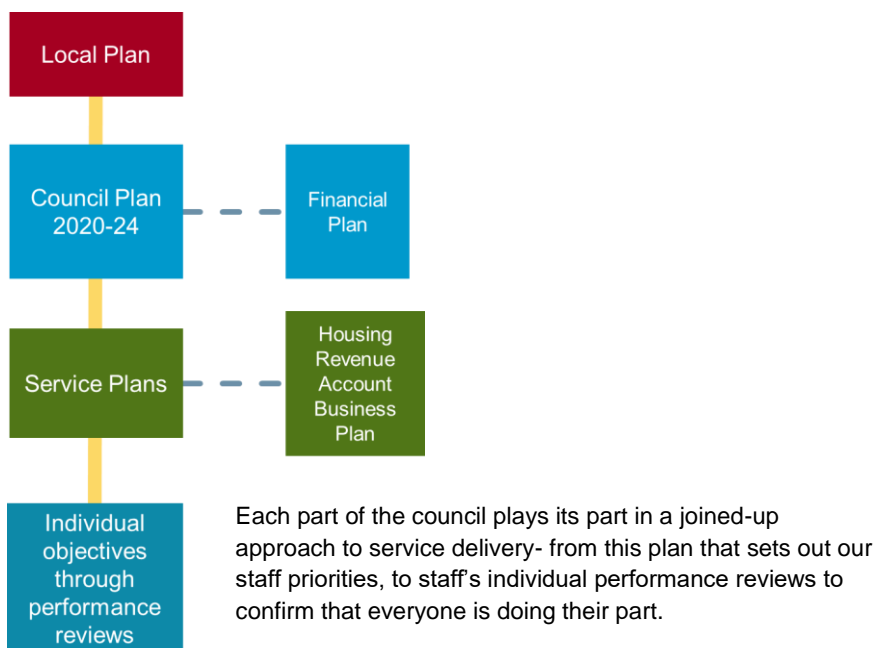


Service Planning 2021-22

Finance Service

Version 2.0

April 2021 – March 2022



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Portfolio holders: Jack Rowland

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Notes for Strategic Leads and Service Leads:

*Certain parts of this form will be pre-populated. This will include your turnover, full time equivalent/headcount and absence rates.

Shaded areas are for guidance.

When you have completed your Service Plan:

- ✓ Save to O:\Service Plans. Final versions will be placed on the intranet/internet
- ✓ Communicate it to your staff
- ✓ Keep it under review – make it a live document which adds value!
- ✓ Use it to formulate individual objectives

Section 1 – Brief description of service and purpose(s)

What we do and who we deliver to

Revenues, Benefits, Corporate Fraud & Compliance:

Benefits: Providing means tested financial support in respect of housing and council tax costs in accordance with prescribed legislation and a local determined scheme. We pay approximately £25m in Housing Benefits and have 4,700 claimants. We provide Council Tax Support of £8.5m to nearly 8,200 households.

Purpose - To pay the right amount to the right person at the right time.

Council Tax: This is collected on behalf of Devon County Council, Devon & Cornwall Police Authority, Devon & Somerset Fire Authority, EDDC & town/parishes. Although the charge is set locally this is a national tax which has to be administered in accordance with legislation. We have to collect £118m this year and have just over 70,000 households. The average bill is £1,889.

Purpose - to collect the right amount from the right person at the right time.

Non Domestic Rates: This is a tax that is set nationally but collected by the local authority. A proportion is retained locally to fund Council services. We have 6,700 rating assessments and are responsible for collecting circa £35.7m although for this year this is circa £19million due to additional Covid-19 relief measures. Business rates has to be administered in accordance with legislation.

Invoicing and collection all Sundry accounts on behalf of other departments of the Council. Total of bills issued is £7m with 7,000 accounts raised.

Benefit Overpayment: Collection of circa £1.2m.

Corporate Fraud & Compliance: Dealing with main types of public sector fraud and error – welfare benefits, tenancy fraud, council tax, business rates, procurement and payroll.

Customer Service Centre (CSC):

This is the main the first point of contact to the Council. The team deals with enquiries from various access channels. Primarily telephone, face to face, and web. They are responsible for main reception, general enquiries and specifically on a one and done basis from customers relating to: Waste, Street Scene, Street Name & Numbering, Environmental Health (dogs and pests), parking services, Planning & Electoral Registration. The team answered a total of 154,000 enquiries across all access channels.

The team also now run the Community Hub helping residents that need assistance during the Pandemic, the team is supported by other officers across the Council.

Financial Services:

Accountancy: Providing financial advice to officers and members of the Council. Budget preparation, monitoring and reporting, Treasury Management, VAT, Statement of Accounts, statutory returns and provision of a financial system and procedures. Latest Statement of Accounts show the Council having gross expenditure of £96m.

Income & Payments: Administer all EDDC creditors and pay all of the council's suppliers through the Creditor's team with over 17,000 invoices paid; administration of the Construction Industry Scheme (CIS). Processing and allocation of all income to the council with over 240,000 transactions (Business Rates, Council Tax, Sundry Debts, Rents, Parking Charges, Benefits Overpayments and Housing Advances) equating to £320m through the Cashier's team.

Procurement:

Professional procurement advice is currently managed through a Service Level Agreement with Devon County Council Procurement Services.

Internal Audit Services:

This service is provided through the South West Audit Partnership. An Annual Audit Plan is approved through the Audit & Governance Committee.

ICT:

	<p>This service is provided through Strata; a separate business plan is approved by a Joint Committee of EDDC, ECC & TDC. Each of the 3 authorities Council's adopt the Plan annually.</p> <p>Place, Asset and Commercialisation – Separate Service Plan produced.</p>
How we deliver and ensure equal access	<p>In the main services are provided in house with specialist and contract support in some areas.</p> <p>Each area has carried out equality assessments and staff have had appropriate training. We provide services in differing ways in order to meet the needs of our customers.</p>
How we compare	<p>Where national performance is measured; Council Tax and business rate collection and speed of processing benefits we are one of the top performing authorities. The costs of running our services are low and the service areas offer good value for money.</p>
Statutory elements of the service	<p>The majority of the work carried out is a statutory requirement. The remaining elements are in the main linked to services which are of a statutory nature.</p>
Current net budget (excludes Internal support charges and capital budget)	TBC

Section 2 – Key achievements in 2020-21

	<i>Briefly describe key achievements and what outcomes were created. This will inform Annual Report at year end.</i>	<i>Strategic link to Council Plan priorities</i>
1	<p><i>All teams have been outstanding in dealing with Covid-19; whether that's been giving direct support to the public and business through financial support and advice, meeting the increased demands of the work in each area and continuing to provide existing services whilst mainly working from home has been amazing.</i></p>	An Outstanding Council
2	<p>The Revenues and Benefits Team have had numerous initiatives to implement and a significant increase in workloads to support residents and businesses in the district impacted by Covid-19;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Rate relief schemes have been introduced by Government to support business during the year. These reliefs have had to be implemented quickly, with customers informed and revised bills issued. (Circa £18m+ in reliefs) - A number of different business grant support schemes have been introduced at extremely short notice ranging from prescriptive schemes to discretionary schemes. This has 	An Outstanding Council

	<p>required working across the Council including with Strata and Members to implement successfully and at pace. This working is ongoing. By the end of March 21 it is likely that we will pay out circa £50m in business grants (currently paid out £47.6m)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There has been a significant and unprecedented increase in the number of individuals requiring financial support. This has resulted in more residents now claiming Council Tax Reduction, requiring arrangements, money advice, council tax hardship and also needing direct financial support. - Led on a Devon wide Test and Trace Payment scheme policy that was set up and implemented successfully within a couple of weeks. - The Council Tax team have supported many of these changes and assisted individuals to deal with the difficulties the public are finding currently in paying their council tax bills. - A financial resilience officer post has now been created using external funds which accords with the work being driven by the Poverty Panel 	
3	<p>The Customer Services Team have been handling a high volume of calls ranging across Council services; in particular the public have required more support with during the pandemic. The Team also now manage (with the support of specialist colleagues across the Council) the Community Hub to ensure the public are directed to the right support.</p>	An Outstanding Council
4	<p>The financial services team have supported and assisted a number of services to help them support the public and business. They have continued with core statutory functions and supporting services and have adapted processes quickly to ensure everything functions for services working remotely.</p> <p>The Council is expecting an unqualified audit opinion on its accounts and value for money assessment for 2019/20.</p>	An Outstanding Council
5	<p>Although Strata have their own business plan but mention has to be made of the support and speed of delivery to support services and in turn the public of East Devon. Implementing processes, electronic forms with some complex solutions has been appreciated across the Council.</p>	An Outstanding Council
6	<p>A new banded discount scheme was implemented for Council Tax Support giving additional support and reducing administration of the scheme.</p>	Outstanding homes and communities

7	The Service Plan would normally include comparison to local and national performance indicators particularly in the Revenues and Benefits area. These statistics are not available for the Service Plan as ourselves and other authorities have had other priorities to focus on. These details will still be gathered and reported.	An Outstanding Council
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Section 3 – Looking forward : what we will do in 2021-22 (service objectives)				
Key Service Objectives (<i>please include consultation or procurement activity required</i>) <i>Please highlight any projects so that they may be recorded and monitored in SPAR. See project guidance document for the definition of a project.</i> Some objectives are being carried forward from 2020/21 which were not delivered as service areas focused on dealing with the Pandemic	Financial/ corporate resource	Lead Officers	Start date	End date
1) A greener East Devon (to include any climate change objectives)				
With the assistance of Strata continue to utilise Firmstep to introduce more efficient online process and continue to increase email contact with customers over printing and post. This will be measured by the reduction of print and post and statistics recorded on Firmstep dashboards. Appropriate targets will be defined in individual performance measurers.	Existing resources	Service Lead – Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services, Corporate Fraud & Compliance	In progress	Review progress 6 monthly
3) A resilient economy				

It is likely that work associated with the business grants may continue into next financial year and therefore this work will continue to be prioritised	Within existing resources	Revenues, Fraud & Compliance Manager	Ongoing (Subject to government timelines)	
A new initiative whereby revenues and benefits will share key data on the economy (business data and claim statistics) with Economic Development to support necessary key interventions the team can take to support the residents and business of the District.	Initially within existing resources	Revenues Fraud & Compliance Manager with the Housing Benefit Manager	April 2021	Review 6 mthly
Implement new Breathing Space legislation that comes into force May 2021 that will need to be reflected in the way we manage debts within the Council. The 60 day breathing space will mean all enforcement action halted and interest frozen. We will need to implement changes to our working practices, review our corporate debt policy and ensure contracts/ agreements with Enforcement Agents are updated.	Within existing resources	Council Tax Manager working with Business Rates, Housing & Car Parking Services	May 2021	Review end of 1 st quarter to ensure implemented
<p>Implement measures associated with addressing poverty in the District:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the effectiveness of the Financial Resilience post and determine any further actions required within the remit of the service to support residents. • Review Corporate Debt Policy. • Review funding & delivery arrangements for Money advice. • Implement a common financial statement for capturing income and expenditure so that we have a consistent approach across all services for assessing income and 	Initially within existing resources but kept under review due to potentially conflicting priorities	Service Lead – Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services, Corporate Fraud & Compliance	April 2021	Review quarterly

<p>expenditure and to remove barriers for residents in accessing support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a poverty dashboard drawing upon data from internal systems that are linked to low income households to help support decision making. • Input and implement relevant poverty actions that are agreed by the Poverty panel (subject to resourcing). 				
<p>Take additional measures to support the recovery of our income collection performance across Council Tax, Business Rates and Sundry Debts which has been severely impacted by Covid-19 whilst balancing this against residents and businesses ability to pay. We will need to monitor and review the effectiveness of our action and adapt processes accordingly</p>	<p>Within existing resources</p>	<p>Service Lead – Revenues, Benefits, Corporate Fraud & Customer Services</p>	<p>April 2021</p>	<p>Monthly collection rates</p>
<p>4) Services that matter to all of us</p>				
<p>Review and develop improved intranet procurement advice and tools to services across the Council</p>	<p>Require admin support but will consider how this can be delivered within Council resources already available</p>	<p>Strategic Lead Finance</p>	<p>April 2021</p>	<p>September 2021</p>

Ensure appropriate framework and advice is given to Council to ensure the Financial Plan is implemented and Balanced budgets are set going forward (2021/22 onwards)	With existing resources	Strategic Lead Finance	April 2021	September 2021
Carry out a review of telephony and reception services within the CSC. This will include reviewing management data to consider how we can better automate the routing of calls, dynamic automated messages, promotion of online services, etc. Alongside this we will also review resources for customer facing roles across the two sites to see how we can create greater efficiencies.	Within existing resources	Customer Services Team Leader (with support and guidance from Revenues Fraud & Compliance Manager with the Housing Benefit Manager)	April 2021	March 2022
Review and improve process of financial monitoring; to provide improved and timelier dashboard reports to the Finance Portfolio Holder and then Cabinet.	Within existing resources	Finance Manager	Now	July 2021
Undertake the statutory requirement of producing the 2020/21 Statement of Accounts, incorporating new accounting standards and their external audit to achieve an unqualified opinion.	Within existing resources	Finance Manager	February 2021	July 2021
Fraud & Compliance and Income generation Initiatives (Income optimisation) – identify additional income to the Council. – Subject to resources Target of £100K	Within existing resources	Revenues Fraud & Compliance Manager	April 2021	September 2021

**Section 3 a – Looking forward: any Service challenges or pressures for the next three years?
(Revenue/Capital)**

1. The implications of the pandemic will have a lasting effect on individuals and business, this will have an impact on the services we will need to provide.

2. The Financial Plan of the Council outlines a severe financial picture which is required to be understood more fully and addressed for 2022/23 onwards.

Section 3 b– Looking forward: options for doing things differently – this section is vital due to the funding gap we face over the next few years.

Please outline any opportunities to do things differently.

1. Areas have been identified as part of the Council overall targets to meet the budget deficit in the Medium Term Financial Plan. In addition to managing the overall process and ensuring the Council set balanced budgets specifics for the service include.
 - Planned reduction of posts in Revenues & Benefits Service through non replacement of vacant post at the right time. This will need careful consideration under the current workloads being seen.
 - Income maximisation £100k target (included as an objective but needs further consideration with Team).
 - Reduction in Financial administration resources

The formulation of a Commercial activity to deliver savings/additional income

Section 3 c – Looking forward: Changes to measures and performance indicators - what we will measure, how often and for whom

Measure/indicator	How often – monthly, quarterly, bi-annually, annually	For whom? Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny	Link to Corporate Priorities (listed on page 3 1,2,3 or 4)	Responsible Officer for production of management information	Retain this measure (yes/no) or new
Percentage of Council Tax Collected	Monthly	Scrutiny & Cabinet	4	Service Lead – Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services, Corporate Fraud & Compliance	Yes
Percentage of Non-domestic Rates Collected	Monthly	Scrutiny & Cabinet	4	Service Lead – Revenues, Benefits, Customer	Yes

				Services, Corporate Fraud & Compliance	
Days taken to process Housing Benefit new claims and change events	Monthly	Scrutiny & Cabinet	4	Service Lead – Revenues, Benefits, Customer Services, Corporate Fraud & Compliance	Yes

Section 4 – Resources and workforce planning

Full time equivalents/Headcount as at 01/04/2020	FTE = 72.3 Headcount = 79
Turnover (April 2019 to March 2020)	Voluntary Turnover = 5% Voluntary & Non Voluntary Turnover = 5%
Absence (April 2019 to March 2020)	Days lost per person: 4.8 days

Section 5 – Training and development

Team based skills/development required – please identify training required that is not currently available	Who for	Expected outcome	When
1. Finance Team will be undertaken Statement of Accounts year end technical training and specialist areas such as capital, treasury management and collection fund.	Accountancy	Ensure complying with legislation and professional codes	Ongoing
2. Technical training in specific areas of Rev's & Ben's	Rev's & Ben's Team	Ensuring the service is compliant with current legislation and regulations	Ongoing

Section 6 – Risks			
New/emerging risks description – See attached Risk Register for current service risks	Impact [minor, significant serious, major]	Likely- hood [remote, unlikely, likely, very likely]	How managed/controlled What action will you take to reduce/minimise risk
1. Risk Register is up to date and reflects the current risk status			

Section 7 – System thinking		
Which services have been reviewed	This is now embedded into the services and teams and individuals continually use system thinking principles to review their work.	
Future systems to be reviewed	Service	Date of review

Section 8 - Equalities and safeguarding		
New / emerging equalities risks	Impact Level [High, Medium, Low]	How managed/controlled
1. Undertaken at time of publication/proposed change.		