and Police Scotland. Buchan House, opened in 2015, was a new build office space that allowed for the release of seven properties in the town centre for alternative use. The building is now being extended to provide collaborative space to be shared by

the council and Police Scotland. The innovative project, supported by Scottish Futures Trust, will provide a potential blueprint for future collaborative approaches.

- The 7:10 desk ratio continues to be the model for Buchan House (Peterhead), the refurbished office in Stonehaven, our smaller offices and in depots. For Woodhill House, and new builds in Inverurie and Ellon, we are introducing a 5:10 desk ratio supplemented by a 'kit of parts' creating an environment enabling all colleagues to work in a space suitable to the task being undertaken. Community benefits are anticipated from the developments at Inverurie and Ellon bringing council services into the heart of our communities and potential economic benefits from increased footfall into our town centres.
- [WorkSmart](#) has proven to be a significant enabler to achieving the WorkSPACE programme, implementing the 7:10 desk ratio across the reducing office estate in our towns. This ensures we have skilled and effective people working at the right time, in the right place on the right issues whilst creating an environment that supports work/life balance, providing flexibility in the way employees work. Having developed and enhanced the initiative over the last ten years, employees are now flexible by default unless the job profile doesn't support it for service delivery reasons. Flexible working can result in higher recruitment, retention and greater productivity due to being able to accommodate employees with specific needs. Another benefit is the reduction of Aberdeenshire Council's carbon footprint.
- A rolling fifteen-year [capital programme](#) is considered by Members when setting the budget. In February 2019 the programme to 2033/34 was confirmed which will see investment of around £1 billion across Aberdeenshire. The monies will be invested on buildings, land, roads, bridges and equipment by either acquiring new assets or extending the life of a fixed asset. There are rolling programmes for continuing activity such as Roads Reconstruction and Planned Building Maintenance, workstreams such as our Depot Strategy and investment to meet the national policy commitment for Early Years expansion. In addition there are a range of projects which are significant capital construction projects, such as the delivery of Kintore Station (2020/21), Peterhead Care & Support Village (2020/21), Peterhead Community Campus (2024-2029) and Inverurie Community Campus (2019/20).

- The nature and scale of the Capital Plan is such that timelines and costs for projects within programmes can vary. However, there are developed processes for managing and monitoring both at an individual project and programme level; with the specific aim to deliver within expected parameters. This has led to increased confidence to undertake significant capital projects within Aberdeenshire which in turn improves the local infrastructure and economy with benefits to the community. A Gateway process model has been adopted to develop major capital projects, including procurement strategy, business case, management of contracts, reporting and monitoring provided to policy committees and post project evaluations. Since 2011 on average 70% of projects have been completed within original timescales and 86% within approved budget.



The above chart illustrates the expenditure in recent years and future levels of investment; it is evident that expenditure on the plan will reduce significantly from 2020/21 onwards.

- The Capital Plan for 2019/20 has been reprofiled to reflect the council priorities. The programme [remains affordable](#) with approximately 6.27% capital financing as a percentage of revenue anticipated by 2023/24.
- The value of the council's housing stock is £396m at 31 March 2019. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Non- Dwellings assets including lock-ups, shop units and hostels total £5m, giving a total value of £401m for HRA assets.

- The approved budget for 2019/20 for HRA Capital amounts to £77.42m and expenditure at end November 2019 totals £23.8m (31% of budget). The projected year-end variance is expected to be an underspend of £31.3m due mainly to the low expenditure in year 1 of the 5 year new build programme where focus will be on the delivery of the existing sites alongside planning and developing the delivery programmes required for years 2-5. It is expected that spend over the 5-year period will balance out and future year budgets will be reprofiled accordingly.

- In the last five years the housing service have:
 - Developed a 325 new council houses from November 2015 to January 2020. Over the same period, 17% of all new affordable build across the council and partners is suitable for people with particular needs, exceeding the Local Housing Strategy target of 15%;
 - Reviewed our tenant participation strategy to ensure that tenant participation becomes more open and inclusive to all who want to be part of shaping the services of the Housing Service;
 - Worked to ensure our properties are improved and meet standards both for now, and the future. The council has significantly invested in not only maintaining the 13,000 homes but also improving their quality and performance to meet the Scottish Housing Quality Standard (SHQS) by the 2015 deadline and is now working towards its commitment to improve the thermal performance of the stock in line with the Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing (EESH). The council is now developing proposals to meet EESH 2. The business as usual works along with the innovation will ensure continued improvement to the housing provided, building sustainability of the community and work towards eradicating fuel poverty in Aberdeenshire.

4.4 WORKFORCE

5

Workforce Information

Staffing Resources: Employee Headcount



Total Headcount as at Q1 2019/20:
16,056 (10,196.3 FTE)

By Service



Chief Executive
8 employees (6.5 FTE)



Business Services
1,772 employees (1,111.6 FTE)



Infrastructure Services
2,212 employees (1,960.4 FTE)



Health & Social Care
2,394 employees (1,576.4 FTE)

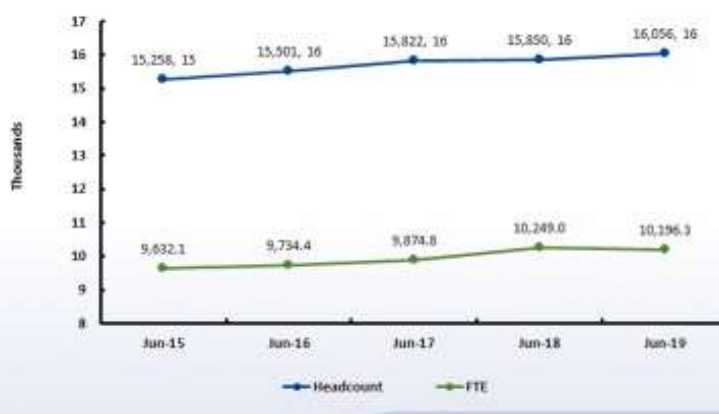


Education & Children's Services
9,994 employees (5,541.3 FTE)



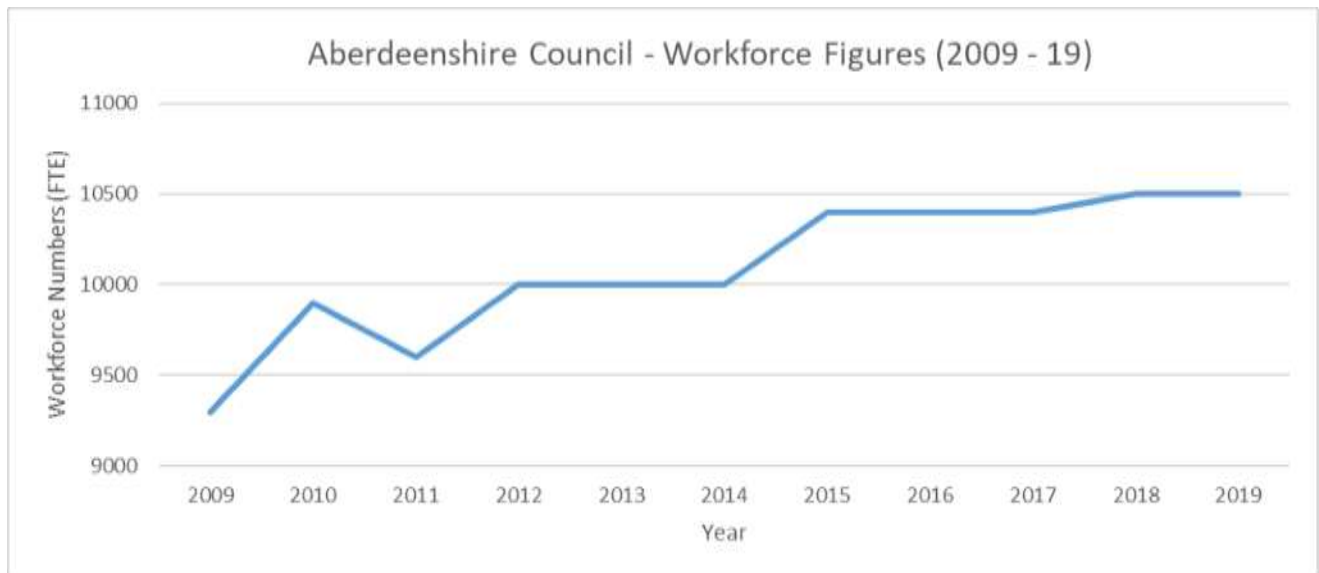
Headcount & FTE Trend

The graph below shows the total headcount and FTE figure on an annual basis for the past 5 years. This shows an increasing trend since 2015 in headcount and a slight reduction in FTE between 2018 and 2019.



Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

- Our [workforce](#) is a key component in delivering effective services. The Council Plan 2017-2022 clearly recognises this and has a priority to 'Have the right people, in the right place, doing the right thing, at the right time'.
- Over recent years, workforce planning has been undertaken on a service by service within agreed frameworks, demand-led basis. The Health & Social Care Partnership has a formal and structured [workforce plan](#) in place. We have had success in this approach with the expansion of the Early Years provision and addressing difficulties in teacher recruitment whilst reducing advertising costs.
- The figures contained within the table below detail the full-time equivalent (FTE) number of staff employed by the council during the period 2009 – 2019. This information, which is published by the Scottish Government, is collated from councils via the quarterly Joint Staff Watch (JSW) Survey.



- Over the reported period the workforce has increased by approximately 1,200 FTE. Since 2015, the workforce has remained relatively stable, increasing by approximately 100 FTE. The overall increase can be attributed to a number of factors including the growing demands on council services arising from demographic changes. Specifically, Aberdeenshire experienced a significant growth in population (+10.3% from 2005 to 2015) which was more than twice the national average of 5.1%.
- Unlike the vast majority of other Scottish local authorities, Aberdeenshire Council has not, to date, outsourced any major service provision or established any arms-length organisations. Service planning and service reviews continue to test and consider whether internal or external provision provides best value and to reform and change service delivery approaches as required. Transformed approaches to delivering services, such as Live Life Aberdeenshire, will be monitored closely to see the benefits it generates and what lessons could be learned in the delivery of other services. The JSW survey excludes employees who have transferred to such entities and this partly explains why most councils have seen an overall reduction in their workforces.
- We have continued to review, restructure and change service arrangements in line with performance & planning, resulting in a continued movement of services and staff within the council.

- It is, however, recognised that the roll out of additional early years provision within Education and Children’s Services has led to an expansion in the associated workforce and that there will be further increases in future years in line with national expectations.
- In light of the ongoing budget pressures, the council has more recently undertaken several targeted voluntary severance schemes in order to reduce headcount and the associated costs within those areas under review. Services are also adopting a more rigorous approach to vacancy management in order to ensure that recruitment is restricted, where practicable. Other measures being adopted by services include the filling of posts on reduced hours and the use of fixed-term contracts, the latter of which provides greater flexibility in meeting fluctuating demand for specific services. These measures will have a conscious effect on staffing levels and arrangements and will seek to ensure we have the right capacity in place to deliver to the scope and standard of service set out by councillors.
- We recognise there is much to do in this area and a Future Workforce Group was established in 2018 to lead on the development of a revised Workforce Strategy to determine and respond to our future workforce requirements aligned to demographic change, digital transformation and reflective of the prevalent financial climate. ‘Our Future Workforce Strategy is close to completion and will be accompanied by an action plan providing a suite of tools and skills for officers as part of our continuous improvement agenda.
- The Future Workforce Strategy will continue to build on developments in recent years, which focus on Aberdeenshire Council being an employer of choice. These include:
 - Commitment to a minimum of Living Wage for all employees, including apprentices;
 - Gold Awards in Healthy Working Lives and Armed Force Covenant;
 - Disability Confident (Employer) status;
 - Streamlining of Employee policies and procedures;
 - Employee self-service through iTrent;
 - Remaining in the top quartile for sickness absence levels (LGBF).

- As a holder of the Healthy Working Lives Gold Award, we have a Healthy Working Lives Strategy outlining our commitment to protecting, supporting and improving the health, safety and wellbeing of our employees. Supporting this is the availability of in-house training in Mental Health at Work and Stress Management Reduction Workshops as well as the provision of an Employee Assistance Programme where staff can access a confidential counselling service via telephone and/or face to face consultations. Currently we have 22 Mental Health First Aiders across the organisation (with two Mental Health First Aid trainers) available to provide support to staff. We also offer Mini Health Checks with increasing uptake year-on-year.
- We work with councillors to co-create their ongoing development programme relevant to the challenges they may face. Recent sessions include personal resilience, community empowerment and education governance. Our Chief Officer and Service Manager development programmes follow similar themes through facilitated sessions and workshops, and there has been a significant time commitment from all chief officers in developing their skills as a team, in digital and in leadership.
- Through our Digital Skills Strategy we aim to become a digitally mature organisation where technology is used by all employees to work, learn and deliver services differently. Digital skills form a key element of future training across the organisation; for example HR&OD have recently completed a full training needs analysis to determine the level of digital awareness across all major digital systems used. This will lead to a training plan and increased levels of digital skills, all with the aim of improving customer service and efficiency. This activity has been underpinned through our Digital Champions initiative, where members of staff from each service have been trained to deal with queries pertaining to digital platforms and technologies. They deliver digital leadership at all levels of the organisation and have become a valuable resource in supporting all digital activity.
- We recognise the importance of young people as our future workforce. Our apprenticeship programme encompasses Modern and Graduate Apprenticeships with 70+ apprentices over 20 occupational frameworks, particularly focussed on those areas in which we encounter recruitment difficulties. The programme has recently been expanded to include Foundation Apprenticeships with 300 places available for students across Aberdeenshire and clear links to future careers within the council. The work of

the apprentices is recognised and celebrated through an annual awards ceremony. In our role as a major employer in the region we continue to engage with educational establishments, promoting the council as an employer and now working as part of a national group on 'employer branding', working with partners to promote careers within Local Authorities. We work closely with Developing the Young Workforce (DYW) to encourage interest from young people in specific sectors such as care and early years, and we are committed to support Career Ready and mentoring schemes. Within the HSCP workforce, we have opened up work experience placements for school pupils and we are also identifying more areas where we can participate in offering modern apprenticeships.

4.5 INFORMATION GOVERNANCE & SECURITY

- The information that the council creates, collects and consumes is a high value asset and we seek to manage it effectively to ensure we get best value from it.
- Over the last 10 years our approach to information management has matured and we have also implemented electronic document and records management systems that have improved the accessibility of information, reduced duplication and paper storage requirements. Our use of collaborative tools such as Office 365 has shaped the way we access information and use it to support decision-making, efficient processes and improved service delivery. We are making better use of analytical tools such as PowerBI and the developing Service Assessment Framework to use data as evidence to support service assessment and design. For example, all schools have taken part in a comprehensive training programme and now have access to PowerBI to support Devolved School Management. Live Life Aberdeenshire are using the emerging Service Assessment Framework to target resources more effectively. A further iteration of our approach to managing information is now underway as the shift from server-based storage to cloud storage continues and all records are migrated onto SharePoint. In the CLD Service for example efficiencies are achieved through co-editing of evaluation and planning documentation on Sharepoint. Progress has been greatly enabled across the council through the appointment of and support for Digital Champions in services.

- The security of our information and those systems that access or process it is critical. We led the PSN (Public Services Network) and are early adopters of Cyber Essential Plus. The latter is backed by the UK Government and certifies that the council has put suitable cyber security protections in place. Our ability to comply with this scheme demonstrates that we take cyber security seriously and also ensures compliance with industry standards.

- Managing the significant changes that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) introduced in May 2018 was a significant exercise for the council. Training was necessary for all employees and elected members, a review of all information held was undertaken to ensure privacy notices were put in place and [Information Asset Registers](#) were updated. The e-learning in relation to GDPR continues to be a mandatory course for all employees and must be refreshed regularly. Currently 89% of employees and 93% of councillors have undertaken their training. While this is a very successful rate of engagement, we will continue to promote the importance of the GDPR and seek to engage 100% of our employees and councillors with our training modules.

- There are economic, social and environmental benefits of making data accessible and reusable by publishing it as open data. We have developed a strategy for opening up our data, while ensuring safeguards are in place to protect privacy. [Our Open Data Strategy](#) is supported by [Innovate Aberdeenshire](#), the council's five-year digital strategy which defines how technology and digital services can support delivery of the council's vision and enable improvements in service delivery and efficiency. "Our Information" is one of the four themes of the digital strategy and aims to ensure that the council's information:
 - is accurate, joined-up and secure to support integrated, efficient service delivery and enable partnership working;
 - is managed effectively and stored efficiently to reduce processing and storage costs;
 - is available as Open Data whenever possible, allowing information to be used, re-used and shared by all;
 - is widely available and used to improve decision making.

4.6 SUSTAINABILITY

- As the first local authority in Scotland to introduce a carbon budget which is agreed and monitored in exactly the same way as the revenue, HRA and capital budgets, the council is demonstrating leadership and a commitment to the national outcome 'We value, enjoy, protect and enhance our environment' and the council's own priority 'Protect our special environment, including tackling climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions'. The council also has in place an Environmental and Climate Change Policy and Climate Change Action Plan.
- The Carbon Budget relates to Aberdeenshire Council's own emissions. Work being done on the North East Scotland Sustainable Energy Action Plan (NESSEAP) will capture emissions from communities and businesses that relate to Aberdeenshire. The CO₂e allowance is reduced each year to achieve the council's target to reduce its climate change emissions by 44% by 2025 from the 2010/11 baseline of 86,155 tCO₂e. In 2018/19 actual emissions reported (tCO₂e) were 57,992 against a Carbon Budget required to reach a target (tCO₂e) of 64,493. In 2019/2020 the target is estimated at 61,786 but we have already surpassed this. Officers are now considering options for the council to increase its target and become even more ambitious on its actions against climate change.

Climate Change Duties

Report Summary 2018- 2019

Aberdeenshire Council remains the only Local Authority in Scotland to develop and approve an annual Carbon Budget process.

We have an Environmental and Climate Change Policy, setting out a requirement to commit to Climate Change mitigation and adaptation.

A target to reduce carbon emissions by **44%** across the whole Council by 2025 (against a 2010/11 baseline).

Sustainability Committee: responsible for matters relating to sustainable development and climate change.

A Council wide Aberdeenshire Building Change (ABC) sustainable behaviour change programme began as a pilot.

Involved in Scotland Climate Week, North East Climate Week, Earth Hour and World Earth Day sharing communication and events around climate change.

Aberdeenshire Council emissions



Energy (electricity, heat, street lighting)



Travel (business and fleet)



Waste (Internal landfill, recycling, garden/food)



Water (supply and treatment)

Our total emissions for 2018/19 were 57,992 tCO₂e.

This is equivalent to the energy use of an average house being met for approx 5,000 years.

A 13% decrease in carbon emissions from 2017/18.

We reduced our travel emissions by 15% from 2017/18.

The Council's energy emissions decreased by 21% from 2017/18.

LED streetlight project reduced emissions by 29% from 2017/18.

Estimated saving of >7 tonnes in 2018/19 of carbon emissions through our online reuse system Warp-it. E-bike scheme for staff replaced 720 car miles during 2018/19.

Renewable Energy Use

The total Solar PV energy consumed for electricity by Aberdeenshire Council increased by 40% from 2017/18 (914,971 kWh).

Biomass energy consumed for heating by Aberdeenshire Council increased by 4% from 2017/18 (13,512,485 kWh).

Climate Change Adaptation

Completed a Local Climate Impact Profile for the region from 2011-18.

Reviewed the Climate Change Risk Register with the latest climate evidence.

Flood studies for specific towns are underway.

Protective policies now in place to conserve woodland and other habitats from development.

More information on climate change at Aberdeenshire Council can be found here:

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/environment/environmental-policy/>

Previous Climate Change reports since 2014/15, can be found here:

<https://sustainablescotlandnetwork.org/reports/aberdeenshire-council/>

5. PARTNERSHIP WORKING

5.1 Best Value findings 2008/2013

- *Community Planning has helped strengthen relationships by bringing CPP partners together on local issues, but there remains uncertainty among partners about how the overall framework should work.*
- *The development of risk management has been slow, and although the council works well with partners on individual projects, improved leadership is required to ensure that the CPP works more effectively together to deliver better outcomes and services.*
- *The council is committed to community engagement and is very active in seeking the views of the local community, making widespread use of surveys. However, this work could be more effective, with no systematic approach to consistently inform policy and service delivery. An opportunity is being missed to share experiences and best practice, and to improve coordination of all community engagement activity.*

Where We Are Now

- We are committed to Community Empowerment and providing a voice and means for all in communities to participate, grow and improve.
- Partnership working is a strength of Aberdeenshire Council and there are many initiatives and activities that the council will look to deliver through partnership as our preferred way of working.
- The Community Planning Partnership and its priorities have undergone an extensive review resulting in an unwavering focus through the Local Outcome Improvement Plan on priorities where the greatest improvement can be delivered through the co-ordinated efforts of partners.
- Collaborative working is a growing area where working together provides mutual benefits. Aberdeenshire Council has contributed to collaborative working in many ways, for instance, Aberdeenshire led the way in the formation of the Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Collaborative, a model then duplicated across Scotland and highlighted as best practice by Scottish Government.

- Our role in the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership is working to deliver integrated services through the budget set by the Integration Joint Board (IJB) and upon the IJB's direction. We deliver positive outcomes and our work has been recognised at national level.
- We are committed to the Regional Economic Strategy and action plan to deliver successful economic outcomes for the north east.
- The City Region Deal is a key driver for economic development and our leading role in this has contributed to its nationally recognised performance.

Challenges

The inevitable challenges of the financial landscape require innovative approaches for delivering quality of services for communities. A challenge will be to maintain provision that communities are used to and expect as well as changing the dynamic and the ways that we work with communities to empower and enable them to grow. The economic climate remains uncertain and it will be a continuing challenge to work effectively with partners to maximise benefits.

Where we're going

- We are committed to further developing our approach to Community Empowerment, which is particularly important in a time of financial uncertainty. We are also committed to developing the capacity of our communities so they can self-determine and thrive with less dependency on public services.
- We will continue to build on collaborative working with the belief that joined-up working will provide greater cohesion and quality for all.
- Our priority is to continue to work towards closer integration to achieve a whole systems approach which will further improve the impact of the services delivered by the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership
- Continue to secure further inward investment to enable the Regional Economic Strategy to be achieved, including the implementation of the City Region Deal.

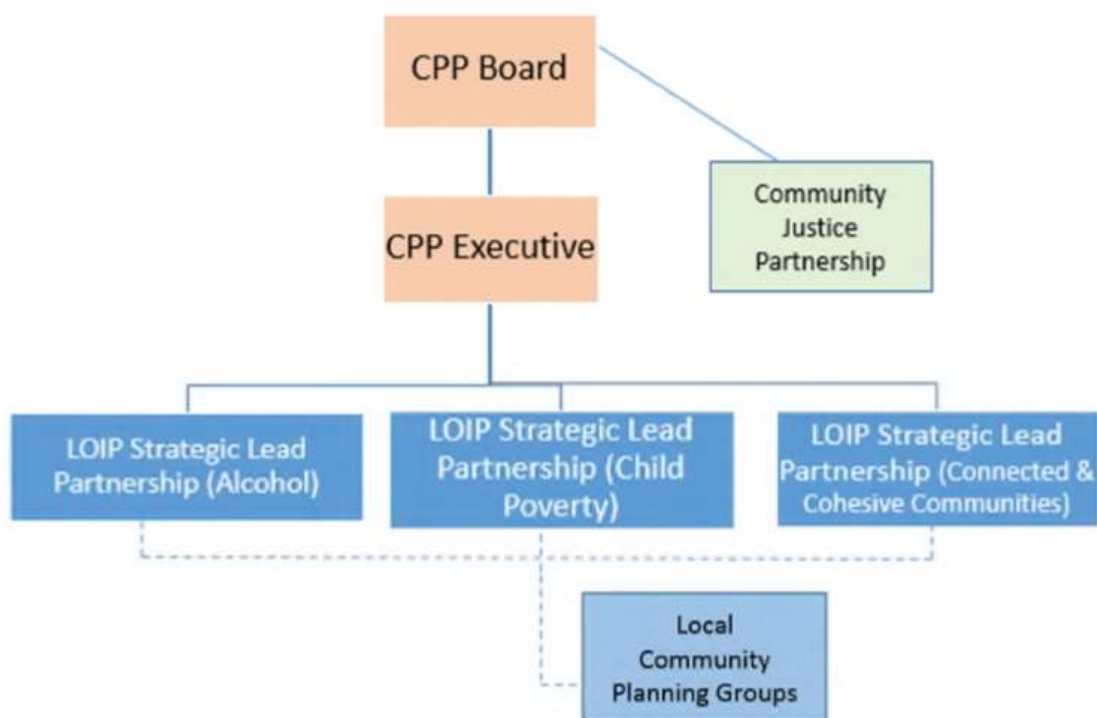
5.2 Partnerships

- Partnership and collaboration is the default working arrangement for the council, underpinning our approach to meeting the needs and outcomes for communities, whilst continuing to deliver quality services in an increasingly challenging environment. There are many different models of collaboration and partnerships in Aberdeenshire, ranging from service delivery partnerships such as those in place to enable refugee resettlement, to shared procurement and service collaboration in trading standards and roads, working towards a shared vision such as City Region Deal and Opportunity North East (ONE) as well as partnerships that are facilitated by the council to support communities influence and participate such as the embedded Rural Partnership arrangements.
- Aberdeenshire has a strong sense of place, supported by cohesive partnership arrangements and locally devolved decision-making structures. This is reflected across Community Planning Partners who have an overarching vision of ‘working together for the best quality of life for everyone in Aberdeenshire’. The strength of local partnerships enables communities to work with public agencies to build capacity in order to set their own agenda, develop plans tailored to meet their needs and aspirations, and access funding to deliver improvements.

As well as Aberdeenshire’s community planning partners, Aberdeenshire Council works well with other authorities such as the Cairngorms National Park Authority and other local authorities. An example of this was when Aberdeenshire Council teamed up with Moray Council and Aberdeen City Council to form the [Energy from Waste \(EfW\) Project](#). In response to The Zero Waste (Scotland) Regulations 2012 placing a ban on biodegradable municipal waste going to landfill post 2020, each council jointly and separately concluded that of the practical solutions available, the local and regional interests will best be served by collaboration on a joint EfW facility, to be built in Aberdeen.

- The council’s approach to partnership working is embedded in everything we do, and its role is supported through the Partnership Working [Policy](#) (officers) and Confident Governance (elected members).

- The overarching partnership body is the Community Planning Partnership (CPP) which joins the efforts and resources of the public, business, voluntary and community organisations to better plan, resource, and deliver quality services that meet the needs of local people.
- The CPP Board is supported by an Executive Group and three strategic lead partnership groups that are tasked with ensuring the three priorities for the period 2017-2027 are progressed:
 - [Changing Aberdeenshire's Relationship with Alcohol;](#)
 - [Reducing Child Poverty;](#)
 - Connected & Cohesive Communities.



In agreeing its Local Outcome Improvement Plan (LOIP) and locality planning arrangements, the CPP used extensive evidence from the strategic needs assessment, whilst the development of the actions supporting the 'Reducing Child Poverty' priority were informed and shaped by [commissioned](#) research.

This incorporated an emphasis on the lived experience of being in poverty or working with those affected by poverty. As a direct result of the research, a Poverty Forum is being created that is made up of around 30 families (including participants in the research). The Poverty Forum will work with partners to develop and test solutions that seek to ameliorate or remove the inequalities families, individuals and communities experience. The Forum will be supported by a dedicated Child Poverty Worker.

- All partners within the CPP are committed to the vision and priorities. The strength of the partnership over the years can be demonstrated through delivery of the [Single Outcome Agreement \(2013-2017\)](#) and now the [LOIP \(2017-2027\)](#). Performance indicators associated with the SOA demonstrated long term improvements over the life of the SOA, [with 72% of the indicators improving over time](#). When considering the Community Planning Outcome Profile tool overtime, performance for the CPP is broadly stable or improving over the 10-year period 2007-2017.
- The strength of the CPP has been highlighted in recent inspections including the inspection of Community Learning and Development in Aberdeenshire which confirmed the following:
 - *Partners have a shared sense of purpose around the three Local Outcome Improvement Plan priorities of tackling child poverty, health inequalities relating to alcohol and building connected and cohesive communities and;*
 - *There is a strong emphasis on planning for improvement across partners.*
- Linked to the CPP are the [Community Justice Partnership \(governed through the CPP Board\) and our local Children's Services Planning arrangements](#) (delegated to the Executive Group for Public Protection).
- Also of significant importance are our [links to the third sector](#). From Rural Partnerships and Aberdeenshire Voluntary Action (the Third Sector Interface) we continue to work in partnership based on collaboration and shared outcomes.
- There are many different [models of collaboration and partnerships in Aberdeenshire](#), created to support everything from service delivery to working together to achieve a shared vision.



An example of effective collaboration is work of the Roads Authorities in the North of Scotland. They have a long history of collaboration including sharing of contracts, resources, mutual aid and knowledge. Formal arrangements were put in place as part of the wider National Roads Collaboration Programme. The Council is an active participant within the Northern Collaborative (seven local authorities) which has a range of priority collaborative initiatives, including harbours and dredging and training/health and safety. The Northern Roads Collaboration Joint Committee oversees progress of priorities and receives regular progress updates. Audit Scotland confirmed in its 2018 Maintaining Scotland's Roads: a *follow-up Impact report*, that with regards to the Northern Collaborative: *Initiatives (were) progressing towards implementation, with harbours work now being considered nationally*. The Northern Collaborative has recently agreed an approach to the sharing of professional services and staff across the collaboration area; looking at current teams, budgets, core priorities, levels of delivery, specialist skills and opportunities for cross authority work to be undertaken more holistically across the partnership.

- Considering alternative delivery models, as part of an options appraisal process in service design, is standard activity. There are several examples of alternative service delivery models that have been implemented to improve outcomes or create efficiencies, [including Live Life Aberdeenshire, PeterDeen and Create Homes.](#)
- In order to showcase our approach to partnership activity, we will highlight three particular areas where working collaboratively with partners is delivering significant outcomes for communities.



- The creation of the Integration Joint Board (IJB) and Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership (H&SCP) provided opportunities to transform the operational and strategic arrangements for the services incorporated into the Integration Scheme. Services are centred around the common vision: 'Building on a person's abilities, we will deliver high-quality person-centred care to enhance their independence and wellbeing in their own communities.'
- From the inception of the HSCP a significant amount of work has been undertaken to support the establishment of integrated teams and processes recognising the challenges presented by bringing together two distinct organisations and cultures. The Aberdeenshire approach has been recognised nationally as good practice, with any differences between organisations set aside in order to achieve the best outcomes for the individual.
- Services are organised around 20 localities that sit within North, Central and South Aberdeenshire. Care is organised and delivered through local multi-disciplinary teams ensuring services are built around natural communities and responsive to local population need. Aberdeenshire HSCP has placed a strong emphasis on empowering localities in identifying and driving forward local priorities based on need, supporting the involvement of all partners and stakeholders, and informing local service delivery and decision-making. The first set of locality plans were endorsed by the IJB in May 2018. They outline areas for action for each locality and support the delivery of the HSCP's strategic plan.
- Work has been undertaken to align and devolve budgets to local areas with the aim of enabling local teams to use their budgets in the most effective way to meet local need. A significant programme of work has been and continues to be undertaken to create bases for integrated teams in both council and NHS buildings, enabling co-location at all levels of the partnership recognising the opportunities this provides for enhanced

communication, shared decision-making and accountability. Similar improvements in IT systems and infrastructure continue to be developed and implemented where possible to again enhance communication and enable teams to work smarter and use their time efficiently and effectively. A Joint Staff Forum was established to ensure communication and transparency with staff groups, HR and trade unions through the initial period of change and on an ongoing basis.

- Through the delivery of health and social care services in line with the first strategic plan and the later development of our locality plans the HSCP has made progress in delivering against the nine National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes. Examples of areas where we have made improvements and progress by working with partners to achieve better outcomes for people includes: Implementation of successful healthy lifestyle interventions as part of the Health Improvement Delivery Plan; Improvements to Dementia post-diagnostic support; enhanced support to carers through Adult Carer Support Plans or Young Carer Statements as part of the implementation of the Carers (Scotland) Act; Positive and consistent results from the iMatter staff engagement process which enables views to be gathered from staff about their experience working for the Partnership; Primary Care Improvement Plan – development of new models of care within the primary care teams.
- The Partnership has strengthened its links with council services, for example in developing the housing contribution statement that sits with the HSCP Strategic Plan. The Independent Living Group reports jointly to the HSCP Strategic Planning Group and through the Local Housing Strategy to Communities Committee on future planning and joint project delivery.

Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership are working together to review all housing and housing related support for older and disabled people in Aberdeenshire. The 'Homely Setting' project aims to ensure that the housing and housing related support in Aberdeenshire allows people to think ahead and plan, gives them choice and control in how their housing needs are met and prevents them from spending more time in hospital than is necessary. The project team are currently engaging with the public to find out about their experience of housing and housing related support in Aberdeenshire.

Aberdeenshire Council is reviewing all Sheltered Housing in Aberdeenshire across all landlords, to ensure it continues to meet current and future requirements and develops in line with Scottish Government Housing and Older People's Strategies. A recommendation will be made on the future model of Sheltered Housing at the end of the review. Membership includes representatives from the Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership and they participated in workshops looking at what is housing support, how is sheltered housing financed and the demand. Joint presentations from Aberdeenshire Health & Social Care Partnership and Aberdeenshire Council Sheltered Housing were delivered to the six informal area committees in January and February 2019.

- The Health & Social Care Partnership has placed emphasis on supporting teams in process improvement and effective team working, with the aim of encouraging and enabling a culture of continuous improvement and recognising the benefits this can bring in ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of what we do. Consolidating the Partnership's self-awareness of capacity to improve are the range of planned and unannounced Care Inspectorate inspections. Over the period April 2017 to March 2019, the proportion of care services graded 'good' (4) or better in Care Inspectorate inspections was 87% (2017/18) and 86% (2018/19). Recent inspections of Care Homes also demonstrate high quality care services with several Care Homes receiving 'excellent' and 'very good' grades in several quality criteria. Inspections tell us that service users value the services they receive and we have many testimonials supporting this.
- In addition to the inspections of care services, there have also been positive inspections of community hospitals across Aberdeenshire indicating "very good" cleanliness standards at Peterhead, Ugie and Fraserburgh community hospitals. Patients also confirmed ward cleanliness as "very good", "extremely impressive" and "exceptional". A joint inspection report on Adult Support & Protection Services which highlighted that, in general, adults at risk of harm were safer, had enhanced wellbeing and an improved quality of life, which was consequential of their adult protection journey.
- The strategic vision of the Aberdeenshire HSCP remains unchanged, and our strategic priorities continue to reflect and support delivery of the National Health and Wellbeing Outcomes.

- The HSCP Strategic Plan is one of a suite of documents, approved by the IJB, which guides the direction of the Partnership, based on the HSCP's five strategic priorities, and the measures against which performance is measured. This is supported by the HSCP Commissioning Plan, Workforce Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy. Underpinning these plans the HSCP has established four programme boards to take forward how we will manage these resources and change operational delivery in order to achieve our priorities.
- For example the Reshaping Care Programme Board oversees a number of projects which have been established with a focus on how the HSCP, working with all partners, can develop support for older people which is fit for the future, balancing the increasing demand for services whilst continuing to provide person centred care which promotes independence and enables people to maintain connections to their local community. Projects include: reducing delayed discharges; development of mainstream homecare and technology enabled care; implementation of rehabilitation and enablement pathway (supporting people to regain their skills and abilities following an episode of ill health enabling them to stay at home longer with increased independence and less requirement for care at home support); improving integrated working for our multidisciplinary core teams; developing management systems to support integrated working; and continued implementation of the Virtual Community Ward model.

In order to address demands on health services, the Health & Social Care Partnership has adopted an innovative approach through its [Virtual Community Wards](#) initiative. It brings together multidisciplinary health and social care teams (who provide care for patients who need regular or urgent attention) with the aim of avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions. This initiative has been adopted in 28 out of 31 GP practices, with over 4,600 'admissions' to the VCW, potentially helping to avoid over 1,600 admissions to hospital.

- The integration of health and social care has also offered opportunities for assets to be better utilised across both the NHS and council estate. Work on co-location across Aberdeenshire has been ongoing since the inception of the HSCP, with co-located sites for staff on council and NHS networks being created in a number of areas. This has involved implementation of Work Smart principles based on a 7:10 desk to person ratio

and including, for example, the introduction of shared wifi, shared printing, and standardised workstations which support flexible working and enable use by both NHS and council staff. Through co-location it has also been possible to declare some buildings as surplus to requirements, reducing lease costs and overall running costs.



- As the forerunner and model for the Scottish Government's regional educational improvement model arrangements, the Northern Alliance is a **Regional Improvement Collaborative** between eight

local authorities, across the North and West of Scotland: Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire, Argyll and Bute, Eilean Siar [Western Isles], Highland, Moray, Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands.

- The Northern Alliance exists to make a difference to the lives of children and young people by ensuring that the professionals who work with them collaborate for improvement and impact. It is one of six collaboratives across Scotland and is part of the national direction regarding educational improvement. The Northern Alliance has been in place for several years and was identified as a ground-breaking development of joined-up working making an impact on educational outcomes.
- Over the past year the Northern Alliance has developed an ELC Project Assurance Toolkit to frame discussions with local authorities regarding progress towards the delivery of the Early Learning and Childcare expansion. 100 Aberdeenshire primary schools have benefitted from training in Emerging Literacy techniques to support improvements in early literacy progression and Aberdeenshire's pioneering work in relation to learning estate has been used to develop a Learning Estates Strategy and Toolkit for the Northern Alliance.
- The latest Northern Alliance Regional Improvement Plan was approved in September 2019 and focusses on four key workstream areas; 1. Curriculum; 2. Raising Attainment and Closing the Gap; 3. Sustaining Education in our Communities; and 4. Leadership. This plan is aligned to the National Improvement Framework for Education in Scotland

and clear targets have been set using benchmark data from constituent local authorities.

5.3 DELIVERING ECONOMIC GROWTH

- The North East's economic performance is detailed in the council's [quarterly economic bulletin](#). Information on the council's involvement in the economic development of the North East can also be found in our [Economic Development annual review](#).
- The council is committed to supporting a strong, sustainable, diverse and successful economy and takes a lead role in economic development across the North East. The [Regional Economic Strategy](#) provides a long-term plan for the economic development of the North East to 2035, ensuring a sustainable future for the region and building on the legacy of the oil and gas industry which has dominated the region's economy for many decades. The four themes reflect the priorities in Scotland's economic strategy: Innovation, Internationalisation, Infrastructure and Inclusivity. It also outlines key sectors for the region, including: Energy; Food, Drink and primary industries; Tourism and Life Sciences.
- The cosignatories to the Regional Economic Strategy are Aberdeen City Council, Aberdeenshire Council and Opportunity North East (ONE), although the Strategy is influenced and driven by a wider collaboration in North East Scotland, including the national enterprise and skills agencies and regional economic partners. It was used as part of City Region Deal negotiations and set the context for Opportunity North East's (ONE's) economic leadership board. A review of the strategy is underway.
- An updated [action plan](#) was created in 2018 to ensure that the council capitalised on the major investment currently seen in the region and take account of a changing policy environment. The plan highlights where partners are working together to move the North East economy forward and ensure our ambitions to achieve economic renaissance are realised.
- Already demonstrating successes, the [City Region Deal](#) will have far reaching impacts, not just on the economy, but on; regional competitiveness; connectivity; infrastructure; housing; employment and lifestyle - all of which are key elements in attracting and

retaining the people we need to power and support the North-East. Our City Region Deal is valued to be worth £826.2 million over a ten-year period. Significant investment is being provided by UK Government (£125m), Scottish Government (£125m), Aberdeenshire Council (£10m), Aberdeen City Council (£10m), the two Universities in Aberdeen (£23,500), Private Sector and other local economic partners (£532.7m).

- Successful delivery to date includes the creation of The Oil & Gas Technology Centre, commencement of the Aberdeen Harbour expansion, securing investment in the region's digital infrastructure and significant progress in bringing forward transport and other sector innovation investments.
- Significant investment has delivered a new arena and events complex in the city, two new Business Improvement Districts in Inverurie and Peterhead, and an extended harbour and a new fish market in Peterhead. Building on an existing strong life sciences sector, a priority within the CRD is the development of the first Bio Hub in North East Scotland, providing space for start-up businesses, specialist shared facilities and support services. Also being supported is increased delivery of ultrafast fibre connectivity, supporting a region wide sensor network.
- Priority will be given to connecting ultrafast fibre to the business and industrial parks across the region. To make rural areas more competitive, the council will require investment in ultrafast fibre along the development corridors to key employment centres and leisure locations.
- While there are obvious connectivity benefits for people and businesses, there are also benefits for the 'Internet of Things'. Key to this will be the deployment of sensors across the region to collate data on traffic flows, environmental issues such as flooding, people flows, stability of the built environment and many other applications.
- [Opportunity North East](#) was launched in December 2015 following extensive consultation with the region's business community and discussion with the public sector. It is the private sector's response to the economic challenges in the region. We have a number of collaborations and jointly funded work streams, such as food, drink and agricultural industry development. In 2019, ONE is contributing £795,000 to maximise the impact of VisitAberdeenshire alongside Aberdeenshire and Aberdeen City

Councils. The aim is to grow visitor spend in Aberdeenshire to £1 billion per year by 2023.

- [Invest Aberdeen](#) is the initiative established as a partnership between Aberdeenshire Council and Aberdeen City Council in April 2018. This followed a period of intensive work between both councils and other key stakeholders on the transition of the Energetica programme and on shaping the regional inward investment offer. A website provides a one-stop hub for potential investors and for local stakeholder organisations and a dedicated team offer direct advice, knowledge and expertise to businesses locally, nationally and internationally. Significant engagement activity has been undertaken with priority growth sectors from the Regional Economic Strategy, with Invest Aberdeen officers now embedded within sector forums and business groups. During 2018/2019, 73 inward investment and regional growth enquiries were actively managed by the team and 46 investment leads have been followed up.
- [NESTRANS](#) is the Transport Partnership for Aberdeen City and Shire with a remit to develop and deliver a long-term regional transport strategy; take forward strategic transport improvements that support and; improve the economy, environment and quality of life across Aberdeen City and Shire. The strength of leadership through this partnership has helped to achieve significant benefits and investment for the region, through our collective voice, strong and persuasive business cases and our reputation for getting things done.

Recent significant deliverables include:

- Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route (AWPR) - providing a new strategic route to improve travel in and around Aberdeen and the north east of Scotland and take through traffic away from the city. The route is backed by the Scottish Government and was developed by Transport Scotland, in partnership with Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils. Fully opened in February 2019, it involved building 58 km of new road, 22 km of new slip roads, two new river crossings, and some 150 other structures to support the route. The AWPR is already having a significant impact on the operation of the road network within the North East reducing journey times and congestion.

- Rail – the delivery of Laurencekirk rail station in 2009 was partly funded by Nestrans and e council. Work is now underway on Kintore Station and exploratory work will begin shortly on the feasibility of stations south of Aberdeen, including a Strategic Transport Appraisal of the area between Aberdeen Railway Station and Laurencekirk. As a result of the reopening of Laurencekirk station in 2009, rail passengers were initially predicted to be around 36,000 per year, 2010/11 showed that the actual passengers were 73,594 and in 2017/18 passenger numbers at Laurencekirk were 95,848.

- It is anticipated the opening of Kintore Station in 2020 will have around 150,000 passengers in the first year.

- Strategic Roads – NESTRANS, along with the CRD has been instrumental in securing funding for the A90 Laurencekirk Junction Improvement Scheme. Route option and assessment work is underway.

- NESTRANS is developing a new [Regional Transport Strategy](#). Work began with the Strategic Transport Appraisal which looked at the key issues, problems and opportunities for the region in relation to transport. The results of this are being fed into the development of a new RTS which will look ahead to 2040.

- Although the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 removes the requirement for Strategic Development Plans, the [Strategic Development Planning Authority](#) (SDPA), a partnership between Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire Councils, currently has a key role in guiding development over the next 25 years. With a vision to create an even more exciting, modern and sustainable European city region - an excellent place to live, visit and do business, the SDPA continues to contribute to work progressing the City Region Deal, with a particular focus on progressing housing and transport themes. The SDPA is represented on the Transport Working Group (along with Transport Scotland, Nestrans and the two councils). This group is focused on preparing a Strategic Transport Appraisal; a £7 million project to identify future transport infrastructure projects to feed into national, regional and local transport and land-use plans and strategies.

5.4 COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

- The diversity of our communities, both geographic and of interest, give Aberdeenshire its unique sense of place. The council, along with partners, is committed to engaging and involving communities to create opportunities for increased participation in decision making and the design and delivery of services within those communities.

5.4.1 Engagement & Consultation

- We aim to work alongside communities in all that we do – and a big part of that is our locality focus, where we work tirelessly to understand and respond to local issues. To achieve this, we have a strong ethos of regular engagement, much of it informal, to get a real sense of what makes communities tick and what matters most to them locally.
- Part of that activity includes a commitment to formal engagement and over the years our approach has further evolved. Communities can choose to engage with us whenever they wish by various methods – social media, our formal [feedback](#) arrangements, frontline informal engagement, our [petitions](#) process, through their local councillors or community council, and we also proactively seek involvement and participation in decision-making processes.
- To support consultation, the council some years ago published a [Consultation Code of Practice](#), [Consultation Toolkit](#) and developed a [Consultation Database](#). Even though now dated in part, this helps ensure consistency and consultation activity is recorded and the outcome made available. The council's existing engagement strategy is under review and a revised policy is in development. It continues to be underpinned by the National Standards for Community Engagement. It will be supported by a range of guidance and processes, as well as tools like a digital citizen engagement space. The policy will be developed using the expertise of officers who work with tenants, carers, young people or people with protected characteristics as well as those with experience of tools and approaches such as place standard, dialogue and deliberation, customer journey mapping and the Scottish Approach to Service Design. An engagement and participation 'clash' calendar is maintained to ensure engagement and consultation activity is carefully scheduled. A dedicated officer provides support to engagement and

participation activities across the organisation. There is also guidance available to partners to support engagement in relation to the work of the CPP.

- There continues to be a role for surveys, although these are now more often online. We have continued to maintain the Citizen's Panel for the wider CPP, which is broadly representative of the Aberdeenshire population and has consistently provided high response rates, allowing for a significant degree of confidence. Panel members are regularly consulted and invited to complete questionnaires on a wide range of topics, which are of importance to local community planning partner organisations.
- There are many examples of [engagement and consultation](#) influencing policy setting and service design across all services.

5.4.2 Participation & Co-design

- Place-based planning is advanced and embedded with dozens of [Community Action Plans](#) (CAP) reflecting the local priorities of communities to influence strategic planning and service delivery. CAPs are led and owned by the communities, facilitated through our Rural Partnerships and area teams and delivered in partnership. During the recent consultation on the future Local Development Plan a community's own place plan has designed the preferred development sites for the locality.
- The [statements](#) taken from the [Aberdeenshire Children and Young People's Charter](#) (which is also available in the North East dialect, [Doric](#)) represent Aberdeenshire children and young people's voices and reflect what they have told us is most important to them. This declaration reflects a commitment across the Community Planning Partnership to uphold the values of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), and to work from a foundation of Children's Rights. It sets out the rightful expectations all children and young people can and should have, of all organisations, services, politicians, communities, and individuals working in Aberdeenshire.
- Aberdeenshire Council's engagement policy and guidance is currently under review and the Charter, Children's Rights and participation will be core within this update. Additionally, services are focussing on improving ways in which the views of children

and young people inform individual assessment and service design (for example as part of the work of the Child Protection Committee and Children’s Services Social Work). Our Youth participation structure is a mechanism to coordinate, facilitate, support and encourage local youth participation. We will be developing further indicators against which to measure progress, which will be done in line with national work being led by the Scottish Government on embedding UNCRC into domestic legislation/policy.

- The council’s Tenant Participation Strategy, agreed in September 2019, aims to enable tenants to become more involved and help shape the Housing service. The Strategy has the support of tenant volunteers who have helped to form its objectives and outcomes after their engagement through the Next Steps programme. The Next Steps programme (facilitated by the Tenant Information Service – TIS) engaged with tenants through a series of workshops and helped to shape the new TP Strategy.
- The council has a process in place to manage [Participation](#) Requests (Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, Part 3) although to date only two requests have been received. A request by community councils to co-design the outcome improvement process is being progressed.



- It is anticipated that the request should result in improvements in how the council promote and facilitate the participation of members of the public in the decisions and activities of the council, including in the allocation of budgets. It is hoped through the process, changes will also include increased confidence in the council policy development framework. The innovative approach used to design the outcome improvement process is now used as a case study by SCDC.

- Participatory Budgeting activity in Aberdeenshire has been based on both the participatory grant model and, more recently, there have been moves to [small scale mainstreaming approaches](#) to test potential frameworks and processes. Between 2016 and 2017, £426k was distributed through a Your Voice, Your Choice grant model approach, benefiting 75 (2017) +17 (2016) groups. The council also received £93k from the Scottish Government to support PB in Aberdeenshire. An independent evaluation found: *There was clear support for the principle behind the PB approach, particularly amongst members of the public. Central to this was appreciating being involved in a genuine decision-making process and that the final outcome of any vote would be respected.*
- It is intended to integrate the council's PB framework with the guidance and tools supporting the engagement and participation policy. It is then intended to work with the Cosla PB team to benefit from shared knowledge and best practice.
- The council has had an asset transfer policy predating the legislative requirements introduced by the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, Part 5. As at October 2019:

Stage	Applications
Expression of Interest (or equiv. pre legislation)	37
Current Stage 1 applications (or equiv. pre legislation)	1
Agreed	16
Incorporating Participation Request	1
Scottish Government Appeal	1 (not agreed)
Other arrangements (Transfer of ownership)	3

- Any group who has enquired about the asset transfer process has been fully supported in completing their application and looking for possible funding by their local Area Manager and asset transfer group. The council works with community bodies to determine the most appropriate approach to meet the needs – other options can include a transfer of land under the Disposal of Land by Local Authorities (Scotland) Regulations, which was recently used to assist a group develop a skatepark.

Ellon Baptist Church (EBC) lodged an Asset Transfer application for the lease of the Ythan Centre, Station Road, Ellon. The Ythan Centre was previously occupied by Aberdeenshire Council's Community, Learning and Development (CLD) service, who have since relocated to the Ellon Academy Community Campus. The building has lain vacant and unoccupied since February 2016.

EBC are a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SC028365), obtaining Charity status in 1998, whose intended use for the building is primarily as a community and religious hub providing events, educational resources, classes and workshops to local residents of the Ellon area. EBC previously held their activities and classes for the community in a variety of different halls and buildings across Ellon. By consolidating these venues in to the one building, namely the Ythan Centre, it is anticipated that the activities and classes will see an increase in users due to the central location. This would also increase the footfall in the town centre.

Formartine Asset Transfer Officer Group carried out an assessment of EBC's asset transfer application to ensure it was robust, and their plans were sustainable. A recommendation was presented to Formartine Area Committee in November 2018, whereby Elected Members agreed to the lease transfer.

An unused town centre building was taken back in to use by a local religious group who had been delivering community development activities across Ellon previously. This transfer allowed EBC to consolidate their activities to the one building to act as a "hub".

The council was able to relinquish the burden of running costs for a vacant building and support a community group to realise their aspirations to be able to deliver their activities from a town centre location.

- In recent months, the council has become an active member of the Scottish Approach to Service Design community. Several third and fourth tier officers have participated in workshops and sessions to become familiar with the approach. Business Analysts and Change Officers provide support and guidance to any teams who wish to use the approach.

The Scottish Approach to Service Design is designed to support and empower communities to actively participate in the definition, design and delivery of their public services. A recent example of how we have used the approach is in the development of a [housing app](#) to ensure better engagement with tenant and service users.

5.4.3 Equalities

- The audit of Best Value in 2013 confirmed the council had *the structures and processes to deliver the equalities duties but needed more engagement from elected members and staff at all levels. We had robust plans in place to identify the main equality issues for the council and its communities and to raise awareness of elected members and staff on equalities issues.* Six years on, the council continues to have robust arrangements to ensure fairness and consideration of protected characteristics and sustainability issues when setting policy or reviewing service delivery. Elected member equality champions work across political groups, committees and areas to support the public sector equalities duty. Our second Equality Outcomes report 2017-2021 prioritises outcomes based on evidence, experience and engagement:
- Our biennial equality reporting demonstrates how we are progressing in making equalities integral to our activities. Our most recent report demonstrates that we continue to ensure that Aberdeenshire is seen as a welcoming place which enables everyone in our communities to build and live fulfilled lives.
- All reports to Committees must include explicit statements demonstrating the author has considered the Fairer Scotland Duty and Equalities. Support and guidance are available to officers and Members to ensure the assessments are robust.
- The performance report also confirms our fair and consistent employment practices that take into account the diversity of groups and individuals in our community and shows our gender pay gap is decreasing. By doing this, we aim to be an employer of choice, and to be recognised as an employer that provides fair employment opportunities for all.

- Within the council there is a Gypsy/Traveller Sub Committee, which as part of its remit, monitors the Gypsy/Travellers Group Action Plan. Officers are continuing to explore ways to promote the good work being undertaken in this area, to promote a positive message and to continue to raise awareness of the Gypsy/Traveller culture and develop cohesive communities.
 - A diversity calendar helps us build awareness of equality matters, for example the marking of IDAHOBIT Day (The International Day Against Homophobia, Bi-phobia and Transphobia) traditionally marked with a flag raising ceremony. This year it focused on presentations from secondary school pupils with their interpretation of this year's theme, 'Justice and Protection for All'. The event was attended by councillors and staff. Jim Savege, the Aberdeenshire Council Chief Executive, tweeted the following post following the event: Powerful & inspiring leadership from some of our amazing young people to mark #IDAHOBIT day today. Proud that @Aberdeenshire showed its continued commitment to inclusion, equity & respect.
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6. CHANGE AND IMPROVEMENT

6.1 Best Value findings 2013

- *The council has a good awareness of where it needs to improve and supports a culture of continuous improvement among staff.*

Where are we now?

Overall, as a council, we remain committed to robust self-evaluation as an approach for recognising how we are doing, how we know and what we need to do next to improve. We have a culture of continuous improvement that encourages officers to contribute to change activity and to challenge the status quo. A range of approaches are used and support is available to ensure activity is managed well. Our Strategic Change Board provides high level oversight of key projects and ensures that any barriers to success are identified and tackled. We will continue to ensure that improvement strategies impact positively on our organisation.

Challenges

The challenges identified through 'How Good is Our Governance in Practice' as reported in May 2019 highlight that more needs to be done to link our budget process, governance and management arrangements to the vision and culture we are trying to achieve through One Aberdeenshire. The weak areas are identified as benefits realisation and the difficulty in reporting on outcomes that identify the difference made. Clarity in cross service working and improving links across service activity to avoid duplication and reduce silo working has always been a challenge in an organisation as large and complex as the Council, and we must continue to work towards addressing these issues.

Where we're going

- Implementing the Benefits Realisation Framework will place the council in a stronger position of identifying outcomes achieved resulting from transformation programmes.
- Having a better approach to a cross service transformation programme, linked to the Medium-Term Financial Strategy that is aligned to delivering the council priorities will contribute towards moving beyond silo working, avoiding duplication and being smarter use of performance data and community engagement. Coordination
- Building on the implementation and work of the Strategic Change Board, a prioritisation framework and toolkit will improve our ability to identify resources and prioritise projects against potential benefits, managing our resources to achieve better outcomes.
- Increasing capacity and skill set in portfolio, programme and project management embedding the [project management approach](#).

6.2 A culture of continuous improvement

- Aberdeenshire Council has a culture of continuous improvement, building on years of experience and knowledge across the organisation. Back in 2007, the council was amongst the first public agencies to adopt Kaizen for Daily Improvement as a way of bringing people together to problem-solve and collectively put in place new models to improve and support efficient processes. This process embedded the need to constantly review and find new ways of doing things and involved those closest to the

action – a mantra that continues today. Our approach is based on empowering employees and teams to make the changes they, and their customers, know will make a difference.

- Over the years, our approach has evolved to introduce more improvement tools, including the growing use of [service design](#) where skills are developed and shared across the organisation, to ensure that managers and teams across the organisation feel empowered to make the changes which will improve their working lives, and the processes that affect our customers.

6.3 Self-assessment and evaluation

- As a result of sustained and continuing budget pressures, our appetite for finding innovative ways of delivering services as a council has grown. The most recent [How Good is Our? \(HGiO\) corporate self-assessment and evaluation](#) confirmed we still have a good capacity and capability to improve working beyond silos and with a shared understanding of a common organisational purpose.
- Self-assessment and evaluation are a key component of the council's performance framework and the commitment to continuous improvement. The HGiO framework is used at team, service and corporate level to understand how we are doing, how we know and how we can improve. At a corporate level, the 'How Good Is Our...?' approach is used annually to understand capacity and capability to improve on a thematic basis. In 2017/18 the tool was applied to understand readiness to deliver the Council Plan 2017-2022 and in 2018/19 it was used to consider corporate governance. The theme for self-assessment and evaluation is agreed with SLT and over time the approach has become more robust and now includes fourth tier managers and elected members. Improvement plans are created and monitored by Audit Committee and the recent Annual Audit Report noted that the 2018/19 *self-evaluation activity has resulted in a comprehensive plan for improvement.*
- The council's Strategic Change Board provides governance to projects which are high cost, cross organisation, significant change, high risk and significant in delivering the Medium-Term Financial Strategy cross service. This has included:

- Delivery of the early years expansion programme – cross service working between Education and Property and significant known risks identified e.g. recruitment challenges;
 - Office space strategy – an ambitious programme that rationalises the office space portfolio, creating modern, fit for purpose office environments, with reliance on being a paperless, digital enabled organisation. Additional partners (NHS and Police Scotland) are being brought together increasing opportunities for collaboration, integration and formation of a public sector hub.
 - Live Life Aberdeenshire in the process of being embedded as business as usual that will continue to be supported through the ECS transformation plan.
 - Updates and learning from the service change and transformation programmes has recently been introduced to the Board to identify cross service opportunities.
- The Board provides direction on the development of the council’s programme and project management approach, with project management training delivered to upskill colleagues and improve practice. The Board’s project [Prioritisation Framework](#) is being reviewed so this can be applied across services to have a consistent approach to project prioritisation, determining resources against potential benefits. [A draft Benefits Framework](#), which has within it a set of defined benefit classifications, is being reviewed by the Board as a basis to bring more focus towards embedding a benefits approach within the council. This will improve the ability to monitor progress towards anticipated benefits. The Board meets quarterly and, having been in place for 18 months, is currently reviewing the operating model and considering how it can add value to areas such as digital, sustainability and empowerment. A [service design model](#), based on the council’s existing change approach, has been developed to support services undertake service design. The model relies on service assessment with the customer being at the heart of co-designing services that may result in increased community empowerment, service sustainability and opportunities for benefits to be gained from commercialisation.
 - The commitment to continuous improvement and Best Value is embedded throughout services. The annual planning process undertaken by Directorates requires a focus on the customer, performance and data and builds on a process that has become well embedded over many years. As part of this activity, improvement activity is considered

with each Directorate developing a change/transformation plan that is designed to take forward improvement and service development activity. For example:

- [Business Services](#) transformation plan has agreed to develop activity based under the themes of commercialisation, digitalisation and service redesign. The plan aims to ensure that professional support provided by the service continues to be valued and supportive of the council's priorities and service ambitions. It is also an opportunity to be bold and innovative in approach, to streamline processes and deliver significant benefits to the organisation, through modern and effective working practices.
- [Education and Children's Services transformation plan](#) has three workstreams, each led by a Chief Officer, which seek to:
 1. Improve integrated working arrangements across ECS services in Aberdeenshire at both strategic and operational levels and between both
 2. Further develop and improve business support services and resources allocation across ECS
 3. Develop a structure of support for clusters across ECS
- **Infrastructure Services** have progressed a programme focussing on People, Assets, Overheads and Supplies/Services, aligned with the council priorities.

Examples of projects include; considering the introduction of drone technology as part of survey works on assets, and the development of multi-skilled/tasked frontline roles and the improvement in how businesses can access council services. Any value and learning emerging from these projects is shared across the council.

In April 2019 the Service introduced the concept of administration hubs, re-aligning Support Services to better suit the current and future needs of the Service, by ensuring the right people are in the right place providing the right level of support.

The business system "[Uniform](#)" was introduced to provide a modernised and improved Planning service; the project was focused on using technology to achieve better

services, turning around poor performance, cost reduction and increased resource efficiency. Once the project was implemented in Planning and Building Standards it was evident that a similar approach to other council services could also reap efficiency benefits and so the project was extended to cover other areas including Environmental Health, Trading Standards, Estates, Licensing and Housing Assistance. The project has been spotlighted by the Scottish Government as having transformed service delivery across a substantial land mass, bringing savings in both time and costs.

The utilisation of new technology (e.g. [the Power App](#)) has created a work allocation and tracking system for all non-routine tasks, to enable the introduction of new and more efficient ways of working, generating service improvements and financial cost savings through staff reductions.

- There is a recognition that the council now has several action plans that seek to deliver improvements, reflecting the scale of the organisation and the devolved approach to change being used. To ensure there is no conflict or duplication, and to identify areas of opportunity across services, work is underway to consolidate plans and enable scrutiny. At an operational level, teams manage improvement directly. Dedicated service-based Improvement Officers and online support through the Improvement Framework provides tools and online learning through ALDO. Education have also adopted the iHi model for improvement (small tests of change), integrating practice through GiRFEC.
- [The One Aberdeenshire Principles](#), developed through the Appreciative Inquiry model involved a diagonal slice of 600 employees (10% of the workforce). A set of three Principles resulted from the process which were endorsed by the Chief Executive. These ultimately will contribute to changing the culture of the organisation. The Principles are embedded in our processes from recruitment, induction, through 1-2-1s and Personal Performance Plans. The third Principle relates to employees feeling empowered and taking informed decisions close to the action. The improvement methodologies applied within the council support and encourage ownership of improvement, enabling all of us to use information and skills to make the right things happen, make our own decisions and helping to ensure that ways of working are as simple as possible.

- Residents and communities also play a significant role in supporting our approach to improvement. The formal [feedback](#) process enables residents to comment on services and this information is used to make improvements where appropriate. Managers receive regular information from the Feedback Team to help understand repeat issues. Our innovative '[My Voice](#)' tool, enables looked after children and young people or people with a disability to have their say in their assessment, planning and review arrangements. Aggregated views can then inform service delivery and process improvement. Customer engagement is a fundamental part of the service design process, with the views of customers helping to identify areas for improvement and driving business change at every level of the organisation.
- The role of elected members to support continuous improvement and lead change is explicit in the Scheme of Governance. The three-stage scrutiny process enables Policy and Area Committees to understand challenges and opportunities and, at each stage, identify improvement activity.



6.4 Responding to National Commitments

- Officers at all levels across the organisation understand the direction and commitments set nationally through the National Performance Framework and wider through the UK government and our approach to service improvement and transformation and policy development ensures we are well placed to reflect national priorities within our strategic and operational delivery. Currently officers are preparing for the possible implications of Brexit, recognising the particular vulnerabilities of Aberdeenshire.

- The council continues to embed the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 refreshing the approach for promoting and managing Participation Requests and Asset Transfers and developing a food growing strategy.
- Through the network of Rural Partnerships, communities were encouraged to get involved in the 'Democracy Matters' conversation and the council continues to be actively involved in the wider Local Governance Review through SOLACE and Cosla.
- Significant legislative changes proposed through the Planning (Scotland) Act and Transport (Scotland) Act as well the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 and commitment to a net zero economy are being understood by officers and councillors and over the coming months we will engage on and amend policy as appropriate.

6.5 Improving services for our customers

- In recent years services have undertaken several projects and improvements to help streamline our processes. Some of these projects had a positive impact on the service delivery which directly affected the public. Others have improved our processes, making us more efficient.

Examples include:

In March 2014 Legal and Governance implemented the use of chip & pin and card payments for fleet services for taxi bookings and the MOT process.
In April 2018 the benefits team reviewed the process of Free School Meals and School Clothing Grants to make it more customer focused. As a result, less staff time and input were required as well as ensuring the entitlement was awarded accurately and timeously to the required pupils.
In April 2018 the HR Transactional Team reviewed their processes, this included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A revamped HR Assistant RAG status dashboard being implemented - A Recruiting Manager Interview template being implemented - Business Object reports are being revamped to make fit for purpose - TalentLink Actions & Cherwell report automation implemented

Since 2014, there have been significant changes as a result of new technology being introduced across the council, bringing considerable efficiencies to ways of working, including the use of PowerBi for live financial updates for all budget holders and iTrent for employee and manager self serve.

- Live Life Aberdeenshire is now approaching its first anniversary, and has already begun to transform the way that culture and sport is delivered in both actual and cultural ways. Examples of new ways of doing things include: the development of the 'Across the Grain' festival of Doric and traditional music for its second year – with 93 different performances and over 3000 attendances, doubling the performance of the initial year; the delivery of the 'Gie it a Go' initiative which offers our local population the opportunity to take part in a wide variety of activities ranging from Nordic skiing, through canoeing to creative writing. The first year's cultural shift has been spearheaded by the development of the innovative (and award winning) dedicated website – Livelifeaberdeenshire.org.uk together with a suite of social media sites – which has enabled LLA staff to be able to directly engage and market our sports and physical activity and cultural services direct to customers. This in turn has enabled staff to develop the confidence locally to adapt programming in each of our networks to meet local needs and circumstances – an aspect of our programming that we will be developing further in 2020 following performance review workshops with each area committee.
- Another area of significant development is the use of technology to support our business objectives, deliver efficiencies and create new ways for customers to engage with us. Our technology journey over the last 5 years is set out below.

TECHNOLOGY

Using technology to increase efficiency and improve delivery of services is important to the Council. Our digital strategy clearly defines how technology and digital services can support delivery of the Council vision and enable improvements in service delivery and efficiency.

It builds upon the work already undertaken on the review of ICT and sets out a fresh approach to the provision of services in a modern efficient local authority operating in a digital age.

Key milestones in our technological journey include:

- Improve productivity
- Improve User Experience
- Improve Staff and User Experience
- Improve Staff Experience

askFred/askHR
New portals created for ICT and HR to improve efficiency and the user experience.

- **myAberdeenshire wifi**
Free wifi available at locations across Aberdeenshire
- **Peoples Network**
The implementation of an updated, modern and robust Peoples Network for Libraries.
- **Council Committee Webcasting**
Users able to see and hear council meeting discussions, either live or from the archive, via a PC or from mobile devices such as iPhones, android devices or tablets.
- **Introduction of myAberdeenshire**
A range of council services accessed a single username and password, as well as ability to pay for school meals. We now have over 37,000 accounts registered and some schools have 100% take-up in online payments.

- **Roll-out of Office 365 to corporate staff**
Provide staff with a suite of O365 tools that enable collaboration and flexible working
- **Bring Your Own Device**
In response to the demands of users, ICT enables the use personal devices. This resulted in many council-device users handing back their smartphones and using BYOD instead.

- **Improving remote connections for flexible working**
In response to demand, ICT made it easier for the workforce to connect when away from the office, removing the need to enter passwords for a second time, and increasing capacity so more can work online at the same time. When the "beast from the east" hit, 1750 users worked remotely.
- **Employee Self Service portal**
Providing staff with easy access to online information when they need it, including timesheet, expense claims and sickness reporting functionality
- **Single sign-on**
Improving the user experience by offering access to key systems without multiple sign ins

- **Increased @aberdeenshire email accounts from 4,200 to 11,000 for existing employees**
Across the first 9 months of 2019, the number of users with @aberdeenshire email addresses has increased by 160%, offering more of our employees access to email, systems and collaboration tools.
- **Launch of the myAberdeenshire app**
Offering users access to a range of council services and information on the move
- **Online payslips**
From October 2019 all employees are able to access their payslips and P50s online through their ESS account.
- **Master Data Management**
Aberdeenshire became one of the first councils in Scotland to introduce Master Data Management, and a single point of reference for residents. By collating data from our various systems, we save staff time and work towards a 'tell us once' approach for our residents.



Hilltop wireless
Delivery of a wireless radio network from hilltop sites to school and office locations across Aberdeenshire

Skype for Business
Corporate users embraced the functionality of Skype, using Instant Messages, sharing desktops, recording meetings and speaking with colleagues regardless of location. The change also brought significant savings and now offering improved collaboration with curricular colleagues as it is introduced to all Academies and Primaries.

Schools Solution and Technology refresh programme
Review and refresh of the technologies in schools, introduction of Skype telephony for the curricular environment and Office 365, providing school-based staff with an @aberdeenshire email address and access to collaboration tools and taking us closer to the "One Council" vision.

Emerging Issues

- Aberdeenshire Council keeps up to date with emerging legislation passed through the Scottish Government and works to embed/amend the way in which it works accordingly. Recent examples include the Planning Bill, Community Empowerment Act and the Local Governance Review.
- Officers ensure that Aberdeenshire Council is represented at national professional groups, influencing and informing national policy; whilst councillors play a vital role through Cosla.
- The council monitors all emerging issues through the Policy Team, with a weekly bulletin sent to all chief officers advising of latest updates, new consultations and activity.
- Consultations to all national emerging issues are co-ordinated centrally with officers and councillors given the opportunity to provide comment. This ensures that Aberdeenshire is able to contribute and ensure a local view is added to all national activity that may have an impact on our communities
- In summary, the council has a well-established a culture of continuous improvement among employees and elected members. We use a wide range of self-assessment and review methodologies to drive change; we are aware of our priorities and that we need to increase the pace of improvement in the areas identified as key priorities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as a council we believe that we have many areas of strength and are very clear about the areas where improvement still needs to be made. We enjoy high levels of satisfaction across our communities and our services are well regarded.

Given the financial pressures, changing demography, workforce planning and community engagement, we are determined that we continue to add value to the public and make a tangible difference to the communities we serve. We recognise that part of our role is to provide stability and consistency in terms of the services we provide to our communities, based on their needs and expectations. To achieve this, we are constantly changing and improving the way we deliver our services, adapting to circumstances and anticipating any future challenges. It results in an organisation that embraces continuous improvement as part of its culture.

Our Council Plan and 11 priorities provide a strategic framework for officers to work towards. We have clear strategic direction and have plans in place to ensure we continue to manage our budgets and resources robustly. We remain committed to building trust with our communities and working with them to support them in delivering on their aspirations. Working together with others is fundamental to our belief in making improvements. Our performance will be measured to reflect on the differences that we are making to our people and our places.

Aberdeenshire Council remains a determined and robust organisation where we will continue to aim for the highest standards for all our communities.