

REVENUES, BENEFITS AND CUSTOMER SERVICES BUSINESS PLAN 2023–2026

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 regularly by General Management Team and reported to Members on a quarterly basis via Members Matters. Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee will also occasionally receive high level reports on progress against Corporate Plan priorities as required and as part of action planning, target setting and outturn reporting.

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

The Council's Values are:

- **Going the extra mile: a strong, caring focus on the needs of communities**
- **Ready for change: innovation and readiness for change**
- **Employees: value our employees and enable the active involvement of everyone**
- **Always improving: continuous improvement and delivering value for money**
- **Transparent: 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
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

Strategy/Policy Document	Purpose of Document	Renewal Date	Responsible Officer/Contact
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.	August 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 2024	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services
Customer Services Strategy	Summarise and set out the detail of the Customer Services Strategy.	March 2026	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
Counter-fraud policy documents	Sets out the Council's approach to protecting its assets from fraud.	On changes to relevant legislation	Deputy Chief Executive August Chief Audit and Control Officer

Strategy/Policy Document	Purpose of Document	Renewal Date	Responsible Officer/Contact
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 2024	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 and Sundry Debts
 - 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 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

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

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 2019/20	Actual 2020/21	Actual 2021/22	Comments including benchmarking data
Total Council Tax Collected FRLocal_10	£66.1m	£68.0m	£70.2m	Expected collection increases in line with the increase in charge.
Total Business Rates Collected FRLocal_11	£27.2m	£11.7m	£24.0m	The amount collected is reflective of the amount charged and a collection rate of 97.41%, During 2020/21, the collectable charge decreased as a result of significant reliefs funded through government section 31 grants.
Total Sundry Debtors Collected FRLocal_12	£5.3m	£5.9m	£3.7m	Data for 2020/21 includes a payment of £910k from one debtor. Collection of debtors remains challenging. The outstanding balance is reflective of pre 2019/20 levels.
Total Council Tax Liability Orders granted FRLocal_13	2,498	1,109	1,941	The level of liability orders granted reflects the increased recovery work being conducted.
Total Business Rates Liability Orders granted FRLocal_14	119	48	97	The level of liability orders granted reflects the increased recovery work being conducted.
Total support/benefit paid FBData_01	£23.3m	£23.5m	£22.2m	With the continued roll out of Universal Credit, this figure will continue to reduce over the coming years.
Benefit claims received FBData_03	2,054	2,544	1,397	With the continued roll out of Universal Credit, this figure will continue to reduce over the coming years.
Changes of Circumstances received FBData_11	29,949	30,113	26,477	With the continued roll out of Universal Credit, this figure will continue to reduce over the coming years.
Applications for DHP FBData_07	346	303	367	The number of applications received has increased significantly however, the level of funding provided by Government has reduced.

Service Data / Description (Pentana Code)	Actual 2019/20	Actual 2020/21	Actual 2021/22	Comments including benchmarking data
Appeals received FBData_09	19	5	6	With fewer changes in customers circumstances, the number of appeals received reduced.
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	117,021	121,165	111,429	With more customers using online channels, this should continue to reduce going forward.
Calls Answered (<i>Answered in Contact Centre</i>) CSDData_02	73,880	69,335	62,775	During 2020/21, the Customer Services team experienced a variety of issues including resourcing levels. In line with the Overview and Scrutiny working group, improvements have been made in this area.

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 2019/20	Achieved 2020/21	Achieved 2021/22	Target 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Future Years	Indicator Owner and Comments (incl. benchmarking)
Council Tax collected in year % (BV9)	97.2%	97.0%	97.0%	98.5%	98.5%	98.5%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Performance is monitored against the gov.uk website.
Non-domestic rates collected in the year % (BV10)	98.6%	96.6%	97.4%	98.5%	98.5%	98.5%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Performance is monitored against the gov.uk website.
% of DHP contribution compared to DWP grant (FRLocal_15)	99.7%	86.0%	100%	100%	100%	100%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services The Council's DHP contribution from central government has been significantly reduced and as a result it is likely that the Council will be required to top up the amounts to support the most vulnerable.
Number of online payment transactions to the Council (CSLocal_14)	62,111	53,479	59,537	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 2019/20	Achieved 2020/21	Achieved 2021/22	Target 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Future Years	Indicator Owner and Comments (incl. benchmarking)
Average time (days) to process Benefit claims (BV78a)	8.6	8.7	8.8	9.0	9.0	9.0	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services The Council's performance is in the upper quartile for the Country
Average time (days) to process Benefit change of circumstances (BV78b)	4.4	3.5	4.5	4.0	4.0	4.0	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services The Council's performance is in the upper quartile for the Country
Housing Benefit Overpayments (HBO) recovered as a percentage of the total amount of HBO outstanding (BV79b(ii))	26.52%	20.70%	26.49%	20.00%	25.00%	25.00%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Although performance improved in 2021/22, this area can be very challenging and influenced significantly by factors such as the rising cost of living.
Calls handled (Answered in Contact Centre) (CSData02)	73,800	69,335	62,775	73,000	71,000	71,000	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services The target remains a challenging achievement but will provide an improved customer experience when achieved.
Switchboard Calls Answered (CSData11) (New)	-	-	-	58,000	56,000	55,000	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Data has only become available during 2021/22 and will continue to be monitored.

Management Performance Indicators (MPI)

Indicator Description (Pentana Code)	Achieved 2019/20	Achieved 2020/21	Achieved 2021/22	Target 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Future Years	Indicator Owner and Comments (incl. benchmarking)
Council tax payers paying by Direct Debit (FRLocal_01)	71%	71%	73%	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)	0.23%	0.00%	0.27%	0.40%	0.40%	0.40%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services The Council only writes off balances that it has exhausted all recovery options for.
NNDR written off as not collectable as a proportion of the gross debit (FRLocal_07)	0.3%	0.03%	0.19%	0.30%	0.30%	0.30%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services The Council only writes off balances that it has exhausted all recovery options for.
Housing Benefit Overpayments written off (BV79B(iii))	6.85%	5.00%	9.65%	8.00%	8.00%	8.00%	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))	120.9%	108.9%	132.98%	85.00%	85.00%	85.00%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Performance in the area has improved due to less overpayments being created as customers move on to Universal Credit.

Indicator Description (Pentana Code)	Achieved 2019/20	Achieved 2020/21	Achieved 2021/22	Target 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Future Years	Indicator Owner and Comments (incl. benchmarking)
Outstanding sundry debtors at year end (FPLocal_10)	£2.3m	£1.5m	£1.7m	£1.4m	£1.4m	£1.4m	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services This is the level of debt outstanding at the end of the financial year. The 2019/20 figure included a debt of £900k that was later credit noted.
Sundry debtors collected in year as a proportion of the annual debit (FPLocal_02)	83.4%	75.2%	86.7%	90.0%	90.0%	90.0%	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services Anticipated that performance in this area will be impacted by COVID and will take several years to return to earlier levels.

4. KEY TASKS AND PRIORITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT 2023/24 – 2025/26 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.
Implement the updated Customer Services Strategy with focus on the updated reception area. 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 2024	The Council has set a budget to allow the redevelopment of the reception area.

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 2024	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, which is now within the existing budget.
Evaluate and implement OpenChannel, subject to Business Case RBCS2124_01	To implement the OpenChannel module giving end to end online functionality for Customers in Council Tax and Benefits	Relevant software provider, using the relevant procurement framework	Head of Revenues, Benefits and Customer Services March 2024	Promoting online facilities allowing integration with the back office system. Initial quotation's provided with further evaluation required. 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. Discussions continue with software provider 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 2024	Identify aspects of unavoidable contact and develop strategies to reduce the number of calls received.
Email Connect RBCS2225_02	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 March 2024	Information@work have provided a quote of £13,400. This additional software will only become available once the Council upgrades to the latest version of Information@work, which will not be available until 2023/24.

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	2023/24 Budget £	2024/25 Budget £	2025/26 Budget £
Budget Implications				
Evaluate and implement OpenChannel	RBCS2124_01	69,000	19,000	19,000
Implement the updated Customer Services Strategy with focus on the updated reception area.	RBCS1620_06	100,000**	-	-
Business Rate Review	RBCS2023_01	20,000	20,000	20,000
Email Connect	RBCS2225_02	13,400		
Efficiencies Generated				
Evaluate and implement OpenChannel	RBCS2124_01	-	(25,000)	(25,000)
Email Connect	RBCS2225_02	10,000	20,000	20,000
New business/increased income				
Business Rate Review	RBCS2023_01	170,000	100,000	100,000
Net Change in Revenue Budgets		Note	Note	Note

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

**previous budgeted amount. Further cabinet report scheduled for January 2023 to request revised budget.

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 Paying claimant direct will impact on rent and council tax collection.	Yes – Risk 16 (see below)	Local Authorities must protect their interests to ensure sufficient employees and resources remain to provide service More time, effort and money will have to be spent on collecting Council Tax.
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 8	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

Risks as extracted from the Strategic Risk Register as at November 2022:

Risk 8: Failure of Financial Management and/or budgetary control and to implement agreed budget decisions

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/>