

TITLE OF REPORT: **Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives - End of Year Assessment of Performance and Delivery 2019/20 and Impact of COVID-19**

REPORT OF: **Darren Collins, Strategic Director, Resources and Digital**

SUMMARY

This report provides the end of year update of performance and delivery for the period ending 31 March 2020 in relation to the Council's Thrive agenda for the indicators and activity linked to Corporate Resources. It also provides a high-level overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on performance.

Background

1. The report forms part of the Council's performance management framework and gives an overview of progress for the priorities appropriate to the remit of the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
2. The Council's new strategic approach Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives, was approved by Cabinet in March 2018, to ensure the Council continues to get the best outcomes for local people and remains a viable and sustainable organisation into the future.
3. While the report follows the standard framework for the Year End 2019/20 performance, it also identifies the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on performance as well potential future implications.

Delivery and Performance

4. This report sets out the performance overview linked to the 14 strategic outcome indicators, identified as providing a high-level picture of the strategic priorities for the Council in relation to Corporate Resources.
5. All 14 indicators are listed in appendix 1 with performance data provided where this is available at the end of the period. There is also an update on key activities and achievements over the last 6 months, with key activities being undertaken in each service area in the upcoming 6-month period also identified along with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendation

6. It is recommended that the Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
 - consider whether the activities undertaken during October to March 2020 are supporting delivery of the Thrive agenda;
 - to identify any areas, they feel they require more detail about or feel require further scrutiny; and
 - note that Cabinet will consider a composite performance report at its meeting on 20 October 2020.

Corporate Resources Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives – Year-end Assessment of Performance and Delivery 2019/20

7 September 2020

Portfolio:	Leader
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Martin Gannon
OSC Chair:	Councillor John Eagle
Lead Officers:	Lindsay Murray, Service Director, Commercialisation & Improvement Andrea Tickner, Service Director, Corporate Commissioning & Procurement Marisa Jobling, Service Director, Customer Experience & Digital John Shiel, Service Director, Financial Management

1.0 Introduction

1.1 This report relates to how well the Council is achieving against the strategic approach of Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives and the five Council Pledges:

- ❖ Put People and families at the heart of everything we do
- ❖ Tackle inequality so people have a fair chance
- ❖ Support our communities to support themselves and each other
- ❖ Invest in our economy to provide sustainable opportunities for employment, innovation, and growth across the borough
- ❖ Work together and fight for a better future for Gateshead

1.2 Progress and achievements of strategic indicators, in line with the committee's remit, are provided along with areas of future focus.

1.3 Tables highlighting an update to the six-month performance and the performance of the strategic indicators are provided in section's B and C.

1.4 Appendix 1 provides a summary of the current position relating to the implementation of budget proposals that have previously been highlighted as potentially having a disproportionate impact in relation to equalities.

2.0 Recommendation

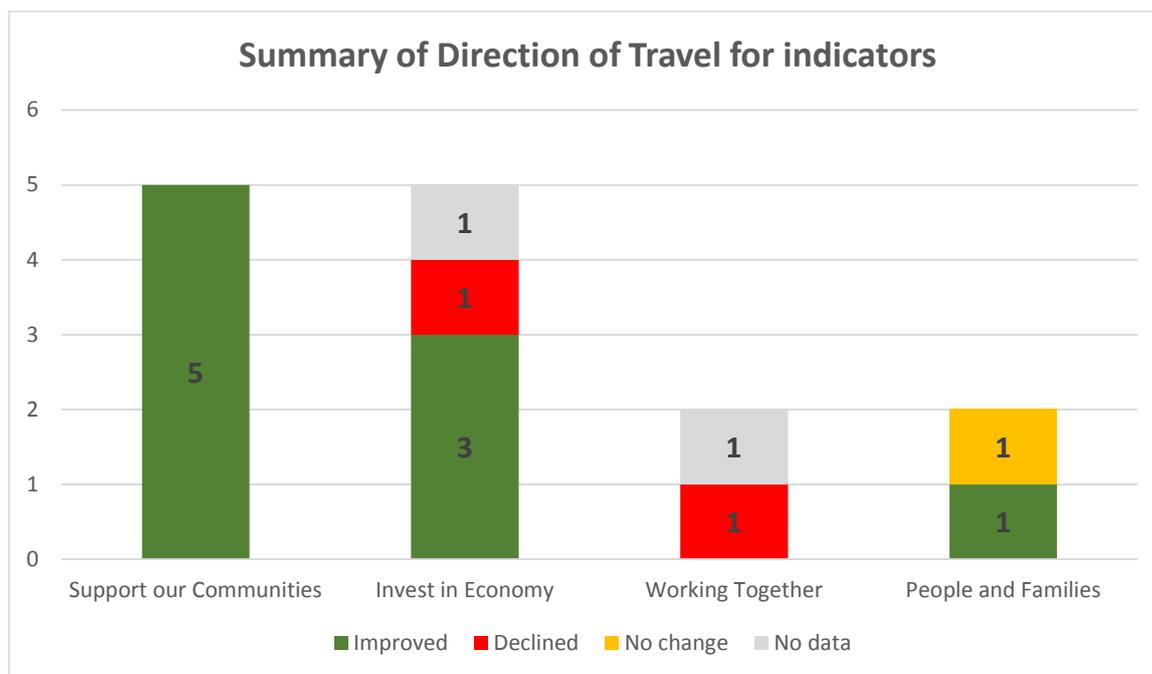
2.1 The Committee is asked to consider:

- (i) whether the activities undertaken during October 2019 to the end of March 2020 are supporting delivery of the Thrive Agenda;
- (ii) any areas they feel they require more detail on or require further scrutiny; and
- (iii) note that Cabinet will consider a composite performance report at their meeting on 20 October 2020.

Section A

3.0 Performance Overview

3.1 The committee receives performance data relating to 14 strategic indicators. Of the 14 indicators, 9 indicators show improved performance, 2 show a slight reduction in performance and 1 with no change. Two indicators have no performance data, with one of these setting the baseline in 2019/20.



4.0 Putting people and families at the heart of everything we do

Performance

- 4.1 Two strategic indicators have been identified that link to the Council pledge of putting people and families at the heart of everything we do:
- Performance relating to the speed of processing housing benefit claims has shown an improvement of 3.12 days compared to the previous year's performance of 6.2 days. To some degree, this is the result of prioritising of Housing Benefit claims, changes and the reduction in the caseload due to Universal Credit. Further work with automation of changes has also been carried out which has helped improve processing times and the benefit team has proactively engaged with the Department for Work and pensions (DWP) initiatives to identify unreported changes at the earliest opportunity.
 - To support the Council's role as corporate parents to children and young people who are looked after, the Council has a strategic indicator to achieve a year on year increase in the number of young people leaving care who are supported to have an opportunity in the Council for an apprenticeship. The year-end figure for 2019/20 apprenticeships remains at 2.

Further information is provided in section C of this report.

Achievements, Challenges and Actions and Impact of COVID-19 on Performance

- 4.2 COVID-19 has affected the lives and livelihoods of all those in Gateshead and the Council has worked hard to ensure that plans were in place and implemented to support local residents, particularly the most vulnerable.
- 4.3 Between 23 March and 26 June 2020, the benefits team took over 10,200 calls from benefit claimants. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on people's personal financial circumstances. Whilst this has had some impact on the number of Housing Benefit applications and changes in circumstances, the main impact has been the increase in claimants moving to Universal Credit (99 claimants moving in March 2020 compared to an average of 70 a month in the preceding five months) and the increase in applications and changes relating to Council Tax Support. In March 2020, 2,370 applications for Council Tax Support were received, compared to 556 in February 2020.
- 4.4 As a result, the Council is facing significant challenge in terms of ensuring these applications are processed and applicants receive their benefits in a timely manner to avoid any further financial hardship. The Hardship Fund, announced by the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government will be delivered to over 13,100 Council Tax accounts.
- 4.5 Housing Benefit employees are working from home and have direct contact with customers by telephone and email. This has allowed us to ensure our service delivery has continued in full including achieving improvements in performance compared to last year (8.66 days in May 2020 compared to 10.63 days in May 2019) in processing claims.
- 4.6 The Benefits team continue to seek performance improvement by implementing further software changes and working with DWP to identify more efficient ways of sharing data, such as HMRC earnings and household data matches. The team has continued to build capacity in terms of welfare advice and provision by training more officers in this area and taking a holistic view of a person's circumstances. The calls in relation to benefits have also enabled employees to talk to customers and enquire about overall welfare and working with others around more complex cases.
- 4.7 The Council will continue to support the Borough's Housing benefit, Council Tax Support and Universal credit claimants by working with others such as DWP, Citizen's Advice Gateshead, local food banks and the community hubs.

5.0 Tackle inequality so people have a fair chance

Performance

- 5.1 This committee does not monitor specific strategic indicators relating to this Council pledge.

Achievements, Challenges and Actions

- 5.2 The purpose of gender pay reporting is to show the difference between the average earnings of men and women. Under the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties and Public Authorities) Regulations 2017, we have a legal duty to report on gender pay. The regulations require us to publish key information based on an agreed methodology. Due to the pandemic, the government suspended the requirement to report gender pay information, however, the Council submitted its information regardless.
- 5.3 Data for the 31st March 2019 shows the mean hourly rate of pay for all male full-pay relevant employees is £14.41. The mean hourly rate of pay for all female full-pay relevant employees is £13.25. The mean gender pay gap equates to 8.04% which is a decrease from 9.68% in 2018. The median hourly rate of pay for all male full-pay relevant employees is £12.77 while median hourly rate of pay for all female full-pay relevant employees is £11.57. The median gender pay gap therefore equates to 9.39% which is a decrease from 12.06% in 2018.

	Number of Males	% of Males	Number of Females	% of Females
Lower quartile	226	22.9	761	77.1
Lower middle quartile	354	35.9	633	64.1
Upper middle quartile	381	38.6	606	65.1
Upper quartile	395	40.1	591	59.9

For the purposes of this data (as specified in the regulations) a pay period of one month equates to 30.44 days. The calculations are based on 'full-pay relevant employees'.

- 5.4 Future action to address the gender pay gap includes a focus on learning and development at all levels within the organisation, using the Appraisal & Development (A&D) scheme and maximising employee potential toolkit. Providing A&Ds are carried out in accordance with the scheme, and regular monitoring and 1:1 meetings take place, every employee should be provided with opportunities to maximise their potential and progress within the organisation. Over recent years, austerity measures have meant that there are fewer recruitment and promotion opportunities, however, discussions about career aspirations provide an opportunity for employees to develop into potential future roles; this will support succession planning and help retain talent within the organisation. It is too early to say whether COVID-19 will impact on the gender pay gap, however, embracing new ways of service delivery in the future, and associated ways of working, particularly more home working and flexible working could have a positive impact on the gender pay gap.
- 5.5. Maximising the take-up of apprenticeships for current employees across the Council is also a priority which, again, will support career development in the longer term. During the pandemic work has continued on delivering the commitments in the Apprenticeship Strategy and Plan, although some new start apprenticeships have had to be paused. Wherever possible, current apprentices have continued to

develop and learn, albeit remotely, working with training providers to minimise disruption.

- 5.6 During 2019/20, the Council provided a wide range of equality and diversity training for employees and partner organisations. Courses ranged from Hate / Mate Crime to Honour Based Violence to training on cultural awareness. During 2019/20, 221 council employees attended one or more of these courses. COVID-19 has impacted on the ability to deliver some face-to-face learning, however, the opportunity to develop more on-line and virtual training has been embraced.
- 5.7 Appendix 1 summarises the assessments provided by services of the equality impact of budget proposals following implementation. Three proposals are recommended to continue to be monitored. The Committee will receive a further update in December 2020.

6.0 Support our communities to support themselves and each other

Performance

- 6.1 Five Strategic Indicators (all relating to the % increase in on-line transactions) have been identified as Supporting our Communities. These relate to the Council's Digital Programme and the Council pledge to support our communities to support themselves and each other and have seen a percentage increases in online transactions have improved on the previous year.

- 6.2 *Online payments* - £21.26m in online payments were taken, representing annual increase of 15% compared to an increase of 18.2% in 2018/19. We anticipate a significant increase again in 2020/21, as even more residents switch to online payments rather than the traditional methods of payments.

Further information is provided in section C of this report.

- 6.3 *Fly-tipping reports* – 2018/19 was a baseline year for the indicator. 5,003 fly tips were reported by the public in 2018/19, 57.4% reported online and 42.65% reported via telephone calls. The 2019/20 data reveals 5,145 fly tips were reported by the public with online reporting up to 65.2% with 34.8% reported using the telephone.
- 6.4 *Garden Waste Subscription* - £799,361 in garden waste subscriptions were collected in 2018/19, with 16,275 subscriptions (66.38%) paid for online in 2018/19. A new online system using the Digital Platform was introduced for 2019/20. This scheme is open until the end of August 2020 but has so far collected £800,575 in come with 17,710 subscriptions (71.5%) paid online.
- 6.5 *Registrars Appointments* – Online registrations for birth and death appointments were launched using the Digital Platform on 13 March 2019. Therefore, 2019/20 is the baseline year for this indicator. This period 4,403 birth and death appointments were made using the system with 56.44% made online and 43.65% using the telephone. 70.46% of birth appointments and 45.43% of death registration appointments were made online. Since 1 April 2020 76% of birth registration appointments have been made online with 51.6% of death registration appointments made online.
- 6.6 *Adult Social Care forms* – Adult social care online forms were launched in November 2018, therefore 2019/20 is the full baseline year. In 2019/20 4,265 online contact forms were received with 1,758 (41.22%) being social care assessments; 1,156 (27.1%) social care reviews; 1,154 (27.06%) social care enquires and 197

(4.61%) submitted by practitioners. This compares to 22,661 telephone calls received by the Adult Social care Direct team over the same period.

Achievements, Challenges and Actions including impact of COVID-19 on Performance

- 6.7 In the last six months of 2019/20, several digital services were launched including a new version of the garden waste subscriptions. The social care contact forms were expanded with the inclusion of a form for social care practitioners allowing external organisations to submit requests to Adult Social Care Direct. An online ordering system for minor works was launched to manage occupational therapy requests. To support the new Landlord Licensing Scheme, a detailed online application process was made available to assist with scheme management.
- 6.8 In March 2020, the old corporate complaints system was completely replaced with a new digital solution to improve the management and reporting complaints.
- 6.9 The launch of garden waste subscriptions resulted in an increase in residents registering with My Gateshead Account www.gateshead.gov.uk/myaccount which now has 8,597 registered users.
- 6.10 The focus for the period April to September 2020 will be to continue responding to the impact of the COVID19 pandemic. The provision of digital services has come to the fore during this time as it has often become the primary method in which to contact and transact with the Council. The closure of the Civic Centre and other council and housing company offices resulted in a reduction in cash payments, but an increase in online payments. For example, there has been a 17.9% increase in internet payments, to the value of £6.2m in the first quarter of 2020/21 compared to the previous year.
- 6.11 To support the Gateshead community hubs established in March 2020 in response to the consequences of the pandemic, the Digital Platform was used to develop a case management solution that supported customer contact. In addition, a hotline telephone number was provided for those residents who required emergency support. As at 1 July 2020, over 4,200 Gateshead residents have been supported via these contact channels.
- 6.12 As well as the development of the community hubs case management system, an online personal protective equipment (PPE) application process was also provided to assist officers in collating requirements from schools and care providers.
- 6.13 Other services that have been required to support businesses have included an online business directory for businesses providing support during COVID19 and applications for both business rates grant and a Local Authority discretionary grant fund. Currently in development is an online application process for pavement licenses to support pubs and restaurants re-opening.
- 6.14 As Council services have restarted, the Digital Programme has supported the recovery phase as they have adapted to new ways of working for household waste and recycling centres, garden waste, bulky waste collections, registrars' bookings, parking charges and the Libraries ring and read service being recent examples.

- 6.15 The Digital Platform has been fundamental to the delivery of online solutions and services that have mobilised the Council's response to Government initiatives and enabled Gateshead's businesses and residents to be supported.
- 6.16 Work has also now restarted on the Digitising Customer Experience project, including business re-engineering, end to end service redesign, streamlining processes and systems. This aims to provide a joined-up experience across all channels by handling customer contact in a consistent manner. The focus in the next 6 months will include waste management, special collections, street cleansing and enforcement, street lighting and furniture and household waste permits.
- 6.17 The Council has been working to support greater digital inclusion as well as supporting people who may have difficulties. For example, during the pandemic, the Council has been unable to accept cash though has ensured alternative payment methods are available. This has included online, over the telephone, use of a payment card, standing order and Direct Debit. Likewise, residents can still contact the Council by telephone to report issues or book appointments.
- 6.18 The Council is planning the development of a tablet lending service for priority residents as part of a project involving IT and the library service. The project will reuse old, but fully functional, IT equipment. Analysis shows that over 70% of IT users in libraries can be categorised as "financially stretched" or live in areas of "urban adversity". The library service will engage fully with the developing initiative Working Gateshead, to support people digital excluded to find work post pandemic.

7 Invest in our economy to provide sustainable opportunities for employment, innovation and growth across the borough

Performance

- 7.1 There are five strategic indicators identified that support investment in economy, innovation and growth. These relate to the collection of Council Tax and Business Rates; Payment of undisputed invoices; Superfast Broadband connectivity and Services for Schools business (though 2019/20 represents the baseline setting year for Services for Schools).
- 7.2 Council Tax collection performance (% of Council Tax Collected) in 2019/20 was 95.9%, compared to 95.7% in 2018/19. Although the target of 96.6% was not achieved, the collection rate improved by 0.2%, albeit with an additional £5.5 million in Council Tax to collect during 2019-20. Some of the improvements made to how we collect Council Tax include helping customers to pay their current charge first, so avoiding additional costs; ensuring arrangements are affordable and sustainable; being empathetic; acknowledging individual circumstances; giving extra time and flexibility when a customer requires this; and providing financial advice and signposting customers to this when it is needed.
- 7.3 Universal Credit continues to have a negative impact on collection, however the Council Tax team continues to ensure that residents are supported and provides an empathetic service aiming to ensure that any payment arrangement that is made is done so in accordance with each individual's circumstances, with the priority being that payments are affordable and sustainable.
- 7.4 We actively identify any unclaimed discounts, exemptions or benefits and give residents the help and guidance they may need in order to receive these.

- 7.5 Business Rate collection performance (% of Business Rates Collected) in 2019/20 was 97.5%, compared to 98% in 2018/19. Collection performance was slightly under the target of 97.6% and would have been achieved but for the impact of Covid-19 which meant that some ratepayers who pay at the end of each month were unable to do so at the end of March 2020.
- 7.6 Collection performance was impacted by the current difficulties in the economy. The amount of uncollected business rates wrote off during 2019/20 increased by £704k to a total of £1.3m (compared to a total of £670k in 2018/19). This is due to a significant increase in business insolvencies.
- 7.7 Any balances written off are still classed as collectable for the purposes of calculating our collection rate. If we had the same level of write offs in 2019-20 as we had in 2018-19 our collection rate would have been 98% which would have matched our previous year performance.
- 7.8 87.7% of undisputed invoices were paid on time by the Council, which represents a sustained improvement from 2017/18 where this was 78.9%. The improvement is largely the result of a review of business processes which have enabled speedier payments of invoices.
- 7.9 The direction of travel for the rollout of Superfast Broadband continues to remain positive with a further increase during the year. The number of premises able to obtain fibre optic based Superfast Broadband is now available to 97.7% of premises in Gateshead which compares favourably against the UK average figure of 96.4%.

Achievements, challenges and actions including impact of COVID-19 on performance:

- 7.10 Between 23 March and 26 June 2020, the Council Tax team took over 13,800 calls from council taxpayers. Council tax customers have been given payment breaks and extended arrangements for payment to March and beyond, where customers have told us they were struggling to pay.
- 7.11 Flexible payment options for council tax arrears have been agreed and officers have ensured that any arrangements made are affordable and sustainable and the team have stressed to each customer that they should tell us if they find they are struggling.
- 7.12 A specialist team focuses on providing help to residents who have contacted the Council Tax team. These residents have significant challenges in their lives, which is often the main reason for payments not being made. The challenges can include but are not limited to multiple other debts, addictions, abuse (past and current) mental health issues (including suicidal, post-traumatic stress disorder), learning difficulties and victims of loan sharks. Inevitably the pandemic is also now playing a part in this.
- 7.13 From April 2020, the Council had responsibility for issuing government payments from the Small Business Grant fund (£10,000) and Retail Hospitality and Leisure Grant Fund (£25,000). As at 30 June 2020, 3,156 grants were issued to businesses for a total value of £36.975 million. The Council is also using this contact with business rate payers to signpost for additional support.
- 7.14 From June 2020, the Council is supporting businesses that were not eligible for the above grants via the COVID-19 Business Support Grants: Local Authority Grant Fund. Up to 1 July 2020, 110 payments have been issued for a value of £570,000.

- 7.15 The Council's approach to debt recovery was paused as a result of the pandemic, however, from the beginning of July, this will be restarted providing a supportive approach that encourages contact, offers advice and guidance and signposts to any specific support people and businesses may need.
- 7.16 The collection of council tax and business rates continues to be an important element of income generation so that the Council's Thrive agenda can be achieved. Areas of future focus relate to learning from the Council's public service reform activity to develop a supportive financial approach for those people who can't pay, whilst conversely developing a harder approach for those people who won't pay, for example seeking to use legislation such as the Digital Economy Act to pursue debt recovery, by effective data-sharing with other local authorities.
- 7.17 Committee received the corporate asset management annual delivery and performance report in December 2019. This report provided an update on the progress made against the Council's Corporate Asset Strategy & Management Plan and the year on year performance of the property portfolio.
- 7.18 The Council's Tenanted Non-Residential Portfolio (TNRP) transferred to PSP LLP, the limited liability partnership jointly owned by the Council and Public Sector plc. In the second half of 2019/20, a further £529k of capital receipts were secured from the sale of surplus assets bringing the total year end value of assets sold to £699k. A further £1.15m of rent was received from PSP LLP, giving a total of £2.32m. This meant the LLP generated sufficient cash to meet the Guaranteed Minimum Rent payable to the Council. In addition, profit rent of approximately £270k has been generated, with the Council receiving £205k as its share.
- 7.19 The marketing of surplus asset sites continues, however, there may be an impact and measures are being looked at to deal with the pandemic. While major projects such as Gateshead Quays, High Street South and speculative office development at Baltic Quarter construction sites closed during March. The full impact of the pandemic of Covid 19 will become clear in the figures for 2020/21.
- 7.20 For 2019/20 schools and academies were offered over 50 services provided by the Council. These covered three broad thematic areas:
- Pupil Focused Services such as Education Psychology
 - Facilities Management Services such as school cleaning
 - Professional & Technical Services such as payroll provision
- 7.21 In total schools and academies received services from the Council to the value of £12.6m (baseline for 2019/20). This represents a positive outcome in the context of an increasingly challenging market. Throughout the year the Council has continued to develop its co-ordinated and increasingly customer focused approach to schools. Positive discussions have been held with schools and these have been used to shape the offer to meet school needs. This resulted in just under 200 different packages being available to schools. The quality of services continues to be high, for example, the catering service was singled out for the fourth year running by APSE as the UK's top performing school meals provider.
- 7.22 The ability of schools to buy back services is complicated by both significant and increasing budget pressures and the rapid rise of academisation and multi academy trusts (MATS - which often seek large scale contracts that cover a wider geographical area). The COVID-19 pandemic is also increasing pressures in this area. At the same time the costs of providing services are increasing such as unit costs for ingredients for school meals and staff salaries as the Council is committed

to supporting local employment and paying the Living Wage. The Council has worked hard to develop a competitive pricing strategy that provides value for money as well as quality for schools and their pupils, whilst supporting Community Wealth Building.

- 7.23 In preparation for the 2020/21 year, the Council hosted a marketplace event on 22 January 2020, where schools and academies were invited to speak with service providers and hear what was on offer. Schools originally had until 20 March 2020, to secure their SLAs, although this was extended to 30 May 2020, as many schools were focused on dealing with closures and other measures needed due to Covid-19. All schools have now responded. There has been minimal reduction in buy-back when compared to the previous year, demonstrating the strength of the Council's offer, though income-based services face a significant challenge due to COVID-19 implications. This is because that while buy back from schools has been strong, there are several income-based services such as School Catering, the Music Service and School Sports Partnerships, which rely on schools being open in order to deliver their service. This will continue to be monitored.

8.0 Work together and fight for a better future for Gateshead -

Performance

- 8.1 There are two strategic indicators identified that support the Council pledge to work together, as follows:
- As reported at the six-month stage, the 2018 staff survey saw an increase in employees feeling that the Council is a good place to work, with responses showing a rise from 64% in 2016 to 73% in 2018. Following a senior management review no survey took place in 2019/20, however, once pandemic response has settled, it would be appropriate to carry out a further staff survey.
 - The 2019-20 year-end performance for the strategic indicator reporting on the number of days staff sickness absence per FTE (excluding school staff) has been recorded as 11.9 which is a slight increase on the previous year's figure of 11.4 days but still down on the 2017-18 figure of 12.75 days.

Further information is provided in section C of this report.

Achievements, Challenges and Actions including Impact of COVID-19 on Performance

- 8.2 Several challenges remain on further reducing staff absence. One of the key areas is around the consistent application of management action in accordance with the agreed absence management procedures. Managers and HR have continued to deal with sickness absences during 'lockdown', although initially this was challenging as it is difficult to conduct empathetic yet business-like meetings with employees and their representatives in a COVID-safe manner. Sickness levels amongst employees continue to be monitored, though there has not been any significant change as a result of the pandemic. At present data is only available across the whole Council for part of the 2020/21 year. FTE days for April were 12.06; May was 11.79 and June was 11.25. It is intended to consider how sickness absence levels compare with previous years, once data is available and analysed for the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. This continues to be monitored and will be included in the next report to Committee.
- 8.3. In January 2020 the North East Better Health at Work Award submission was approved, with the Council 'maintaining excellence' for a further year. The Council

will work towards 'Ambassador' status, which is where the assessment recognises that the Council is going above and beyond to improve the health and wellbeing of employees.

- 8.4. In terms of tackling stress, every service has been required to complete a Work Related Stress Action Plan which addresses the issues raised in employee focus groups. Action plans are monitored at quarterly health and safety meetings. A further review of these plans will be required to align with the Council's new staffing structure implemented in November 2019, and the impact of Covid-19 on related stress. HR and OH&S have continually reminded employees throughout the pandemic of the support available in relation to mental health and physical health, especially for those who are working remotely. In some areas e.g. social care, the Occupational Health Doctor has facilitated sessions to enable staff to have group and one-to-one discussions about the impact on their mental health in respect of working closely with residents who may have tested positive for COVID-19.
- 8.5 The Tackling Poverty in Gateshead Board is to take place, led by Alison Dunn and Councillor Catherine Donovan. This has been delayed due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, however progress is highlighted below:
- The Council has worked closely with NEFirst Credit Union to bring about a premise move from their rarely visited branch at the bottom of the Interchange Building to a highly prominent shop front location on Jackson Street. This now provides NEFirst with the opportunity to raise its profile in Gateshead, grow its membership and offer much needed ethical and affordable financial services often to those who are financially excluded.
 - In addition, the Council has worked with a subgroup of the NEFirst Board to develop a rebrand, which launched earlier this year, giving a new and modern look for the business.
 - The Council has supported NEFirst financially via the Growth Reserve to cover costs associated with rents, rates and fit out costs, without which the move could not have taken place.
 - The Council continues to support NEFirst in its endeavours to develop a marketing and growth plan for Gateshead, which will be aided by the appointment of a Senior Council Officer to the NEFirst Board.
 - LEAP (Local Energy Assistance Partnership) which launched last year has been very successful. The programme, which offered a free 1-2-1 home visit with a qualified energy advisor resulted in: 281 home visits; 3,217 individual energy efficiency measures installed in Gateshead homes; £225,000 of additional annual income identified via referrals to Income Max charity; and over £627K of lifetime energy bill savings identified for Gateshead households.
 - The Gateshead Poverty Truth Commission launched on 5th March in the Council Chamber and was a highly emotive event, drawing calls of action from a number of elected members and business leaders to do more for Gateshead's most disadvantaged residents having heard first-hand the testimonies of local people with lived experience of Poverty in Gateshead. The next step has been halted due to COVID-19 but will recommence with the bringing together of those testifiers and those in positions of power to collaborate on making change.
 - The Council brought in, via its relationship with Citizens Advice, a series of free 'Gambling Awareness Training' sessions across four dates, which were made available to public facing employees. The training taught employees how to identify signs of problem gambling and how to offer or refer for specialist support.

- Accredited Level 2 ‘Fuel Debt Advice in the Community’ training was delivered to more frontline Council employees, ensuring they can identify and address fuel related issues for Gateshead households or refer to specialist services.

- 8.6 In February 2019, Council agreed the Budget and Council Tax Levy for 2019/20. This was set at £206.999m. The Budget in 2019/20 included £13.113m of savings and income growth, which closed the funding gap for the year, in response to Government funding reductions and increased service demand pressures. This was subsequently revised to £207.262m on November 2019, following the receipt of additional funding of £0.263m. The Budget outturn will be finalised in the Spring with a report to Cabinet in June 2020.
- 8.7 The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) was updated and agreed by Cabinet in October 2019. It is based on a financial forecast over a rolling five-year timeframe to 2023/24. The MTFS sets the financial context for the Council’s resource allocation process and budget setting. The MTFS will be fully reviewed in October 2020 and will take account of the difficult financial position.
- 8.8 The hugely challenging financial context is predicted to continue over the medium term and the high levels of uncertainty around future funding reforms and the economy as a result of the pandemic, which are likely to add to the potential for financial volatility and risk.
- 8.9 Providing mechanisms for the involvement of local people and communities of Gateshead in the work of the Council is a core aim. To facilitate these conversations the Council undertakes various consultation exercises each year. During the last six months of 2019/20, 41 consultations have been undertaken using the consultation portal – 20 of which related to traffic and transport schemes. There have been several significant public consultations, including Gateshead Quays Development Framework, a review of the polling districts and stations, air quality final proposals, the regeneration proposals for Gateshead High Street south, Bewick’s Customer Survey and the review of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle policy and conditions. A total of 5,297 responses were received from Gateshead residents and other stakeholders.
- 8.10 The Council commenced a Household Impact of COVID-19 survey on 23 June alongside a Gateshead Business Survey. The findings will be important in developing our response to the pandemic accounting for local demand and needs.

Resilience and Emergency Planning

- 8.11 Corporate Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee receive regular updates on the Council’s resilience and emergency planning. An update was provided on 9th September 2019. Highlights from the remainder of 2019/2020 include:
- Supporting the Direct Public Health Team with the corporate response to Coronavirus (COVID-19). Our pre-existing plans were used in the initial response and were continually adapted to manage the evolving situation nationally, regionally and locally.
 - Further recruitment to the Emergency Response Team has been undertaken and the team has 13 new members from various groups and services. All officers have received inductions, role specific training and the equipment required to safely allow them to fulfil these roles effectively

- A programme of refresher training for the Emergency Response Team has been completed following the development of a training needs analysis a number of be-spoke training sessions were held to raise awareness and up-skill employees in the roles of HQ Coordinators and Site Incident Officers.
- The Emergency Response Team has worked with the Council's IT Services over a period of several months to develop a bespoke new Emergency Response SharePoint site, to replace the existing system. This new web-based site, which went live at the beginning of February 2020, offers users better connectivity, without a reliance on Council system availability and was extensively used during the COVID-19 response.
- A review of the Emergency Response Process and Strategic Emergency Management of an incident has been completed in conjunction with the council's senior management restructure. Future training and exercising are to be scheduled over the next few months with the Council's Senior Leadership Team to undertake the role of Incident Controllers in an incident situation
- Gateshead Council is continuing to provide leadership within the Northumbria Local Resilience Forum and, as of September 2019, chair and lead the Tactical Business Management Group - a multi-agency planning function group responsible for the coordination of all LRF activity and vice chair of the Strategic Board - a multi-agency planning function group to ensure there is an appropriate level of preparedness to enable an effective strategic response to emergencies.

8.12 Over the next three-months the future priorities that will be focussed on, include:

- future planning for both COVID-19 and other potential pandemic outbreaks;
- reviewing and adapting the current emergency plans, protocols and procedures in line with national guidance to ensure practices of working safely during COVID-19 whilst continuing to work with partner organisations embracing new ways of working and use of virtual technology; and
- monitoring the potential impacts of the UK's exit from the EU working with colleagues across the Council to consider any relevant implications for Gateshead and assessing the Council's readiness as the transition period evolves.

Section B: Update on actions from previous report

Action	Thrive Pledge	Service Area	Update
<p>Employee Engagement</p>	<p>Work Together</p>	<p>Human Resources & Workforce Development</p>	<p>2018 Employee Survey: Service Directors have been identifying actions from the survey where they feel they can make improvements, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service managers attending other team meetings to raise the profile and promote their teams work; • Introduction of regular 6:1 meeting's with strategic director and employees from across the group; • Ensuring Achievement & Development discussions are complete • Training plan included as part of service business planning, along with succession planning. • Regularly emailing the whole service providing regular updates and information. • Locating teams together where possible/feasible. • Rolling-out the Gateshead Leadership Development Programme (unfortunately delayed until 2021 as a result of the social distancing requirements). • Regularly reviewing flexible working practices • Encouraging employees to identify new ideas/ways of working that will enhance work-life balance and encourage managers to consider new ways of working which support employees work life balance.

Action	Thrive Pledge	Service Area	Update
Workforce Plan	Work Together	Human Resources & Workforce Development	<p>Workforce Plan Refresh –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussions with Service Directors and their management teams took place to ascertain the needs of each group and their workforce requirements. The main themes which emerged: succession planning and how apprenticeships might support this; recruitment and retention to key roles; the ageing workforce, particularly in frontline services and how the public sector reform work can support the identification of core skills of the workforce of the future. The information will inform the content of a refreshed workforce plan; however, this work has been paused to enable a potentially different slant on the workforce plan to take account of the impact of COVID-19. • The 2020 pay award has not yet been agreed; unions are currently balloting their members on the current pay offer. • The uptake of apprenticeships remains steady, with over 124 employees now undertaking apprenticeships across the Council. An apprenticeship strategy and delivery plan have been developed which aim to embed a positive apprenticeship culture across the Council. The Apprenticeship Co-ordinator is working closely with services to encourage investment in apprenticeships and maximising take-up of apprenticeship training across the workforce. Engaging with providers to encourage participation and drive up apprenticeship delivery is an important aspect of this work. There is also a focus on using apprenticeship levy funds to up-skill the current workforce. • The Leadership Development Programme was scheduled to commence in May 2020; however, this has been paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to socially distance. New dates have been arranged for 2021. Work is however ongoing to refresh the Council's corporate training programme to ensure that all employees have the skills needed going forward. • Employee salary sacrifice schemes and a financial wellbeing resource are continually reviewed, with a more flexible 'cycle to work' scheme being introduced this year. The Ways of Working Board has refreshed its aims and objectives, with an emphasis on embracing, longer term, the new ways of working which were thrust upon us during the pandemic.
Equality Impact Monitoring	Tackle Inequality	Chief Executive's Office	<p>Equality Impact Budget proposals</p> <p>Assessments of the budget proposals impact on equality characteristics have been made, with three budget proposals currently monitored by this committee now being recommended by services to require further monitoring. Committee will receive an update in the performance reporting for 2020/21.</p>

Action	Thrive Pledge	Service Area	Update
Tackling Poverty	Tackle Inequality	Chief Executive's Office	<p>Tackling Poverty</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has worked closely with NEFirst Credit Union to bring about a premises move from their rarely visited branch at the bottom of the Interchange Building to a highly prominent shop front location on Jackson Street (the former Dawson & Sanderson travel agent site). This now provides NEFirst with the opportunity to raise its profile in Gateshead, grow its membership and offering much needed ethical and affordable financial services often to those who are financially excluded. • In addition, the Council has worked with a subgroup of the NEFirst Board to develop a rebrand, which launched earlier this year, giving a new and modern look for the business. • The Council has supported NEFirst financially via the Growth Reserve to cover costs associated with rents, rates and fit out costs, without which the move could not have taken place. • The Council continues to support NEFirst in its endeavours to develop a marketing and growth plan for Gateshead, which will be aided by the appointment of a Senior Council Officer to the NEFirst Board. • LEAP (Local Energy Assistance Partnership) provided a programme, which offered a free 1-2-1 home visit with a qualified energy advisor resulted in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 281 home visits; ▪ 3,217 individual energy efficiency measures installed in Gateshead homes; ▪ £225,000 of additional annual income identified via referrals to Income Max charity; and ▪ over £627K of lifetime energy bill savings identified for Gateshead households. • Accredited Level 2 'Fuel Debt Advice in the Community' training was delivered to more frontline Council employees, ensuring they can identify and address fuel related issues for Gateshead households or refer to specialist services.
Digital Programme	Work Together	<p>Corporate Programme:</p> <p>IT Services</p> <p>Customer Experience & Digital</p>	<p>Digital Customer Indicators</p> <p>With the advent of the new Digital Platform the use of online forms and services available have seen rises in online uses across the indicators. This is expected to have consistent rises in percentage of actions year in year as more services come online. The focus for the immediate short term period is to continue to respond to the impact of Covid19 with the digital capabilities now coming to the fore such as the closure of the Civic Centre seeing a reduction in cash payments but a rise in online payments.</p>
Trading	Work Together	Commercialisation & Improvement	<p>Services to Schools</p> <p>Throughout the year the Council has continued to develop its co-ordinated and more customer focused approach to schools. Positive discussions have been held with schools and these have used to shape the offer to meet school needs. This resulted in just under 200 different packages being available to schools. The quality of services continues to be high, for example, the catering service was singled out for the fourth year running by APSE as the UK's top performing school meals provider for quality, cost and productivity.</p>

Section C: Performance Overview

Indicator	Thrive Pledge	Service Director Lead	Target 2020	Most recent performance- Year End 2019/20	Direction of Travel	Comments and Actions
IE01 % of Council Tax collected that was due to be paid	Invest in our Economy	Marisa Jobling	95.7.6%	95.9%		For the year 2019/20, council tax collection of 95.9% is slightly up on the previous year's performance of 95.7% with an additional £5.5m of Council tax collected. Universal Credit continues to have a negative impact on collection although the Council ensures empathetic support is provided to reflect individual circumstances
IE02 % of Business Rates collected	Invest in our Economy	Marisa Jobling	98%	97.5%		For the year 2018/19 business rates collection of 97.5% was slightly below the previous year's performance of 98%. The Covid19 period has impacted on this figure as some payments due in late March 2020 were not able to be made.
IE03 % of undisputed invoices paid on time	Invest in our Economy	John Shiel	95%	87.7%		For the year 2019/20 there has been a sustained improvement from 2017/18 with significant improvement from the level 78.9% which has largely been achieved from the continued growth of purchase cards and the review of business processes to allow speedier payment of invoices.
IE04 Improve Superfast Broadband connectivity-increase coverage in Gateshead	Invest in our Economy	Roy Sheehan	Increase	97.7%		The direction of travel continues to remain positive with a further increase during the year. The number of premises able to obtain fibre optic based superfast broadband is now available to 97.7% of premises in Gateshead which compares favourably against the UK average figure of 96.4%.
IE05 Increase in new Services to Schools business generated	Invest in our Economy	Lindsay Murray	Increase	£12.6m	Not available	Year 2019/20 represents the baseline year.
PF01 Speed of housing benefits claims (processing) – average time to process new claims & changes in circumstances	People and Families	Marisa Jobling	6.2 days	3.12 days		Performance for 2019/20 again shows further improvement compared to previous year's performance of 6.2 days. Following a reduction in Universal Credit caseload and prioritising Housing benefit claims. IT improvements have also been introduced to allow further automation of changes of circumstances and customer self-service.
PF02 Ensure young people leaving care are supported to have an opportunity in the Council for an apprenticeship	People and Families	Janice Barclay	Year on year increase	2		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2019/2020 – During the 19/20 financial year, there were 2 care leaver apprentices on programmes. 1 apprentice completed their apprenticeship in Dec 2019 and secured further employment within the Council and has subsequently secured a further promotion to a higher position. The other apprentice is still on programme, due to complete in Summer 2020. The Apprenticeship Co-ordinator is continuing to explore apprenticeships for LAC and care leavers and ensure that the relevant

Indicator	Thrive Pledge	Service Director Lead	Target 2020	Most recent performance- Year End 2019/20	Direction of Travel	Comments and Actions
						<p>support is in place to ensure these apprenticeships are successful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Council has developed an Apprenticeship Strategy and underpinning Delivery Plan. One of the keys aims of the strategy and delivery plan is that the Council, acting in its capacity as corporate parent, will ensure that young people leaving care are supported to have access to Apprenticeships, but can also sustain, succeed and progress into further employment. The application process for apprentices is under review to make it easier for young people such as LAC and care leavers to access and apply for Council apprenticeships.
WT01 Employee engagement e.g. a good place to work	Work Together	Janice Barclay	70% (2016)	73% (2018 - most recent)	No new data	<p>The 2018 staff survey saw an increase in council employees feeling Gateshead is a good place to work from 64% in the 2016 survey to 73% in 2018 - surpassing the target for 2020. Following a senior management review in 2019/20 further consultation activity will occur once new working arrangements have been fully established.</p>
WT02 Staff sickness (excluding school staff) per FTE	Work Together	Janice Barclay	8.0 days	11.9 days		<p>The average sickness days per FTE for the period 2019-20 was 11.9, a slight increase from 11.4 in 2018-19.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> HR will continue to provide performance dashboards and detailed data to services and provide advice/support, so managers can take appropriate action. The Council will strive to become 'ambassador' status under the North East Better Health at Work Award. Implement the action plan in relation to the 'Time to Change Pledge' to reduce the stigma around mental health issues and enable employees to access appropriate support, hopefully before they feel a need to take sick leave, will continue. Managing the menopause is a new theme where the Council is working in partnership with Unison to develop support, information and advice for women who suffer from menopausal symptoms, and for managers and other staff (male and female) with a view to mainstreaming this topic. Strategic Directors & Service Directors will continue to monitor and address absence. As anxiety, stress and depression is one of the key reasons for long term sickness in the council. Focus has been given to campaigns, information and activities around these issues. Examples include

Indicator	Thrive Pledge	Service Director Lead	Target 2020	Most recent performance- Year End 2019/20	Direction of Travel	Comments and Actions
						<p>displaying posters, providing information for further support through employee bulletins and supporting stress awareness week by creating opportunities for one to one or group discussions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A relaxation breathing video was also created and focus groups have also taken place to assess training needs to support employees with mental health issues.
SC01 Percentage increase in online transactions: a) Online payments	Supporting our Communities	Marisa Jobling	+18.2% (£18.48m)	+15% (£21.26m)		In 2018-19, we received £18.48m in income from online payments which is a 18.7% increase from the previous year. This figure rose to £21.26m in 2019/20. We expect this figure to rise substantially as we continue to increase the number of payments that can be made on our websites.
SC02 Percentage increase in online transactions: b) Fly-tipping reports			57.4%	+7.8% (65.2%)		5,003 fly tips reported by the public in 2018/19, 57.4% reported online and 42.65% recorded over the telephone. The 2019/20 data reveals 5,145 fly tips were reported by the public with more people reporting online at 65.2% and 34.8% recorded over the telephone.
SC03 Percentage increase in online transactions c) Garden Waste subscriptions			+3.86%	+5.12%		17,710 (71.5%) subscriptions were made using the new Digital Platform compared to 16,275 (66.38%) garden waste subscriptions paid for online in 2018/19 and 15,793 in 2017/18.
SC04 Percentage increase in online transactions d) Registrars appointments			Baseline year	56.44%		Online Registrars birth and death appointments were launched on 13 March 2019 using the new Digital Platform, therefore, 2019/20 is the first full baseline year. During this period 4,403 birth and death registration appointments were made with 56.44% made online and 43.65% made using the telephone (70.46% for births and 44.43% for death registrations).
SC05 Percentage increase in online transactions d) Adult social care forms			Baseline year	4,264 online contact forms		Since the Adult Social Care online forms were launched in November 2018, making 2019/20 a baseline year for full data recording. Of the 4,265 online forms 41.22% were social care assessments; 27.1% were social care reviews; 27.06% were social care enquiries and 4.61% were submitted by practitioners.

1.0 Equality Impact Assessment

- 1.1 The Council's strategic approach of Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives identifies a commitment to reduce the levels of inequality that are apparent within the borough.
- 1.2 To achieve a balanced budget in 2019/20, the Council reviewed all areas of spend which, in some instances, resulted in budget proposals that reduced service provision that directly supports the protected characteristics as defined under the Equality Act 2010. The Council's role is to mitigate the levels of disproportionate impact identified in the equality impact assessments, wherever possible, following implementation of proposals.

2.0 Monitoring the impact of budget proposals

- 2.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010; advance equality of opportunity between people from different groups; and foster good relations between people from different groups.
- 2.2 Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) on the individual budget proposals identifies any disproportionate impact in relation to the protected characteristics as described within the Equality Act 2010. The assessments also identify mitigation where applicable.
- 2.3 Several budget proposals were considered as having a positive or neutral impact. However, the following proposals where potential disproportionate impact was highlighted, along with possible mitigation, are set out below:

2017/18 & 2018/19 - Review of commissioned arrangements/supporting people voluntary organisations

- 2.4 The SAILS - supported and independent living services for young people Housing pathway for people aged 16 to 25 years commenced in July 2018. The following outputs are for the period July 2019 to March 2020 and include:
- a total of 89 young people accessed the service from 121 referrals;
 - 27 young people were successfully referred to the High Needs, Clinical intervention, Shared Living Service;
 - 12 young people were successfully referred to the Taster Flats Service;
 - of 121 referrals, 38 young people moved outside the pathway, i.e. not homeless or in custody; and
 - 13 moved in with family or friends;
- 2.5 All 6 services that constitute the SAILS Pathway are under ongoing review and scrutiny via KPI returns, Outcomes Scoring Data, the functioning of the multi-disciplinary panel, individual contact with care management, Psychologically Informed Environments/ Psychologically Informed Practice self-assessment reviews, and quality assurance visits by a dedicated contract management officer.
- 2.6 Durham University is to prepare an outline proposal for a piece of further research to evaluate the journey for people through SAILS pathway.

2018/19 – Review of Carers Services

- 2.7 The Carers service was awarded in 1st May 2019. This will continue to the 30th April 2024, jointly funded by NewcastleGateshead Clinical Commissioning Group and Gateshead Council. The Commissioning Team from Gateshead Council's Children, Adult's & Families directorate continue to monitor the mobilisation of the services and work with the two service providers to ensure that there is a smooth transition of staff and service users. The award was to:
- Carers Trust Tyne & Wear for support to young carers up to 18 years
 - Gateshead Carers Association are responsible for delivering services to support adult carers aged 18 years and over.
- 2.8 The Carers Partnership role will be to refresh the Carers Strategy. This work is still to commence as the primary priority has been to support carers and their families during the pandemic and to ensure the services are effective.
- 2.9 Officers in the commissioning team have stayed in contact with the services and both have been offering a full-service offer to Gateshead Carers, with regular contact with existing carers through welfare calls, plus offered carers assessments to new carers and been able to actively provide advice and guidance about any support needs.
- 2.10 In preparation for a potential lockdown for the Young Carers Service, the team created a list of families that were already priority service users, as well as those living in single-parent families. Once lockdown began, the team made regular contact with the families to check how they were coping and explore any support needs. From the end of March to the end of April over 200 calls to families were made, resulting in six families being referred to some form of food support. We continue maintain a priority check in list that is regularly reviewed and refreshed. In most cases, families are experiencing some form of isolation and appreciate that someone is checking in on how they're doing.
- 2.11 We anticipated that we would not be able to provide face to face services to young carers for the foreseeable future so decided to explore how we could continue to provide alternative services, including online. We continued to provide children's activity packs to young carers age 5-7. Children in Need and Tyne and Wear Sport have supported us to create online yoga and physical activity videos for young carers of different ages. These are created in-house by a member of the team, as well as by local partners Spirit Level Yoga and filmmaker Mani Kambo. Using Zoom, we have also started to deliver online peer support groups. These are based around an art activity that we send to families in the post and then complete together in a video call. Our online work is in its early stages. Engagement is still limited and has its challenges, but we hope that it will prove to be a valuable addition to the services that we offer as we move out of lockdown.
- 2.12 With young carers, we are also exploring ways we can support using the wellbeing fund, to enhance the IT offer for those individuals to allow them to support their education and contact during the lockdown and beyond.

2019/20 - New Accommodation Charge for Aftercare Post Discharge from Hospital

2.13 External legal advice has identified practical difficulties quantifying the cost of accommodation at a care home. That difficulty arises due to the nature of the care home provision, where care and accommodation are provided. That characteristics means that not only would the calculation be difficult in practical terms but as a matter of principle, you cannot separate the accommodation provision from the care provision. Further consideration, in regard of this advice will now need to be made.

2020/21 Budget Proposals

2.14 There were no new proposals identified as affecting protected characteristics as part of the 2020/21 budget setting process.