

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

ANNUAL REVIEW 2020-21: LEARNING, SKILLS & CULTURE

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To present an annual review against the Council Plan 2018-21 in the context of the COVID-19 response and mid-term recovery plan.
- 1.2 The report provides an overview of performance for the year and achievement against the ambitions, goals and priorities of the council plan.
- 1.3 It also informs cabinet of the work undertaken across the portfolio to support the response to the pandemic and contribution to the covid-19 mid-term recovery plan priorities.
- 1.4 As part of the next phase of strategic planning the report highlights areas of focus for 2021-22 and beyond.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Council Plan 2018-21 sets the strategic framework for the operational delivery of council functions. This report demonstrates the activity and performance across the Learning, Skills & Culture portfolio that have contributed to the strategic ambitions and priorities.
- 2.2 The operating environment during 2020-21 has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the report outlines how we have reacted, responded, and adjusted our responsibilities in implementation of government guidelines and to ensure business continuity of council business.
- 2.3 The Council's approach throughout this period has been rooted in the values, principles and ambitions of the council plan, and furthered

through the strong partnerships within North Lincolnshire, framed under the following priorities:

- keeping staff and residents safe and well
- protecting the most vulnerable
- protecting the local economy
- enabling communities to remain resilient.

Whilst at the same time ensuring the council is well led through a resilient workforce, good governance, and sound financial practice across the Council.

Headlines contributing to the Council Plan and Covid priorities include:

2.4 **Well led: Business Continuity**

2.4.1 The health and wellbeing of residents have been prioritised within our business continuity plans and contingencies. Throughout each phase of national restrictions, community facilities were assessed for Covid security, so that functionality could be resumed in a safe and timely way for residents and staff.

2.4.2 As national restrictions greatly impacted on the usual functionality of much of the council's offer to communities, opportunities were taken to further enhance our online resources and enable a continued offer to residents, including:

- 5,600 people attended nearly 400 livestreaming fitness classes during the second lockdown
- 7,790 'visits' to 20-21 Visual Arts Centre, North Lincolnshire Museum, the Rural Life Museum and Normanby Hall using virtual tours created with innovative 3D modelling technology
- engagement with digital library resources increased by over 200%
- the Music Hub successfully transitioned online, enabling continuous provision for children and young people

Other aspects of the council's core offer continued throughout:

- the world leading North Lincolnshire Imagination Library continued to reach most (91%) of our under 5's, with 7,367 books per month being delivered directly to families
- active lifestyles activators continued to reach out to vulnerable people, making 1,400 contacts throughout the pandemic

2.4.2 Workforce resilience has been exceptional within Learning, Skills & Culture, with nearly all staff available for work throughout the pandemic. Colleagues have shown high levels of adaptability and willingness to be deployed flexibly to meet the demands of the moment. This has included being trained remotely to provide new functions such as contact for

clinically extremely vulnerable people and stepping into new frontline roles such as community enablement and contact tracing.

- 2.4.3 In keeping with the One Family Approach, the ambition throughout the pandemic has been to keep children in their families, in their schools and in their communities. This has been the foundation of our approach to business continuity, working in partnership with school leaders and as a whole council team to ensure children and young people were safeguarded and could continue to access their learning and support networks as best as possible given the national restrictions. Notwithstanding intermittent closures of learner bubbles as required by public health guidance, schools and settings have striven to remain functioning and have done so admirably.
- 2.4.4 Across schools, colleges and settings, workforces have shown very high levels of resilience. Leaders of schools and settings across North Lincolnshire have continued to make informed and well-judged decisions to manage risk at each stage of the pandemic – keeping the welfare and education of children at the heart of decision making.
- 2.4.5 As permitted, priority has been given to ensuring health and social care staff (including staff in special schools and children’s disability services) have been offered the vaccine to provide added protection for vulnerable children and young people. This, along with substantial protective measures taken within settings has added to workforce resilience.
- 2.4.6 With local support and interventions, 100% of early years settings sustained their businesses throughout Covid and all schools were successfully supported to manage leadership succession. 9 out of 10 schools and nearly all early years settings remained good or outstanding as judged by Ofsted.

2.5 **Well Led: Governance and Assurance**

- 2.5.1 The annual governance statement for Learning, Skills & Culture demonstrates the comprehensive approach to assurance and oversight across this diverse portfolio. Essential structures for ensuring partnership governance continued throughout, including the Education Standards Board and SEND Standards Board. Public accountability was maintained through reports approved through the democratic process and through scrutiny panels, for example the SEND Annual Report. Audit reports, external review and contribution to regional peer challenge provided additional oversight and opportunities to further develop practice.
- 2.5.2 The Matrix Standard was reaccredited to the careers information advice & guidance function and attained by Adult Education Community Learning for the first time.

2.6 **Keeping people safe and well**

- 2.6.1 Routine standards and effectiveness functions for monitoring, challenge, support and intervention to schools and settings were largely stood down at the start of the pandemic. The capacity released was diverted to supporting school leaders to manage and interpret the vast quantity of national guidance that was being released at pace in the face of national restrictions and managing the public health emergency.
- 2.6.2 In May 2020, the council provided schools with a set of five principles to shape how the local authority would respond to the pandemic, founded chiefly on the adherence to national guidance, strong support for decision making and high levels of trust and confidence in school leaders to manage for their context. This principled approach created a shared understanding and basis to steer through the events, in the most uncertain of times.
- 2.6.3 Online cluster meetings for school leaders proved an effective means for knowledge exchange, sharing of practice and forward planning as the pandemic unfolded. Training was moved online, as were governor meetings and keeping in touch meetings with representatives of the school-related trade unions and managerial associations.
- 2.6.4 Support for vulnerable children and young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) was sustained and developed. All Education Health Care Plans were reviewed ahead of the summer term, and daily tasking meetings ensured a line of sight to the most vulnerable and their access to in-school learning. Council specialist teachers for vision, hearing, physical disability, autism and social-emotional needs continued to keep in touch with children, young people and their families throughout the pandemic - liaising with schools and settings where needed to ensure that needs continued to be met whether learning was taking place at home or in school. The Cygnets continued to offer overnight short breaks for families of children with disabilities throughout the year and as conditions permitted. Children's disability services continued to provide additional short break activities through a blended approach of remote on-line activity and individually where this was possible. Disability social workers continued to support families throughout the covid challenge using innovative approaches to communication, alongside practical advice and support to families.
- 2.6.5 Vulnerable families were supported to access home learning resources and support, including the creation and delivery of over 600 reading and literacy packs. Laptops and dongles were distributed to disadvantaged children to support online learning. Additional arrangements were made for children transitioning between education phases, particularly year 11 into post-16 to reflect the disruption to their GCSE courses.
- 2.6.6 The North Lincolnshire Free School Meal Scheme was implemented for October half-term 2020 and continued throughout the subsequent school holidays, with almost 6,000 children benefitting from vouchers for the purchase of food from local supermarkets.

2.6.7 Whilst steeped in managing the impact of the pandemic, transformation and developments within education and inclusion functions have continued:

- implementing a digital hub for education, health and care plans to increase family engagement in the process and to speed up assessments.
- reviewing and strengthening arrangements for Initial Teacher Training
- with stakeholders, including families, developing a new SEND and Inclusion Plan for 2021-24
- launching a further SEND capital competition for locality-based social, emotional, mental health provision at secondary age in Winterton and Scunthorpe and complementing that already established in Barton
- establishing a new 20 place provision for key stage 2 age children with social, emotional, mental health needs at Wyredale Road and enabling the relocation of Coritani Academy to high quality accommodation
- ensuring a sponsor was appointed by Department for Education for our post-16 SEND Free School, for September 2022 opening

2.7 **Enabling resilient and flourishing communities**

2.7.1 The pandemic proved to be a binding factor within communities, leading to strengthened relationships within neighbourhoods and between the council, individual volunteers, and voluntary & community groups. Working together has been both highly localised and place-based, as well as formal and informal. Community volunteering was further strengthened through place-based brokerage and the TeamNL volunteer hub. 458 new volunteers were recruited and deployed to local vaccination centres, to existing community organisations, and to provide targeted support for vulnerable residents. This was in addition to the groundswell of neighbourliness engendered through the 'Do One Thing' appeal. Community Champions were recruited as the credible and informed local voice, providing localised feedback on what was working and helping to shape targeted responses to Covid, e.g. faith and community leaders worked with the council to increase the reach of the vaccination programme. These community first approaches created the conditions for ensuring residents who may have become vulnerable or who were at increased risk were enabled to stay safe, well and connected.

2.7.2 The council led the place level response to enabling residents who were deemed clinically extremely vulnerable to shield from Covid. By employing an approach rooted in organisational development, initially c7,000 residents were able to access support for unmet needs – rising to over 11,000 as the vaccination programme gained momentum. This allowed people to stay safe, with access to food, medicine, and social contact. The shielding response has been the subject of a previous report where it is covered in detail; it remains an exemplar of how outcomes can be achieved for residents by working with and through communities, in the spirit of the council plan and to our organisational values. The legacy

of community enablement will remain at the centre of our approaches into the future.

- 2.7.3 Community facilities and functions have been brought back as national restrictions, staff deployment and local priorities have permitted, with the focus on ensuring a health and wellbeing offer for residents. Currently at stage 3 of the national roadmap, all council run facilities are open with covid secure arrangements in place. Our valued volunteers at community led libraries are being supported and retrained where necessary to recommence functionality of those sites.
- 2.7.4 While reacting and responding to the pandemic has been a significant factor for community functions, the drive to transform and develop the community offer has continued. Backed by £5M of capital investment, the community hub programme has continued to transform the way in which residents can access the community offer. The North Axholme community hub opened in August 2020 at Crowle Market Hall, including a pop-up post office to meet community needs. The Brigg community hub opened in October 2020 at The Angel, with the Ashby Community Hub opening in March 2021. Fully integrated, the six core hubs each provide information, advice and guidance on council and community services and facilities, a library, access to computers, health lifestyle advice, children and adult group activities and community space. Increasingly, the offer at each hub is being differentiated to the community, for example in the provision of adult education and family learning courses.
- 2.7.5. Alongside the six core community hubs, work has continued to encourage greater community ownership of the council's assets so that these can be shaped to meet the needs and aspirations of each area. Oasis Community Learning has adopted the former Park library and is creating their own version of a community hub. Likewise, Messingham Parish Council has adopted the library site to develop the functionality for their residents, and Haxey library is moving forward towards a volunteer led model.
- 2.7.6 The council's ambition to further strengthen and develop the cultural offer within communities has progressed. A consultation was held on the future of Baysgarth House Museum, with a bright vision for the facility being taken forward with new partners to celebrate the heritage of Barton upon Humber and the local area. Normanby Hall secured Arts Council funding for enhancing the visitor experience, including interactive digital displays that bring to life the international heritage of the hall.
- 2.7.7 Transformation in leisure functions continued to yield an impact. Pre-covid, the renewed focus on customer experience, investment in staffing and facilities, and a transformed business model that combined social and commercial value had created a sustainable financial position after many years of in-year deficits. Following investment in the quality of the offer, memberships to Normanby Hall Golf Club increased by 67% over

the year. The Pods was awarded the Best Performing Leisure Centre (2019/20 data) in England by the Association Public Service Excellence.

2.8 **Enabling economic growth and renewal**

2.8.1 The drive to reach and empower people towards employment has developed further. A partnership with Department of Work and Pensions created a youth hub that has recently engaged 90 young people over a five-month period, with 54 already progressing into apprenticeships, training, or paid employment. The Action Station engaged and supported 388 people virtually, supporting job search and training requests. The North Lincolnshire Building Better Opportunities Programme enabled residents to be supported with their financial affairs, benefit support, housing issues, training and mental health and wellbeing. The potential of Normanby Hall was further developed for providing a safe and nurturing environment for people to gain skills and confidence, with the embedding of on-site partnerships with Skills Plus and most recently, R-Evolve. Adult Education and Community Learning has continued to develop meaningful progression pathways, with the impact of the reinvigorated service being recognised by Ofsted.

2.9 **Priorities for 2021/22**

Priorities across the portfolio of Learning, Skills & Culture moving forward include:

- embedding the learning from the pandemic and the considerable potential for community enablement into plans that underpin the council priority for *enabling resilient and flourishing communities*
- strengthening the connection between physical activity and health & wellbeing, in support of commissioning intents across the health and care system, including social prescription
- addressing the anticipated shortfall in leisure and culture income until public confidence and behaviours recover from the pandemic
- realising the opportunity to enable greater community engagement in culture and arts by bringing the venue management of the Baths Hall and Plowright Theatre in-house, and developing the partnership for Baysgarth Museum
- developing the ambition and vision for a new, interactive cultural attraction within the heart of Scunthorpe as part of the towns fund plans
- progressing proposals for an Epworth Community Hub through consultation, design and build stages, creating a new integrated facility for the town and improving transport infrastructure
- refreshing and reinvigorating approaches to community literacy
- further developing the local implementation of the Holiday Activity and Food Programme, providing quality experiences for children and young people, especially those eligible for free school meals
- working with partners and businesses to further develop employability and prosperity opportunities for people with additional needs

- providing place leadership in readiness for national policy on skills
- driving forward the place ambition for our youngest children getting the Best Start, including developing the scope for 'shaping places for healthy lives' for which funding has been awarded through competition
- developing the 'high support – high challenge' peer leader approach to school improvement
- working with Schools Forum to mitigate the changes to combined services funding arrangements.
- continuing the transformation to locality-based provision for children with social, emotional, mental health needs and decommissioning centralised provision
- commissioning for the new post-16 free school for young people with complex needs
- working with partners, including the Parents in Participation Forum, to achieve the ambitions within the new SEND & Inclusion Plan
- as an area, being ready for the joint Ofsted and CQC inspection of local arrangements for special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and Ofsted inspections of children's services and Adult Education and Community Learning
- further integrating functions within the education and inclusion services

3. **OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

- 3.1 Cabinet are asked to consider the report and note the contribution made to the Council Plan strategic ambitions and response made to date to the covid pandemic and mid-term recovery.

4. **ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

- 4.1 The core functions across Learning, Skills & Culture have been effectively maintained and a range of systems and processes updated and implemented to enable efficient and agile operational delivery and improved customer experience.
- 4.2 The positive working practices that have been successfully embedded throughout this period will be considered and built on as part of the next phase of strategic planning for the council.
- 4.3 The overall risk environment across Learning, Skills & Culture has been well managed. Audit reports and the evaluation of the annual statement of governance provide robust evidence of leadership and management oversight.

5. **FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)**

5.1 **Financial**

- 5.1.1 Learning Skills & Culture overall expenditure in 2020/21 was £48.3M, comprised of £25.1M of dedicated schools grant, £10.9M of core council

funding, £3.5M of other income and £10.9M of grants, including covid related grants. Budget management was complicated by the significant disruption across all service areas arising from the pandemic. Fees and charges receipts were lost with the mandated closure of facilities. Prudent management of vacancies, staff deployment and reduced mileage costs offset losses. Covid pressures of £5.413m were identified and additional funding allocated accordingly. Financial closedown allowed £1.042m of core funding to be put to reserves in readiness for an undoubtedly challenging trading year ahead. £1.143m was transferred to the DSG earmarked reserve at the year-end for oversight by Schools Forum.

5.1.2 There are no direct financial impacts of this report. The highlighted risks and opportunities will be managed through the usual processes of the council budget setting and monitoring.

5.2 **Workforce**

Staff within this functional area have completed a well-being assessment and identified needs met. Covid secure arrangements continue in line with national guidance and local risk assessments. At 5.93 days, average staff absence across the 599 employees (461 full time equivalents) within Learning, Skills and Culture continues to be well below the council average of 7.77 days. The large majority (71%) of staff had no sickness absence in 2020/21, compared to 61% of the whole council workforce.

6. **OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)**

6.1 National advice and guidance have been incorporated into the local response to the pandemic as it has become available. The enactment of the Coronavirus Act 2020 led to certain relaxations of statutory requirements and the introduction of new powers and statutory instruments.

7. **OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

7.1 Not applicable for the purposes of this report.

8. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED**

8.1 Not applicable for the purposes of this report.

9. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 That Cabinet notes the contribution made to the Council Plan strategic ambitions and response made to date to the covid-19 pandemic and mid-term recovery.as outlined in the report.

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report: None