

REVENUES, BENEFITS AND CUSTOMER SERVICES BUSINESS PLAN 2022–2025

This Business Plan details the projects and activity undertaken in support of the Council's Corporate Plan priorities.

The Corporate Plan prioritises local community needs and resources are directed toward the things they think are most important. These needs are aligned with other local, regional and national plans to ensure the ambitions set out in our Corporate Plan are realistic and achievable.

The Business Plan covers a three-year period but is revised and updated annually. Detailed monitoring of progress against key tasks and outcome measures is undertaken quarterly by the Finance and Resources Committee. The Policy and Performance Committee also receives a high level report of progress against Corporate Plan priorities on a quarterly basis.

The Council's Vision for Broxtowe is 'a greener, safer, healthier Broxtowe where everyone prospers'.

The Council's Values are:

- **G**oing the extra mile: **a strong, caring focus on the needs of communities**
- **R**eady for change: **innovation and readiness for change**
- **E**mployees: **value our employees and enable the active involvement of everyone**
- **A**lways improving: **continuous improvement and delivering value for money**
- **T**ransparent: **integrity and professional competence**

The Council's Priorities and Objectives for Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services are 'provide an excellent customer focused service whilst maximising the Council's income collection':

- Assist residents to be financially secure through advice or signposting
- Provide payment options to customers while further developing our preferred online options
- Ensure strong income collection is maintained.

1. PUBLISHED STRATEGY AND POLICY DOCUMENTS SUPPORTING THE DELIVERY OF PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES

Strategy/Policy Document	Purpose of Document	Renewal Date	Responsible Officer/Contact
Corporate Plan	The Council's overarching plan for its priorities, targets and objectives. The plan sets out priorities to achieve the vision to make "Broxtowe a great place where people enjoy living, working and spending leisure time" with focus on the priorities of Housing, Business Growth, Community Safety, Health and Environment.	April 2024	Chief Executive
Business Strategy	Deigned to ensure that the Council is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lean and fit in its assets, systems and processes • Customer focused in all its activities • Commercially minded and financially viable • Making best use of technology. 	Updated annually	Deputy Chief Executive
Medium Term Financial Strategy	The Council's key financial planning document. In detailing the financial implications of the Corporate Plan, the MTFS provides a reference point for corporate decision-making and helps to ensure that the Council can optimise the balance between its financial resources and the delivery of its priorities. The MTFS informs the annual budget-setting process, ensuring that each year's budget is considered within the context of the Council's ongoing sustainability over the entirety of the planning period.	Updated annually	Deputy Chief Executive Head of Finance Services
Commercial Strategy	Promote and support a change in organisational culture towards a more business-like approach to the delivery of services. Overall, commercialism will enable departments to adopt a business-like approach with the focus firmly on delivering the best services possible for residents and businesses within the Borough whilst at the same time maximising income generation.	March 2023	Deputy Chief Executive Commercial Manager

Strategy/Policy Document	Purpose of Document	Renewal Date	Responsible Officer/Contact
Capital Strategy	An overarching summary document which encompasses all capital and treasury activity including the capital programme, financing planning, accounting policies and asset management.	Updated annually	Deputy Chief Executive Head of Finance Services
Corporate Debt Policy	Provides a statement of fairness and intent.	March 2024	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Benefit Overpayments and Recovery Policy	Explains the service intentions when an overpayment of benefit has been made and the subsequent processes of recovery	March 2024	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Discretionary Rate Relief policy guidelines	Highlights the priorities for supporting business through discretionary rate relief and hardships relief. Provides guidance on the award of relief in the Enterprise Zone.	March 2023	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Local Council Tax Support Scheme	Sets out the rules governing the calculation and award of local council tax support.	Each year in January	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Council Tax Discretionary Discounts S13A Policy	Provides a set of guidelines for the creation of discretionary council tax discounts.	On changes to relevant legislation	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Service Level Agreement with Ashfield District Council	Sets out NNDR partnership agreement with Ashfield.	March 2022	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Customer Services Strategy	Summarise and set out the detail of the Customer Services Strategy.	March 2022	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Customer Services Training Strategy	Set out the Department's vision for maintaining and enhancing the skills and capabilities of staff.	Reviewed regularly	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services

Strategy/Policy Document	Purpose of Document	Renewal Date	Responsible Officer/Contact
Counter-fraud policy documents	Sets out the Council's approach to protecting its assets from fraud.	On changes to relevant legislation	Deputy Chief Executive Chief Audit and Control Officer
Council Tax Care Leavers Discretionary Discount	Sets out the Council's guidelines to assisting care leavers within the Borough through Council Tax reductions.	Reviewed Annually in January	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Service Level Agreement with Newark and Sherwood District Council	Sets out the Partnership in relation to Business Rates Property Inspectors.	September 2022	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services

2. SERVICE LEVEL OBJECTIVES LINKED TO CORPORATE OBJECTIVES

Revenues

- Revenue Collection
 - Billing, collection and recovery of all the Council's locally raised revenues - Council Tax, Non Domestic Rates, Council Housing Rents and Sundry Debts
 - Work in partnership with Housing Officers to support tenancy sustainment while ensuring timely recovery of all rents due
 - Accurate and timely completion of the key government and pool returns: NNDR, CTB and QRC
 - Provide accurate financial and statistical data to the Council and Government
 - Canvass, inspect and process correspondence to maintain accurate records to support accurate and timely billing and recovery processes
 - Partner with the Citizens Advice Bureau to ensure the effective implementation of Universal Credit and support residents with debt issues
 - In line with the digital strategy deliver on line payment facilities that customers consider payment channels of choice
 - Distribution of over £30m in Business Grants to support those impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic

Benefits

- Benefits
 - Assessing and paying Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support (CTS) in an accurate and timely manner
 - Provide benefit advice to members of the public
 - Calculating Housing benefit and CTS overpayments
 - Accurate and timely completion of the relevant Housing Benefit subsidy returns
 - Lead the Council's approach to welfare reform providing information training and technical briefings to members and senior management
 - Provide the single point of contact for liaison with the DWP's single fraud investigation service
 - Providing Support for Households required to Self-Isolate as a result of the governments Test and Trace Policy

Quality and Control

- Quality and Control
 - Bill, collect and recover all Sundry Debts owed to the Council
 - Manage the claim and assessment process for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP).
 - Prepare and represent the council at Appeal Tribunals and DHP member panels
 - Provide key relevant financial reconciliations

Customer Services

- Be the Council's first point of contact for face-to-face and telephone contact
- The provision of effective customer access channels, with emphasis on channel shift through automation and enabling of online self-service
- The provision of inbound telephony services and face to face interviews for a range of high volume services

- Improving the quality of transactions by increasing the percentage of enquiries answered at first point of contact, reducing queuing and average handling times and increasing the range of services provided

Legal Services

- Provide support with resolving debt collection where the legal process is required to be followed to recover debt

Housing

- Assist tenants to remain in their homes working together with the Financial Inclusion Team to ensure financial stability

Rent

- Work with the Tenants Sustainability and Inclusion Officer to enable tenants to remain in their home and manage rent payments

3. MEASURES OF PERFORMANCE AND SERVICE DATA

Context – Baseline Service Data

Service Data / Description (Pentana Code)	Actual 2018/19	Actual 2019/20	Actual 2020/21	Comments including benchmarking data
Total Council Tax Collected FRLocal_10	£62.6m	£66.1m	£68.0m	Expected collection falls in line with the increase in charge.
Total Business Rates Collected FRLocal_11	£26.5m	£27.2m	£11.7m	Reduction is due to the government expanded Retail Discount to support businesses through the pandemic. The Council received the difference through direct government funding, rather than collection from Businesses.
Total Sundry Debtors Collected FRLocal_12	£4.2m	£5.3	£5.9m	2020/21 year includes a payment of £910k for one debtor.
Total Council Tax Liability Orders granted FRLocal_13	2,437	2,498	1,109	The level of liability orders granted has reduced due to the fact that courts were closed during the pandemic.
Total Business Rates Liability Orders granted FRLocal_14	115	119	48	The level of liability orders granted has reduced due to the fact that courts were closed during the pandemic.
Total support/benefit paid FBData_01	£26.3m	£23.3m	£23.5m	Small increase is a result of the increased support provided during the pandemic.
Benefit claims received FBData_03	2,586	2,054	2,544	Increase is as a result of the pandemic.
Changes of Circumstances received FBData_11	32,657	29,949	30,113	Increase is as a result of the pandemic.
Applications for DHP FBData_07	381	346	303	The number of applications reduced as a result of the increased award of £20 per week to Universal Credit Claimants and the Council Tax Support Hardship fund.
Appeals received FBData_09	3	19	5	With fewer changes in customers circumstances, the number of appeals received reduced.

Service Data / Description (Pentana Code)	Actual 2018/19	Actual 2019/20	Actual 2020/21	Comments including benchmarking data
Calls offered (<i>Total demand for calls, i.e. those answered and abandoned in both the Contact Centre and in the back offices</i>) CSDData_01	115,816	117,021	121,165	The number of calls increased significantly in 2020/21 as a result of the pandemic.
Calls Answered CSDData_02	79,800	73,880	69,335	During 2020/21, the Customer Services team experienced system technical issues and a reduced resource capacity.

CRITICAL SUCCESS INDICATORS (CSI)

Priority leaders should work corporately to **define** the **outcome objective** for each priority area and **identify an outcome indicator** or indicators which will be **Critical Success Indicators**. There will be a maximum of two CSI for each corporate priority.

Indicator Description (Pentana Code)	Achieved 2018/19	Achieved 2019/20	Achieved 2020/21	Target 2021/22	Target 2022/23	Future Years	Indicator Owner and Comments (incl. benchmarking)
Council Tax collected in year % (BV9)	98.5%	98.3%	97.0%	97.5% (Revised) 98.0% (original)	98.0%	98.0%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Performance has been significantly affected by COVID-19 and a lack of recovery options available due to court closures. It is likely that it will take several years to recover to pre-pandemic levels.
Non-domestic rates collected in the year % (BV10)	99.1%	98.6%	96.6%	97.5% (Revised) 98% (Original)	98.0%	98.2%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Performance has been significantly affected by COVID-19 and a lack of recovery options available due to court closures. It is likely that it will take several years to recover to pre-pandemic levels.
% of DHP contribution compared to DWP grant (FRLocal_15)	95.3%	99.7%	86%	100%	100%	100%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services The Council always attempts to ensure that it spends 100% of the government allocation.
Number of online payment transactions to the Council (CSLocal_14)	67,541	62,111	53,479	71,000	71,000	71,000	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Online transactions will continue to be promoted as the best method of communicating with the Council.

OTHER PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Priority leaders are to identify two sets of performance indicators namely **Key Performance Indicators (KPI)** for reporting to GMT/Members and **Management Performance Indicators (MPI)** for use in business planning and performance monitoring purposes at a service level.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI)

Indicator Description (Pentana Code)	Achieved 2018/19	Achieved 2019/20	Achieved 2020/21	Target 2021/22	Target 2022/23	Future Years	Indicator Owner and Comments (incl. benchmarking)
Average time (days) to process Benefit claims (BV78a)	11.4	8.6	8.7	9	9	9	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Performance has been affected by COVID-19 and the subsequent increase in the number of people requiring support.
Average time (days) to process Benefit change of circumstances (BV78b)	3.9	4.4	3.5	4	4	4	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Performance has been affected by COVID-19 and the subsequent increase in the number of people requiring support.
Housing Benefit Overpayments (HBO) recovered as a percentage of the total amount of HBO outstanding (BV79b(ii))	29.0%	26.5%	20.7%	20%	25%	25%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services This area has been significantly affected as a result of COVID-19. On DWP guidance, most recovery action was placed on hold. It is anticipated that it will take several years to reach pre-pandemic levels.
Calls handled (Answered in Contact Centre) (CSData02)	79,800	73,800	69,335	75,000	73,000	71,000	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services During 2020/21, the Customer Services team experienced system technical issues and a reduced resource capacity.

Management Performance Indicators (MPI)

Indicator Description (Pentana Code)	Achieved 2018/19	Achieved 2019/20	Achieved 2020/21	Target 2021/22	Target 2022/23	Future Years	Indicator Owner and Comments (incl. benchmarking)
Council tax payers paying by Direct Debit (FRLocal_01)	71%	71%	71%	73%	73%	73%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services The achieved performance is almost at saturation point. Work will continue to increase the number of Direct Debit payers.
Council tax written off as 'not collectable' as a proportion of the gross debit (FRLocal_06)	0.36%	0.23%	0.0%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Due to the break in recovery, as a result of Covid-19, no in year Council Tax charges were written off. This will increase to reflect the temporary suspension.
NNDR written off as not collectable as a proportion of the gross debit (FRLocal_07)	1.0%	0.3%	0.03%	0.5%	0.6%	0.6%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services It is expected that there will be an increase in write offs as a result of COVID-19 but this will not be reflected until future years.
Housing Benefit Overpayments written off (BV79B(iii))	7.46%	6.85%	5.00%	9.0%	8.0%	8.0%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services It is expected that there will be an increase in write offs as a result of COVID-19 but this will not be reflected until future years.
Recoverable Housing Benefit Overpayments that are recovered during period (BV79B(i))	106.0%	120.9%	108.9%	85%	85%	85%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Performance in this area has been improving over recent years but with the halt on recovery as per the DWP guidance it is expected that performance will reduce.

Indicator Description (Pentana Code)	Achieved 2018/19	Achieved 2019/20	Achieved 2020/21	Target 2021/22	Target 2022/23	Future Years	Indicator Owner and Comments (incl. benchmarking)
Outstanding sundry debtors at year end (FPLocal_10)	£698k	£2.31m	£1.50m	£1.5m	£1.4m	£1.4m	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services The 2019/20 figure is misleading as it contained an amount of £990k which has subsequently been withdrawn as a result of COVID-19. It is expected that the levels of outstanding debt will increase over the coming years.
Sundry debtors collected in year as a proportion of the annual debit (FPLocal_02)	83.5%	83.4%	75.2%	90%	90%	90%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Anticipated that performance in this area will be impacted by COVID-19 and will take several years to return to earlier levels.

4. KEY TASKS AND PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT 2021/22 – 2023/24 INCLUDING COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES

Priority leaders are asked to consider potential **commercial activities** in their priority areas when setting the key tasks and priorities for the next three years. In doing so priority leaders should consider:

- In which service areas could new commercial activities be undertaken?
- How much additional income could be generated from the new commercial activities?
- Would additional resources (employees, equipment, systems etc.) be needed to undertake the new commercial activities? If yes, outline these with estimates of costs.
- How will these new commercial activities link into the Council’s Medium Term Financial Strategy, Capital Programme, Business Strategy and Commercial Strategy?
- Will the new commercial activities affect existing Revenue and Capital budgets? If yes, then remember to include the net income or costs to Section 5 ‘Link Key Tasks and Priorities for Improvement to the Financial Budgets’.
- Please identify new ‘**commercial activities**’ in the comments column.

Action (Pentana Code)	Targeted Outcome	Partnership / Procurement Arrangement	Officers Responsible / Target Date	Budget Implications / Efficiencies / Other comments
Manage the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) RBCS1620_01	Transfer of working age HB claims to UC will be administered by the DWP	Other council departments, system suppliers and DWP	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services March 2024	The roll out of UC continues and will reduce the amount paid out by the Council. This will impact on the Subsidy amounts that can be claimed.
Update the Council’s face to face customer contact experience RBCS1620_06	To create a modern welcoming environment for customers.	Work with partners and other council departments.	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services April 2022	Implementation is partly dependent on progress of the New Ways of Working Project and the availability of finance to make physical changes to reception

Action (Pentana Code)	Targeted Outcome	Partnership / Procurement Arrangement	Officers Responsible / Target Date	Budget Implications / Efficiencies / Other comments
Business Rates Review BCS2023_01	To review the relevant Rateable Value (RV) of Businesses.	Working with Newark and Sherwood District Council (NSDC) and Analyse Local to review the Rateable Values	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services September 2022	Contract with NSDC will cost £20k per annum. Analyse Local will charge a 10% of any RV that they identify as an increase. Any amounts payable will be linked to an increase in the Business rates collectable. Analyse Local will also provide software that will allow greater analysis of the Business Rates data at a cost of £2k per annum
Evaluate and implement Civica OpenChannel RBCS2124_01	To implement the OpenChannel module provided by Civica giving end to end online functionality for Customers in Council Tax and Benefits	Civica, using the relevant procurement framework	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services August 2022	Promoting online facilities allowing integration with the back office system. Initial quotation is capital cost of £69k with ongoing maintenance of £19k per annum. Efficiencies to be made through reduction in hours as a result of reduced need for re-keying information and reduced calls made to the Contact Centre. It is anticipated that this could be the equivalent of two FTE's across Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services totalling around £50k per annum efficiency. Discussions continue with Civica around the proposed cost of the software and implementation.

Action (Pentana Code)	Targeted Outcome	Partnership / Procurement Arrangement	Officers Responsible / Target Date	Budget Implications / Efficiencies / Other comments
Reduce telephone abandonment RBCS2023_03	Reduce the number of calls that are abandoned in the Contact Centre and in the back Office.	Working with all relevant departments to ensure telephones are answered in a timely manner	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services March 2022	Identify aspects of unavoidable contact and develop strategies to reduce the number of calls received.
Council Tax Single Person Discount Review RBCS2225_01 (New)	To conduct a risk based review of all Single Person Discounts.	Evaluation of potential partners remains ongoing	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services August 2022	Contract with external organisation will be approximately £15,000. It is to be negotiated with all precepting Authorities that an appropriate contribution will be made from each Council. This would mean Broxtowe pick up approximately 10% of this charge.
Email Connect RBCS2225_02 (New)	To implement the Information@work email connect module, providing automatic referencing of emails received.	Working with Information@work	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services October 2022	Information@work have provided a quote of £13,400

5. LINK KEY TASKS AND PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT TO THE FINANCIAL BUDGETS

Priority leaders should ensure that key tasks and priorities (including commercial activities) that have a financial implication are included in the analysis below.

Revenue and Capital Budget Implications/Efficiencies Generated	Pentana Action Code	2022/23 Budget £	2023/24 Budget £	2024/25 Budget £
Budget Implications				
Evaluate and implement Civica OpenChannel	RBCS2124_01	69,000	19,000	19,000
Update the Council's face to face customer contact experience	RBCS1620_06	100,000	-	-
Business Rate Review	RBCS2023_01	20,000	20,000	20,000
Single Person Discount Review	RBCS2225_01	15,000	-	-
Email Connect	RBCS2225_02	13,400	-	-
Efficiencies Generated				
Evaluate and implement Civica OpenChannel	RBCS2124_01	-	(25,000)	(25,000)
Business Rate Review	RBCS2023_01	200,000	100,000	100,000
Single Person Discount Review	RBCS2225_01	100,000	70,000	50,000
Email Connect	RBCS2225_02	10,000	20,000	20,000
New business/increased income				
Net Change in Revenue Budgets	NOTE*	Note	Note	Note

* Budget implications to be considered and confirmed once project business cases have been finalised.

6. SUMMARY OF KEY RISKS

Priority leaders have identified three strategic risks for the Business area and ensured that these are considered in the Council's Strategic Risk Register.

Key Strategic Risk	Action to be taken or required to mitigate/minimise the risk or threat
Failure to mitigate the impact of the Government's welfare reform agenda	The Council will continue to work with the DWP, DLUHC and CAB to ensure the Welfare Reform Agenda is implemented successfully for the people of the borough.
Corporate and/or political leadership adversely impacting upon service delivery	Working with GMT and political leaders to ensure that relevant guidance is given at appropriate times.

The top five risks (strategic or operational) arising from the key tasks and priorities for improvement have also been identified. As part of the project planning process for each key task detailed risk analyses will be undertaken and mitigation actions identified. It is anticipated that there will be 'common themes' identified that are covered by Strategic Risks.

Key Task	Risk or Threat to Key Task	Covered by an existing Strategic Risk?	Action taken/required to mitigate/minimise the risk or threat
Universal Credit introduction RBCS1620_01	DWP will remove significant resources despite the Council still administering CTS and HB for pension age	Yes – Risk 16 (see below)	Local Authorities must protect their interests to ensure sufficient employees and resources remain to provide service
Universal Credit introduction RBCS1620_01	Paying claimant direct will impact on rent and council tax collection.	Yes – Risk 16	More time, effort and money will have to be spent on collecting Council Tax and Housing Rents
Update the Council's face-to-face customer contact RBCS1620_06	New reception arrangements do not develop as planned or do not facilitate effective operation of customer services	Yes - Risk 2	Involvement of key stakeholders in development of reception area
Business Rates Review RBCS2023_01	Conduct a thorough review of the Business Rates properties within the Borough	Yes - Risk 9	Working with Newark and Sherwood to provide Property Inspectors

Key Task	Risk or Threat to Key Task	Covered by an existing Strategic Risk?	Action taken/required to mitigate/minimise the risk or threat
Single Person Discount Review RBCS2225_01	Conduct a risk based review on single person discounts	Yes – Risk 9	Working as a countywide partnership to minimise risk.

Risks as extracted from the Strategic Risk Register as at November 2021:

Risk 2: Failure to obtain adequate resources to achieve service objectives

Risk 9: Failure to maximise collection of income due to the Council

Risk 16: Failure to mitigate the impact of the Government's welfare reform agenda

The latest Strategic Risk Register is available in full at

<https://intranet.broxtowe.gov.uk/finance/risk-management/>