Aberdeenshire
COUNCIL

APPENDIX 1

Annual Performance Report 2019/20

24 September 2020

Index

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Executive summary

Aberdeenshire's Annual Performance Report is a key part of our ongoing commitment to provide clear and consistent information to help you review how we have performed. Our report for 2019/20 aims to provide a balanced picture of the Council's performance over the year – highlighting our achievements but also explaining where we need to do more to improve services.

The report covers the period up to March 2020, before the full impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the demands it threw at the Council almost overnight. I am immensely proud of the how the Council has responded and the innovative ways of working that have developed. It was only right in light of the pandemic that the Council refreshed its thinking around the priorities that were agreed in 2017. New priorities were agreed by our Councillors in July 2020 and we are now developing a robust and wide-ranging programme setting out our approach and priorities for the next few years.

The report provides a detailed overview of council performance in 2019/20 against the previous Council priorities, drawing on corporate performance indicators and benchmarking data including the Local Government Benchmarking Framework 2018/19 data.

Whilst the majority of indicators remain on target, the Council has seen a decline in performance in 49 out of 78 comparable indicators. At least 50% of measures in 18 indicators are identified as significantly below target.

The 49 indicators that show a decline in performance in 2019/20 are found across the services rather than being focused in a single service area. They reflect a single aspect of a service, such as the length of time to deal with household planning applications, and the annual budget identified for bridges being 3.2% of the identified work, and not the performance of the service as a whole. Most show only marginal declines and steps are being taken to identify and address any ongoing issues.

The Council has seen an improvement in 38 indicators including a reduction inoverall staff turnover, the completion of 249 social rented properties and increase in the number of local authority early learning settings achieving grades of good or better across Care Inspectorate quality improvement areas.

The refresh of our priorities is an excellent opportunity for the Council to change our approach and address the issues identified in the report. We will harness the resilience, enthusiasm and energy shown over the last six months and use that to become the best Council.

Jim Savege, Chief Executive

Introduction

The council has a strong commitment to being a high performing council with a culture of performance improvement inherent in everything we do. In recent years the council has invested in learning and development to support managers and staff with performance improvement.

The revised actions and performance measures against the new Priorities are currently being formulated and reporting will begin during the year 2020/21. Until that time, performance reporting will continue against the backdrop of the previous 11 Council Priorities which provide the backdrop of this report:

1. Support a strong, sustainable, diverse and successful economy
2. Have the best possible transport and digital links across our communities
3. Provide the best life chances for all our children and young people by raising levels of attainment and achievement
4. Work with parents and carers to support children through every stage of their development
5. Encourage active lifestyles and promote well-being with a focus on obesity & mental health
6. Have the right mix of housing across all of Aberdeenshire
7. Support the delivery of the Health & Social Care Strategic Plan
8. Work to reduce poverty and inequalities within our communities
9. Deliver responsible, long-term financial planning
10. Have the right people, in the right place, doing the right thing, at the right time
11. Protect our special environment, including tackling climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions

Our performance management system, Pentana, enables teams to see at a glance how they are doing and also allows reports to be produced for scrutiny by councillors.

Performance reports use a range of evidence to explain how we are doing in delivering the priority outcomes identified in the Council Plan 2017-2022.

Aberdeenshire Performs is the council's performance improvement framework. Beginning with Priority Outcome delivery planning, through reporting and monitoring performance, then taking account of external scrutiny, self-assessment and resident and service user feedback we identify improvement activity that enables us to continually improve what we do.

If you would like to explore our performance more fully you can access the detailed information that was used to compile this report

- Quarterly performance monitoring
- How Good Is Our Council Evaluation
- Reputation Tracker
- Local Scrutiny Plan
- Audit of Best Value
- Annual Audit Report

- Local Performance Indicators
- Statutory Performance Indicators (Local Government Benchmarking Framework)
- Service Plans
- Council Plan 2017-2022
- Complaints Monitoring

The Public Performance Reporting Calendar at the end of this report also contains links to performance information that will be published through 2019/20.

We would welcome your comments on our performance or any feedback about this report. Or if you would simply like further information then please contact us via email: performance@aberdeenshire.gov.uk or contact our Strategic Policy Lead (Performance) by phone: 01467 539735

A Day in the Life…

We have a responsibility to provide hundreds of services to the residents and communities of Aberdeenshire. This short [animation](#) explains more about what we do – but on any given day we:

- Spend £2.7m delivering services across Aberdeenshire

- Treat 1,674 kilometres of road against ice and snow (November-April)

- 2.6 household planning applications

- 2.5 business start-ups assisted by the Business Gateway

- £401,258 spend on delivering capital projects

- 1,260 kilometres swum in leisure centres

- 684 museum visits

- 7 complaints received

- 33,700 people follow us on Twitter

- 472 calls answered and resolved at first point of contact

- Register 22 birth, deaths, partnerships/marriages and British Citizenships ceremonies

- Recycle 50 tonnes household waste

- Collect £552,823 council tax income

- 35,834 pupils attend 151 primary schools 17 academies and 4 special schools

(Based on an average working day)

Successes

There have been a significant number of successes for the council in the last year. Highlights include:

Covid-19 Response

- On 30 March 2020 a new website and phoneline were launched, providing information to people across Grampian with information on how to access social, practical and emotional support on Coronavirus (COVID-19). The new **Assistance Hub** pulls together links to the latest advice from a range of partners including all three local authorities, Police, Health, Red Cross, volunteers and community information. It is a site for anyone in Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray, with information for residents and businesses alike. The main objective is as a focal point for information and assistance for anyone affected by coronavirus anywhere in Grampian. It is also a way for residents to offer their support which they can safely deliver in their communities. An important feature is that the site can be used to request help on behalf of someone else, allowing friends and neighbours to signpost to someone in need. Partner agencies who are providing first line care for people came together (virtually) and as a result we have, together, established a **single source of support**. The main aim of the website and phoneline is to allow people to reach out for help, as well as providing a way for people to offer their help safely in their own communities.

- Arrangements were put in place for families in need and who were eligible to receive free school meals – not those offered universally in P1-3 – to receive a payment to cover the cost of these (£12.50 per child per week) directly from Monday, 30 March. Payments will be sent in four-weekly instalments during term time. The Council would make this payment to families in the same way as is done for school clothing grants. This only applies to families who are eligible for clothing grants too.

Awards

- The **My Aberdeenshire** App, offering residents' access to local information and services, was named **Best Mobile App at the Holyrood Connect Awards** in June 2019. The award recognised Aberdeenshire Council's ability to use technology to develop innovative and creative solutions to public sector challenges.

- Aberdeenshire Council's Transportation Strategy team received two national awards this year. The team won the '**Excellence in Cycling and Walking' category in the National Transport Awards**' and were also successful in the **Scottish Transport Awards, winning the 'Excellence in walking, public realm and cycling'** category for the same project. Ellon, Fraserburgh, Huntly, Inverurie and Portlethen have all been selected as Integrated Travel Towns. There are masterplan proposals for these towns, that range from development designed to support active and integrated travel, as well as

improvements to maps, signs and promotional events which it is hoped will benefit the town's communities. In the citation, the judging panel of the National Transport Awards wrote: "The judges have been impressed with how Aberdeenshire has been working to improve travel opportunities in its towns by implementing a focused masterplan approach alongside new infrastructure. Ellon, Fraserburgh, Huntly, Inverurie and Portlethen have all been designated as Integrated Travel Towns and are already delivering real positive changes in travel behaviour. The number of people cycling more than two days a week and traveling by foot as their main mode has increased substantially in all towns."

- Environmental charity, Keep Scotland Beautiful, announced that 71 Scottish parks were presented with a **Green Flag Award** in 2019. **Aberdeenshire is home to two of them** - Aden Country Park and Haddo Country Park.

- The International Green Flag Award, administered in Scotland by Keep Scotland Beautiful, acts as a benchmark for recreational outdoor space. The award celebrates well maintained parks and greenspaces and supports the opportunities that they provide to enable exercise, improve mental wellbeing and provide safe spaces for play. Almost 2,000 parks across the world have achieved the award.

Aden Country Park

- Having been awarded £1.25 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) in 2018, Aden Country Park in Mintlaw opened their new children's play facilities this year. The new play area has been developed as part of the £2.13 million Aden Country Park project, supporting the major restoration and redevelopment of both Aden's historic buildings and landscape, improving park facilities such as the creation of the children's play area, as well as planned improvements to park interpretation, accessibility and signage, and a programme to enhance biodiversity.

Live Life Aberdeenshire

- Live Life Aberdeenshire opened its latest state-of-the-art **sports and recreation facility in Banchory**. Complementing Banchory's other Live Life Aberdeenshire facilities, including the town hall, library and museum, it provides an excellent modern facility for residents and visitors. It offers a six-lane, 25-metre pool and a training pool, as well as two squash courts with the capability to transform into a doubles court or extra fitness hall at the push of a button. There is a large three-court sports hall lined for a wide range of activities and a well-equipped gym including free weights and modern fitness stations. It is designed to be inclusive of the whole community, with excellent disabled access.

- From August 2019, Live Life Aberdeenshire libraries began acting as NHS hearing aid battery collection points. Any resident, who uses an NHS

prescribed hearing aid, has been able to go to their library, including the three mobile libraries, with their NHS audiology hearing aid leaflet and be given a pack of batteries. This initiative is a partnership between Live Life Aberdeenshire Library and Information Service and the NHS Audiology Department at Woodend Hospital in Aberdeen.

Apprenticeships

- Aberdeenshire Council has increased the number of Foundation Apprenticeship opportunities it delivers to over 200, during the last academic year, with the help of partners including NHS Grampian. Foundation Apprenticeships provide work-based learning opportunities for young people, while they are still at school, supporting skills demands from employers and creating pathways into critical occupations for the Scottish economy. Taken over one or two years by senior pupils during their senior phase, completion of a Foundation Apprenticeship leads to a qualification at the same level as a Higher.

Polystyrene Recycling Trial

- As of 1 February 2020, Aberdeenshire Council began a polystyrene recycling trial at three of its Household Recycling Centres (HRCs). The council signed a contract with Styropack for a one-year pilot of the recycling service. New bins are being designated for polystyrene within the three participating HRCs at Banchory, Portlethen and Stonehaven. The centres will be accepting Expanded Polystyrene (EPS) only, which includes all polystyrene packing materials such as shape-molded packaging, blocks, and planks of fill materials, packing boxes and packaging balls.

Schools

- According to recent Local Government Benchmarking reports, Aberdeenshire residents have given their schools a satisfaction rating of 75.63% which is 3.8% above the Scottish average of 71.83%.

- Inspectors praised Meiklemill Primary School pupils for being 'happy, enthusiastic and ready to learn' following an inspection. Education Scotland also acknowledged the school's efforts in creating partnerships with community groups, partner agencies and parents and encouraging them to become involved in supporting children's learning. The positive approach to inclusion and equality in the school and nursery and the encouragement and celebration of children's achievements were also highlighted in the report. The school received a "very good" rating for ensuring wellbeing, equality and inclusion and "good" ratings for leadership of change, learning teaching and assessment, and raising attainment and achievement.

- New reports to the Education and Children's committee indicate that the percentage of school leavers in Aberdeenshire who have found employment

or embarked on further or higher education courses has continued to rise. For example, in 2018/2019 there were 2,620 school leavers from Aberdeenshire schools with a total 96.4% finding 'positive destinations', a slight increase compared with 2017/2018 and nearly one percent higher than 2016/2017.

'Positive destinations' include young people finding work or continuing studies in further or higher education. In particular, 94.9% of those who studied care, started new jobs or progressed to further/higher education in 2018/2019, which compares with 70.7% in 2016/2017, a 24.2% increase.

Challenges & Opportunities

Covid-19

- The COVID-19 pandemic during the early part of 2020 may result in a 14% drop in Scotland's GDP over the year. A similar drop in Aberdeenshire GVA would see GVA fall from £7.4 to approximately £6.4 billion – a level not seen since 2012.

- In light of COVID-19 and the subsequent school closures, the Scottish Government announced that local authorities would no longer be legally obliged to deliver 1,140 hours of funded childcare from August 2020. The extent of the delay to 1,140 becoming a statutory entitlement across Scotland is yet to be determined.

- **The consequences of COVID-19 may negatively affect youth employment in the region**. Past experience tells us that while recessions naturally drive up unemployment across the population, **the effects are more severe for those who have only recently left full-time education**.

- **Early intervention to tackle mental health issues can address problems earlier and be more cost effective in the long term.** Recent events will have increased the magnitude of mental health problems in Aberdeenshire. The scale of the problem means that support for people with mental health problems will need to come from a variety of sources **through partnership working** – council, Live Life Aberdeenshire, health services and youth justice.

- The COVID-19 crisis has confirmed the **foundational importance of digital technologies** in all aspects of life, and enhanced investment will likewise be a foundation of economic recovery and a robust and resilient wellbeing economy.

- Looking to the future, organisations that lead on the **post-COVID-19 environment will boldly question long-held assumptions about how work should be done and the role of the office**. There is no one-size-fits-all solution. The answer, different for every organisation, will be based on what talent is needed, which roles are most important, how much collaboration is necessary for Best Value/excellence, and where offices are located today, among other factors.

- Although the immediate landscape appears uncertain, the Council's system of financial management appears robust and fit for purpose, a critical function given the current climate. Other major assets for the region include, but are by no means limited to, the profile of residents, – relatively highly skilled, generally well paid, relatively healthy, tolerant and peaceable – and the

strengths of both the public and private sectors. These strengths will doubtless touch and positively affect the lives of residents and visitors alike over a longer time horizon despite the immediate and medium-term consequences of COVID-19.

- Aberdeenshire's ambitions are justifiably global in scope. In keeping with one strand of Aberdeenshire's economic agenda (diversification), the region is seeking to attract sizable inward investment over the coming years. Aberdeenshire Council's involvement in the Invest Aberdeen initiative should provide additional opportunities in that regard. Brexit and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic may inhibit inward investment in future years, although enquiries relating to new renewable energy related inward investment projects continue to be actively managed.

- Aberdeenshire is supporting and developing existing industries whilst encouraging innovation and diversification and continuing to make the region a more attractive proposition for visitors and investors, as well as current and prospective residents. This, among other things, entails continuing to improve infrastructure (digital, transport and housing), and ensuring future skills requirements are met in an age of increasing automation. The Regional Economic Strategy and various other policy frameworks, as well as activities under the remit of Opportunity North East (ONE), provide a solid foundation on which to advance. It is important that strategic planning arrangements remain integrated and all relevant policies are closely aligned.

- Scottish Government revenue funding to councils has reduced in real terms over the period 2013/14 to 2020/21 by 3.3%. Since 2017/18 however, it has increased by 3.9% in real terms, to £10.7 billion in 2020/21. The strain on budgets is evident as councils continue to dip into their reserves to make ends meet. Medium-term funding levels are uncertain, making continued use of reserves to manage the funding gap unsustainable. Aberdeenshire again received a relatively low Settlement Grant per head of population (3rd lowest in Scotland). The greatest stress on future budgets (besides real terms reductions) will likely come from demographic changes. Challenges will be particularly acute in Aberdeenshire, with a relatively large proportional increase in the over-75 age group.

- With regards to the challenges within Education, a selection of attainment-related indicators on the face of it suggests an assortment of outcomes for Aberdeenshire pupils relative to their peers nationally. Where attainment is measured in terms of courses and units, areas that present the greatest opportunity for improvement include S5 attainment and the attainment of young people with differing abilities. These were to be scrutinised during Attainment Review meetings in each secondary school. On average, children/young people in more deprived areas attain less well than those in less deprived areas, although the gap is narrowing.

- Transport Infrastructure in Aberdeenshire is improving, the long awaited AWPR has significantly improved travel times for residents and businesses. There are infrastructure upgrades and improvement projects planned over the next decade that will benefit the region.

- Aberdeenshire is often thought of as a region without poverty. Indeed, it includes two parliamentary constituencies with the lowest levels of child poverty in Scotland and the UK. However, there are 5,105 households on absolute low-income in Aberdeenshire.

- Income inequality appears to be rising after a decline following the recession. With the projected increase in older people, the number of pensioners in persistent poverty will rise increasing demand for support services.

- Housing has an important influence on poverty and health inequalities in Scotland. This is through the effects of housing costs, housing quality, fuel poverty and the role of housing in community life. The mixture of house sizes, types and tenures is an important consideration in the creation of strong communities.

- There is a risk that funding for affordable housing cannot be spent in a slowed down market. Most affordable housing in Aberdeenshire is provided through section 75 agreements with developers and any slowing of the build-out rate may make affordable housing targets difficult to deliver.

- There are health inequalities in Aberdeenshire which, if left unchallenged, present a ticking time bomb for the NHS, the Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership (AHSCP), and the Council.

- Obesity and low levels of physical activity are common to both mental disorders and other non-communicable diseases. Many of these conditions can be delayed or prevented with more focus on prevention and changes to lifestyle and behaviours.

- The Aberdeenshire Health and Social Care Partnership (AHSCP) has a fundamental role to play in any discussion around the health and wellbeing of Aberdeenshire residents. The AHSCP have clearly identified the need for effective use of resources to deliver health and social care in Aberdeenshire.

Delivering Our Priorities

The Council Plan 2017-2022 identified eleven core Priorities and Outcomes for the council:

Our Vision

To be the best council from Mountain to Sea

Priorities

- Support a strong, sustainable, diverse and successful economy
- Have the best possible transport and digital links across our communities
- Work with children and carers to support children through every stage of their development
- Provide the best life chances for all our children and young people by raising levels of attainment and achievement
- Encourage active lifestyles and promote well-being, with a focus on obesity and mental health
- Have the right mix of housing across all Aberdeenshire
- Support the delivery of the Health and Social Care Strategic Plan
- Work to reduce policies and inequalities within our communities
- Deliver responsible, long-term, financial planning
- Have the right people, in the right place, doing the right thing at the right time
- Protect our special environment, including climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions

These core outcomes can broadly be aligned to the Policy Committees that support and govern relevant workstreams across the council with each Priority being led by the relevant service Directorate.

How Did We Do In 2019/20?

The performance scorecard is based on an analysis of performance measures reported regularly as part of Service Plans. A more detailed analysis of performance is available at the end of this report.

Performance Scorecard:

Trends are based on performance as at the end of the reporting period for 2019/20 and compared to an average of performance over the previous three years, where this information is available. Many of the indicators presented within this report were introduced to support the new Council priorities and therefore 2019/20 or 2018/19 data is the baseline and no long-term trend comparison can be made.

It is important when reviewing the performance of indicators to take into account that these support the relevant Priority overall and should not be viewed in isolation. Where a target has not been met and the status is 'Red', further investigation has

identified improvement actions which will be monitored and expected improvements should be seen in the next reporting period.

In the 2017/2022 Council Plan, Priorities have been identified, and are measured on an 'outcome' basis. This takes into account a broad range of performance information, performance indicators being one part of that process. Action plans have been developed for each Priority and the outcomes of those actions, are regularly monitored at each Policy Committee.

Performance Scorecard:

✅	**Council Plan 2017-2022**
✅	Support a strong, sustainable, diverse and successful economy
✅	Have the best possible transport and digital links across our communities
✅	Provide the best life chances for all our children and young people by raising levels of attainment and achievement
✅	Work with parents and carers to support children through every stage of their development
✅	Encourage active lifestyles and promote well-being with a focus on obesity & mental health
✅	Have the right mix of housing across all of Aberdeenshire
✅	Support the delivery of the Health & Social Care Strategic Plan
✅	Work to reduce poverty and inequalities within our communities
✅	Deliver responsible, long-term financial planning
✅	Have the right people, in the right place, doing the right thing, at the right time
✅	Protect our special environment, including tackling climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions

Performance Trends:

Key:				
🔴	At least 50% of measures in this outcome are significantly below target (red)	⬆️		Performance Improving
🔺	At least 25% of measures in this outcome are slightly below target (amber)	➖		No Change or New Measure
✅	The majority of performance measures are on target	⬇️		Performance Declining
📈	Data only – no target has been set	❓		New measure/baseline line year of introduction

Council Priority	Number of Indicators reported in 2019/20								Number of Indicators reported in 2018/19							
	Status				Long Trend				Status				Long Trend			
	✅	🔺	🔴	📈	⬆️	⬇️	➖	❓	✅	🔺	🔴	📈	⬆️	⬇️	➖	❓
Priority 01 - Support a strong, sustainable, diverse and successful economy	14	1	5	5	8	16	1	0	16	0	4	5	13	10	2	0
Priority 02 - Have the best possible transport and digital links across our communities *4 Indicators relating to road traffic safety will be validated and updated in September	6	2	1	4	2	7	0	4	8	0	1	4	3	10	0	0
Priority 03 - Provide the best life chances for all our children and young people by raising levels of attainment and achievement *13 indicators relate to attainment and will be updated in 2021	3	3	2	0	4	1	0	17	13	2	1	2	12	3	0	3

Council Priority	Number of Indicators reported in 2019/20								Number of Indicators reported in 2018/19							
	Status				Long Trend				Status				Long Trend			
	✅	🔺	🔴	📈	⬆️	⬇️	➖	❓	✅	🔺	🔴	📈	⬆️	⬇️	➖	❓
Priority 04 - Work with parents and carers to support children through every stage of their development	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Priority 05 - Encourage active lifestyles and promote well-being with a focus on obesity and mental health	6	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Priority 06 - Have the right mix of housing across all of Aberdeenshire	12	0	7	2	15	5	0	1	13	0	3	5	9	5	0	7
Priority 07 - Support the delivery of the Health and Social Care strategic plan *2 Indicators data not available	4	3	0	4	4	5	2	2	6	2	0	5	2	0	0	11
Priority 08 - Work to reduce poverty and inequalities within our communities	Reporting against Poverty and Inequalities within Communities is by way of Annual Report – there are no specific performance measures allocated															
Priority 09 - Deliver responsible, long-term financial planning	1	1	2	0	0	3	0	1	2	0	1	0	0	3	0	0
Priority 10 - Have the right people, in the right place, doing the right thing, at the right time	9	1	1	0	3	7	1	0	9	1	1	0	4	7	0	0
Priority 11- Protect our special environment, including tackling climate change by	1	0	1	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	1	0	0

Council Priority	Number of Indicators reported in 2019/20								Number of Indicators reported in 2018/19							
	Status			Long Trend					Status			Long Trend				
	✅	🔺	🔴	📈	⬆️	⬇️	➖	❓	✅	🔺	🔴	📈	⬆️	⬇️	➖	❓
reducing greenhouse gas emissions																

What You Told Us

Every month an independent research company asks 150 residents (25 in each administrative area) how we are performing as a council. This is what you said in 2019/20:
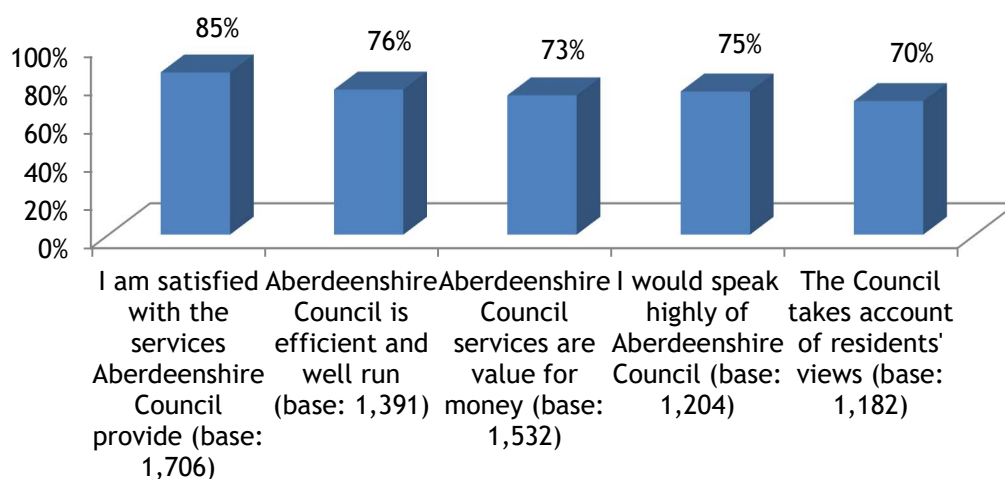
Residents are also asked to rate their overall satisfaction on key council services throughout the year with the results for April 2019– March 2020 displayed below:
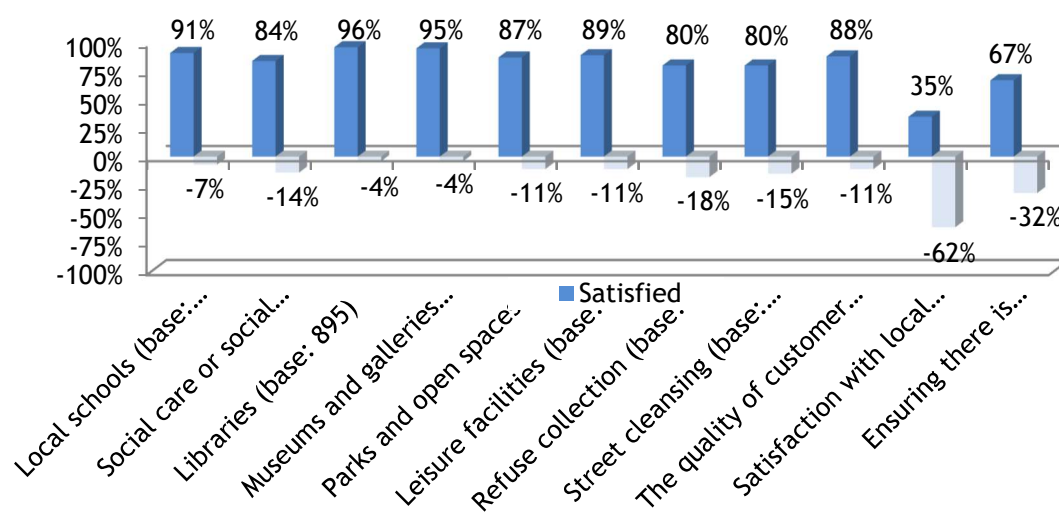
Our Complaints Handling 2019/20

The current Aberdeenshire Council Complaints procedure is as follows:

- Front Line stage (Stage one) complaints could mean immediate action to resolve the problem or complaints which are resolved in no more than five working days.
- Investigation stage (Stage two) deals with two types of complaints: those that have not been resolved at Stage 1 and those that are complex and require detailed investigation.
- After the Council has fully investigated the complaint, and if the customer is still not satisfied with the decision or the way the Council dealt with the complaint, then it can be referred onto the Scottish Public Service Ombudsman (SPSO).

In 2019/20 complaints received were:

Total complaints	1,891
Total resolved at stage one and within timescale	1,452
Total that went to stage 2 and were resolved within timescale	439
Total complaints partially or fully upheld	844
Investigations initiated by Scottish Public-Sector Ombudsman	40

The table below provides the breakdown of complaints by Service Directorate.

Complaints Received by Directorate			
Directorate	**2018/2019**	**2019/2020**	**Trend**
Business Services	258	274	▲
Education & Children's Services (ECS)	389 (including LLA)	284	▼
Health and Social Care	70	57	▼
Infrastructure Services	1112	1204	▲
Live Life Aberdeenshire (LLA)	Included with ECS	72	N/A
Total	**1829**	1891	▲

The council actively uses feedback to implement positive changes to the service they provide to their customers.

The following decision report summary, taken from the SPSO's website, demonstrates good practice and is a prime example of the council's Feedback Team working with a service to respond and address a customer complaint appropriately.

While the SPSO acknowledged there was room for improvement, they confirmed that they were satisfied with the Council's handing of the complaint and would not be taking the case any further.

Mr C complained that the council failed to provide a reasonable level of housing support. Mr C lives in sheltered accommodation and had experienced some significant problems with his property since moving there. Mr C said that the Sheltered Housing Officer (SHO) was not on site enough and felt that he should not have to pay the housing support charge. After we became involved, the council met with Mr C to try to resolve his complaint and provided apologies for the problems he had experienced with his tenancy. In their response to our enquiry, the council said that a breakdown of the care and support charges was clearly itemised on the Tenancy Agreement Mr C had signed. They also explained that the SHO was not on site all of the time but should be available to respond on the telephone if called upon. They also said that when Mr C moved into sheltered housing he requested not to have contact with a SHO. Based on the available evidence, we did not uphold this aspect of Mr C's complaint.

Mr C had also complained about the tone of some of the council's complaint correspondence. While we acknowledged that Mr C was upset by some of the content of the correspondence, we noted that the council are entitled to seek to limit communication where a matter has already exhausted their complaints process. We found that the council's handling of the complaint had been reasonable and therefore, did not uphold this aspect of Mr C's complaint. However, we considered that some of their email correspondence with Mr C could have been more sensitively worded and we fed this back to the council.

The Revised Model Complaints Handling Procedure

The SPSO published a revised Model Complaints Handling Procedure (MCHP) for Local Authorities on 31 January 2020 to be implemented by 1 April 2021.

Following consultation, the MCHP was revised to:

- **Standardise the core text across all of Scotland's public services** – this will remove (and future-proof against) minor inconsistencies in how the MCHP operates within different sectors, while retaining individualised sector-specific content where appropriate;

- **Update the content in line with:**
  - Feedback from organisations under SPSO's jurisdiction (via the consultation survey, feedback on the draft, and individual feedback from contacts with SPSO)
  - Issues identified from our casework, and
  - Recent research and good practice in relation to using alternative resolution approaches, promoting positive complaint behaviours and improving access to complaints for vulnerable groups.

Work is under way to implement this for Aberdeenshire Council and compliance will be monitored as normal by the SPSO through their investigation, improvement and standards work.

Complaints performance indicators

The MCHP requires organisations to report on and publish complaints performance information in line with complaints performance indicators published by the SPSO. The SPSO is currently developing a new set of complaints performance indicators for each sector in consultation with the complaint handling networks. This will include a core set of performance indicators, which are consistent across all public services, with some additional performance indicators for those sectors which currently undertake benchmarking through their complaint handling network. Due to delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, we are waiting updates on this work.

What Others Told Us

As a council we undertake our own self-evaluation each year to understand how we are doing and where we need to improve. Our latest evaluation 'How Good is Our Governance in Practice? indicates that overall, we have important strengths with areas for improvement. Our most recent summary self-assessment and evaluation is available on our website within ['Strategy and Performance'](#).

However, 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. Our own self-assessment and evaluation will help inform scrutiny undertaken by external scrutiny bodies.

Shared Risk Assessment

The Shard Risk Assessment (SRA) process has been subject to regular review over the last decade. The latest review in 2018 recognised the importance of the changing landscape for local service delivery as well as scope to improve the SRA process.

As part of the review scrutiny bodies were asked to consider the strengths and weaknesses of the SRA and how the system could be improved. In October 2018, councils and Local Area Networks (LANs) were consulted about the previous approach and options for change.

17 responses were received from individual councils. This showed that there were mixed views about how effective the SRA process and scrutiny coordination more widely have been. From this feedback, Audit Scotland developed and agreed a new approach to SRA.

The aim of the new approach is to focus on fulfilling the requirement to coordinate scrutiny at a national level. Under this revised approach there will be a greater focus on the National Scrutiny Plan (NSP) and on national coordination. The new model is:
   o Strategic Scrutiny Group - responsible for setting the overall approach and
   o monitoring progress with the NSP and sharing intelligence;
   o Operational Sub group - chaired by the Care Inspectorate, with membership from the larger scrutiny bodies. Critically, this group is responsible for producing, updating and reporting on the National Scrutiny Plan. The group is responsible for the operational development of the new approach to sharing intelligence, including identifying, and responding to any problems/issues in how scrutiny bodies work together or escalating these to SSG if they cannot resolve them;
   o Local networks - which include the appointed auditor for the council and representatives from each of the larger scrutiny bodies, namely the Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland and the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Affordable Housing: National Report undertaken and published in 2019/20 includes a detailed case study of Aberdeenshire Council:

Good progress has been made towards the Scottish Government's ambitious target to deliver 50,000 new affordable homes between April 2016 and March 2021. Of these, 35,000 will be social rented homes provided by councils and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). By December 2019, 31,136 homes had been completed including 20,336 homes for social rent. The Scottish Government plans to invest around £3.5 billion to meet the target. Over the first three years of the programme, it has spent around £1.9 billion. Councils and RSLs have also invested significant sums.

Key findings for Aberdeenshire Council:
- There are around 160 RSLs in Scotland, although not all are developing new housing. The number operating in any council area varies. For example, there are 12 RSLs operating in Aberdeenshire;
- Aberdeenshire Council cannot develop the Blackdog corridor north of Aberdeen until Scottish Water has the capacity and funding to provide the necessary infrastructure;
- The use of the planning system to secure the provision of affordable housing varies across the country. This largely depends on the local housing market and the scale of private house building in the area. For example, over half of Aberdeenshire's affordable housing is delivered using Section 75 agreements. There are locations in Aberdeenshire, however, where Section 75 agreements are not used, as there is little or no private housing development taking place;
- Using Section 75 agreements to deliver affordable housing carries risks. Councils can work to mitigate these risks. For example, Aberdeenshire Council's delivery team includes council officers and RSL partners who decide which RSL will work with a developer on a particular site. The council has developed a policy and process that includes pre-planning engagement with private developers. It reports that this results in less negotiation with developers and reduces delays;
- A lack of capacity in the construction industry may result in additional costs or delays Councils and RSLs are reporting capacity issues within the construction sector in some areas. This could potentially be exacerbated by EU withdrawal. The skills shortages in the construction industry can affect the costs of building or the speed of development and Aberdeenshire Council highlights that construction workers often go offshore, where the pay is higher.

The full Audit Report can be accessed via this link: [Affordable Housing](#)

The scrutiny programme for Aberdeenshire Council in 2019/20 inclues a Best Value Assurance Report (BVAR) undertaken by our external auditors Audit Scotland. The report is expected to be published in October 2020. Following publication the report will be made available on Aberdeenshire's website.

Council	Scrutiny activity	Scrutiny body/bodies	Fieldwork/ engagement dates
Aberdeenshire	Best Value Assurance Report	Audit Scotland	February to April 2020 Report to Accounts Commission: October 2020
	Career information, advice and guidance services (follow-up)	Education Scotland	February 2020
	Engagement on: service quality; services for people who are homeless; Gypsy Traveller minimum site standards	Scottish Housing Regulator	2019/20

*Annual Audit – 2019/20 information will be updated when available during October 2020

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. The audit is reported to Aberdeenshire Council and any action required by the council is monitored by the Audit Committee.

Findings of the most recent audit (2018/19) are summarised below and the detailed report can be accessed here:

Audit Area:	Main Judgements:
Financial Management	Financial management is effective, enabling the council to take appropriate action as required. The council manages a medium term financial plan, a 15 year, £850m capital plan and a reserves policy, including earmarked balances, which allows a more strategic approach to financial planning and decision making. A change in capital financing from capital from current revenue to borrowing was an important decision in ensuring a balanced outturn position was achieved. While the council's cost of borrowing remains low relative to other councils, any additional borrowing needs to be considered as part of overall borrowing requirements to ensure it remains affordable.

Financial Sustainability	Through its medium term financial planning, the council is aware of its future funding shortfalls.
	The council used around £6m of reserves, both planned and unplanned, to support the revenue position in the year. As the council already has one of the lowest levels of reserves in Scotland, it cannot depend on reserves indefinitely.
Wider Governance Arrangements	
Governance and Transparency	The audit committee should assess its effectiveness following an increase in committee business and changes in membership.
	The governance self-evaluation activity has resulted in a comprehensive action plan for improvement.
	The council demonstrates a commitment to transparency in the way it conducts its business.
Value for Money	The council has been slow to implement a performance framework to measure progress in delivering Council Priorities.
	The council needs to do more to demonstrate that it is using scrutiny and performance information to assess impact and drive continuous improvement.
	Performance against the Local Government Benchmarking Framework indicators is mixed, with similar levels above and below and improving or declining compared to the Scottish average.

The council agreed with the findings of the audit and an action plan is in place to deal with the recommendations.

Managing Our Risks

Aberdeenshire Council operates in an environment where it continually requires balancing expenditure pressures against the need to meet statutory duties and deliver high quality services in the most efficient and effective manner. Failure to pay proper attention to the likelihood and consequences of risks can cause the council serious problems. Service disruption, financial cost, reputational damage, threats to public health and public liability claims are among the most obvious.

On a day to day basis the council requires to manage risks that impact on its strategic and operational objectives. Effective risk management enables delivery of quality customer focused services in support of the council's vision and priority outcomes.

Risk management is the process of identifying risks, evaluating their potential consequences and determining the most effective methods of controlling them and/or responding to them. It is a means of minimising the costs and disruption to the council caused by undesirable events. The aim is to reduce the frequency of risk events occurring (wherever this is possible) and minimise the severity of their consequences if they do occur.

Even when the likelihood of an event occurring (such as a severe storm) cannot be controlled, steps can be taken to minimise the consequences by having effective and robust Emergency Plans and Business Continuity Plans in place.

Senior Managers regular identify and review risks as part of the council's Risk Management Policy and Procedures. The Council's Risk Register hierarchy is currently being reviewed to better align identified risks against Council & Service Priorities and Directorate Business Plans.
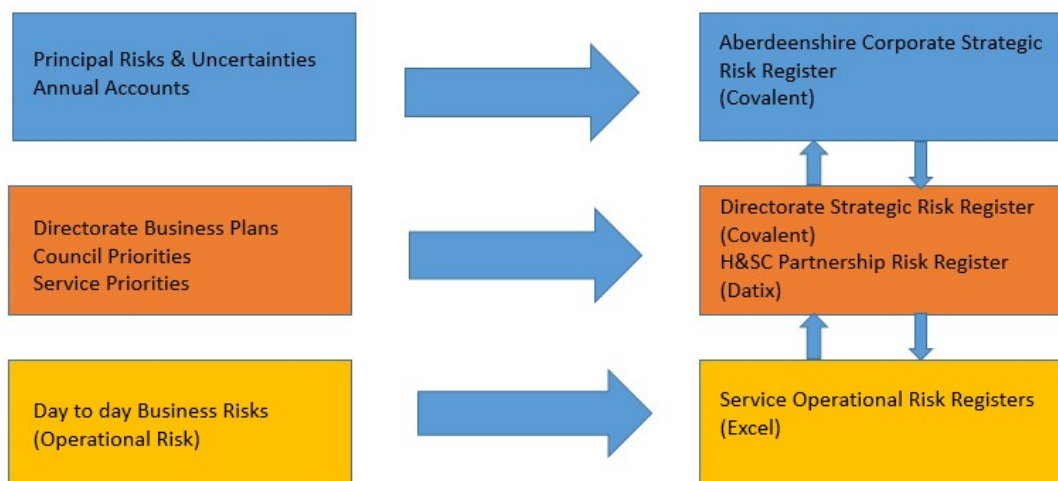
The Council has a Corporate Risk Register and a Directorate Risk Registers available to view on the website. The risk registers are currently under review and will be updated on the website in due course.

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.

Managing Our Finances

Key Facts

- **£1,241 Band D Council Tax (increase of 3% from 2018/19)**
- **Scottish average = £1,251 (increase of 3.6% from 2018/19)**

Over the last three years there have been requirements for Aberdeenshire Council, like other local authorities, to deliver savings within its budget.

Aberdeenshire Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) represents a structured approach to financial planning across Services and sets out a complete view of the Revenue Budget, Capital Plan and Reserves allowing the Council to consider and plan the full financial impact of decisions taken now on next year's budget and an indication of the impact on future years.

In February 2019, following a further single year settlement from the Scottish Government, Aberdeenshire Council set the 2019/20 budget with provisional budgets for 2020/21 – 2023/24. These provisional budgets indicated a potential investment resource available to the Council of some £1 billion per year across revenue budgets, capital plans, Housing Revenue Account, reserves and the Health & Social Care Partnership resources.

To enable an even more outcome focused MTFS based on the policies and priorities of the Council, a deliberate shift has been made in the current budget setting process to a '3 + 2' MTFS. The intention behind this is to recognise that the Scottish Government has undertaken to produce more than single year settlements, so Aberdeenshire will be focusing on preparing a three year balanced budget with a further two indicative years, further reflecting the move to national performance reporting and embedding policy led decision making in the Council.

The preparation of a five-year budget will help ensure the financial stability of the council. Medium and longer-term financial planning is essential, particularly in the current economic climate as the council must review spending priorities, make choices and realign service provision with the priority outcomes. We will continue to identify ways to make the necessary savings by looking at how things can be done differently, and our focus will be maintained on the continued delivery of quality services.

Revenue Funding 2019/20

The funding which makes up the 2019/20 budget came from different sources. This includes money from Aggregate External Finance, Fees and Charges and Council Tax.

Net Revenue Expenditure 2019/20

Committee	Expenditure £	Cost per head of population £
Education & Children's Services	£385,608,000	1,476
Communities	£146,737,000	562
Infrastructure Services	£102,211,000	391
Chief Executive & Business Services	£58,672,000	225

Capital Budget

The Council has a large capital plan with planned expenditure running through to 2035. The plan consists of several major initiatives to enhance or replace assets in accordance with the Council's Priorities. The most recent plan was approved at Council in March 2020. The funding for the plan comes from a variety of sources, but most is prudential borrowing. Actual capital spend in the year was £104.327m.

The main areas of investment were on the following ongoing capital projects:

- Capital grants and improvements to Early Years Facilities to support the delivery of 1140hrs;
- Energy Waste Facility;
- Stonehaven Flooding Scheme;
- Roads resurfacing and reconstruction

The table below shows the capital expenditure by Policy Committee. While capital expenditure was lower than budgeted, the Capital Plan delivers large scale projects which can and will take longer to deliver than sometimes expected. Therefore, the Capital Plan should be viewed as a series of connected years rather than just individual financial years and as such the majority of the £54.034 million will be carried forward into future financial years to deliver the agreed projects. Progress against the Capital Plan is monitored by the Capital Planning Group (group of officers from across all services), with slippage identified at the earliest opportunity and projects accelerated where possible to ensure best use of available resources, with budgets revised to reflect the changes. Project slippage and budget revisions,

together with the explanations for the changes are reported to Policy Committees quarterly.

Key areas of spend by Policy Committee:	
Education & Children's Services	Early Learning Childcare (1140 Hours Projects); Early Learning Childcare (Children & Young People Bill; Improved Disable Access (Education); Inverurie Community Campus; Kinellar Primary School; Kintore Primary School; Markethill Primary School Replacement; Uryside Primary School, Westfield Community Hub; Alford Campus; Portlethen/Hillside Primary School Causeymounth Road Upgrading Works
Communities	Banchory Sports Village (Community Sports Facility, Hill of Banchory); Culture, Sports and Business Unit; Learning Disabilities: Adaptation Centres; Peterhead Care and Support Village; Banff & Macduff Sporting Facilities; Midmill Pavillion, Kintore; Disabled and Elderly Housing Adaptations
Infrastructure Services	Greenbanks Travellers Site; Stonehaven Flooding Scheme; Town Centre Fund (Council Projects); Portlethen Park & Ride (EV Chargers and Infrastructure); Uryside Meadows; Bridges and Structures; Burial Grounds; Cycling and Walking; Harbours, Coast and Flooding; Kintore Station
Chief Executive & Business Services	Buchan House – Police Office Extension; Development of Industrial Portfolio and Factory Units; Information and Communication Technologies; Council Depots; Legal & Governance System Software; Office Space Strategy: Ellon, Inverurie, Woodhill House; Workspace: Viewmount, Stonehaven; Faithlie Centre (Saltoun Square Fraserburgh)

How We Measure Up – Our Performance 2019/20

We have identified a range of Key Performance Indicators within Delivery Plans to help evidence delivery of the council's core outcomes and priorities. These indicators form the basis of the performance scorecards for each core outcome summarised on page 16 of this report.

Each year Audit Scotland prescribes a set of Statutory Performance Indicators - SPI 1 and 2 that all council's in Scotland must report.

Statutory Performance Indicator 1 (SPI 1) relates to corporate management – areas such as responsiveness to communities, procurement, managing assets and economic development). It also focuses on service performance – areas such as roads and lighting, housing, children's services, community care and planning services.

SPI 1 is a set of locally defined indicators that demonstrate the council recognises, and is meeting, its responsibilities under the 2003 Best value legislation including ensuring a balance between cost and quality. The council's local indicators were agreed by Policy & Resources Committee and most of the indicators are incorporated into Service Plans and support the performance scorecards used in this Annual Report.

Statutory Performance Indicator 2 (SPI 2) comprises of indicators defined in the Local Government Benchmarking Framework. The Local Government Benchmarking Framework encompasses all councils in Scotland and that allows the council's performance to be compared to other council's in Scotland. The latest data available is for the financial year 2018/19 and you can see it ['here'](#). These indicators will be updated for 2019/20 early in 2021.

The most up to date performance data for the council is always available online at www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/performance.

Public Performance Reporting Calendar 2019/20

The council publishes a range of reports and documents throughout the year that provide an update on how the council is performing. The calendar is available ['here'](#) and is regularly updated.

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