

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Performance & Administration Cabinet Committee

Date: 20 September 2023

Reporting officer: Director (Corporate Services)

Subject: Overview of Performance & Administration Portfolio

Purpose and summary of report:

To provide the Committee with an overview of the service areas included within the Performance & Administration portfolio.

Recommendations:

1. That the Committee note the service areas covered by the Performance & Administration Cabinet Committee and comment on the activities/issues outlined.

Key Implications:	
Item	Implications
Legal	No implications. The report is for information only.
Finance and Value for Money	No implications. The report is for information only.
Corporate Plan	#1 People: Safeguard residents, Put our customers first. #3 Progress: Deliver a more resilient, creative and cost-effective council, Drive service improvement and corporate governance, successfully manage key business risks.
Climate Change	Climate Change considerations will be recognised throughout these service areas.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The terms of reference for Cabinet Committees, included in Annex 1.7 of the Council's Constitution, are:

1.1.1 To make recommendations to the relevant portfolio holder as to determining any matters within his/her remit.

1.1.2 The Committees may invite such other persons as appear appropriate to attend and take part in their deliberations, subject to the nondisclosure of

confidential and exempt information (as defined in the Access to Information Rules set out in Annex 2.2 to this Constitution)

- 1.2 The Performance & Administration Cabinet Committee has no delegated authority; however, its purpose is one of monitoring and scrutiny.
- 1.3 The following service areas are within the scope of this Community & Leisure Cabinet Committee:
 - 1.3.1 Revenue & Benefits
 - 1.3.2 Corporate Performance
 - 1.3.3 Internal Audit and Counter Fraud
 - 1.3.4 Corporate Change
 - 1.3.5 Information Governance
 - 1.3.6 Corporate Governance
- 1.4 An overview of each of these service areas follows.

2. Revenues & Benefits

Overview of Function

- 2.1 This is a statutory service. It is responsible for the administration, collection and recovery of council tax (domestic properties) and business rates (commercial properties) together with the administration and payment of specific benefits including housing benefit and council tax reduction scheme.
- 2.2 The service has played a key role in the distribution of specific funds provided by central government in response to initially the COVID-19 pandemic and of late the cost-of-living crisis.
- 2.3 The service has been recognised as a national leader in the use of a system known as LIFT (low-income family tracker) which brings together monthly administrative datasets and combines them with specific universal credit data. This enables the service to analyse and interrogate data via one accessible portal. This in turn assists the service to proactively identify/target and apply appropriate funding or assist the most vulnerable households in the borough.

Current Activities/Issues pertinent to the Cabinet Committee

- 2.4 The cost-of-living crisis is negatively affecting both residents and businesses. This is being reflected:
 - 2.4.1 in the collection and recovery of council tax and business rates. Service will assist/advise those residents/businesses who cannot pay but will take appropriate action where a resident/business will not pay. Drop-in sessions are being held periodically where residents/businesses may discuss.
 - 2.4.2 in an increase in number of benefit claims particularly from those residents in temporary accommodation.
 - 2.4.3 in an increase in applications for discretionary housing payments from a finite external fund of £179k for 2023-2024.

- 2.5 The service will support vulnerable households in securing tenure of property and assisting with winter energy payments. Households will be identified using LIFT and funded from 'Household Support Fund 4 grant.
- 2.6 Continual managed/natural migration of benefit cases from Housing Benefit to Universal Credit administered by the Department for Works and Pension. Whilst caseload has slowly reduced it has left the service with the most complex cases. Also, additional workload due to notification of multiple changes in Universal Credit for a claimant requiring reassessment of council tax reduction cases.
- 2.7 Citizen's access digital solution (Benefits application/information) going live to claimants during Q3 2023-2024 to supplement Citizen's access digital solution (Revenues) which has been live since 2019.
- 2.8 Council Tax review of discounts, disregards and exemptions particularly concerning empty properties and those long-term empty properties which attract a premium charge. This is in order to maximise council tax-base and reduce the number of dwellings within the borough.
- 2.9 Business Rates review of reliefs and exemptions in order to maximise tax-base.
- 2.10 Ongoing changes/appeals to the business rating list following revaluation of all commercial properties from 1 April 2023.
- 2.11 Ongoing interventions utilising LIFT in order to maximise benefit take-up for residents.
- 2.12 Preparation and testing for annual billing of Council Tax and Business Rates. A complex undertaking to ensure that approximately 47,000 annual bills are accurately calculated and based on the latest legislative requirements. Additionally, to ensure that notifications of any benefit awarded are issued.

Officer Contact

- 2.13 Pat Knight Head of Revenues and Benefits - email: pat.knight@gravesham.gov.uk
- 2.14 Jackie Baker, Assistant Revenues and Benefits Manager – email: jackie.baker@gravesham.gov.uk

3. Corporate Performance

Overview of Function

- 3.1 This service area assists in the strategic planning of the council through:
 - 3.1.1 supporting the development of its Strategic Corporate Plan.
 - 3.1.2 co-ordination of the design and implementation of the council's Performance Management Framework, intended to provide qualitative and quantitative information on plan delivery, during a Corporate Plan period.
 - 3.1.3 leading the council's annual service business planning process.
 - 3.1.4 the provision of regular legislative and government policy bulletins to the Management Team and Wider Management Team.

- 3.1.5 leading on research and policy development with key officers by advising on, and responding to, key legislative changes/government consultations.
- 3.1.6 co-ordination of data research programmes featuring core socio-economic data to support decision making, with a core product being the production of the Gravesham Community Profile.

Current Activities/Issues pertinent to the Cabinet Committee

- 3.2 Development of the Performance Management Framework which will underpin monitoring and delivery of the new Corporate Plan.

Supporting Information

- 3.3 [Corporate Performance – Gravesham Borough Council](#)

Officer Contacts

- 3.4 Ben Turner, Strategic Policy Manager – email: ben.turner@gravesham.gov.uk

4. Internal Audit and Counter Fraud

Overview of Function

- 4.1 Internal Audit & Counter Fraud is a shared service operated with Medway Council, providing both internal audit and counter fraud services to both councils, with resources allocated in accordance with the terms of the shared service agreement.
- 4.2 The specific activity conducted by the Internal Audit & Counter Fraud service is reported regularly to the Finance & Audit Committee as the group of members charged with providing independent assurance and scrutiny of the council's corporate governance and risk management arrangements. The focus of the Performance & Administration Cabinet Committee will be on the arrangements for the provision of the service and how the service contributes to the objectives of the portfolio.

Current Activities/Issues pertinent to the Cabinet Committee

- 4.3 The Annual Shared Service review for Internal Audit and Counter Fraud has recently been concluded and will be reported to Members of the Cabinet Committee on this agenda.
- 4.4 The Internal Audit team continue to work on delivering assurance audits and providing consultancy advice to services in line with the audit plan agreed with the Finance & Audit Committee.
- 4.5 The Counter Fraud team continue to work on the delivery of reactive and proactive fraud investigation activity, as well as delivering fraud awareness training to staff and members. Proactive fraud activity currently includes working with services to complete fraud risk assessments and produce a corporate fraud risk register to sit alongside the corporate risk register.

Supporting Information

- 4.6 [Fraud is a criminal offence | Fraud – Gravesham Borough Council](#)

Officer Contacts

- 4.7 James Larkin, Head of Internal Audit & Counter Fraud Shared Service – email: james.larkin@medway.gov.uk

5. Corporate Change

Overview of Function

- 5.1 Corporate Change draws on a number of individual service areas across the council as a means to continuously reviewing the services the council is providing and ensuring these remain effective, efficient and fit for purpose. In addition, corporate change activity will be undertaken where projects are identified that will require significant service design changes. An example of this would be the current national Local Land Charges Programme project, which will see the phased transfer of responsibility for holding and maintaining local land charges registers from local authorities to HM Land Registry.
- 5.2 Due to its nature, the specific activity conducted through Corporate Change activity is likely to be reported regularly to the Cabinet or Full Council, as the Constitution requires. The focus of the Performance & Administration Cabinet Committee will be on how Corporate Change activity contributes to the objectives of the portfolio.

Current Activities/Issues pertinent to the Cabinet Committee

- 5.3 As part of its Medium Term Financial Strategy, the council is currently in the process of conducting a series of Continuous Improvement Reviews, building on the Service Review Programme developed in 2016. Corporate Improvement Reviews are conducted by a core team of officers from across the council led by the Assistant Director (Corporate Services). The Team will be reviewing all service areas of the council over a 2-3-year period to identify ways to generate income, reduce expenditure and ensure that services are working as efficiently as they can.

Supporting Information

- 5.4 [MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY \(gravesham.gov.uk\)](#)

Officer Contacts

- 5.5 Lisa Nyon, Assistant Director (Corporate Services) - email: lisa.nyon@gravesham.gov.uk

6. Information Governance

Overview of Function

- 6.1 The term Information Governance relates to the framework to support legal compliance, transparency, and risk management in managing information managed and handled by the council in whatever medium it is held, balancing

these requirements against the objectives of the council to deliver effective services.

- 6.2 Whilst the Director (Corporate Services) has overall responsibility for the arrangements to manage information risk in the council, support is provided by the Data Protection Officer and the Information Governance Team. Both the Data Protection Officer and Information Governance Team operate as a shared service with Medway Council, with services provided to both councils and the resources available allocated in accordance with the terms of the shared service agreement.

Current Activities/Issues pertinent to the Cabinet Committee

- 6.3 Supporting the Information Governance Strategy Group (IGSG) which is chaired by the Director (Corporate Services) as an officer group and provides direction & guidance across the council for data protection and information governance activities.
- 6.4 Management and maintenance of GBC's data protection policies and procedures, including the provision of training and monitoring of data and cyber incidents.
- 6.5 Overseeing the management of Information requests directed to the council.
- 6.6 Updating of Privacy information and privacy notices issued by the council.
- 6.7 Overseeing the management and maintenance of Information Asset Registers and Records of Processing activities as a mandatory requirement within the GDPR law.
- 6.8 Providing support to council services in the set up and maintenance of data sharing arrangements with third parties, including review of contracts, data sharing agreements and support in the completion of Data Privacy Impact Assessments (DPIAs).

Supporting Information

- 6.9 [Information Governance Framework | Privacy – Gravesham Borough Council](#)

Officer Contacts

- 6.10 Sarah Parfitt, Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) & Director (Corporate Services) – email: sarah.parfitt@gravesham.gov.uk
- 6.11 Darren Everden, Deputy SIRO & Assistant Director (IT & Transformation) – email: darren.everden@gravesham.gov.uk
- 6.12 Preeti Lalli, Data Protection Officer & Information Governance Manager
Preeti.lalli@gravesham.gov.uk

7. Corporate Governance

Overview of Function

- 7.1 A number of different service areas support the governance arrangements of the council through a number of activities such as maintenance of the Constitution, review and maintenance of the Code of Corporate Governance and preparation of the Annual Governance Statement, and risk management activity.

- 7.2 Much of the specific activity conducted around corporate governance is monitored by the Finance & Audit Committee as the group of members charged with providing independent assurance and scrutiny of the council's corporate governance and risk management arrangements. The focus of the Performance & Administration Cabinet Committee will be on how activity to maintain, develop and enhance the council's governance arrangements contribute to the objectives of the portfolio.

Current Activities/Issues pertinent to the Cabinet Committee

- 7.3 A project is currently underway to review and update the council's Constitution. The outcomes of this review and any updates required will be reported to Full Council for ratification.
- 7.4 The Code of Corporate Governance is reviewed at least annually. Any amendments to the Code of Corporate Governance are considered and ratified by Full Council.
- 7.5 An Annual Governance Statement is produced each year for the council, supported by a comprehensive assessment and evidence-gathering exercise that is considered by the Finance & Audit Committee.
- 7.6 The council's strategic risk exposure is reviewed every six months, with the Corporate Risk Register updated at least annually. The council's strategic risk management arrangements are considered by the Finance & Audit Committee before being endorsed by Cabinet and approved by Full Council.

Supporting Information

- 7.7 [Corporate Governance – Gravesham Borough Council](#)

Officer Contacts

- 7.8 Sarah Parfitt, Senior Information Risk Owner (SIRO) & Director (Corporate Services) – email: sarah.parfitt@gravesham.gov.uk
- 7.9 Lisa Nyon, Assistant Director (Corporate Services) - email: lisa.nyon@gravesham.gov.uk
- 7.10 Ben Turner, Strategic Policy Manager – email: ben.turner@gravesham.gov.uk

8. Appendices

- 8.1 There are no appendices.

9. Background Documents

- 9.1 There are no background documents. Supporting information is linked into each section above.

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Secondary Implications	
Risk Assessment	N/A
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>
	<p>a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner's Office website via the above links.</p> <p>N/A</p>
	<p>b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice?</p> <p>N/A</p>
	<p>c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk.</p> <p>N/A</p>
Equality Impact Assessment	<p>a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer.</p> <p>N/A</p>
	<p>b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer.</p> <p>N/A</p>
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
Crime and Disorder	N/A
Digital and website implications	N/A
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	N/A