

Foreword

It would be remiss of me as we prepare for the 2021/22 year ahead to not recognise the extraordinary work, commitment and extremes that the teams within my portfolio have risen to and gone to since March 23rd 2020, to ensure that our residents and our businesses were even more supported than in pre-Covid times.

Millions of pounds of Government grants and support have been analysed, designed and processed by the Revenue and Benefits team with what seems to have been business-as-usual but in a thoroughly unusual and ever-changing world and that is reflected in the £24.45m of direct income compared to the budgeted £12.58m in 2019/20

The Housing Strategy team have been able to restructure and recruit whilst “clearing the streets” and ensuring that our homeless, needy and those fleeing domestic violence were provided with a place of safety and as I write this foreword, the Housing Team are confident that not a single person will be either homeless or in Bed & Breakfast over Christmas.

The Community Services team, like many others, have had to adapt to remote working and designing new ways to ensure that we retain a safe district to live within and to understand the underlying issues that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the surface whilst formulating and designing new strategies and the new Community Hub to take us forward in the new normal whatever that may become.

Lightbulb has overcome considerable barriers with being unable to enter domestic residences but to still provide the same levels of service despite Covid-19. Tara has just proposed a reform to the DFG element of their work and I look forward to seeing how this reform materialises in being able to do more for those who need our support.

The Hospital Enablement Team has excelled during the pandemic and Kyle is working on new initiatives to further develop this incredibly successful service.

Technology and data will play an ever more important role in the new world and Covid-19 has taught us all many things, no more so than who and where our elderly, our vulnerable, our needy and our challenges and opportunities are and how we can adapt and enhance our services to the benefit of our residents. I very much look forward to many new and exciting initiatives being brought forward to this council by these teams.

Our Portfolio Priorities for 2020/21 are as follows:

For **Council Tax and Benefits** there may be further phases of the national implementation of Universal Credit and the phasing out of older legacy benefits. The current pandemic situation has stalled plans in this area presently but this could change if the national picture stabilises. Service delivery being operated remotely will continue to bring some challenges including the training of new recruits to the service. We will focus on the complaints that the service receives to help shape delivery going forward. The profile of the Business Rate element of the service has increased significantly together with the associated grant work

which may continue into 2021. Operation of the Test and Trace service is due to end at the beginning of February 2021 but this could extend further into 2021.

For the **Community Services** Team, to produce the Community Safety Partnership Strategy action plan for 2021/22. We will be focusing on emerging threats from the pandemic such as criminal exploitation, violent crime, the Night Time Economy and antisocial behaviour (particularly neighbour nuisance) and ensuring our staff, communities and businesses know how to spot the signs, what help is available and how to report. Having developed and implemented a BDC workplace Domestic Abuse Policy, we will be promoting the adoption of workplace Domestic Abuse policies in local businesses. We will produce a Serious Violence Reduction Plan for the Community Safety Partnership that is based on a strategic assessment of issues in our area. We will support the delivery of the Violence Reduction Network Mentors in Violence Programme in 1 High School and Our schools work offer (Safety Crew) will be delivered to the 3 high schools in the area and we will continue to develop and deliver Housing Skills 4 Life and other community support services.

In **Housing Services**, we aim to continue to manage the implications of the Homelessness Reduction Act and in doing so manage the additional footfall that has been experienced by the housing services team throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. This will include our aim to continue to reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation, increasing the supply of affordable housing and enabling more supported provision for our most vulnerable customers. We will continue to support and utilise our partnership links and the projects set up through the likes of the trailblazer funding, Rapid Rehousing Pathways and the Cold Weather Fund. We also have plans to work collaboratively to increase availability of accommodation in the Private Rented Sector. The review of service was approved by Council in May 2020 and recruitment into the new posts has been completed. 2020/21 will see the implementation of a new Housing Strategy which will set out our strategic housing priorities for the next five years and will build upon some of the excellent partnership work that has previously helped us to deliver our housing service.

For **Lightbulb**, we aim to further develop the new ways of working which include telephone and digital appointments as well as self-referral that were initially implemented, due to the pandemic. We will work with partners to ensure that DFG funding is fully utilised via Regulatory Reform Order policy as well as campaign for the review of the statutory guidelines. We also aim to further develop out Trusted Assessor Framework to offer more advanced services and also support Officers with career progression. We also aim to follow up on the review of service for the hospital Housing Enablement Team which was halted due to the pandemic.

Our main Challenges / Opportunities for 2020/21 will be:

- Utilisation of the Disabled Facilities Grant is restricted by legislation and is a challenge to being able to provide more options for residents to remain independent at home for longer.
- Manage assessments for vulnerable customers with no ICT and no family / friends support if further restrictions introduced.
- Any new phase or change to the Universal Credit programme of implementation may impact on local residents, Council services, rent arrears for tenants and ability to be able to manage their benefit matters digitally.

- A replacement of the document management system was delayed during 2020. This will be picked up in 2021. Failure to procure a robust IT system for this purpose will seriously hamper the digitalisation process for the team and result in an inadequate storage of personal and sensitive document copies belonging to local residents.
- Absorbing the work of the pandemic response arising from the Community Hub into business as usual in the Community Services team as the socio-economic effects continue to drive demand for support
- We cannot build enough affordable housing to meet the demand, this continues to be tested by an increase in homelessness cases.
- The increase in homelessness cases has and will continue to impact on the availability of temporary accommodation
- Any reduction in Government grant will lead to an impact on the housing services team and their ability to deal with homelessness demand.
- A reduction in affordable housing funding or Strategic Partnership funding will impact upon new affordable housing for both general needs and supported accommodation
- Lack of land availability or suitability for Registered Providers to acquire land will result in a drop in new affordable housing units and available public subsidy being repositioned elsewhere.

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Les Phillimore

Senior Officer: Housing & Community Services Group Manager

Portfolio Total

Community Services - Total	2020/21 Approved Budget	2020/21 Revised Estimate	2021/22 Proposed Budget	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
	[A]	[B]	[C]		
1. Establishment Costs	£2,631,820	£2,855,235	£2,941,922	£310,102 11.78%	£86,687 3.04%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£12,709,575	£25,102,141	£11,903,598	-£805,977 -6.34%	- £13,198,543 -52.58%
3. Direct Income	-£13,791,370	-£25,746,974	-£13,097,043	£694,327 -5.03%	£12,649,931 -49.13%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£1,550,025	£2,210,402	£1,748,477	£198,452 12.80%	-£461,925 -20.90%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	73.86	80.36	77.97	4.11 5.56%	-2.39 -2.97%

Council Tax & Benefits

Revenues and Benefits	2020/21 Approved Budget	2020/21 Revised Estimate	2021/22 Proposed Budget	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
	[A]	[B]	[C]		
1. Establishment Costs	£799,502	£805,762	£817,814	£18,312 2.29%	£12,052 1.50%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£12,288,175	£24,217,496	£11,511,148	£-777,027 -6.32%	- £12,706,348 -52.47%
3. Direct Income	£-12,577,878	£-24,447,584	£-11,787,751	£790,127 -6.28%	£12,659,833 -51.78%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£509,799	£575,674	£541,211	£31,412 6.16%	£-34,463 -5.99%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	25.69	25.69	24.10	-1.59 -6.19%	-1.59 -6.19%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2021/22 Establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, and increases to employer's national insurance and pension contributions in addition to the reduced costs of the fixed term post that has been removed.
2. Gross Direct Expenditure mainly comprises the amount of estimated rent allowance that is due to be paid out by the authority to assist local residents in staying in their homes because they are on a low income, or in receipt of certain benefits. The revised Estimate includes Covid-19 Discretionary and Small Business Grants paid to residents.
3. The Direct Income figures include all government grants, one off costs, new burdens, rewards and subsidy.
4. This represents the net impact of the variances listed above.
5. Fixed term post removed.

Community Services

Community Services	2020/21 Approved Budget	2020/21 Revised Estimate	2021/22 Proposed Budget	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
	[A]	[B]	[C]		
1. Establishment Costs	£402,425	£452,427	£443,075	£40,650 10.10%	-£9,352 -2.07%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£40,670	£148,204	£34,650	-£6,020 -14.80%	-£113,554 -76.62%
3. Direct Income	-£25,217	-£55,604	-£26,700	-£1,483 5.88%	£28,904 -51.98%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£417,878	£545,027	£451,025	£33,147 7.93%	-£94,002 -17.25%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	9.59	12.59	10.59	1.00 10.43%	-2.00 -15.89%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2021/22 Establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, and increases to employer's national insurance and pension contributions. Including one off grant funding carried forward from 2019/20 to fund Resident Support and Domestic Abuse posts.
2. One off budget provision carried forward from 2019/20 is included in the revised budget.
3. Income increase in line with expected. Revised Estimate includes Defra funding re Covid-19.
4. This represents the net impact of the variances listed above.
5. As per note 1.

Housing Services

Housing Services	2020/21 Approved Budget	2020/21 Revised Estimate	2021/22 Proposed Budget	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
	[A]	[B]	[C]		
1. Establishment Costs	£283,377	£441,749	£464,513	£181,136 63.92%	£22,764 5.15%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£192,420	£540,713	£193,000	£580 0.30%	-£347,713 -64.31%
3. Direct Income	-£123,140	-£163,756	-£148,100	-£24,960 20.27%	£15,656 -9.56%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£352,657	£818,706	£509,413	£156,756 44.45%	-£309,293 -37.78%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	8.50	12.00	12.00	3.50 41.18%	0.00 0.00%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2021/22 Establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, and increases to employer's national insurance and pension contributions. The revised estimate increase relates to the restructure approved during the year.
2. Revised includes Government grant funding carried forward from 2019/20 to be used for reducing homelessness and expenditure in relation to COVID-19 grant funding.
3. This represents income from Housing Benefit for households placed in temporary accommodation as well as Government grant funding.
4. This represents the net impact of the variances listed above.
5. As per note 1.

Lightbulb

Light Bulb	2020/21 Approved Budget	2020/21 Revised Estimate	2021/22 Proposed Budget	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
	[A]	[B]	[C]		
1. Establishment Costs	£1,035,664	£1,043,612	£1,102,553	£66,889 6.46%	£58,941 5.65%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£185,530	£193,728	£162,800	-£22,730 -12.25%	-£30,928 -15.96%
3. Direct Income	-£1,065,135	-£1,080,030	-£1,134,492	-£69,357 6.51%	-£54,462 5.04%
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£156,059	£157,310	£130,861	-£25,198 -16.15%	-£26,449 -16.81%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	28.58	28.58	29.78	1.20 4.20%	1.20 4.20%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2021/22 Establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, and increases to employer's national insurance and pension contributions. Plus an additional fixed term Technical Officer Post.
2. The revised includes one off budget provision for funding carried forward from 2019/20 in relation to the HET team and Lightbulb project.
3. Income from the Districts and County for the Lightbulb project, and funding for the HET team.
4. This represents the net impact of the variances listed above.
5. As per note 1, plus change in hours.

Management & Administration

Group Manager	2020/21 Approved Budget	2020/21 Revised Estimate	2021/22 Proposed Budget	Variance [C] - [A]	Variance [C] - [B]
	[A]	[B]	[C]		
1. Establishment Costs	£110,852	£111,685	£113,967	£3,115 2.81%	£2,282 2.04%
2. Other Gross Direct Expenditure	£2,780	£2,000	£2,000	-£780 -28.06%	£0 0.00%
3. Direct Income	£0	£0	£0	£0	£0
4. Net Direct Expenditure	£113,632	£113,685	£115,967	£2,335 2.05%	£2,282 2.01%
5. Overall No. of Posts (FTE)	1.50	1.50	1.50	0.00 0.00%	0.00 0.00%

Reasons for Variances

1. The 2021/22 Establishment budget takes account of the estimated pay award yet to be confirmed, contractual increments where applicable, and increases to employer's national insurance and pension contributions.
2. Saving made where possible.
3. No income in respect of this cost centre.
4. Net impact of the variances listed above.
5. No change.

Movement in budget and staff from last year

Council Tax & Benefits

The 2020/21 direct income does not include any new burdens funding, administration grant funding for pandemic related initiatives or grants, any one off cost contributions made to the Council from various sources for any new, sudden and immediate, or software changes or costs for start-up or administration.

Community Services

2021/22 income only includes external funding where that funding stream has been confirmed. Similarly, staffing costs do not include externally funded posts for which funding is unconfirmed (0.5 FTE Children's Worker funded by Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council) 1 FTE fixed term Community Services Staff have been included in the budget for 2021/22.

Housing Services

A review of the service was approved by Members in May 2020. This results in an increase in posts and recruitment into those roles has now been completed which reduces the reliance on temporary staff. This will assist the Housing Services Team in managing the impact of the Homelessness Reduction Act, the increase in homelessness applications as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as being able to retain experienced staff members that have previously been lost to higher paying neighbouring authorities.

Lightbulb

The funding for staffing comes from Leicestershire County Council and all those district and borough councils for which we are running Lightbulb. In terms of the central hub team this is a shared cost with all 8 partners making contributions based upon an assumed caseload. A small contingency budget remains out of the Transformational Challenge Award Grant, and this will be used to support the delivery of Lightbulb across Leicestershire.

The Hospital Housing team is funded through Leicestershire and Leicester City Better Care Fund and with a contribution from Leicestershire Partnership Trust (LPT). Going forward the funding will come from the LPT and the amalgamated Clinical Commissioners Group.

Portfolio Priorities

Services

Council Tax & Benefits

The team priorities for 2020/21 are:

- To increase the resilience of the Business Rate element of the service
- To respond to and prepare for any pandemic related initiatives that are allocated to the team for delivery
- To prepare for and implement any changes to the Full Service Universal Credit delivery including any change or reversion of the DWP approach
- To introduce an electronic change of circumstances form

Community Services Team

Team priorities for 2020/21 are:

- To produce the annual CSP strategy action plan
- To deliver a schools programme to all High Schools
- To deliver Housing Skills 4 Life, Friends Against Scams, Ask for Angela and Keep Safe Places
- To deliver the annual programme of campaigns and awareness for Community Safety
- To implement a viable staffing structure that meets the demands of the service
- To procure and implement a document and case management system for support services

Housing Services:

Team priorities for 2021/22 are:

- To take an active role in the delivery of the County wide funded Homelessness Prevention Trailblazers and Preventing Rough Sleeping projects
- Preventing and relieving homelessness in accordance with the Homelessness Reduction Act
- To ensure maximisation of affordable housing delivery
- To enable new supply of supported housing provision
- To increase Private Sector Housing provision
- To review the current Housing Strategy
- To provide further Member Training on the local housing and homelessness picture

Lightbulb

Lightbulb priorities for 2020/21 are:

- To ensure that advantage is taken in any flexibility in the DFG mandatory legislation to allow new initiatives and provide more options to residents to keep them at home and enable independence.
- To support the DFG review which calls for a review of statutory guidance for the use of the grants.

- To further develop the digital offers to customers such as virtual assessments and easy self-referral forms and assistive technology
- Review the staff structure for the Hospital Enablement Team following changes due to the pandemic and health restructure
- To further develop the Trusted assessor framework to improve the range of services to residents

Key points

<p>Doing things differently – plans for the coming year</p>	<p><u>Council Tax & Benefits</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise service to take account of legislative changes or Universal Credit changes • Digitalise change of circumstance reporting <p><u>Housing Services</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To continue to influence housing requirements on major planning applications • Review and reduce temporary accommodation options • Improve housing statistics reporting and information management • Development and delivery of a new housing strategy • Enabling new supported provision within the District • Operating an effective private rented sector service for both tenants and landlords <p><u>Community Services</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To produce the Annual Community Safety Partnership Strategy Action Plan for 2021-22 • To support the delivery of the Violence Reduction Network Mentors In Violence programme in 1 High School • To facilitate workplace domestic abuse policies in local businesses • To produce a CSP Serious Violence Reduction Action Plan <p><u>Lightbulb</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To develop the preventative offers to residents • Develop the Hospital Enablement Service • To develop the virtual and self-assessments
<p>Income generation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To maximise overpayment recovery. • To minimise local authority overpayment error by getting it right first time

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timely returns for the DWP and Inland Revenue • The correct interpretation and applications of any government led grants or funding • Collection from the timely and efficiently paid instalments of Council Tax and Business Rates
Capital plans for the portfolio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The contract for the provision of the Council Tax and Benefits software, currently Northgate has been extended beyond 2021. There is no pressing need to replace the current software, the Council will need to ensure that it complies with the prevailing procurement rules following the exit from the EU. Given the value of the contract the full procurement rules will apply. • The purchase of a replacement document storage and management product with full workflow capability for the Council Tax and Benefits Team and the Income and Collection Team.

Key Performance Indicators

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 YEAR TO DATE	COMMENTS
Number of cases where homelessness has been prevented	262	323	152	The Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) places a duty on the Council to work with applicants for longer in order to help prevent them from becoming homeless. The figure currently remains consistent with previous years.
Number of homelessness applications taken	132	230	134	The total number of applications no longer applies as the HRA splits cases into 'prevention' and 'relief'. This 2018/19 figure represents the number of homeless cases that fall into the relief category. It should be noted that in addition to this figure there have been a further 216 prevention cases that have also been opened and to which the Council

				has a duty to take reasonable steps (including setting up personalised housing plans) in order to prevent homelessness.
Number of Affordable Houses	119	47		Due to delays in receiving completions data this figure is no longer recorded on a month by month basis. The actual figure will be recorded at year end.

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 YEAR TO DATE	COMMENTS
End to end times for completion of DFGs (time taken from receipt of a completed application to approval of grant – average days)	16.5 weeks	20.20 weeks	10.99 weeks	16.5 weeks
Demand for DFGs (number of recommendations received)	150	169	117	83
Time taken to complete DFGs (from initial enquiry by customer to completion of work, broken down by stages)	26 weeks	25 weeks	21 weeks	4.8 weeks
Number of hospital admissions/ readmissions avoided as a result of Lightbulb intervention	647 patients seen, Referral to resolution times 6.8 days	786 patients seen, Referral to resolution times 7.79 days	935 patients seen, referral to resolution times of 7.2 days	808 patients so far with a referral to resolution time of 3 days so far
Number of holistic housing needs assessment carried out (through	1532	2497	4137	4032

Lightbulb Programme) and outcome				
Percentage of benefit claims which were paid correctly	95.74%	87.72%	84.77%	We now have a dedicated officer for monitoring work that is carried out. We provide active refresher and on the job training solutions for staff although the social distancing of the team this year has reduced the ability of the team to seek guidance. Yearly subsidy claims continue to demonstrate a good accuracy rate and there are relatively few changes to the DWP subsidy claim in terms of entitlements and subsidy that is due.
Number of ASB cases reported in Blaby		926	650	These are Police figures. There is likely to be an increase in recorded ASB in 20/21 due to the pandemic as Covid breaches were recorded as ASB. There was also a sharp increase in neighbour nuisance complaints at the beginning of the first national lockdown which has now steadied out.
Support services (Resident Support/Children's Worker/Domestic Abuse)– number of people supported		480	265	2020/21 turnout is likely to be below 19/20. Whilst Domestic Abuse has seen a significant rise in referrals (in line with National trends during the pandemic), children's workers services were put on hold whilst schools were closed meaning no referrals were received for 4 months.

Customers

- We noticed a reduction in paper surveys being returned, however customers have been providing feedback to Officers following telephone calls. So far residents have been really positive about having a telephone assessments.
- Residents have been calling in to show their appreciation for the Trusted Assessors and Technical Officers carrying out full health and safety checks to ensure residents safety and enable them to get the adaptations they need to remain independent.
- *"I have found her (HSC) to be nothing but kind, understanding and extremely competent in not just my physical needs, but working with empathy towards making my life better."*
- Digital access for changes in circumstance will reduce postage costs for customers
- Customers personal records will be held securely
- Increased use of email for contact will save on postage costs and information supplied more efficiently to the Council Offices
- Changes to the DWP Universal Credit process will receive careful and considered preparation
- Businesses receive clear guidance and timely responses to application for assistance
- Community Services carry out an annual Community Safety Partnership survey asking residents for their views on how safe the district is and what their community safety priorities are.
- Information on how many Community Trigger (ASB reviews) and the outcomes are now on the website
- Online referral forms are in place for all support services
- The new housing jigsaw system includes an on-line module which measures customer satisfaction. This module will be available later in 2020 and feedback will be available towards the end of the 2020/21 financial year.

Risks

- Demand for Lightbulb preventative work has increased as a result of Lightbulb Programme's proactive/early identification of need. The flexibility in the DFG legislation has not, which could hinder new initiatives
- Demand has increased for the Hospital Housing Enablement team and the system for patient flow has been redesigned. Without expansion into community hospitals, residents risk being stranded.
- Any further funding may be limited and demand may exceed allocation of funding for either residents or businesses
- Lack of affordable housing options will increase homelessness.
- Lack of suitable supported provision in the affordable sector could lead to a lack of appropriate accommodation for the more complex homelessness cases.
- Any reduction in homelessness grant funding will impact upon service delivery.
- Lack of land availability or suitability for Registered Providers to acquire will result in a drop in new affordable housing units and available public subsidy being repositioned elsewhere.