

Guildhall Gainsborough
Lincolnshire DN21 2NA
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AGENDA

This meeting will be webcast live and the video archive published on our website

Governance and Audit Committee
Tuesday, 25th July, 2023 at 2.00 pm
Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, DN21 2NA

Members:

- Councillor Stephen Bunney (Chairman)
- Councillor David Dobbie (Vice-Chairman)
- Councillor Baptiste Velan (Vice-Chairman)
- Councillor John Barrett
- Councillor Mrs Jackie Brockway
- Councillor Christopher Darcel
- Councillor Sabastian Hague
- Councillor Mrs Angela Lawrence
- Councillor Jeanette McGhee
- Alison Adams
- Andrew Morriss

1. **Apologies for Absence**
2. **Public Participation Period**
Up to 15 minutes are allowed for public participation.
Participants are restricted to 3 minutes each.
3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting** (PAGES 3 - 9)
To confirm and sign as a correct record the Minutes of the Meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held on Tuesday 13 June 2023.
4. **Members Declarations of Interest**
Members may make any declarations of interest at this point but may also make them at any point during the meeting.

5. **Matters Arising Schedule** (PAGES 10 - 12)
Matters Arising schedule setting out current position of previously agreed actions as at 17 July 2023.
6. **Public Reports for Consideration**
- a) Internal Audit Quarter 4 Report 2022/23 (PAGES 13 - 34)
 - b) Internal Audit Annual Report 2022/23 (PAGES 35 - 57)
 - c) Annual Voice of the Customer Report 2022/23 (PAGES 58 - 95)
 - d) Annual Counter Fraud Report 2022/23 (PAGES 96 - 105)
7. **Workplan** (PAGES 106 - 108)

Ian Knowles
Head of Paid Service
The Guildhall
Gainsborough

Monday, 17 July 2023

WEST LINDSEY DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held in the Council Chamber - The Guildhall, Marshall's Yard, Gainsborough, DN21 2NA on 13 June 2023 commencing at 2.00 pm.

Present: Councillor Stephen Bunney (Chairman)
Councillor David Dobbie (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor John Barrett
Councillor Mrs Jackie Brockway
Councillor Christopher Darcel
Councillor Sabastian Hague
Councillor Jeanette McGhee
Alison Adams
Andrew Morriss

In Attendance:
Emma Foy Director of Corporate Services and Section 151
Jeanette McGarry Assistant Director People & Democratic Services
Peter Davy Financial Services Manager (Deputy Section 151 Officer)
Claire Goodenough Head of Internal Audit & Risk Management
Katie Storr Democratic Services & Elections Team Manager
Andrew Warnes Democratic and Civic Officer

Also In Attendance: Councillor Paul Key

Apologies: Councillor Mrs Angela Lawrence

Membership: No Members were substituted.

1 CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

The Chairman welcomed Members of the Committee to the first meeting and invited everyone sitting around the table to introduce themselves.

The Chairman also paid tribute to previous Members of the Committee including his predecessor, former Chairman of the Committee, John McNeill, thanking all of them for their service over the years.

2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PERIOD

There was no public participation.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the previous Meeting of the Governance and Audit Committee held on 18 April 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

4 MEMBERS DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests made at this point in the meeting.

5 MATTERS ARISING SCHEDULE

Brief reference was made to the future training requirements for Committee Members, with the Chair advising this would be further discussed outside of the meeting or under the workplan item. With no further comments, the Matters Arising Schedule was duly **NOTED**.

6 MOTION TO VARY THE AGENDA

In light of to the recent change of the Committee meeting time, the Section 151 Officer was required at a previously scheduled meeting, and as such it was proposed and seconded that agenda item 7a) – Unaudited Statement of Accounts 2022/23, be the final public report considered as opposed to the Internal Audit Charter 2023/24. On being put to the vote it was: -

RESOLVED that the order of the agenda be varied as detailed above.

7 DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2022/2023

Members gave consideration to the report which presented the draft Annual Governance Statement for 2022/23. The Committee were asked to review its content and identify any additional issues they considered should be contained in the associated action plan, prior to receiving the final document for approval at its meeting on 26 September 2023.

The Officer highlighted that there were no significant governance issues raised in 2022/23

Having reviewed the year; taken account of progress against the AGS 2021/22 action plan and having also considered recommendations made within various governance related reports/audits, the matters suggested for possible inclusion in the action plan were set out in Section Six of the report and summarised to the Committee.

Debate ensued, and Members raised several queries about whether and how this statement differed from past documents and whether there were any significant updates. The Interim Monitoring Officer clarified that there were no substantial changes to any governance concerns, bar no permanent Monitoring Officer being in place.

Members commented on how understanding the bigger picture was often of assistance, and

those with County Council experience, referenced reports provided to Members which demonstrated investments, yields, gilts, interest rates and the like. Officers confirmed that they did receive something similar from the Council's Treasury Advisors on a monthly basis and could share that with Members. It was further suggested that national picture update information had previously been supplied by Internal Audit through its reports. Those with County Council experience concurred, indicating they received such links and reports and the Chairman undertook to look into the matter further.

Following a further period of questioning, it was clarified that KPMG would be taking next year's audit, the 2022/23 statements were the responsibility of the outgoing External Auditors, Mazars. Regarding the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge, Members learned how peers were selected noting that the LGA led and oversaw the work, focusing on objective measures through a national framework. This also included checks and balances on Peer Challenges.

Having been moved and, seconded, on being put to the vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that having reviewed the draft Statement, no additional governance related matters be included in the draft statement.

8 INTERNAL AUDIT DRAFT ANNUAL PLAN 2023/24

Members considered the Internal Audit Draft Annual Plan Report for 2023/2024 based on assurance mapping and risk assessments across the Council's critical services, following Members' comments at the meeting on 18 April 2023. The Head of Internal Auditor introduced the report and provided Members with brief context as to the reports purpose, highlighting the main aspects of the Annual Plan in the appendix.

The plan had been developed taking a risk-based approach and had been developed in conjunction with Management through managers requests, member requests, cyclical reviews, and areas of interest intelligence gathering such as the combined assurance work.

The report included the level of resources, and costs of providing assurance through delivery of the plan. It was confirmed the Plan had not been amended since last been seen by Committee in April 2023.

Debate ensued, and Members enquired about the working practices of the Committee and the work of Lincolnshire Audit. Members learned that Auditors, both from Lincolnshire County Council (Internal Audit) and Mazars (External Audit), could receive unfettered access and were able to provide a supportive challenge to the Authority.

Members also received assurance that issues to be considered had been taken through by the Combined Assurance report, the Strategic Risk register, and any emerging risks within the local government sector. Members were further advised how those areas not included in the Plan had been determined.

In response to questions regarding intentions in relation to ICT cyber- security and development, Auditors clarified that their role would be to focus on the cybersecurity elements, reviewing the level of risk the Council exposed itself to, the controls and

mitigations in place to make sure that the documentation was kept safe and secure. In respect of ICT Development Plans no further detail was available yet, as to what that audit would cover. It was further advised that the role of Committee was to seek assurance, the development of Policy did not sit within the Committee's remit nor did changing a Policy because of Audit.

With no further comment, having been proposed and seconded, upon taking the vote, it was

RESOLVED that the contents of the Internal Audit Plan be agreed.

9 INTERNAL AUDIT CHARTER 2023/24

Members gave consideration to the Internal Audit Charter 2023/24, which established a set guide on the working relationship and expectations between Lincolnshire Audit and West Lindsey District Council. This followed the work commenced by the newly appointed Head of Internal Audit at Lincolnshire Audit which was to ensure standards set out by the Chartered Institute of Internal Auditors (CIIA) were being followed.

The Charter was part of the professional indemnity that covered the work between West Lindsey District Council and Lincolnshire County Council (as the provider of the Internal Audit Function), and covered the service that was expected to be delivered in relation to reporting, independence and quality oversight.

Debate ensued, and Members queried the proposed changes. The Head of Internal Audit explained that the formalisation of the wording was the most significant change proposed, with minimal content changes. The wording was focused on the CIIA guidance and was to standardise the service. In a follow-up query, Members learned that there was a clear expectation of the delivery work to be completed and it was again re-repeated that Auditor's had unfettered access.

In response to a query about the definition of appropriate parties, Members heard that this was part of the CIIA's guidance, which related to a whole host of different sectors outside the public sector. It was further explained that these must be disclosed to the Committee and placed the obligation within the Charter if required. It was explained that this was not necessary at the present moment in any of the audit work. In reply to a further query about future work, it was confirmed that the audit work for 2023/24 would commence shortly.

With no further comment, having been proposed and seconded, upon taking the vote, it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the contents of the Internal Audit Charter be agreed.

10 UNAUDITED STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2022/23

The Committee were presented with the Unaudited Statement of Accounts for Scrutiny. The Accounts had been approved for issue by the S151 Officer on 31 May 2023 to the Auditor, Mazars, prior to this statutory deadline for consideration and review. These were published on 31 May 2023 and available until 12 July 2023 for public inspection.

The Committee was responsible for the approval of the Statement of Accounts and any material amendments of the accounts recommended by the external auditors. The statement of accounts had been prepared under the International Financial Reporting Standards based Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting.

The Audited Statement of Accounts would therefore be presented to the Committee on 26 September 2023 after the audit process. The Unaudited Statement of Accounts for 2022/23 had been prepared under the International Financial Reporting Standards based Code of Practice on Local Authority Accounting (the Code). Members noted that extended deadlines again applied as they had the previous year, with the unaudited accounts having to be published on or before 31 May 2023. Audited accounts must be published by 30 September 2023.

In his introduction, the Financial Services Manager clarified the items in the statements which were displayed as positives were expenditure and items displayed either with a minus sign or in brackets were income. Items within the accounts that the Officer was keen to highlight were the primary statements which showed an improved balance sheet position mainly due to an improved position on the Pension fund. This was due to increased investment returns and changes to longer term assumptions.

The general fund had reduced slightly to £4.682 million (m) as planned which was still well within prudent levels. Earmarked reserves had increased slightly as the Council had achieved a budget surplus for 2022/23. The Council was still holding £3.7m of capital grants at the balance sheet date for schemes which were due to be delivered in 2023/24. The Comprehensive Income and Expenditure Statement showed an accounting surplus on services of £1.841m. This had then been reconciled to the actual budget surplus in the Expenditure and Funding Analysis found at note 7 in the accounts.

The Financial Services Manager stated the key message was that the Council had good reserve levels and a robust medium term financial strategy which together meant the Council was an ongoing concern with no material uncertainty at this stage. In concluding his assessment, the Officer placed on record his thanks to the finance team who had worked very hard during March, April and May to meet the deadline for producing the accounts.

Members of the Governance and Audit Committee would be provided with specific training on the Statement of Accounts, as required by the Constitution, prior to the relevant Committee Meeting.

Debate ensued, and Members referenced the balance sheets and made comments about the financial performance of several parts of the Council. Further assurance was requested about the reserves and contingency planning by the Authority. It was explained by the Section 151 Officer that a pay award could be agreed upon in the near future and that there were contingency plans in case of any voids of the commercial property stock. In a later enquiry concerning substantial changes to reserves year on year, the Officer explained that a supporting document would benefit the Committee when the budget setting process was in progress. This included a review of the adequacy of the reserves and projects, how they were to be spent, and the addition/removal of them from the projected income.

In explaining the effect of inflation, the Section 151 Officer explained that different inflation

rates applied to the Authority's expenditure. These included an initial 2% on the current pay award negotiations, with another 2% after that. It was later explained that this could increase further. Pension increases were set externally and therefore the Council had no control over these increases. Pensions received a 1% triage, which the contribution from the Authority was set. The council tax increase scheduled for 2024/25 was 2.99% at the maximum capped level without a referendum. Members also heard that the utility market inflationary increases were significantly higher, with 100% on electricity and gas, whilst water was set at a 6% increase. The Section 151 Officer stressed that she was happy to provide the medium-term financial strategy to Members for their information to assist with any concerns about overspending and the effect on the Authority's finances.

To provide clarity Officers advised that the forecast for pensions had been provided by Barnett Waddingham, Barnett Waddingham, being the actuary appointed by Lincolnshire County Council. Lincolnshire County Council's audit financial statements of the pension financial statements and /or the actuarial assumptions were reviewed by both the auditors of Lincolnshire County Council and also our own auditors as well, and in effect was considered twice.

Funding was also set a side to contribute to any funding gap at the next triannual valuation. In a later query on the pension contribution and arrangements made by employees, Members were advised that the Authority operated an auto-enrolment scheme, with employees tending to opt for the local government pension scheme. The Section 151 Officer explained that she was unaware of any significant cost pressures on other schemes and emphasised that she would check further.

On a query about the local industrial strategy, and the effect of operating in a water-stress county in consideration for longer-term preparation, Members learned that the Chief Executive Officer had recently attended and worked on water-related matters and that an update to Members was possible. The Section 151 Officer was keen to stress that it was about ports and the villages supporting the local community's logistical improvements.

In a query about the placement of the Authority within the national picture, the Section 151 Officer explained a new Local Government Office (OFLOG) to benchmark financial information had been created. The first report on reserves had been released, and future reports were scheduled to be shared. It was clarified that since not all Councils had published their 2022/23 account information, any such comparison at the time of debate was challenging.

In responding to a Member's observations regarding capital receipts, the changes to the Capital Receipts Reserve fluctuated yearly. This change was dependent on sold and bought assets in that specified year. Any capital receipts could only be spent on capital projects.

In answering a query about the business rates retention scheme mentioned, Members learned that the Authority and other local government authorities previously received an annual grant in the form of the Revenue Support Grant, which was paid from National non-domestic rates (NNDR) which had previously all been paid over to the government. With the reduction of Revenue Support Grant, local authorities could retain a portion of the business rates they collected. The Section 151 Officer noted that the level of Revenue Support Grant previously received greatly exceeded the current level of the business rates retention scheme. In replying to a related query about the increase in council tax collection, it was

explained that the budget setting process had a baseline of 98.02% collection rate of council tax, whilst the actual collection was 0.6% more, with a collection rate of 98.8%. This would therefore boost the budget in future years.

In response to a later Pensions query about reviewing the mortality assumptions and the possibility of younger pension enrolees losing out on due to shorter lives, it was noted that the District Council representative on the Lincolnshire County Council Pension Committee, Councillor Trevor Young, could be notified of the Committee's suggestions.

Having been moved and, seconded, on being put to the vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that having had the opportunity to review the Unaudited Statement of Accounts there are no comments from the Committee which need to be referred to the Section 151 Officer for subsequent discussion with the Council's External Auditors, Mazars.

After the vote, the Chairman wanted to record his thanks to the Section 151 Officer and the Finance team for their hard work on getting the Unaudited Statement of Accounts prepared in time.

11 WORKPLAN

The Democratic and Civic Officer informed Members that the Committee would consider the Quarter 1 Internal Audit Report at the 26 September 2023 Meeting.

The Chairman also highlighted the reports coming to the next meeting of the Committee and raised the idea of individual members assessing different reports. This would be for the Lead Members to further consider. The Chairman also noted the possibility of hosting the Statement of Accounts training shortly before the meeting of the Committee on Tuesday, 25 July 2023, to which details would be circulated.

With no further comment, the Workplan as set out in the report was **NOTED**.

The meeting concluded at 3.20 pm.

Chairman

Governance & Audit Committee Matters Arising Schedule

Purpose:

To consider progress on the matters arising from previous Governance & Audit Committee meetings.

Recommendation:

That members note progress on the matters arising and request corrective action if necessary.

Matters arising Schedule

Meeting	Governance and Audit Committee				
Status	Title	Action Required	Comments	Due Date	Allocated To
Black	Update on Housing Risks	Taken from Minute 58, from the 18 April 2023 Governance and Audit Committee:- "In a discussion about the housing associated risks, the Assistant Director explained that she would take back the concerns raised to the Housing team. The issues raised included, small-level landlords dropping out of the market, renting issues, the number of older people in the District, property sizes, ageing dwellings and a predicted drop in house prices. The Officer highlighted these were wider connected problems with housing and re-iterated specialists were to be made aware."	See action required. Update (15 May 2023) from Andy Gray: "Officers welcome the comments from members in relation to these matters and they are asked to provide clarity as to whether these additional risks need further investigation or whether they feel that the existing strategies and plans take them into consideration. Where further work may be required, officers can look at the feasibility of this and consider whether it can be accommodated within the existing strategies and policies in place." Update (30 June 2023): Action added to Chair's Briefing Matters Arising Schedule for further discussion.	28/07/23	Jeanette McGarry
Black	Request from Members to have an updated Strategic Risk Review for July 2023	Taken from Minute 58, from the Governance and Audit Meeting on Tuesday 18 April 2023:- "During multiple points in the debate, Members raised the idea of having another updated review at the July 2023 meeting of the Committee. The	See action required.. Update (30 June 2023): With major changes required to Strategic risks, following consultation with Chairman of Committee, and the Member Champion for Risk, the updated Strategic Risks will be considered at	26/09/23	Jeanette McGarry

		Officer agreed for Members to receive an updated report at that meeting, which was to take on the concerns of the highlighted issues during the debate, and factor in recent and pending changes."	the scheduled Governance and Audit meeting on 26 September 2023.		
Black	Distribution of Medium Term Financial Strategy	Taken from the draft minutes of the meeting on 13 June 2023: "The Section 151 Officer stressed that she was happy to provide the medium-term financial strategy to Members for their information to assist with any concerns about overspend and the effect on the Authority's finances."	See action required. Update (30 June 2023): Please do provide information on the Medium Term Financial Strategy to the Committee. This could be through a separate email or as part of the Member Newsletter. Please indicate when completed. Update (17 July 2023): Emma Foy has promoted upcoming budget consultation process to Members. Strategy to be distributed to Members shortly in separate communication.	08/09/23	Emma Foy
Black	Adequacy of Reserves Update	Taken from the draft minutes on 13 June 2023: "In a later enquiry with regard to substantial changes to reserves year on year, the Officer explained that a supporting document would prove beneficial to the committee when the budget setting process was in progress. This included a review of the adequacy of the reserves and projects, how they were to be spent, the addition/removal of them from the projected income."	See action required. Update (30 June 2023): Please do provide information on the reserve adequacy levels to the Committee. This could be through a separate email or as part of the Member Newsletter. Please indicate when completed. Update (17 July 2023): Information on reserves to be distributed within the Medium Term Financial Strategy communication.	26/09/23	Emma Foy
Green	Local Authority Financial Benchmarking Distribution	Taken from the minutes on 13 June 2023: "In a query about the placement of the Authority within the national picture, the Section 151 Officer explained that a new Local	Ongoing action. See action required. This could be in the Members Newsletter as a regular item.	28/11/23	Emma Foy

		Government Office had been set up and was scheduled to benchmark financial information. The first report on reserves had been released, and future reports were scheduled to be shared."			
Green	Request for wider economic information to be presented to Members.	Action taken from the minutes of the meeting on 13 June 2022: "Members commented on how understanding the bigger picture was often of assistance, and those with County Council experience, referenced reports provided to Members which demonstrated investments, yields, gilts, interest rates and the like. Officers confirmed that they did receive something similar from the Council's Treasury Advisors on a monthly basis and could share that with Members."	Ongoing action. Please do provide information/updates from the Treasury Advisors to Members of the Committee. This could be in a separate email, or as part of the Members Bulletin. Please do indicate once in place and progressing.	26/09/23	Peter Davy



**Governance and Audit
Committee**

Tuesday, 25 July 2023

Subject: Internal Audit Quarter 4 Report 2022/23

Report by:

Head of Service – Corporate Audit & Risk
Management – Lincolnshire County Council

Contact Officer:

Emma Foy, Director of Corporate Services and
Section 151 Officer

Emma.foy@west-lindsey.gov.uk

Purpose / Summary:

The report gives members an update of progress,
by the Audit partner, against the 2022/2023
annual programmes agreed by the Audit
Committee in March 2022.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That Members consider the content of the report and identify any actions
required.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: None.

Financial: FIN/38/24/GA/SL

There are no financial implications arising from this report. Information contained within the report.

Staffing : None.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :

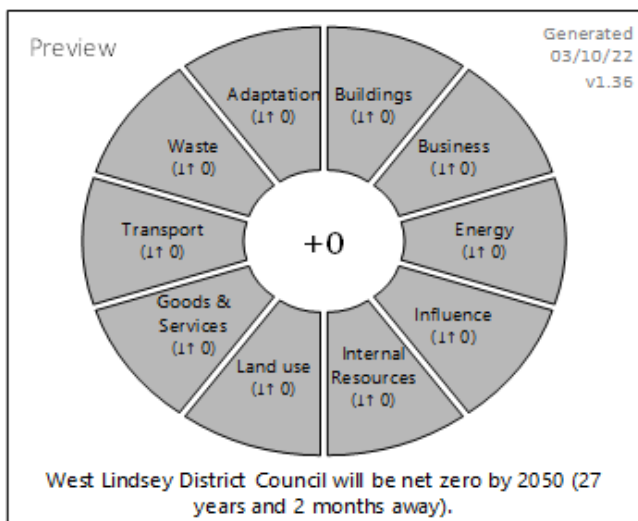
None.

Data Protection Implications :

None.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:

None directly arising from this report.



Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations:

None.

Health Implications:

None.

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report :

None.

Risk Assessment :

None.

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

X

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

X

Internal Audit Progress Report



West Lindsey District Council May 2023

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Thurrock Council Update

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-
- 1 - Assurance Definitions
 - 2 - Audit Tracker of Due Actions
 - 3 - Internal Audit Plan 2022/23 – Progress to Date

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This report has been prepared solely for the use of Members and Management of **West Lindsey District Council**. Details may be made available to specified external organisations, including external auditors, but otherwise the report should not be used or referred to in whole or in part without prior consent. No responsibility to any third party is accepted as the report has not been prepared for and is not intended for any other purpose.

The matters raised in this report are only those that came to our attention during the course of our work. There may be weaknesses in governance, risk management and the system of internal control that we are not aware of because they did not form part of our work programme, were excluded from the scope of individual audit engagements or were not brought to our attention. The opinion is based solely the work undertaken as part of the agreed internal audit plan.

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide details of the audit work during the period December 2022 to May 2023
- Advise on progress of the 2022/23 plan
- Raise any other matters that may be relevant to the Audit Committee's role

Key Messages

Audit Plan 2022/23

During the period from December 2022 to May 2023 the internal audit service has completed seven audits. These are:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| • Levelling Up Fund (Phase 1) | High Assurance |
| • Staff Resilience | High Assurance |
| • ICT Patch Management | High Assurance |
| • ICT Asset Management | Substantial Assurance |
| • Key Control Testing | Substantial Assurance |
| • Risk Management | Substantial Assurance |
| • CRM Project | Consultancy |

There are currently no audits in progress that contribute to the 2022/23 audit plan.

An overview of the internal audit assignments along with key findings follow in this report.

Items Deferred Or Removed From The 2022/23 Audit Plan

The second phase of the levelling up review was not completed as part of the 2022/23 plan. The draft report detailing the findings and recommendations from phase one was issued in February 2023, this left insufficient time to deliver the follow up, phase two. The subsequent phase two will be delivered as part of the 2023/24 internal audit plan.

There were two audits originally planned to take place during 2022/23, these were not completed and following a review of priorities, risk areas and current resilience, these will not form part of the 2023/24 internal audit plan. The two assurance reviews are:

- Governance, Risk and Resilience Framework
- Wellbeing Lincs Service

3
HIGH ASSURANCE

3
SUBSTANTIAL ASSURANCE

0
LIMITED ASSURANCE

0
LOW ASSURANCE

1
OTHER REPORTS

High Assurance

Levelling Up Fund (Phase One)

As part of Central Government's Levelling Up programme, the Council submitted a bid for a share of the £4.8 billion available and were successfully awarded a £10million grant in October 2021. The fund was set up to support the town centre and high street regeneration, local transport projects, and cultural and heritage assets.

As a result of internal audit's work, the assurance review assigned a high level of assurance for the Levelling Up Fund's governance arrangements; confirming they were robust in nature and application and fully compliant with the Project Management Framework and other relevant Council policies and strategies.

The following areas of good practice were identified:

- A portfolio board is in place, chaired by the Executive Director of Resources, which has oversight of all the Council programmes.
- An effective and formally approved governance structure where roles and responsibilities were clearly and appropriately defined. The review found the programme board had effective oversight of the programme.
- Funding arrangements for the Thriving Gainsborough Programme were detailed, shared and approved at meetings of the Prosperous Communities and Corporate Policy and Resources Committees.
- Risk registers were in place for each project having been compiled through risk workshops. The registers were reviewed every month at the project meetings.

One recommendation was made to ensure that the risk registers contained a creation date along with the date of last review and that medium and high risks were routinely presented to the Programme Board.

Further improvements included reviewing the wording of some of the risks to ensure that they described the risk fully and did not contain a summary statement which could be open to misinterpretation.

High Assurance

Arising from the national pandemic, the typical work environment has undergone significant change and now provides new processes to enable and support Council staff in delivering remote working. For the Council it was important that the staff working at home continued to feel supported whilst not working in the offices.

One area which underwent a particular change relates to how staff health and wellbeing were supported. Practical implications, such as correct equipment and suppliers to ensure conformance to Health and Staff health and wellbeing is integral to the achievement of the Council's objectives and operational day-to-day activities. The Council has a duty of care to ensure effective measures are in place to support staff with any associated issues they may be experiencing.

Nationally it has been recognized that the recent pandemic has led to an increase in individuals experiencing mental health issues. The remote working environment may make some of these more difficult to identify and influence and therefore require different tools to be in place.

The assurance work was able to provide a high assurance opinion as a result of reviewing the arrangements put in place by West Lindsey District Council for the purposes of protecting and supporting the health, safety and welfare of their staff.

The review noted high levels of engagement with staff, through the annual staff survey, to identify emerging issues and/or areas of concern, with demonstrable action being taken to deliver improvements.

Levels of reported sickness absence (a key resilience indicator) were found to be positive and consistently below the Council's threshold target.

The Council's online training portal provides staff with access to personal learning opportunities across a variety of categories. These categories include health & wellbeing and personal development. Targeted training was also found to be provided to those colleagues in front-line or enhanced roles that required line management and/or leadership of others. The Assistant Director People & Democratic Services advised that these courses were well utilised.

Staff Resilience

High Assurance

The ICT service operates a structured approach to patch management, ensuring that patches are identified, obtained and installed safely and promptly. Supporting systems are used effectively and have been enhanced since the previous internal audit review in 2018. The review examined the following areas:

- Management

The review was satisfied that roles and responsibilities had been allocated for delivering patch management. A patch management policy was in place to inform staff around management expectations for this area. The policy was regularly updated to ensure it remained aligned with best practice and had relevance to the processes within the Council.

- Patch Identification

The review found the ICT section had used effective automation to identify and collect security updates as and when they became available. The advantages of this automation are:

1. **Increase Efficiency:** Automated patch identification and collection can save time and resources by quickly identifying and gathering the necessary patches, without the need for manual intervention.
2. **Greater Accuracy:** Automated systems can identify and gather patches with a high degree of accuracy, reducing the risk of missing critical patches.
3. **Improved Security:** Automated patch identification and collection can help organisations stay up to date with security patches, reducing the risk of vulnerabilities and breaches.

- Patch Installation

The review identified that the deployment of security updates was similarly automated with schedules set to autorun that disseminate updates for end user devices to test groups for an established period of time before the update is then applied to the remainder of the Councils devices. Updates to servers were completed in sequence to minimise the risk of disruption to the ICT environment.

Updates were scheduled for application promptly resulting in a reduction to the risk of known vulnerabilities being exploited on Council systems.

- Reviewing Patch Activity

The review found that patch deployments are monitored by council systems for distribution and installation. The systems receive information back from Council devices to confirm whether the update was successful.

Substantial Assurance

Overall, the Shared Partnership's controls and general arrangements of the ICT assets were found to be robust and operating effectively and efficiently. Arising from the review work, the following good practices were observed, which contributed to the substantial assurance opinion provided:

- There was an ICT Asset refresh monitored by the Finance Business Partner and the ICT Manager monthly. The S151 Officer has quarterly oversight.
- There were sufficient ICT asset management reports produced for operational oversight across both Council's.
- New ICT assets (hardware and software) were either procured or installed only if there was a business need and all were subject to appropriate management approvals.

Recommendations were made to improve processes and strengthen controls:

- There was no formalised ICT Asset Strategy in place for the Shared Service Partnership to confirm how ICT assets were managed (hardware and software). NKDC were in the process of finalising their ICT Asset Strategy and WLDC were in the early stages of drafting their ICT Shared Service Strategy. The absence of these may result in a lack of clarity and/or misalignment with the strategic direction, objectives and priorities for both Councils.
- A review of the ICT Register confirmed that 86 hardware assets out of 696 assets recorded dated pre-2018 and as far back as 2013. There is a risk that aged ICT assets are not being regularly identified, reviewed, and disposed of when they either become obsolete or at the end of their useful life. The ICT Team will schedule a monthly ICT asset review to identify assets ready for disposal.
- ICT assets were not always timely recorded on the ICT Asset Management System (Lansweeper). As a result, there is a risk that the processing and recording of ICT assets is not accurate and could be misplaced.
- The review found no ICT Asset Disposal Policy or formal procedures are in place. Testing confirmed that this activity is being undertaken with devices having data erased before being removed from Council premises. Additional contractual arrangements with the disposal company have been entered into with WLDC but needed to be formally established for NKDC.

Substantial Assurance

The Council operate a significant number of fundamental systems which cannot be audited in detail every year.

To ensure the key controls for these fundamental systems continue to operate effectively, we had a risk-based programme where a full systems audit is undertaken in one year and key control testing in subsequent years. For 2022/23 the internal audit service examined Council Tax Debtors, Housing Benefit Overpayment Debtors, NNDR Debtors, Income Debtors and Budget Monitoring.

Overall, the review found that key controls were operating effectively, and appropriate safeguards were in place to ensure the integrity of the financial systems and their data.

A number of improvement recommendations were made to processes and to strengthen controls:

- Policies and procedures should reflect the limits below which the Council has determined that it is not economical to pursue.
- It was noted that within a sample of five NNDR debtor accounts, two automated reminders had not been issued, nor had the debt progressed in the recovery process. This situation will be investigated with the software provider and remediated. Additionally, it was noted that a Council Tax debtor account placed on hold, had not been reviewed since June 2020. Management agreed to review on a bi-monthly basis all held accounts.
- Write-offs of accounts that had progressed through the debt recovery cycle were not consistently processed in a timely manner. Management confirmed that write-offs will be sent to the Section 151 officer for approval on a quarterly basis.
- Reconciliations between the debtor accounts (CT, HB, NNDR and Income) and the general ledger were not always signed and dated, or not signed and dated in a timely manner. Management agreed to ensure debtor reconciliations were carried out monthly and reviewed within 10 working days. This would aid the timeliness of any remedial work required.

Key Controls

Substantial Assurance

Risk management is central to good governance and supports decision making processes to achieve strategic objectives, project and service delivery, and for some service areas ensures compliance with legislation.

The review was able to provide independent assurance that the Council's risk management framework was operating effectively in all areas, including strategic and operational levels, fraud, programmes, projects, and partnerships.

Overall, the review found that the key controls were operating effectively and had appropriate safeguards in place to support its management throughout the Council. A substantial assurance opinion was awarded on the effectiveness of the key controls reviewed.

Areas of good practice included:

- An approved Risk Management strategy with a risk appetite in place.
- Designated risk champions at senior management and member levels.
- Regularly reviewed and reported risks shared with senior management and members.

Five medium priority recommendations were made to improve processes and strengthen controls. These related to :

- Provision of training to officers and relevant Members to aid consistence in approach and understanding.
- Ensuring that each risk contains information as to the direction of travel in managing that risk.
- Ensuring that committee report templates capture sufficient information about key risks associated with decisions taken.
- Producing a partnership risk register to identify, assess, manage and monitor partnership risks on an ongoing basis.
- Incorporating risk tolerance information to risk registers which could then help inform risk management decisions.

Risk Management

Consultancy

The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is a key aspect of the Council's Together 24 Transformation Programme.

CRM is a long-term project which started in April 2020 and is expected to be completed in 2024. A programme of service redesigns was being undertaken to allow the CRM system to be incorporated into processes. Initial support with the development of the software was provided by Provident consultants.

The review sought to provide independent advice and support to the CRM Project team in the following areas;

- Handover – a full set of documents on the system design and build is complete and available (for whoever is supporting the CRM long term).
- Coding – a consistent coding / configuration standard is used.
- Quality assurance testing – there is a testing framework to ensure new modules introduced aren't impacting on other parts of the system.

CRM Project

Overall, the audit found that the three elements within the scope of this engagement were well controlled.

The report acknowledged that once user acceptance testing (UAT) was completed, detailed handover notes were created by the Corporate Systems Team. The Council confirmed that it would enter into a software licensing agreement with the provider to ensure relevant updates were received for ongoing protection.

The Council confirmed that although guidance was provided by the supplier on how to customise and enhance the system through coding, the source code of the system is secured internally against amendments that could impact the integrity of the application.

Any changes that do take place are developed, subject to user acceptance testing (UAT) and quality assurance all within a safe test environment. No changes are applied to the live system without going through the test environment.

Work in Progress

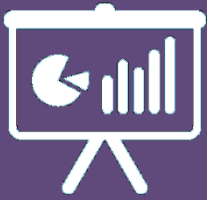
No work is currently in progress.

Other Significant Work

Housing Benefit Subsidy

As part of the work undertaken to support the subsidy claim, we examined twenty-eight cases in respect of payments made in the 2021/22 financial year. Two errors were identified, both of which related to payments of temporary accommodation; an underpayment of £13.99 and an underclaim of subsidy of £47.04. We have not made any formal recommendations within this report as the errors themselves are not systemic or material.





Internal Audit's performance is measured against a range of indicators. The statistics below show our performance on key indicators year to date.

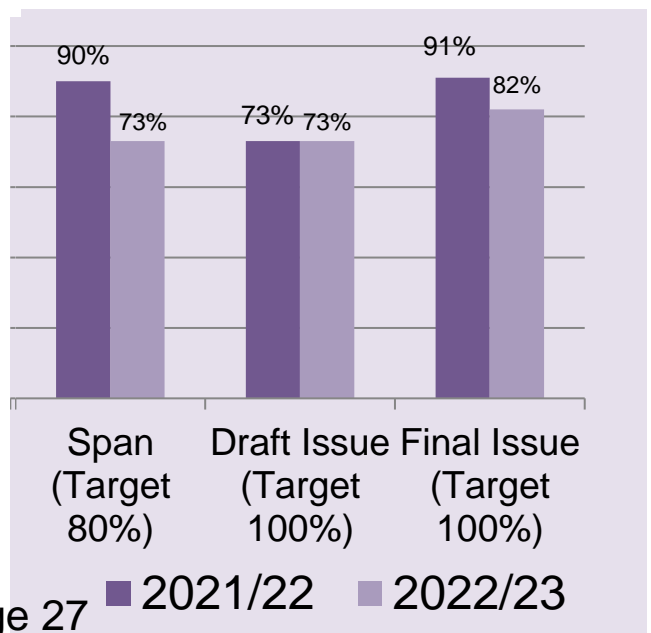
Performance on Key Indicators



Positive feedback has been received



Plan completed: 90%





Other Matters of Interest

A summary of matters that will be of particular interest to Audit Committee Members



National Cyber
Security Centre
a part of GCHQ

Cyber Security Toolkit for Boards – April 2023

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) has recently revised its Board Toolkit to ensure that cyber resilience and risk management are embedded throughout an organisation, including its people, systems, processes and technologies.

The toolkit states that it is aimed at board members in medium to large organisations in any sector.

The National Audit Office has provided some guidance to audit committee on Cyber Security, though is itself based on the NCSC's 10 steps to Cyber Security guidance. The NAO publication references the NCSC's board toolkit as a source of further reading and would commend this publication to Senior Officers and Members alike.

<https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/collection/board-toolkit>



The Committee on Standards in Public Life publishes new report, 'Leading in Practice'

The independent Committee on Standards in Public Life has published 'Leading in Practice', a new report which shares examples and case studies gathered from public and private sector organisations on maintaining ethical organisational practices.

There is also an open letter from Committee Chair Lord Evans, to all public sector leaders, encouraging them to think about how they build and support a robust ethical culture. It includes 20 questions for leaders and others to reflect on.

[Committee on Standards in Public Life](#) Page 28



Other Matters of Interest

A summary of matters that will be of particular interest to Audit Committee Members



Thurrock Council- Funding gap and current position

The government has intervened to hand Essex County Council control of financial functions of Thurrock Council, amid concerns over debt levels.

Details of the authority's financial woes became clearer in November, when a £452m funding gap emerged in this year's budget due to the impairment of four assets and a significant increase to Minimum Revenue Provision in order to comply with the guidelines.

A best value inspection is being undertaken to review the governance, audit, risk management and overview and scrutiny at the unitary authority.

[Essex to manage finances of Thurrock Council | Public Finance](#)

[Thurrock seeks £182m of exceptional support | Public Finance](#)



Woking Borough Council – Section 114 Notice

The Council issued a Section 114 notice on the 7th June as a result of a service financial shortfall owing to its historic investment strategy that has resulted in unaffordable borrowing. Whilst the Council received core funding of £16m in the 2023/24 financial year, it faced a deficit of £1.2 billion.

This is thought to be the biggest financial failure in local government history and is a developing story.

High

Our critical review or assessment on the activity gives us a high level of confidence on service delivery arrangements, management of risks, and the operation of controls and / or performance.

The risk of the activity not achieving its objectives or outcomes is low. Controls have been evaluated as adequate, appropriate and are operating effectively.

Substantial

Our critical review or assessment on the activity gives us a substantial level of confidence (assurance) on service delivery arrangements, management of risks, and operation of controls and / or performance.

There are some improvements needed in the application of controls to manage risks. However, the controls have been evaluated as adequate, appropriate and operating sufficiently so that the risk of the activity not achieving its objectives is medium to low.

Limited

Our critical review or assessment on the activity gives us a limited level of confidence on service delivery arrangements, management of risks, and operation of controls and/or performance.

The controls to manage the key risks were found not always to be operating or are inadequate. Therefore, the controls evaluated are unlikely to give a reasonable level of confidence (assurance) that the risks are being managed effectively. It is unlikely that the activity will achieve its objectives.

Low

Our critical review or assessment on the activity identified significant concerns on service delivery arrangements, management of risks, and operation of controls and / or performance.

There are either gaps in the control framework managing the key risks or the controls have been evaluated as not adequate, appropriate or are not being effectively operated. Therefore the risk of the activity not achieving its objectives is high.

Substantial

A reliable system of governance, risk management and control exists, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

Adequate

There is a generally reliable system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

Limited

Significant gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance were identified. Improvement is required to the system of governance, risk management and control to effectively manage risks in the achievement of objectives in the area audited..

No

Immediate action is required to address fundamental gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance identified. The system of governance, risk management and control is inadequate to effectively manage risks in the achievement of the objectives for the area audited.

Audit Actions

The audit tracker report identified that there were 16 actions due for completion by the 31st March 2023. These comprised of zero high and eight medium priority actions.

Following review and discussions with managers we can confirm that seven of the eight medium priority actions have been completed (88%).

The table below shows the outstanding action and supporting information on future implementation or completion.

Outstanding Actions

Audit Title	Issued	Assurance	Total Recs	Recs Imp	Priority of Overdue Recs	Recs Not Due
Vulnerable Communities Follow-Up	Feb 2022	Substantial	2	1	Medium (1)	0

The finding relates to improving performance reporting and communicating this information to relevant Senior Officers within the Council.

Management agreed to develop a basket of measures to be reported through the Corporate Plan and that this would be implemented by the 31st March 2023.

Reporting methods are to be reviewed as part of the refresh of the Communities at Risk work which will take place in 2023. A revised implementation date of January 2024 has been given.

Audit	Scope of Work	Start Planned Date	Start Actual Date	End Date	Rating and Progress Report
Value for money	To provide assurance that the Council takes all reasonable steps to achieve value for money in the delivery of its services.	20/04/2022	20/04/2022	19/08/2022	High Assurance Oct 2022
Flood Management	To provide assurance that adequate arrangements are in place between the Council and the LLFA to both prevent and respond to flooding.	11/05/2022	11/05/2022	23/08/2022	High Assurance Oct 2022
ICT Helpdesk	Follow-up review to provide assurance that actions agreed previously have been implemented and an improved control environment now exists.	01/03/2022	01/03/2022	10/06/2022	Substantial Assurance Oct 2022
ICT Disaster Recovery	To provide assurance that back-ups are robust and that disaster recovery arrangements are in place and also tested.	09/02/2022	09/02/2022	22/08/2022	Substantial Assurance Oct 2022
ICT Cloud Services	Review of several cloud service solutions to ascertain the level of due diligence undertaken in the selection of providers and the security arrangements in place.	06/05/2022	06/05/2022	22/08/2022	Substantial Assurance Oct 2022
Key Control and ERP	Delivery of key control testing to allow the Head of Internal Audit to form an opinion on the Council's	05/05/2022	05/05/2022	22/08/2022	Substantial Assurance Oct 2022
Contract Management	Assurance that the contract management process within WLDC is operating as planned and in line with policy.	12/07/2022	12/07/2022	21/12/2022	Substantial Assurance Dec 2022
Housing Benefit Subsidy	Work to support external audit in the verification of the Housing Benefit subsidy claim.	01/07/2022	01/07/2022	08/12/2022	Substantial Assurance Dec 2022
Staff Resilience	Reviewing measures that WLDC have in place to manage and support staff including supervision, home workplace assessments and support mechanisms.	16/08/2022	16/08/2022	02/05/2023	High Assurance May 2023

Audit	Scope of Work	Start Planned Date	Start Actual Date	End Date	Rating and Progress Report
ICT Patch Management	To provide assurance that software and hardware are kept up to date in order to mitigate against known vulnerabilities.	06/12/2022	06/12/2022	12/04/2023	High Assurance May 2023
ICT Asset Management	To provide assurance that all ICT hardware assets are tracked and effectively managed.	19/12/2022	19/12/2022	06/04/2023	High Assurance May 2023
Risk Management	Review of the risk management monitoring procedures in place at WLDC.	21/11/2022	21/11/2022	15/02/2023	Substantial Assurance May 2023
Levelling Up Fund	Phase 1 Assurance over the management, decision making and governance of the £10m Levelling Up Fund received from the Government.	14/08/2022	14/08/2022	01/02/2023	High Assurance May 2023
Key Control Testing	Delivery of Key Control Testing to enable the Head of Internal Audit to form an opinion on the Council's financial control environment. Areas covered include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Tax Debtors • Housing Benefit Overpayment Debtors • NNDR Debtors • Income Debtors • Budget Monitoring 	06/02/2023	15/03/2023	19/05/2023	Substantial Assurance May 2023
Key Project – CRM System	Consultancy to advise and support on new system controls. NB – As this is a consultancy piece of work, no assurance opinion is provided.	06/02/2022	06/02/2022	17/05/2023	N/A May 2023



**Governance and Audit
Committee**

Tuesday, 25 July 2023

Subject: Internal Audit Annual Report 2022/23

Report by:

Head of Service – Corporate Audit & Risk
Management – Lincolnshire County Council

Contact Officer:

Emma Foy, Director of Corporate Services and
Section 151 Officer

Emma.foy@west-lindsey.gov.uk

Purpose / Summary:

This report gives the Head of Internal Audit's
opinion on the adequacy of the Council's,
Governance, Risk and Control environment and
opinion of the Internal Audit Plan for 2022/23.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. That the Committee consider the Head of Audit's Annual Report and Opinion for 2022/2023 and identifies any actions it requires.
2. That the Committee take into account this Annual Report and the Head of Internal Audit's opinion when finalising the Council's Annual Governance Statement 2022/2023 at a future meeting

IMPLICATIONS

Legal: None.

Financial : FIN/37/24/GA/SL

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Staffing : None.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :

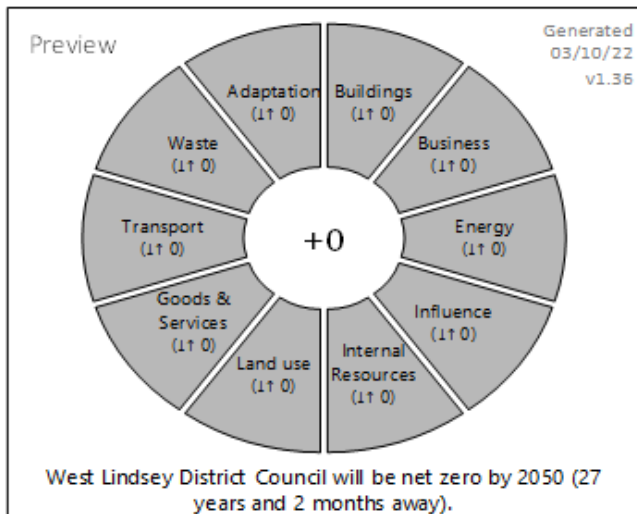
None.

Data Protection Implications :

None.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:

None directly arising from this report.



Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations:

None.

Health Implications:

None.

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report :

None.

Risk Assessment :

None.

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

X

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

X

Executive Summary

1. The Annual Internal Audit Report aims to present a summary of the audit work undertaken over the past year. In particular:
 - Include an opinion on the overall adequacy of and effectiveness of the governance framework and internal control system and the extent to which the Council can rely on it;
 - Inform how the plan was discharged and of overall outcomes of the work undertaken;
 - Draw attention to any issues particularly relevant to the Annual Governance Statement.

2. Our internal audit service continues to work well with the Governance and Audit Committee and Management to help the Council maintain effective governance, risk and control processes.

3. The Full Report can be found in Appendix 1.

Internal Audit Annual Report 2022/23



West Lindsey District Council

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2 - Details of Plan Changes

3 - Benchmarking

4 - Assurance Definitions

5 - Glossary of Terms

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Sara Jackson – Audit Manager

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This report has been prepared solely for the use of Members and Management of West Lindsey District Council. Details may be made available to specified external organisations, including external auditors, but otherwise the report should not be used or referred to in whole or in part without prior consent. No responsibility to any third party is accepted as the report has not been prepared, and is not intended for any other purpose.

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The matters raised in this report are only those that came to our attention during the course of our work – there may be weaknesses in governance, risk management and the system of internal control that we are not aware of because they did not form part of our work programme, were excluded from the scope of individual audit engagements or were not brought to our attention. The opinion is based solely the work undertaken as part of the agreed internal audit plan.

Purpose of Annual Report

The purpose of the Annual Internal Audit Report is to meet the Head of Internal Audit annual reporting requirements set out in the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS) and the Accounts and Audit Regulations. The report will:

- Include an opinion on the overall adequacy of and effectiveness of the Council's governance, risk and control framework and therefore the extent to which the Council can rely on it;
- Inform how the plan was discharged and the overall outcomes of the work undertaken that supports the opinion;
- Provide a statement on conformance with the PSIAS and the results of the internal audit quality assurance);
- Draw attention to any issues particularly relevant to the Annual Governance Statement

Introduction

For the twelve months ending 31 March 2023 the Council's arrangements for governance, risk management and control framework have continued to be strong.

It has been another challenging year for the Council operating in times of economic pressure locally and nationally.

Based on the work we have undertaken and wider information obtained from other assurance sources; The HIA's opinion on the adequacy and effectiveness of the Council's arrangements for governance, risk management and control is:

Governance



Performing Well — No concerns that significantly affect the governance, risk and control framework and successful delivery of the Council priorities.

Risk



Performing Well — No concerns that significantly affect the governance, risk and control framework and successful delivery of the Council priorities.

Internal Control



Performing Well — No concerns that significantly affect the governance, risk and control framework and successful delivery of the Council priorities.

Financial Control



Performing Well — No concerns that significantly affect the governance, risk and control framework and successful delivery of the Council priorities



"Achieving the intended outcomes while acting in the public interest at all times"

It is comprised of systems, processes, culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and through which they account to, engage with, and where appropriate, lead their communities.

Each year the Council is required to reflect on how its governance arrangements have worked and identify any significant governance issues that should be drawn to the attention of the public. This encourages accountability and transparency interests.

An update on progress against the issues identified in the 2021/22 Annual Governance Statement was provided to the Governance and Audit Committee in March 2023. Actions being addressed included:

- Financial settlement: the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS). The MTFS has been updated on an ongoing basis and built in all information known from Policy Statements into future years. An ongoing review and savings programme will be launched in June 2023 to further support this.
- New finance system: The 2023-24 Budget has been built within Tech One, launched in March 2022. The Financial Statements for 2022-23 have been successfully closed within the financial system. Dashboards are to be completed for all budget managers in June 2023.

The draft Annual Governance Statement presents as a positive report with no significant governance issues identified. Areas for improvement identified include:

- Loss of key staff: ensure that processes are fully documented with appropriate succession plans in place and activities reliant on one individual are identified.

- Undertake recruitment for a permanent Monitoring Officer, to replace the current interim role.
- Continue the review of corporate procurement services due to the current providers restricted availability.

The action plan arising from the LGA Peer review (January 2020) was updated in June 2022. It comprised of 10 key recommendations, eight have been completed, with two in progress. The Peer Review team confirmed: *"the Council has made significant progress against the recommendations from the peer team's January 2020 report. This is no mean feat given that the Council has been responding to the various impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic throughout this time"*. Consideration is being given to the timeline for the next peer review.

The Governance and Audit Committee aims to ensure governance is working effectively. This involves regularly reviewing the governance framework and considering the Annual Governance Statement. Following local elections in May 2023, a new Committee Chairman and several members of the Committee have changed. A training programme is in place to support new committee members.



It is comprised of systems, processes, culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and through which they account to, engage with, and where appropriate, lead their communities.

The 2023 Monitoring Officer's Annual Report was presented to the Governance and Audit Committee in April. Commenting upon the constitution's performance, the report stated:

"The Constitution has continued to be tested during the 2022/23. As Monitoring Officer, I am pleased to report that it has provided a clear and robust framework for the governance and decision-making of this Council. This has been especially important with the delivery and inception of some very ambitious projects which no doubt will benefit our visitors and residents for many years to come, another reason to support minimal changes at this time."

As stated in the 2022/23 Annual Constitution Review, no major changes have been made following the Constitutions review. The report discussed whether a more comprehensive review is required in the coming years due to more comprehensive reviews having been undertaken in previous years.

The 2022/23 Annual Report of the Monitoring Officer highlighted several areas including:

- Confirming that no Governance issues have been raised around WLDC owned companies and no legal challenges issued.
- Identified that the number of complaints had reduced when compared to the previous three years.
- Work continues relating to the Council's investigation powers through the RIPA policy. Adoption is expected in 2023/24, along with planned.
- An independent member has been recruited

to and approved for appointment on to the Governance and Audit Committee.

Two areas around governance were rated as red in the 2022 annual combined assurance report. These were safeguarding and procurement. Both areas have demonstrated progressed with safeguarding being reassessed as green and procurement as amber. While resilience in procurement remains an issue, relationships with external procurement providers have improved and staff training in place. There were now no red rated areas within governance identified on the assurance map which influenced the combined assurance report.



"Achieving the intended outcomes while acting in the public interest at all times"

It is comprised of systems, processes, culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and through which they account to, engage with, and where appropriate, lead their communities.

During 2022/23 three of our audits focused on governance arrangements. Key findings from these reviews included:

Staff Resilience

During the pandemic the Council adopted a hybrid approach to home and office working for staff. The audit considered measures the council had in place for staff including supervision, home workplace assessments and support mechanisms. The review provided a High Assurance opinion.

Leveling Up Fund

The Council submitted a bid as part of the 'Levelling Up' programme. In October 2021 they were successfully awarded a £10 million grant, as part of a £17.5million programme. We were able to provide High Assurance over the management, decision making, and governance of the £10 million Levelling Up Fund received from the Government.

Contract Management

Four significant contracts were examined to confirm that appropriate management and monitoring was in place.

We provided Substantial Assurance and identified four medium rated findings to improve the process. These included improved capture of meeting actions, the introduction of contract risk registers and contract management guidance.

The outcome of the internal audit work and the intelligence gathered through the combined assurance framework has helped inform the Head of Internal Audit's opinion on Internal Control that it is performing well.

Governance assurance



Assessed as Performing Well

Risk



Good risk management is part of the way we work. It is about taking the right risks when making decisions or where we need to encourage innovation in times of major change – balancing risk, quality, cost and affordability. This put us in a stronger position to deliver our goals and provide excellent services.

The Council’s risk management arrangements were assessed as green through the combined assurance review (a high level of assurance).

Internal audit can confirm that there are established structures and processes for identifying, assessing and managing risk and these remain effective. New Strategic Risks have also been added to the Register in 2022/23, demonstrating an ongoing process in identifying risk that might impact Council objectives.

Strategic risks are regularly monitored by the Management Team and reported to the Governance and Audit Committee twice per year. The last review took place in March/April 2023. Agreement was reached to consider project risks relating to activity with the RAF Scampton site. Updates are due at the Governance and Audit Committee in July 23.

During the year we reviewed risk management and gave an opinion of **Substantial Assurance**. We found good practice in place such as an approved risk management strategy, and competent risk management practices. Officers and designated risk champions are present at senior management and Member levels and engage appropriately.

A small number of areas to strengthen were identified. These included refresher training to aid consistency, transparency and improved awareness.

Internal audit did not identify any significant risks

requiring inclusion on the risk registers during the delivery of our audit work.

This information has helped inform the Head of Internal Audit opinion that risk management is performing well.

Risk Management Assurance



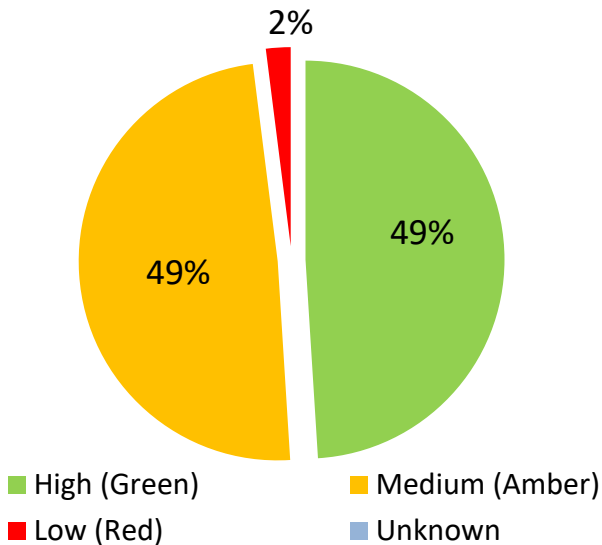
Assessed as Performing Well



A Combined Assurance Status report is produced by the Council on the level of confidence they can provide on service delivery arrangements, management of risks, operation of controls and performance for their area of responsibility. These reports are reviewed by the Governance & Audit Committee and provide key assurance evidence to support the Head of Internal Audit opinion.

Combined Assurance

Overall Assurance Status 21/22



We help co-ordinate the Council's assurance intelligence. The overall assurance status is positive with the vast majority of areas continuing to receive a medium (amber) or high (green) level of assurance.

The percentage of areas gaining a high level of assurance have increased by 8% from last year, demonstrating a recognition of control assurance.

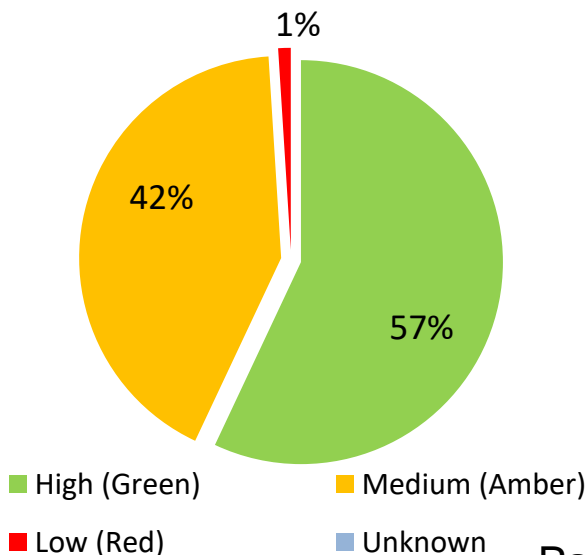
The percentage of areas gaining a low level of assurance has reduced by 1% from last year. These areas are:

Transactional Services - Gainsborough Market

Emerging Risk- Lack of availability of good quality Private Rented stock.

As a result of the audit reviews, the combined assurance work and review of external independent documents, the Head of Internal Audit is able to provide an opinion on internal controls as performing well.

Overall Assurance Status 22/23



Internal Control assurance





The Council is responsible for establishing and maintaining risk management processes, control systems and governance arrangements. Internal Audit plays a vital role in providing *independent risk based and objective assurance* and *insight* on how these arrangements are working. Internal Audit forms part of the Council's assurance framework.

Scope of Work

Our risk based internal audit plan was prepared taking account the critical activities and key risks to support the basis of my annual opinion. It has remained flexible to enable us to respond to emerging risks and maintain effective focus.

In March 2022, the Audit & Governance Committee approved the internal audit plan of 166 days. We have delivered 90% of this agreed plan. This remained sufficient to provide an annual opinion.

Restriction on Scope

In carrying out our work we identified no unexpected restrictions to the scope of our work.

We have worked closely with the Council's senior management team to agree audit scopes and to ensure audit work is progressed.

I do not consider the restrictions and changes to the plan to have had an adverse effect on my ability to deliver my overall opinion. The combined assurance work undertaken helped in this regard.

We have not experienced any impairment to our independence or objectivity during the conduct and delivery of the Internal Audit Plan.

Our Work



Internal Audit's role include advisory and related client service activities, the nature and scope of which are agreed with the client, are intended to add value and improve an organisation's governance, risk management and control processes without the internal auditor assuming management responsibility. Examples include counsel, advice, facilitation and training.

Other Significant Work

Housing Benefit Subsidy

The Council submits annual Housing Benefit Subsidy claims to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). This claim is subject to the Housing Benefit Subsidy Assurance Process HBAP, presently carried out by external Auditors.

During the year we have undertaken detailed Housing Benefit Subsidy testing to support external audit in their evaluation of the claim.

We examined twenty-eight cases in respect of payments made in the 2021/22 financial year. Two errors were identified, both of which related to payments in respect of temporary accommodation – an underpayment of £13.99 and an underclaim of subsidy of £47.04. We have not made any formal recommendations within this report as the errors themselves are not systemic.

Housing Benefit Subsidy is no longer part of the Assurance Lincolnshire offering and the Council has made alternate arrangements for delivering this work in the future.



We recognise the importance of meeting customer expectations as well as conforming to the UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). We continually focus on delivering high quality audit to our clients – seeking opportunities to improve where we can.

Quality Assurance

Our commitment to quality begins with ensuring that we recruit, develop and assign appropriately skilled and experienced people to undertake your audits.

Having skilled and effective people remains at the heart of our workforce strategy. The team has provision to deliver work at both the County Council and contracted internal audit plans at District clients.

Building capacity and resilience remains a key issue facing the partnership. We continue to engage co-sourced work whilst we grow and train our own auditors of the future.

Our audit practice includes ongoing quality reviews for all our assignments. These reviews examine all areas of the work undertaken, from initial planning through to completion and reporting. Key targets have been specified - that the assignment has been completed on time, within budget and to the required quality standard.

There is a financial commitment for training and developing staff. Training provision is continually reviewed through the appraisal process and monthly one to one meetings.

All public sector internal audit services are required to measure how well they conform to the UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standard

An External Quality Assessment must be undertaken every 5 years – As highlighted last year Assurance Lincolnshire’s second external assessment was undertaken in February 2022. They concluded that:

“the Assurance Lincolnshire Partnership’s self-assessment is accurate and as such we conclude that they FULLY CONFORM to the requirements of the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards and the CIPFA Local Government Application Note”.

No significant improvement recommendations were made. The final report from the External Quality Assessment was shared with the Committee.



We recognise the importance of meeting customer expectations as well as conforming to the UK Public Sector Internal Audit Standards (PSIAS). We continually focus on delivering high quality audit to our clients – seeking opportunities to improve where we can.

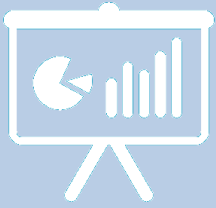
Quality Assurance

Our quality assurance framework for 2022/23 helps us maintain continuous improvement which includes the following:

- **Workforce strategy** – building capacity and growing our own talent in both leadership and professional skills
- **Improving the audit process** - working with client senior management to improve progress and delivery of audits in a remote (hybrid) working environment
- **Continuing professional development** - around new and emerging practice guidance
- **Enhance digital capabilities** - in line with our digital strategy, including data analytics

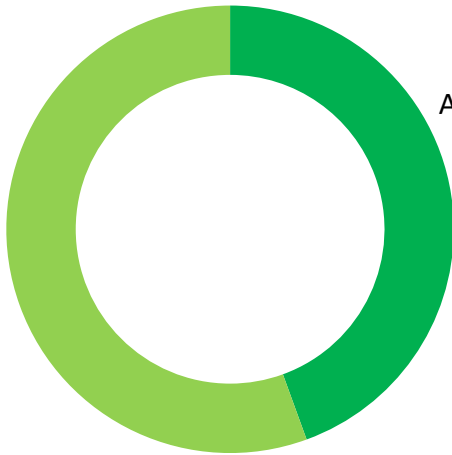
External Audit

Although internal and external auditors carry out their work with different objectives in mind, many of the processes are similar and it is good professional practice that they should work together closely. Wherever possible, External Audit will use the results of internal audit work where it is appropriate.



Our audit plan includes different activities each year – it is therefore not unexpected that these vary; however, the assurance levels do give an insight on the application of the Council's control environment and forms part of the evidence that helped inform the overall annual opinion.

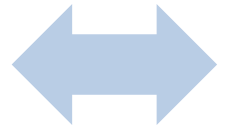
Assurances



High Assurance

Substantial Assurance

Number of Low or Limited Assurances remains static at zero



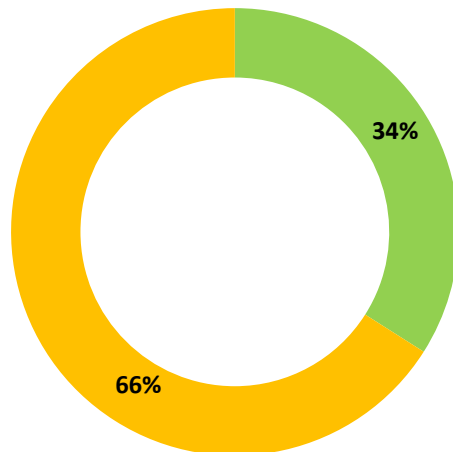
Recommendations

1%

Medium priority recommendations have increased

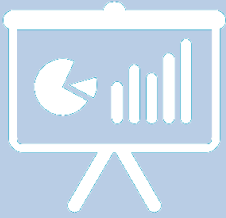
9%

High priority recommendations have decreased



Page 51 ■ Advisory ■ Medium ■ High

Internal Audit Performance

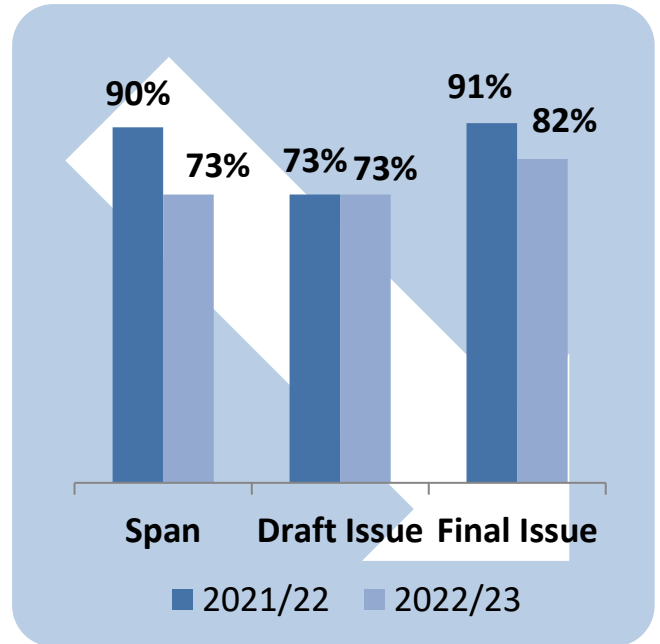


Internal Audit's performance is measured against a range of indicators. The table in **Appendix 3** shows our performance on key indicators at the end of the year. We are pleased to report a good level of achievement in the delivery of the revised plan and the added value of our work.

Performance on Key Indicators

90%*

of the plan delivered



* Two audits were removed from the plan and one has been deferred to next year

Audit	Rating	Type	High Findings	Medium Findings	Advisory Findings	Total
Flood Management	High Assurance	Risk Based	-	-	1	1
Key Control Testing	Substantial Assurance	Risk Based	-	5	-	5
Levelling Up Fund	High Assurance	Risk Based	-	3	2	5
Contract Management	Substantial Assurance	Risk Based	-	4	1	5
Risk Management	Substantial Assurance	Risk Based	-	5	1	6
Staff Resilience	High Assurance	Risk Based	-	-	4	4
Key Project - CRM	N/A	Consultancy	-	-	3	3
ICT Patch Management	High Assurance	Risk Based	-	-	-	-
ICT Asset Management – Hardware	Substantial Assurance	Risk Based	-	8	1	9
Housing Subsidy	Substantial Assurance	Subsidy	-	-	-	-
Contain Outbreak Management Fund	Signed off	Grant	-	-	-	-
Assurance Mapping	N/A	Risk Based	-	-	-	-
TOTAL FINDINGS			0	25	13	38

The original approved plan was 166 days.

A small number of audits were removed from the original audit plan, and this was due to re-prioritising audit resources to those areas of highest risk.

Outlined below are the areas that have been removed from the original plan:

- **Wellbeing Lincs Service**

A key staff member for this review was absent through long-term sickness. The review was originally scheduled for quarter four. Given the absence of a key contributor it was agreed this would be deferred.

A review of the risk-based plan for 2023/24 recognised a change in the risk profile and this review was no longer considered necessary.

- **Governance, Risk and Resilience Framework**

This was scheduled for quarter four but unable to be completed. A review of risk profile relating to this area resulted in the decision this work was no longer a priority.

During the year internal audit were requested to undertake the following additional work:

- **Contain Outbreak Management Fund Grant**

This work has been considered as part of the Financial Controls area of this report.

The internal annual audit plan contains an element of flexibility should Council priorities and risk profiles change. This means internal audit can adapt the plan and to provide assurance or consultation around emerging risks. When delivering this adaptability, we retain a focus on transparency and effective understanding by seeking approved by management and the Governance & Audit Committee.

Performance on Key Indicators

Performance Indicator	Annual Target	Actual
Percentage of plan completed (based on revised plan)	100%	90%
Percentage of recommendations agreed	100%	100%
Percentage of 2021/22 actions implemented	100% or escalated	100%
Timescales:		
Draft Report issued within 10 days of completion	100%	73%
Final Report issued within 5 days of management response	100%	82%
Draft Report issued within 3 months of fieldwork commencing	80%	73%

High Our critical review or assessment on the activity gives us a high level of confidence on service delivery arrangements, management of risks, and the operation of controls and / or performance.

The risk of the activity not achieving its objectives or outcomes is low. Controls have been evaluated as adequate, appropriate and are operating effectively.

Substantial Our critical review or assessment on the activity gives us a substantial level of confidence (assurance) on service delivery arrangements, management of risks, and operation of controls and / or performance.

There are some improvements needed in the application of controls to manage risks. However, the controls have been evaluated as adequate, appropriate and operating sufficiently so that the risk of the activity not achieving its objectives is medium to low.

Limited Our critical review or assessment on the activity gives us a limited level of confidence on service delivery arrangements, management of risks, and operation of controls and/or performance.

The controls to manage the key risks were found not always to be operating or are inadequate. Therefore, the controls evaluated are unlikely to give a reasonable level of confidence (assurance) that the risks are being managed effectively. It is unlikely that the activity will achieve its objectives.

Advisory Our critical review or assessment on the activity identified significant concerns on service delivery arrangements, management of risks, and operation of controls and / or performance.

There are either gaps in the control framework managing the key risks or the controls have been evaluated as not adequate, appropriate or are not being effectively operated. Therefore the risk of the activity not achieving its objectives is high.

Significance

The relative importance of a matter within the context in which it is being considered, including quantitative and qualitative factors, such as magnitude, nature, effect, relevance and impact. Professional judgment assists internal auditors when evaluating the significance of matters within the context of the relevant objectives.

Head of Internal Audit Annual Opinion

The rating, conclusion and/or other description of results provided by the Head of Internal Audit addressing, at a broad level, governance, risk management and/or control processes of the organisation. An overall opinion is the professional judgement of the Head of Internal Audit based on the results of a number of individual engagements and other activities for a specific time interval.

Governance

Comprises the arrangements (including political, economic, social, environmental, administrative, legal and other arrangements) put in place to ensure that the outcomes for intended stakeholders are defined and achieved.

Risk

The possibility of an event occurring that will have an impact on the achievement of objectives. Risk is measured in terms of impact and likelihood.

Control

Any action taken by management, the board and other parties to manage risk and increase the likelihood that established objectives and goals will be achieved. Management - plans, organises and directs the performance of sufficient actions to provide reasonable assurance that objectives and goals will be achieved.

Impairment

Impairment to organisational independence and individual objectivity may include personal conflict of interest, scope limitations, restrictions on access to records, personnel and properties and resource limitations (funding).

Agenda Item 6c



**Governance and Audit
Committee**

Tuesday 25th July 2023

Annual Voice of the Customer Report 2022/23

Report by:	Director of Commercial & Operational Services
Contact Officer:	Natalie Kostiuk Customer Experience Officer natalie.kostiuk@west-lindsey.gov.uk 014227 676685
Purpose / Summary:	To summarise customer feedback received during the year 2022/23 and analyse customer contact demand data to provide a clear view of the voice of the customer.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

- **That Members welcome the contents of the Annual Voice of the Customer Report for 2022-23 and note the progress that has been made by the Council in improving the customer experience over the last 12 months**

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

None arising directly from this report.

Financial : FIN/31/24/GA/SL

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Staffing :

None arising directly from this report.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights :

By understanding how customers interact with the Council in more detail, means that we will be able to identify and address issues that are preventing them from accessing services in an equal manner.

Data Protection Implications:

None arising directly from this report.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities:

None arising directly from this report.

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations:

None arising directly from this report.

Health Implications:

None arising directly from this report.

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report :

- West Lindsey District Council Customer Feedback Policy
- 2022/23 Quarterly Voice of the Customer Reports x 4

Available on the West Lindsey District Council website via this link:

www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/feedback

Risk Assessment :

Not Applicable

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

X

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

X

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Executive Summary

2022/23 saw an increase in customer feedback and customer demand when compared to the previous year. The 2022/23 period started in April 2022 when council operations were back to business as usual following the Covid-19 pandemic when changes to our ways of working were required.

During the pandemic period the majority of council services worked on a virtual first basis so footfall and face to face contact at the Guildhall was limited. From January 2022 full access to the Guildhall building was reinstated so face to face figures have increased compared to the previous year.

Customer demand increased dramatically across all channels during the first few months of the 2022/23 period due to the implementation of the new recycling service that started in April 2022. This increase in customer contact was expected as residents got used to the new recycling arrangements which included the introduction of the new purple lidded bin for paper and card collections, new rules on what would be accepted in the blue recycling bins and a new no side waste policy. The tagging and rejection of contaminated purple lidded and blue bins also commenced in April 2022.

As with customer demand, it was expected that we would see fluctuations in customer satisfaction and feedback during the roll out of the new recycling service and changes to policy. Complaints increased dramatically in May 2022 and customer satisfaction decreased before improving from August 2022 onwards.

During 2022/23 we continued to receive contact in relation to cost of living support, enquiries were relating to any funding or financial support available to those most in need. Contact continued regarding the Household Support Fund, the Council Tax Energy Rebate and enquiries in regard to the ongoing Ukraine situation.

A new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system was implemented in 2022, the first service to be moved onto the system was waste services, this system allows for more informative customer records to be kept which includes all recent contact and discussions that have taken place and any waste issues that may occur at each property. This improves the customer experience as all records relating to them are kept in one central place which is easily accessible to all council officers. Moving forward more services will be moved over to the CRM system.

A chatbot pilot took place during the implementation of the new recycling service in order to assist with the additional workload and enquiries that were generated, it was available to customers 24/7 and was well used, it helped us manage the project successfully within the resources we had with minimal requirement for temporary resources during this increase in demand. Considerations are now taking place to identify services that could potentially benefit from a chat bot facility in the future. More information on the chatbot pilot is included in the section Insights into Action – Learning and Improvement Actions.

All the information included within the report is considered and fed into the T24 service redesign work that is currently ongoing across the council.

Listening to our customers and acting on customer feedback assists the Council to deliver excellent customer services, ensuring that it is operating and using its resources in the best way possible to provide 'right first time' speedy, efficient, and effective services.

1.0 Introduction

What is the Voice of the Customer?

- 1.1 The Voice of the Customer Report examines all customer feedback received across the Council and also considers a wider scope of customer views, customer demand data, customer opinions and expectations.
- 1.2 Information is collected via a number of different customer contact channels including data collected from day to day interactions as well as the compliments, comments and complaints received by the Customer Experience Officer and customer satisfaction survey responses.
- 1.3 The aim is to learn from the insight available and implement actionable solutions in order to deliver a better service for our customers, in line with the objectives of the Corporate Plan, and to drive continuous learning and improvement across all Council services. The data included within this report feeds into the T24 service redesign work that is ongoing.
- 1.4 Throughout the year quarterly Voice of the Customer Reports are produced which contain information on customer feedback and customer demand during the period. Complaints received, upheld and complaint response times are also monitored through Progress and Delivery reporting.
- 1.5 This report pulls together and analyses the data and information contained within the four quarterly reports that were published during 2022/23.

2.0 Customer Feedback

Customer Experience Policy and Customer Feedback

- 2.1 All customer feedback received is processed in line with the West Lindsey District Council Customer Feedback Policy Complaints Process, is investigated where required and responded to by the Customer Experience Officer.
- 2.2 Customer feedback is broken down into three categories: Compliments, Comments and Complaints.
- 2.3 All customer feedback received is recorded on a central system allowing for easier and more specific reporting, so that that meaningful comparison can take place. Customer feedback is logged by service and specific subjects or issues can be reported on making it easier to identify and examine issues, trends and potential improvement actions.
- 2.4 When improvement actions are identified they are logged and are fed back to the relevant service managers for implementation, with the assistance of the Customer Experience Officer where appropriate. The action is tracked and service managers then report back to confirm the action has been implemented and advise of any outcomes. This improvement log also helps to identify any wider areas for improvement which can potentially be built into the service redesign work that is taking place.
- 2.5 Another method used to gather customer feedback is via customer satisfaction surveys which are sent out on a weekly basis to customers that have received a service during the previous week. These surveys are sent to customers of the main customer facing services which include waste services, street cleansing, planning and development, public protection, licensing, street naming and numbering, planning enforcement and more recently home choices.

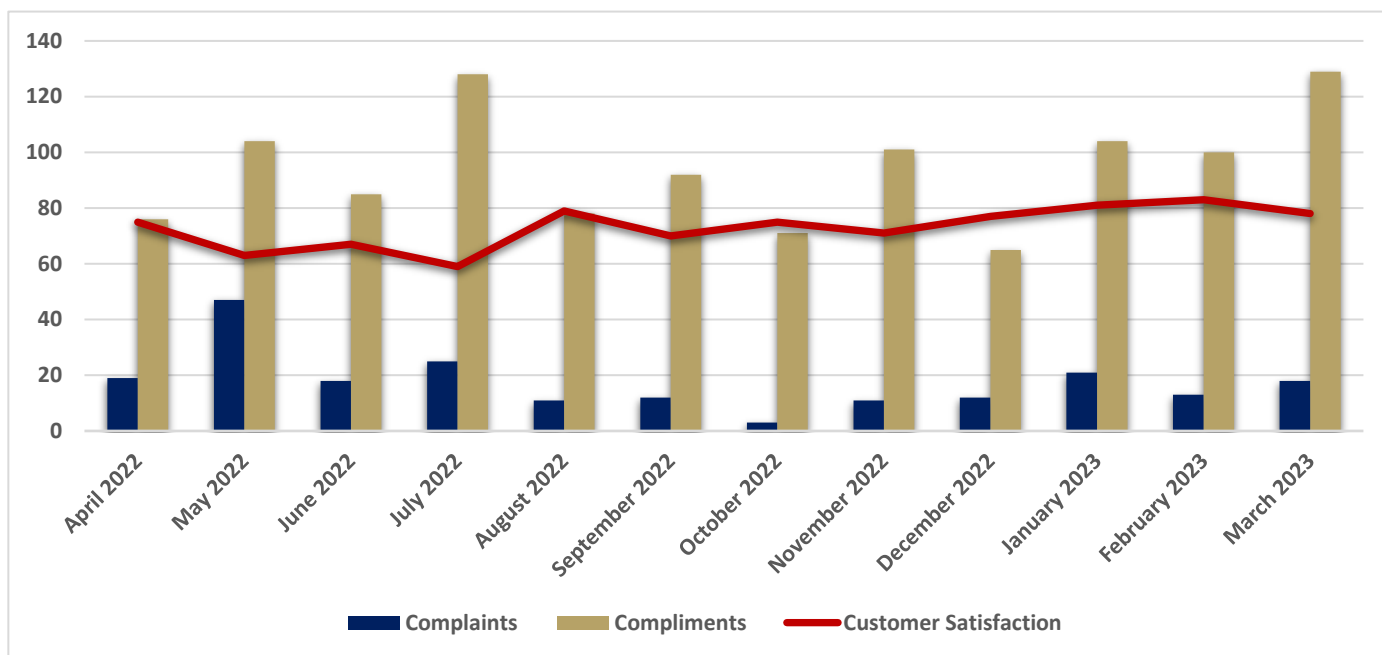
Overall Customer Feedback Statistics 2022/23

- 2.6 The table below shows the overall figures for all customer feedback received in 2022/23 compared to the previous five years including complaint response times and the number of upheld complaints:

Overall Figures	Direction of Travel compared to previous year	Totals/Averages					
		2022/2023	2021/2022	2020/2021	2019/2020	2018/2019	2017/2018
Complaints	↑	210	155	178	187	146	168
Compliments	↑	1133	1117	784	675	505	402
Comments	↓	104	155	64	73	139	79
Average number of days to respond	↓	6.5 days	8.3 days	8.2 days	6.6 days	7.3 days	5.8 days
WLDC at Fault	↑	51	46	50	71	52	84
WLDC at Fault %	↓	24%	30%	28%	38%	36%	50%

2.7 The graph below shows how many compliments and complaints were received each month as well as monthly customer satisfaction levels.

2.8 In May 2022 there was a big increase in the number of complaints received (47) and customer satisfaction decreased (63%). The new recycling service and waste policy changes that began in April 2022 led to this unusually high number of complaints and low satisfaction score, however, this was expected as residents became used to the new service.



Compliments

2.9 When compliments are received it allows us to identify what is working well and which aspects of our services our customers appreciate the most. Compliments received are shared with teams and relevant officers, they encourage our officers to be the best they can and provide the highest standard of service possible. Compliments are used to embed good practise across all Council services.

2.10 The Council received a total of 1133 compliments between April 2022 and March 2023, this is an increase compared to the previous year when 1117 were recorded.

2.11 The services that receive the highest number of compliments are the main customer facing services, Waste Services, Planning and Development and Customer Services. The table in [Appendix A](#) shows how many compliments were received by each individual service in 2022/23 compared to the previous three years. It should be noted that compliments for these services are also taken from customer satisfaction survey responses received (which are not sent to every Council service), so a wider number of customers have been asked for their views for some services in particular.

2.12 Compliments received are generally regarding the quality, speed and the efficiency of the service provided or officer professionalism including politeness, patience, knowledge and willingness to help. Customers appreciate it when we do what we say we are going to do when we say we are going to do it. If delays are expected they appreciate it when they

are kept up to date and informed. Even where we do fail on the odd occasion if we identify the failure, admit to it and put it right customers will often still provide positive feedback in relation to the service they have received and how the matter was handled.

Comments

- 2.13 Whilst some feedback received may not be particularly praising our services or raising a complaint or feeling of dissatisfaction comments are still classed as important feedback as they provide useful insight and suggestions that may help to improve the services and experiences we provide.
- 2.14 Between April 2022 and March 2023, the Council received a total of 104 comments, this is a decrease compared to the previous year when 155 comments were received. The table included in [Appendix B](#) shows how many comments were received by each individual service in 2022/23 compared to the previous three years.
- 2.15 The majority of the comments received were for waste services (70), these comments included suggestions for the green garden waste service, several comments have been received regarding the new recycling collection arrangements and blue bin issues including the frequency of collections and concerns with blue bin rejection and tagging. Other issues including sack deliveries, sack collections, fly tipping and bulky collections have also been commented on. Comments have been received requesting larger recycling bins, and several comments have been received in regard to general and recycling bin collection frequency, some residents feel that collections should be more regular.
- 2.16 Sometimes improvements can be made from comments received. During 2022/23 comments taken into account led a new litter bin and signs being erected in a location that was a hot spot for fly tipping. A comment that was received with a suggestion for a map to be provided when a plot is purchased at the cemetery was implemented and now all customers purchasing a plot are sent a map showing where it is. Investigation into a comment received identified that the WLDC website page for reporting missed bins did not make it clear that missed bins need to be reported up to 3 days after the collection was missed, as soon as this was identified this information was added to the website page.

Complaints

- 2.17 Whilst complaints are perceived as negative feedback the Council still encourages and welcomes them as all feedback can potentially help to improve our services and customer experience in the future. The number of complaints has been growing in both the private and public sectors. In part, this reflects rising expectations and new technologies making it easier to complain and is not necessarily due to decreasing service quality. However, where complaints provide an early-warning signal that something has gone wrong, they can be a useful way to stimulating innovation, and a powerful form of knowledge.
- 2.18 A total of 210 complaints were received between April 2022 and March 2023. This is an increase compared to the previous year when 155 complaints were received. The table in [Appendix C](#) shows how many complaints were received by each individual service in 2022/23 compared to the previous three years.

2.19 51% (107) of all the complaints received related to waste services. Waste Services have historically always received the highest number of complaints, this is expected and relative to the volume of service requests they receive as this service has contact with the largest number of households and customers in the district on a regular basis. It is pleasing to note that Waste Services also receive a lot of positive feedback in the form of compliments recorded.

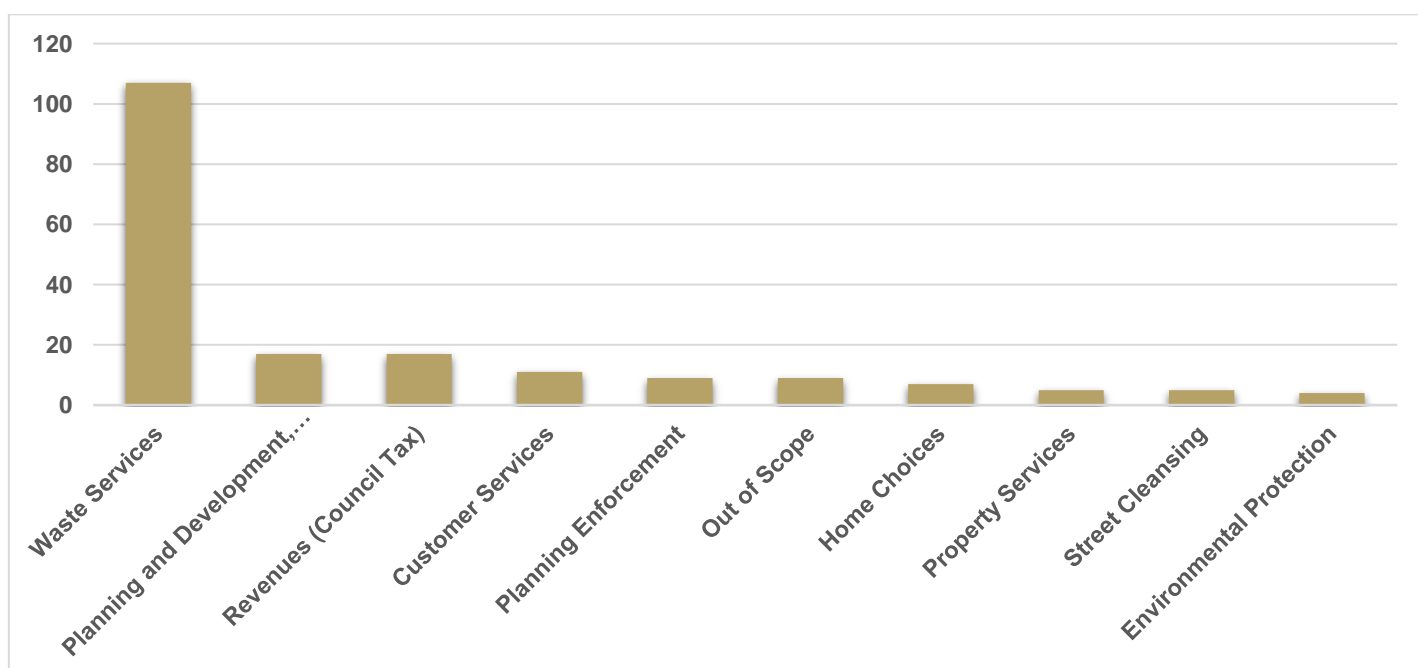
2.20 2022/23 saw an increase in the number of waste services complaints due to the implementation of the new recycling service in April 2022. An increase in complaints was expected as residents became used to the new service arrangements which included the introduction of the new purple lidded bin for paper and card collections, new rules on what would be accepted in the blue recycling bins and a new no side waste policy. The tagging and rejection of contaminated purple lidded and blue bins also commenced in April 2022. Overall the number of complaints received remained low considering the number of households that were affected by the new recycling service.

2.21 When analysing the complaints received for waste services it has been identified that 67 of the 107 complaints received related to the new recycling service and changes to policy.

18 complaints were in relation to purple lidded bins, a mixture of complaints were received including disagreement with having another bin at the property, space to store the extra bin, issues with purple lidded bin deliveries, and complaints following rejection of the bin due to contamination.

49 complaints were in relation to blue bins, they were mainly regarding rejection of blue bins due to contamination, when contamination was found in a blue bin the waste operatives place a tag on the bin with the offending items highlighted and the bin is not emptied. The contaminated bin and reason for rejection is then recorded on the property account on the CRM system.

2.22 The graph below illustrates the top 10 services that received the highest number of complaints between April 2022 and March 2023:



- 2.23 In comparison to the previous year, complaints for waste services have increased by 69, and complaints for planning and development, trees and conservation have decreased by 4. The number of complaints received for revenues (council tax) has increased by 3 and complaints received for customer services have increased by 7. There has also been a decrease in the number of complaints received for planning enforcement.
- 2.24 The topic or reason for the complaints received is recorded and reported on in order of frequency (highest to lowest) the topics/reasons for complaints are as follows: Quality of Service, Decision Made, Staff Behaviour, Process, Other, Quality of Information provided, Lack of Contact or Communication, Repeated Missed Bin Collection, Incorrect Information provided and Staff Communication. The table in [Appendix C](#) shows how many complaints were received overall categorised by topic/reason. The main reasons for complaints received are Quality of Service and Decision Made.
- 2.25 It should be noted that a single occurrence of a missed bin collection would not be classed as a formal complaint, the only time missed bins are treated as formal complaints is when there has been a repeated issue of missed bins, normally 3 occurrences in a row or where we have failed to return for a missed bin within the 5 days promised. In these instances, further investigation into the reasons why it keeps occurring is required and it may not always be the waste crews that are at fault.
- 2.26 The target response time for complaints is 21 days. The 21 days stated is 21 days (not working days) the system used at the moment cannot distinguish between working days and none working days – when the complaints process is moved over to the new system this will be brought in line with other targets and changed to working days.
- 2.27 The average time to respond to complaints in 2022/23 was 6.5 days compared to 8.3 days and 8.2 days the previous years. This is still well below our 21 day target. The majority of waste complaints are usually resolved quickly and some on the day they have been received which brings the average response time down whereas more complicated Planning and Development and Enforcement complaints often take longer to investigate.
- 2.28 During 2022/23 six complaint responses took longer than 21 days. In May 2022 there were three out of time responses and in July 2022 three responses took longer than 21 days. These complaints were in relation to Planning and Development, Trees and Conservation, Revenues (Council Tax), Environmental Protection and Arts and Leisure, the time taken to respond was affected by various aspects out of the Customer Experience Officers control including the amount of complex information that needed to be considered for some of the longer planning and development complaints submitted, officer availability due to annual leave and sickness as well as the increase in the number of complaints received in May 2022. All complainants were kept up to date throughout and were made aware of the delays expected.
- 2.29 Of the 210 complaints received, 51 (24%) were upheld with the Council deemed to be fully or partially at fault by the independent officer (the Customer Experience Officer) following their investigation. This is a decrease in upheld percentage when compared to the previous year when 46 (30%) of complaints received were upheld. Waste services complaints have a big effect on the overall upheld percentage with almost 50% (24 out of the 51) that were upheld relating to the waste service. Upheld complaints for waste services include repeated missed bin collections, failed assisted collections, staff behaviour and damage caused amongst other issues.

2.30 The full breakdown of the number of complaints upheld per service can be found in the table in [Appendix D](#).

2.31 Complaints received can vary in nature, often they can be justified but there is little within the authorities control that can be done to resolve them, here are some examples of different scenarios;

a. A complaint that was justified and led to a clear change:

For example, when several complaints were received in relation to a new waste initiative regarding sack presentation where signs had been erected and leaflets distributed to all households in the area as they had incorrect information printed on them leading to a lot of confusion, frustration, extra contact and feedback from customers. The signs and leaflets stated that sacks should be presented **from** 7am on collection day when they should have said **by** 7am on collection day.

When the error was identified the signs were replaced, new leaflets were distributed and social media messages were updated. Customers that had complained received an explanation and an apology for the inconvenience caused.

b. A complaint that was not justified that led to no changes being made:

For example, several complaints have been received regarding planning application decisions made and the fact that the applications did not go to planning committee for decision.

Investigation found that the complaints were not justified as the decision had been made correctly and in line with planning guidelines, policy, plans and legislation and the application did not warrant being decided by committee.

The complaint was not upheld and no changes were made.

c. A complaint that was justified but we were unable to take any action:

For example, when a complaint was dealt with where a customer was not happy that our enforcement team could not take action against a business that had painted their industrial fencing a new colour. The complaint stated that the colour used could be perceived as an eyesore and claimed it was not the colour that was given permission.

The complaint could be perceived as justified however, the enforcement team were not able to take action as the condition written in the planning permission was not specific enough in terms of the colour that should be used. This has been shared with the manager of the planning team who has in turn briefed the wider team.

2.32 Further and more detailed information on all compliments, comments and complaints received and upheld throughout the year can be found in the previously published Quarterly Voice of the Customer Reports for 2022/23. These reports also include specific detail on the improvement actions that were made following complaints being upheld and can be found on the West Lindsey District Council website via the following link - <https://www.west-lindsey.gov.uk/feedback>

Customer Feedback Governance and Reporting

2.33 Customer Feedback is governed by a set of regular reports:

- Monthly Progress and Delivery reports monitor customer feedback levels including feedback received, days to respond to complaints and information on how many complaints are upheld in each period as well as customer satisfaction levels.
- Monthly reports on feedback received are shared with each service.
- Quarterly customer feedback and demand reports are produced for the Management Team and Service Team Managers and are published on the WLDC website.

2.34 Regular reports are submitted to the Management Team and monthly 'emerging issues' meetings are held with the Directors of Operational & Commercial Services and Change Management, ICT & Regulatory Services.

2.35 The Quality Monitoring Board discusses and oversees decisions on complex and sensitive complaints where high risk or reputational issues are involved. The QMB will agree any resolution or action required.

2.36 Quarterly Voice of Customer Reports are published to all Team Managers and Officers and via the regular Members newsletter to our Councillors.

2.37 This Annual Voice of the Customer Report is presented to the Management Team, Governance and Audit Committee and the Wider Management Team.

2.38 A report on the Annual Local Government Ombudsman letter will be presented to the Management Team and Governance and Audit Committee at a later date in the year.

Insights into Action – Learning and Improvement Actions

2.39 Gathering feedback from customers enables the Council to use these insights to shape the way it improves and develops. Customer insights relating to services are shared with the relevant Team Managers stating the actions required and a deadline implementation date, this is escalated to the Management Team if failing to implement within the set timescale. The Customer Experience Officer will assist with implementing the improvements where possible. Over time all suggested improvements are gathered into reports which are prioritised and fed into relevant projects and service redesign work.

2.40 When feedback is received and complaints are investigated the outcome is examined in order to identify any learning opportunities that can be gained from the issues raised. During the 2022/23 period many improvement actions have been implemented including changes in processes, procedure reviews, updates to the website, external systems and the continued monitoring of customer standards. Further and more detailed information on the improvement actions made throughout the year can be found in the previously published Quarterly Voice of the Customer Reports for 2022/23.

2.41 A chatbot pilot took place over a three month trial period during the roll out of the new purple lidded bin paper and card collection service between March 2022 and May 2022.

- The chatbot was accessed 2364 times.
- In 747 cases (32%) the user went on to engage further with the chatbot.
- 133 engaged users (18%) responded to the chatbot satisfaction question.
- 56% were happy with the chatbot support they received.
- 147 (20%) of engaged users requested further contact and provided details.
- No complaints were received regarding the chatbot.

The findings from the chatbot pilot will be considered as we look to use a chatbot for other services in the future.

2.42 The table below includes details of the learning and improvement actions that have been identified during the 2022/23 period:

<p>Property and Assets – Land Ownership</p> <p>An investigation into a fly tipping that involved an examination of land ownership identified that a strip of land that should have been transferred over to the local housing company was still listed as being under the ownership of West Lindsey District Council.</p> <p>Once identified the necessary steps were taken to transfer the ownership of the strip of land over as it should have been previously.</p>
<p>Committee Administration - Planning Committee Site Visits</p> <p>An investigation into a complaint relating to a planning application which had involved a committee site visit identified that objectors had been allowed to speak to the committee members after the site visit had officially closed (this was noted in the committee minutes)</p> <p>A recommendation was made that the committee chair and other members are reminded of the formal site visit procedure and that once the site visit has ended members of the committee should not enter into communication or debate with any objector. The site visit protocol will also be sent out to committee members as a reminder of correct behaviour.</p>
<p>Waste Services - Green Garden Waste</p> <p>Towards the end of 2021/22 and at the start of the 2022/23 period there was an increase in feedback received regarding the duration and dates of the GGW collections. Some residents feel it should start earlier, some think it should continue for longer into the winter months, for example later than November and earlier than March.</p> <p>The collection dates are set as they are for a reason and following extensive consultation that took place. An improvement in publicity and communications when the GGW subscription period begins has been suggested, informing residents of the collection dates and frequency as well as start and end dates along with an</p>

explanation as to why they are set as they are. This will help to manage expectations and may assist in reducing feedback in the future.

Customer Services and Waste - Blue Bin Lid repairs

A complaint in regards to a blue bin lid repair identified that in some cases the whole bin is replaced rather than just the bin lid being repaired. This matter needs further investigation and consideration as there are several issues around consistency, charging for bins and what information our customer service officers are giving residents when they contact us regarding a bin lid repair.

Revenues - Energy Rebate online application form

An investigation into a complaint regarding the fact that it was mandatory to supply a telephone number when applying for the council tax rebate online led to amendments being made to the application form. The telephone number request in the form had been made mandatory so that if any issues arose the customer could be contacted quickly to avoid any further delays.

Following consideration of the complaint the application form was amended so that the telephone number field was not mandatory, a note was added to explain the reason why it would be beneficial to supply a telephone number in case of any problems.

Data Protection and awareness training has been suggested for all teams to reiterate the rules and regulations surrounding requests for, and storage of personal information. Guidance on Privacy Notices was published on Minerva on 28/09/22.

Property Services refunds of key deposits for the Plough Business Hub (when tenants vacate)

An investigation into a complaint in relation to the refund of a deposit to a tenant when they left our property found that unnecessary delays had been experienced. The delays were due to several factors but the main cause was the finance procedure for this type of transaction which appears to be complicated and long winded.

Discussions are ongoing with the relevant officers in the debtors and finance teams to establish if any improvements can be made to the deposit refund procedure, keeping in mind any financial rules and regulations that need to be followed.

Property Services – Internet access for tenants at the Plough Business Hub

An improvement action was identified following a complaint that was received regarding internet access at the Plough Business Hub. It was found that if it was to go down outside of normal business hours (9am to 5pm Monday to Friday) that tenants would have to wait for a WLDC staff member to call the provider on their behalf.

The provider suggested that the general telephone number for their support line and the service engineers telephone number could be shared with the tenants of the

Plough along with the account details and pin number. This will allow tenants to contact them directly should they wish (which will be useful when our office is closed).

The property team are also looking at installing an outage tracker so we can track and record the frequency of outages in order to have a better understanding of whether there are a high number of reoccurrences that should be of concern.

CRM call backs

An investigation into a complaint examining why a call back did not take place discovered that not all teams were confident and skilled in using the CRM system, the system that call backs are logged and sent through, so officers have been using other methods.

Using other methods such as teams messages or email for a call back request means that it is not formally logged and cannot be tracked, recorded and reported on.

It was identified that more training on CRM was required across all council services so that call backs and other requests can be logged and tracked appropriately. A call back system reminder and instructional video on how to use the CRM system was published on Minerva on 30/08/22.

Assisted collection service acknowledgement email

Comments were received regarding the assisted collection acknowledgement email that customers receive when they request an assisted collection:

On examination it was found that the email does not make it clear exactly when the service will start and does not explain what the customer should do in the meantime etc, the wording needs to be improved.

Investigation will take place in regards to the set up for this on CRM, to establish if the wording of the acknowledgement email could be amended and whether a reminder could be sent to customers like on a bulky waste collection booking to remind them that the service will start from their next collection date and what they need to do.

Planning Customer Care

Customer feedback received regarding emails and requests sent to planning customer care not being responded to were investigated and discussed with the Planning Team Manager and relevant officer.

It was agreed that the following actions would take place to ensure that these issues did not continue to happen going forward; the inbox will be monitored on a regular basis, a process will be created for how emails should be dealt with and a rota will be put in place in order to have something to track who was working on PCC emails on each particular day/time. Access to the mailbox will be examined and restricted if necessary to ensure that only those who need to can access it.

Street Cleansing and Community Safety - Fly Tipping Hot Spots

Comments were received from a regular litter picker in regards to whether signs could be placed in an area that was a hot spot for littering and fly tipping.

Following the comments received work is underway to install a new litter bin in the area and signs to deter fly tipping in the location, the possible use of a temporary camera will be considered as there have been several instances of fly tipping in the location reported to us which have been investigated by the community protection team.

Green Garden Waste (GGW) T&Cs online - WLDC website

On examining GGW information on the WLDC website to assist in responding to a comment received it was identified that the T&C's published online stated the cost as still being £35, not the new £39 price.

The issue was fixed by the GGW coordinator via the website team as soon as it was identified and reported to them.

Planning and Development - Validation letter

On examining correspondence in relation to a complaint it was found that the wording used on the validation letter for planning was out of date, it stated that all site visits must be unaccompanied - this wording was used when Covid-19 restrictions were in place.

Following the discovery, the wording was amended to: *If you are able to provide photographs of the site and area for development, this will assist the Planning Case Officer. If the Case Officer considers that they need to visit the site, they will usually do so unaccompanied in the first instance, and may contact you in order to arrange access to the site.*

Planning/Systems Development – searching for applications with key words

A comment was received regarding planning application searches when searching for planning applications, there's no option to search using 'keywords'.

As it stands, the searcher is required to know either the application number or a variety of specific information re: applicant, address, etc. that they might not know in advance. However, if a searcher could use a keyword such as: "telecommunications" it would facilitate greater transparency and be an overall improvement on your service.

This suggestion has been shared with the web development team.

Waste Services – Commercial Waste record keeping

An issue was identified where a commercial bin had been recorded as being emptied on several occasions when it had not been. The commercial waste service is a paid for service, so it is important that the records kept are accurate. Crews that work on

commercial waste rounds have been reminded of the importance of accurate record keeping.

Cemetery – Plot information/location on a map

A comment/suggestion was received from a customer who had recently purchased a plot at Market Rasen Cemetery that when she received the documents for a plot for her mother (in Wales) they had included a plan with X marking the spot where the plot was, so she and the family knew where it would be.

This was shared with the relevant officers and now when a plot is purchased the customer is sent a map showing where the plot is in the cemetery.

Waste Services – communications regarding the no side waste policy

In the run up to Christmas there was a small increase in the number of complaints regrading crews not taking side waste. Given that more side waste may be presented over the holiday period the communications team ensured that more information regarding the no side waste policy was put out on social media so that residents were fully aware of the policy.

Waste Services – Bin Day collection calendar information regarding missed bin reporting

A customer called to report a missed bin collection, but they were outside the three day reporting period. They commented that it would have been helpful if this was made clear on the bin collection calendars, that a missed bin needed to be reported to us within three days of the missed collection date.

This will be shared with the waste team for future consideration when the 2023/24 calendars are produced.

Home Choices – Customer Charter

Following an upheld complaint decision from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman a new Customer Charter has been agreed and implemented for the Home Choices Service.

The charter sets out what a customer can expect from the service along with the services expectations of the customer, in particular how certain assessments need to be undertaken either in person or over the telephone.

Waste Services – Bulky Waste Collections and CRM notifications

Customer feedback received highlighted that a customer had received a notification to say that their bulky collection had been completed when it hadn't been.

The crews had mistakenly marked it as complete when there was actually a problem with collecting the items.

Further guidance and training has been provided to the crews to ensure that accurate records are kept on the CRM system, especially when updates and notifications are now sent automatically to customers.

Waste Services – Bin Collection Calendars

Several complaints were received regarding the quality of the 2023/24 bin collection calendars that were sent out to households in the district. The complaints focussed on the size of the font used and the colours that had been used to illustrate the different coloured bins.

On examination of the printed version of the calendars it was apparent that the font size and the colours used were not suitable, the font was not big enough and the colours were not clear enough. They did not meet standard accessibility requirements.

Customers that requested a larger print calendar were provided with one and learning has taken place to ensure that extra checks are put in place next year to ensure that the calendars are acceptable. Going forward printed versions of the calendars need to be checked rather than just relying on an electronic version shown on screen.

Waste Services – Green Garden Waste Stickers

Customer feedback was received on several occasions regarding the quality of the 2023/24 Green Garden Waste stickers that were sent out to subscribers.

On inspection it was evident that the backing would not peel off easily and the level of stickiness on the stickers was not as good as it should have been.

Advice was provided to customers on the best way to peel back the stickers and if needed new replacement stickers were sent out.

It was found that the company that were contracted to produce the stickers had changed the materials used on the stickers this year.

Feedback was provided to the company and measures will be put into place to ensure that the same issue does not occur again in the future.

Waste Services – updates to website information regarding reporting a missed bin

Investigation into a comment received identified that the WLDC website page for reporting missed bins does not explain that missed bin reports will only be accepted for three days after the missed collection took place.

This was updated on the website as soon as it was identified.

Planning – Case Officer Reports and Committee Minutes

An investigation into a complaint identified that unintentional administration errors had occurred in regards to a planning application, an objectors representations were

mistakenly omitted from the officers report and the associated planning committee minutes had not accurately recorded a condition that had been agreed during the meeting.

In order to ensure these types of errors do not occur again in the future, planning officers have been reminded of the importance of ensuring all representations are included in reports and that thorough checks should be made when checking the accuracy planning committee minutes that relate to their own particular applications.

Trinity Arts Centre – Purchasing tickets at the Guildhall

A customer attended the Guildhall to purchase TAC tickets as they heard on the voicemail message that you could book shows there. We do not currently take TAC bookings at the Guildhall due to not having a card payment machine that connects to the TAC system.

Following this incident the voicemail message was updated and an additional card payment machine is in the process being arranged so that TAC bookings can be made at the Guildhall.

Trinity Arts Centre – show running times

A suggestion was made that show running times be added to the booking system and the TAC brochure so that customers are aware how long shows and performances last.

This is currently being considered by the TAC team.

Customer Services Reception operations

Following a complaint received further training in handling difficult situations and difficult customers will be provided to officers that work in the Guildhall reception and a formal dress code will be implemented.

Property Services – Roseway Toilets

Feedback was received on more than one occasion regarding the public toilet in the Roseway carpark not being open at the stated times, in particular on a weekend. On investigation it also became apparent that the opening times on the sign at the toilet entrance did not match the times stated on the WLDC website.

A meeting was held with the contracted companies manager and checks were put in place to ensure that the toilets were open at the correct time.

Work is underway on a new sign for the toilet entrance that states the correct opening times.

3.0 Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Complaints (LGSCO)

- 3.1 Between April 2022 and March 2023 internal records indicate that a total of 13 complaint referrals were made to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO), this will be confirmed once the Annual LGSCO letter is received later this year. This is a slight increase compared to the previous period when 10 enquiries were made. All but one of the referrals made have now been closed with final decisions being received.
- 3.2 When a complaint is referred to the LGSCO they decide whether or not to investigate further. The table below shows the outcome of the complaints referred to them compared to the previous year. A report will follow later this year when the Annual LGSCO letter has been received which will detail the whole 2022/23 period of complaints to the LGSCO. This report will include benchmarking data to illustrate how we compare to other District Councils in terms of referrals and instances where councils are found to be at fault. This report will be presented to the Governance and Audit Committee later in 2023.

LGO Outcome	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20	2018/19
Not investigated	9	3	9	7	8
Not found to be at fault	2	5	1	3	5
Fault identified	1	2	1	0	3
Still under investigation	1	0	2	0	0
Total	13	10	13	10	16

- 3.3 The number of complaints referred to the LGSCO where they decided not to investigate has increased this year. The LGSCO decided to investigate 4 of the complaints referred to them, 2 in relation to Planning Enforcement, 1 in relation to the Home Choices service and another in relation to Housing Enforcement.
- 3.4 Following their investigations the LGSCO found no fault in relation to the 2 Planning Enforcement complaints so they were not upheld.
- 3.5 The LGSCO investigated and upheld the complaint in relation to the Home Choices Service, their investigation into the Housing Enforcement complaint is still ongoing.
- 3.6 Further and more detailed information on the complaints referred to the LGSCO throughout the year can be found in [Appendix E](#) and the previously published Quarterly Voice of the Customer Reports for 2022/23 and in the forthcoming Annual LGSCO Report.
- 3.7 Where fault is identified by the LGSCO a suitable remedy is recommended which usually includes an apology and on occasions a compensation payment for the time and trouble the customer has had to go to in order to make their complaint and escalate it to the LGSCO.
- 3.8 The LGSCO identified fault in one of the complaints referred to them in the last year. The complaint was in relation to the Home Choices service:

The complaint that was submitted:

Ms X complained that the Council failed to provide interim accommodation when she was homeless, leaving her in an unsuitable property where she was at risk of domestic abuse. She also complained the Council ended its housing duty by offering her an unsuitable property. As a result, Ms X says her mental and physical health have suffered, and she remains in unsuitable accommodation.

The Ombudsman's final decision:

The Council was at fault for failing properly to assess Ms X's circumstances when she was homeless and delay offering interim accommodation which left Ms X at risk of domestic abuse. The Council has agreed to apologise, pay Ms X £1,500 and take action to improve its service.

Agreed action - The Council should take this action within 4 weeks of the final decision:

To remedy the injustice to Ms X from the faults identified, the Council has agreed to:

- Apologise to Ms X in writing
- Pay Ms X £200 a month for the five months spent in unsuitable accommodation, for £1,000
- Pay Ms X a further £500 in recognition of her avoidable distress, uncertainty, and missed opportunity.
- Write to Ms X reiterating the Council's agreement to reinstate her housing register application following the OT report.

The Council should also take the following action to improve its services: The Council should take this action within 8 weeks the final decision.

- Share a copy of this decision with staff in the relevant departments.
- Remind relevant staff that initial assessments must address the circumstances leading to homelessness, the housing needs, and support needs, of the applicant.
- Remind relevant staff that a decision about whether an applicant is threatened with homelessness or is homeless should include consideration of whether it is reasonable for them to continue to occupy their current accommodation, especially where the applicant is a victim of domestic abuse.
- Provide training or guidance to relevant staff on how to produce adequate Personalised Housing Plans with reasonable steps for both the Council and the applicant to take.

All of the above actions were completed within the required timescales and evidence was sent to the LGSCO for confirmation of satisfactory completion.

A further improvement that came from this complaint decision and the LGSCO's findings was the implementation of service standards for the home choices service. Following examination of the findings it was established that had an officer been able to speak directly to the applicant then some of the failings identified would not have occurred.

In March 2023 a new Homelessness Customer Charter was agreed and put into place. This charter sets out what the council will do when approached for housing support, what customers can expect from the council and what is expected from the customer. A wider piece of work will take place in the late summer 2023 to examine and refresh customer standards across all council services.

4.0 Customer Satisfaction Measurement

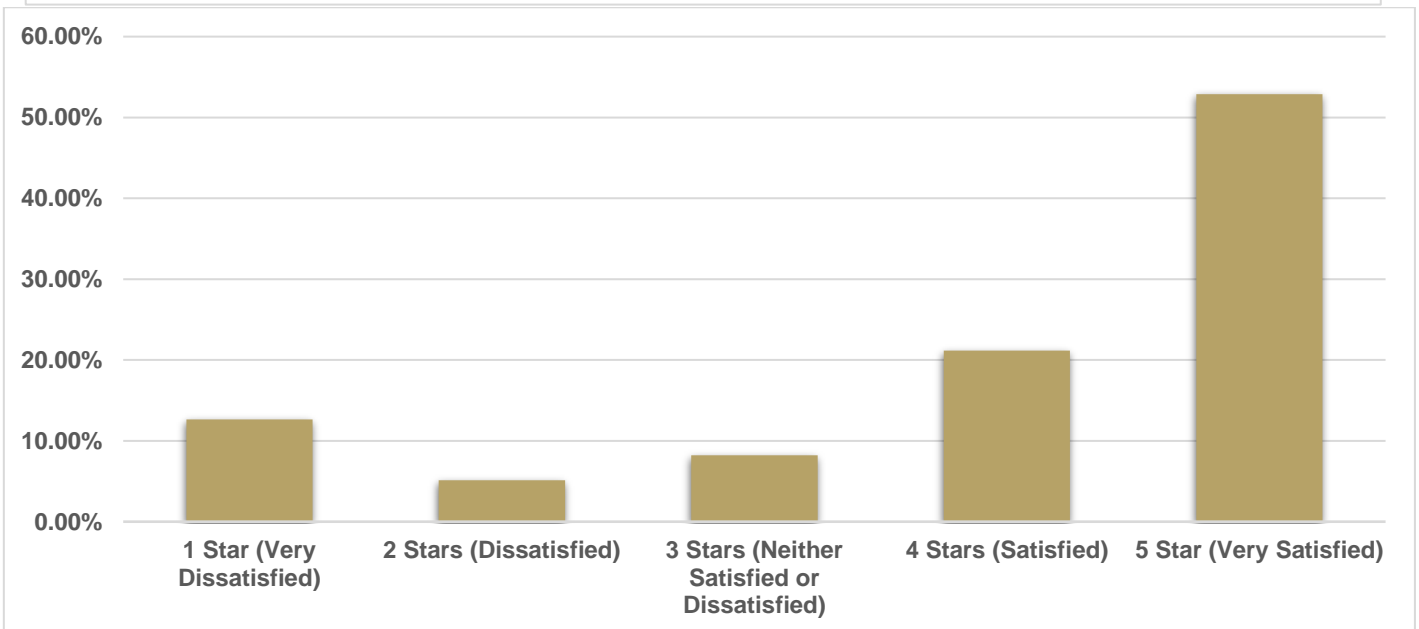
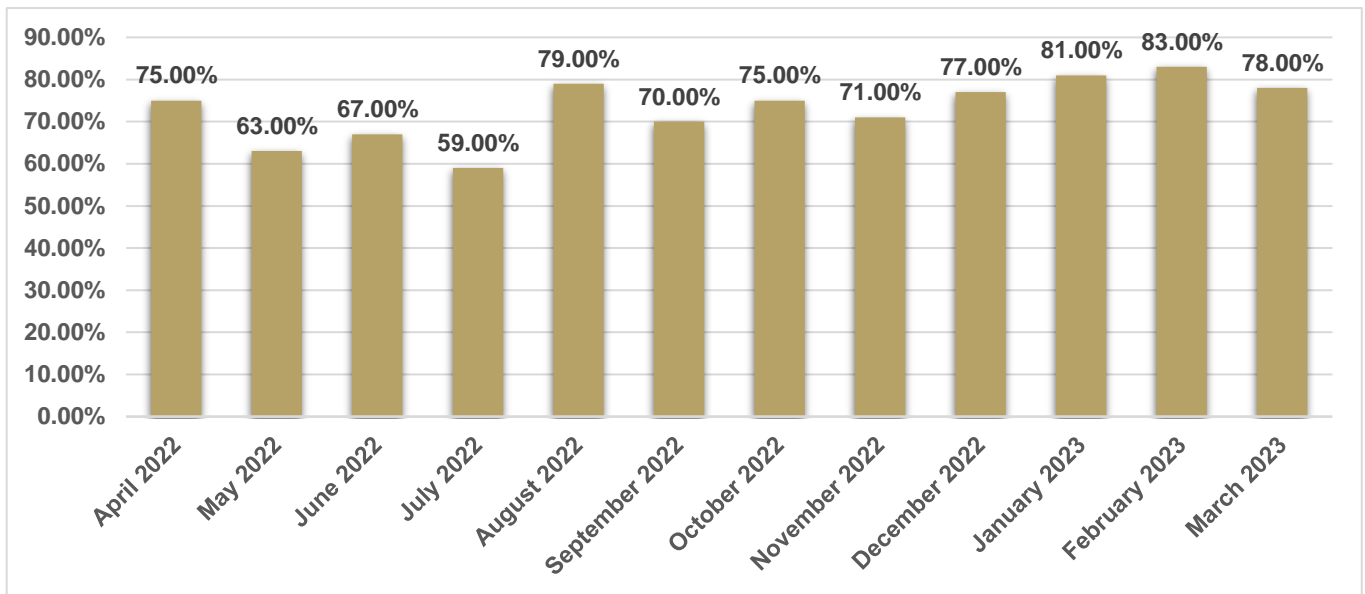
Satisfaction Surveys

- 4.1 The Council has been using an e-survey platform over the last few years which enables the sending and analysis of customer satisfaction surveys from one place with real time results, this platform is called Qualtrics.
- 4.2 Surveys are sent on a weekly basis to customers that have contacted the Council or have received a Council service during the previous week, including planning application decisions.
- 4.3 Currently surveys are only being sent via email but other methods are currently being considered during the implementation of the new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system.
- 4.4 The insights gained from surveys are fed into the customer feedback system in order to collate all feedback in one central place. Identifying issues that customers report in survey responses allows the Council to act on and solve those issues before they potentially escalate into a formal complaint.
- 4.5 Not all customers are sent satisfaction surveys, surveys are sent to customers of the main customer facing services. During 2022/23 the services that have been surveyed are; Environmental Protection, Planning and Development, Trees and Conservation, Planning Enforcement, Public Protection, Street Cleansing, Waste Services, Street Naming and Numbering and Licensing and Home Choices.

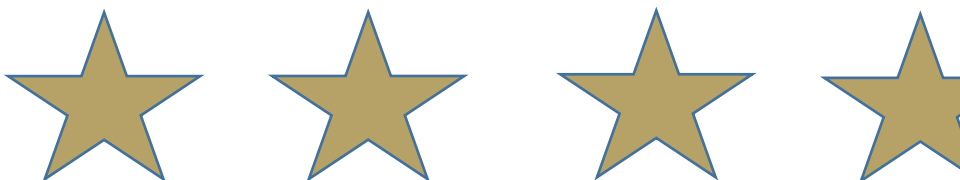
Satisfaction Levels

- 4.6 During the 2022/23 period from April 2022 to March 2023 a total of 7863 satisfaction surveys were sent out and 1343 responses were received, giving a response rate of 17% which is a small decrease compared to the previous year where the response rate was 18%. The overall satisfaction rating for 2022/23 is 73.00%, this is a small decrease compared the previous year where overall satisfaction was 74.00%.
- 4.7 During 2022/23 fluctuations in customer satisfaction were expected due to the implementation of the new recycling service in early 2022. Waste services provide a service to every property in the district so a higher number of surveys are sent to those customers on a weekly basis. It was expected that satisfaction would decrease whilst residents became used to the new waste collection arrangements. This expectation was realised as during May, June and July 2023 there was an increase in the number of complaints received for waste services and customer satisfaction decreased before increasing again from August 2023 onwards.
- 4.8 During the last six months surveys have been sent to home choices customers, high satisfaction scores have been provided which have increased the overall satisfaction score across all services. Customers appreciate the valuable help and support that the home choices service provides in often very difficult and upsetting times.

4.9 The charts below show the breakdown of all customer satisfaction scores received between April 2022 and March 2023:



4.10 Customers are asked to rate the service they received out of 5 stars (ranging from very satisfied to very dissatisfied) ratings of 4 stars and 5 stars are used to calculate the overall customer satisfaction score of **73.00%**. This equates to an overall star rating of 3.74 Stars.



4.11 High satisfaction scores have been given where customers have appreciated that we have done what we said we would when we said we would. They are happy when they have been able to speak to helpful, understanding, polite and friendly staff on the phone who have been able to help with their query there and then. Customers who have provided a 5 star rating have left comments regarding the speed of service, being kept

updated and regularly informed and the professionalism, helpfulness, efficiency and politeness of staff they have dealt with.

- 4.12 Low satisfaction scores have been given where customers are disappointed that things have not happened as quickly as they should have done. Low scores have also been received where customers would have liked more communication or human contact, comments have also been received where customers have not received call backs, updates or a response to their problem.
- 4.13 In order to improve the overall satisfaction score any low star ratings received where comments have been submitted are analysed and are fed into the customer feedback system where improvement actions are recorded. If required, changes to processes and procedures are made and all relevant comments are fed into the service redesign work which is currently taking place. Any concerning comments received are followed up and logged as formal customer feedback.
- 4.14 To increase customer satisfaction going forward services need to ensure that they are keeping customers up to date and managing their expectations in terms of what will happen, when, and what they should expect. The new service standards work that is taking place will assist with this as these will ensure that appropriate acknowledgements and response times are put in place and communicated to the customer from the outset.

5.0 Demand Analysis

- 5.1 The demand analysis part of this report focuses on the data available surrounding customer contact points. This includes data collected around telephony, face to face interactions, the website, payments and how service requests are received. Analysing this information can show how customers are choosing to interact with the council and through which channels.

Service Requests and Customer Contact Methods

- 5.2 Service requests can be made by customers through various channels. For example, telephone, online forms, at the Guildhall and via email. It is important to understand how customers are making requests so the receipt of these can be resourced adequately and appropriately.
- 5.3 Currently the method of receipt of service requests are only recorded by the following teams: Anti-Social Behaviour, Planning Enforcement, Housing Enforcement, Food Health and Safety, Public and Environmental Protection, Street Naming and Numbering (SNN) and Waste Services. Future investments in technology will allow for improved recording of future service request enabling a better understanding of our demands in this area.
- 5.4 The number of service requests received recorded for 2022/23 was 41,553 which is a small increase compared to the previous year where 41,136 were recorded. (Note - these figures include GGW subscription requests)
- 5.5 The overall breakdown of the main contact channels used for service requests made to the teams mentioned above during 2022/23 is: 23.46% from phone, 66.91% from online forms, 6.06% from face to face enquiries, 2.48% from email and 1.03% from internal referrals. Online service requests and requests via telephone have increased compared to previous years. As with previous years the majority of customers (over 90% in 2022/23) made contact with us via the phone and online forms. The charts below illustrate the full breakdown of all contact channels used in 2022/23 compared with the previous year:

Contact Method	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2022/23 Vs 2021/22
Online Forms	66.91% (27,805)	65.04% (26,753)	62.77% (25,787)	Increase of 1.87%
Email	2.48% (1,030)	2.52% (1,037)	3.29% (1,351)	Decrease of 0.04%
Telephone	23.46% (9,748)	29.42% (12,101)	28.42% (11,674)	Decrease of 5.69%
Face to Face	6.06% (2,517)	0.61% (251)	0.29% (121)	Increase of 5.45%
Letter	0.06% (23)	0.34% (140)	0.72% (296)	Decrease of 0.28%
Internal Referrals	1.03% (430)	2.08% (854)	4.51% (1851)	Decrease of 1.05%
Total number of service requests received	41,533	41,136	41,080	Increase of 0.96% (397)

Face to Face Demand

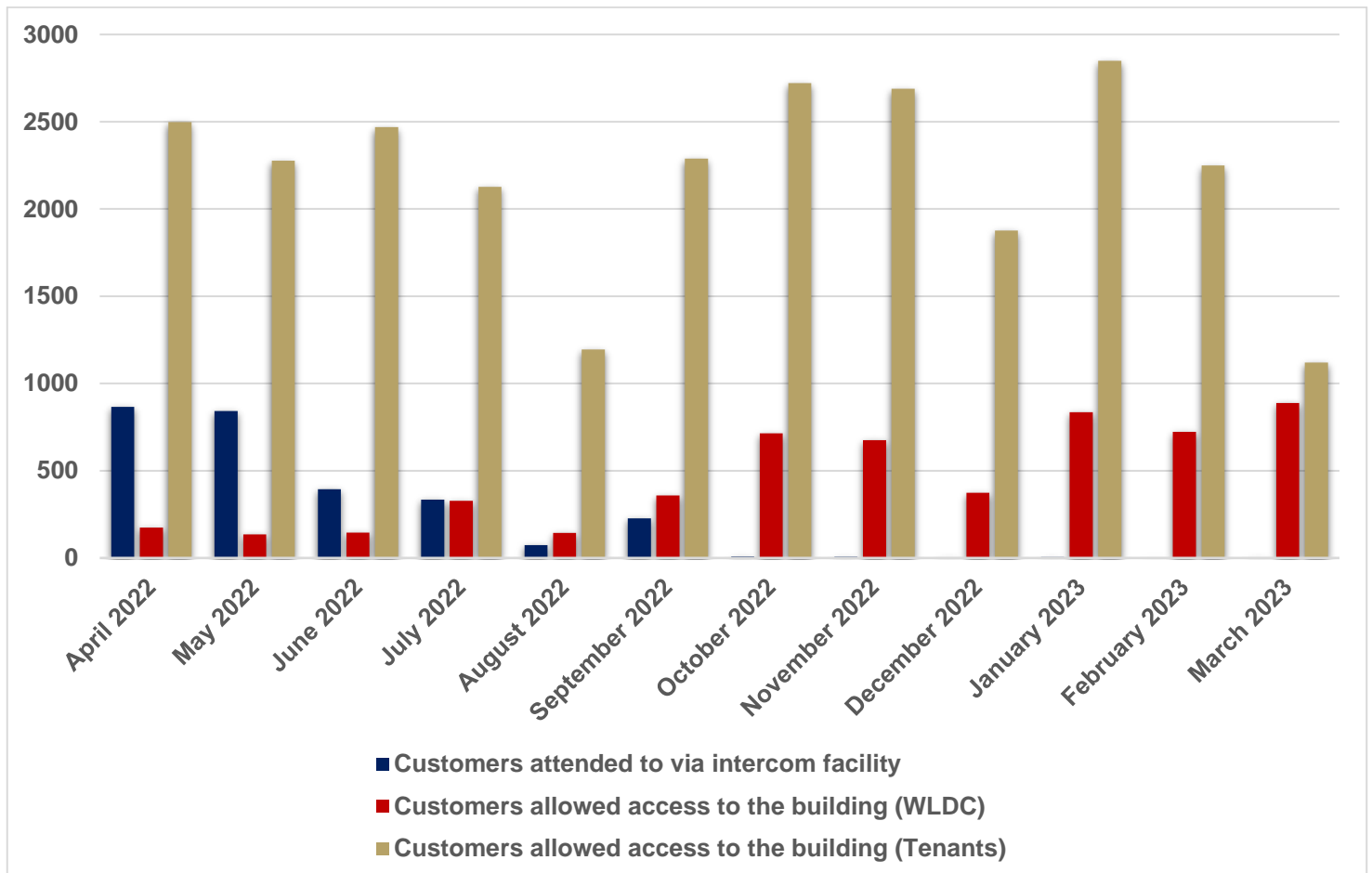
5.6 Historically the number of customers that choose to visit the Councils reception at the Guildhall is relatively low as many customers now opt to request services via other means. During the 2022/23 period face to face contact increased compared to the previous 2 years as during the Covid-19 pandemic the Guildhall's main entrance was closed to walk in customers and face to face contact remained limited to vulnerable and emergency customers only as well as pre-arranged appointments with officers.

During the Covid-19 pandemic customers were dealt with via an intercom facility to reduce face to face contact. The intercom facility was still in use from April 2022 to July 2022.

5.7 Although face to face demand for WLDC services is relatively low it is recognised that a face to face service will always be required as customers need the choice available, however, a higher number of customers may choose to use online services now they are confident in doing so rather than visiting the Guildhall for a face to face service.

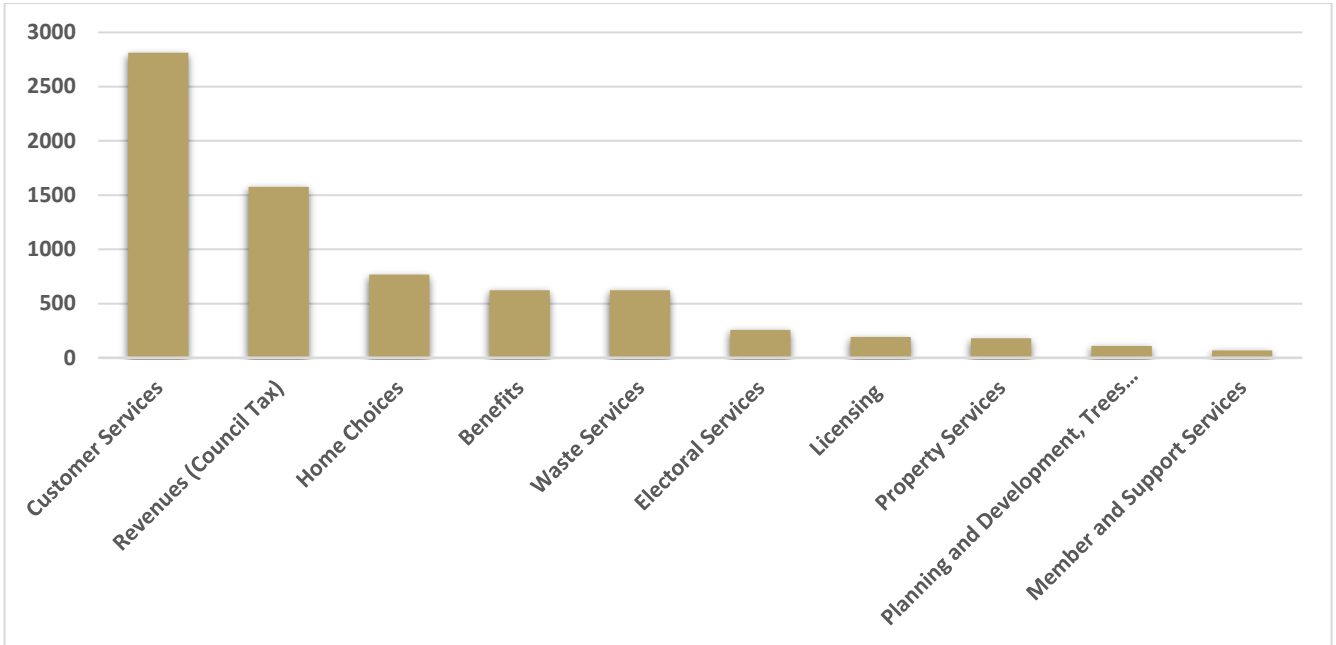
5.8 As well as customers for WLDC services, WLDC visitors and customers for our tenants are also dealt with via the main Guildhall reception. A big majority of the customers that come into the Guildhall are attending Job Centre Plus (JCP) appointments.

5.9 The graph below shows how many customers were attended to via the intercom and how many customers were allowed access to the building each month:



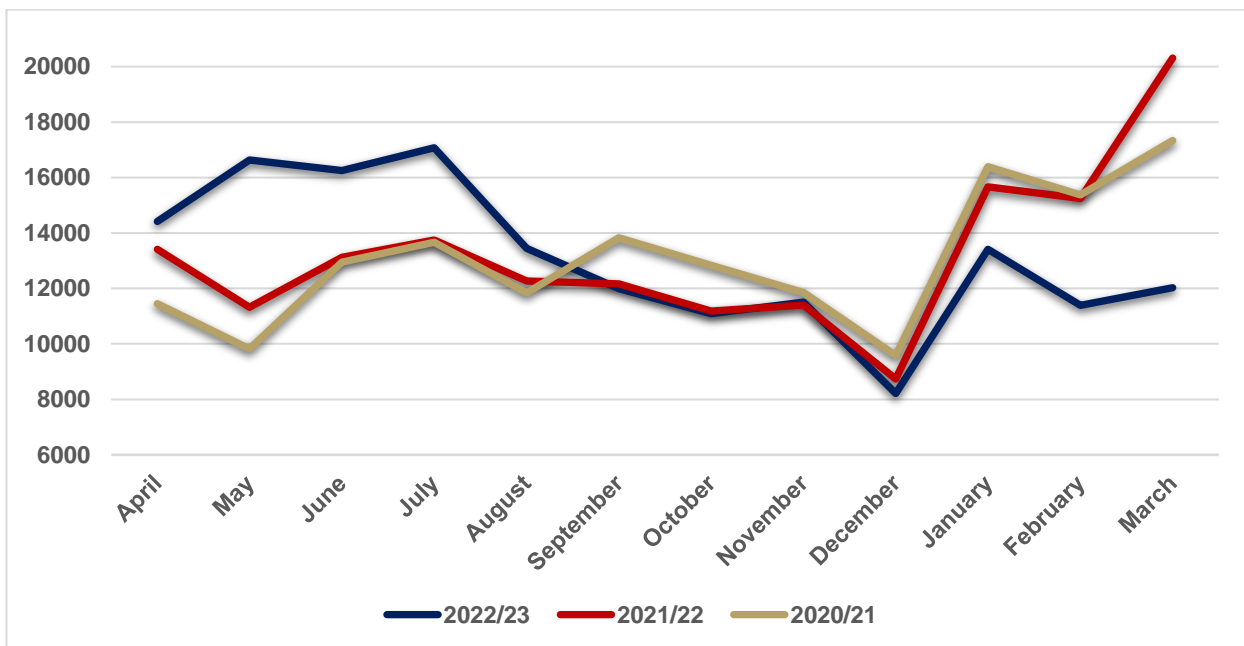
5.10 These figures along with data relating to the specific reasons why customers attend the Guildhall will be analysed and used in the plans for the future design of how the reception area will work in terms of face to face contact and how services will operate going forward.

5.11 The graph below shows the top 10 WLDC services that were accessed via customers on a face to face basis during 2022/23:



Telephone Demand

5.12 The graph below illustrates telephone demand each month for 2021/22 compared to the previous two years:



5.13 Overall telephone demand has decreased during 2022/23 compared to the previous years, however the start of the year saw a big increase in the number of calls received. Between April 2022 and August 2022 there was an increase in calls relating to the new

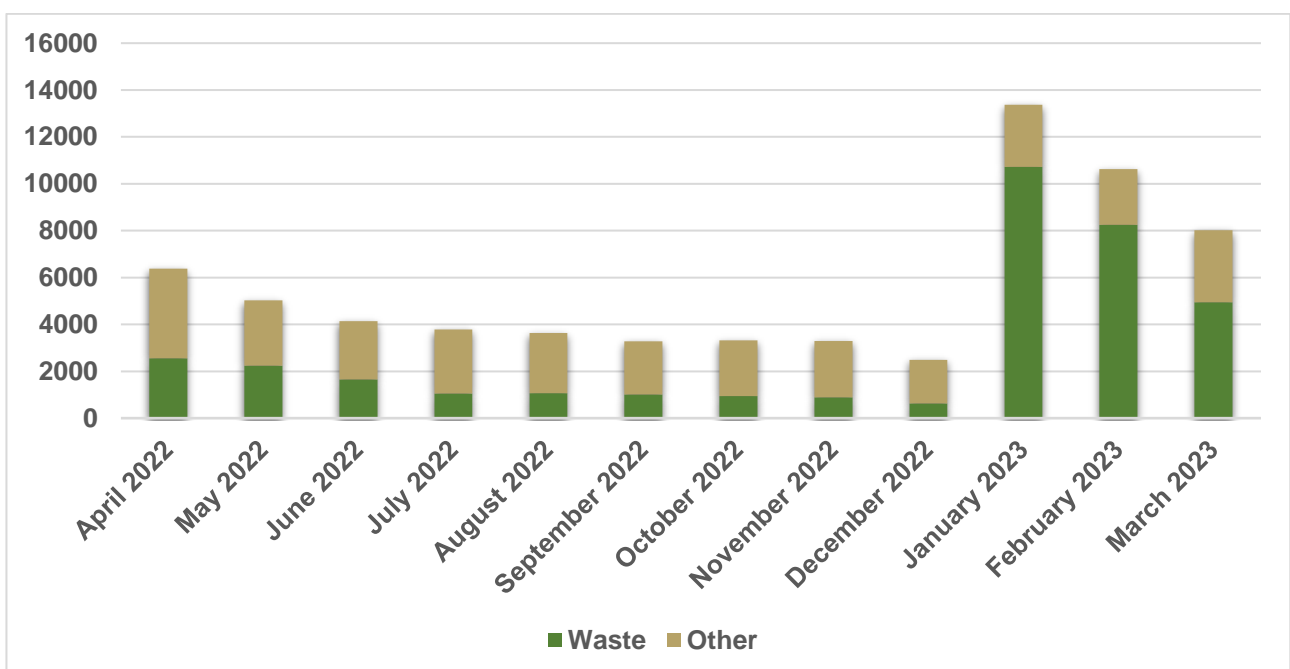
recycling service.

- 5.14 Calls also increased at times during 2022/23 as we received a high number of telephone queries in relation to the Cost of Living Crisis, the Household Support Fund and the Council Tax Energy Rebate as well as enquiries in regards to the ongoing Ukraine situation.
- 5.15 During 2022/23 a total of 157,460 calls were received across the whole council compared to 158,577 in 2021/22.
- 5.16 On average 81% of all calls received across the council were answered and handled during 2022/23, this is an increase compared to the previous year where 76% of all calls were answered and handled on first contact. It should be noted that although a call may go unanswered, customer can opt to receive a call back once the officer is available. (unanswered call figures include calls which go through to voicemail services).

Online Customer Demand

Online Service Requests

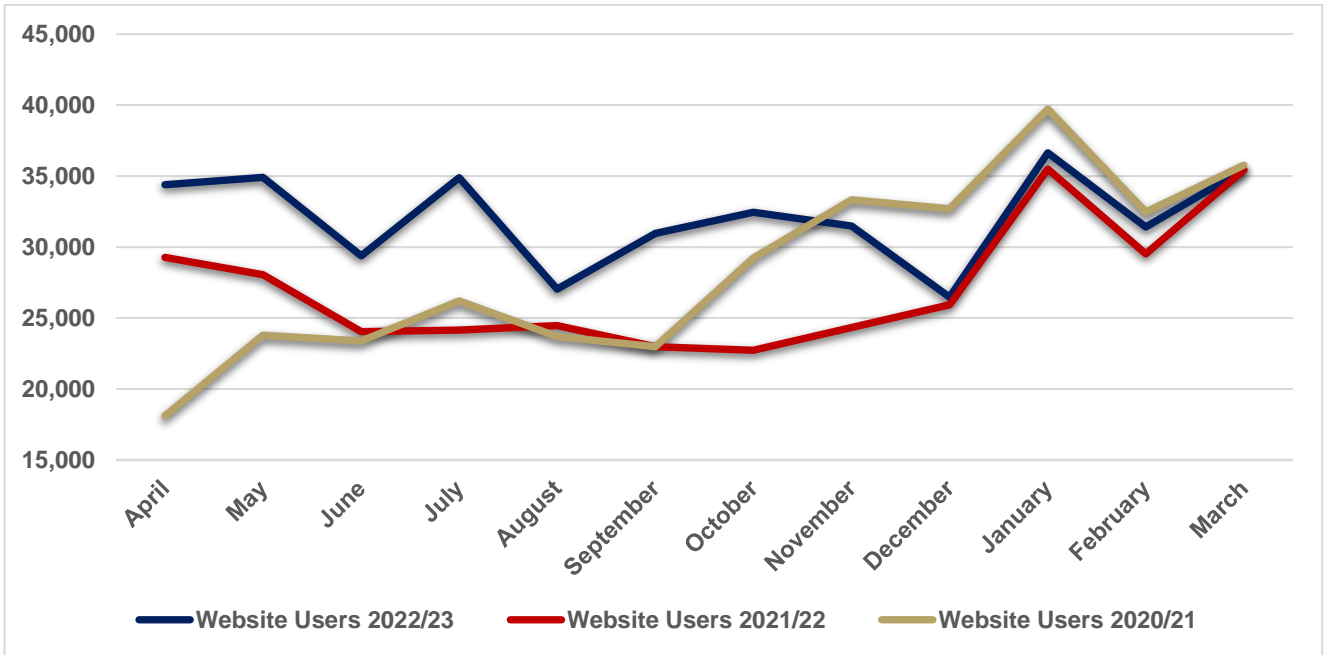
- 5.17 Customers can request or subscribe to a service via the Council website. The most visited pages on the website include the Green Garden Waste Service pages during the subscription period and the second most popular pages are relating to Planning and Development.
- 5.18 Compared to the previous year there has been an increase in the number of service requests made via online forms during the 2022/23 period. In total 67,338 online requests were received compared to 65,593 in 2021/22.
- 5.19 The graph below illustrates how many online requests were received each month during 2022/23 broken down by waste requests and other requests. The increases in January, February and March are due to Green Garden Waste subscriptions.



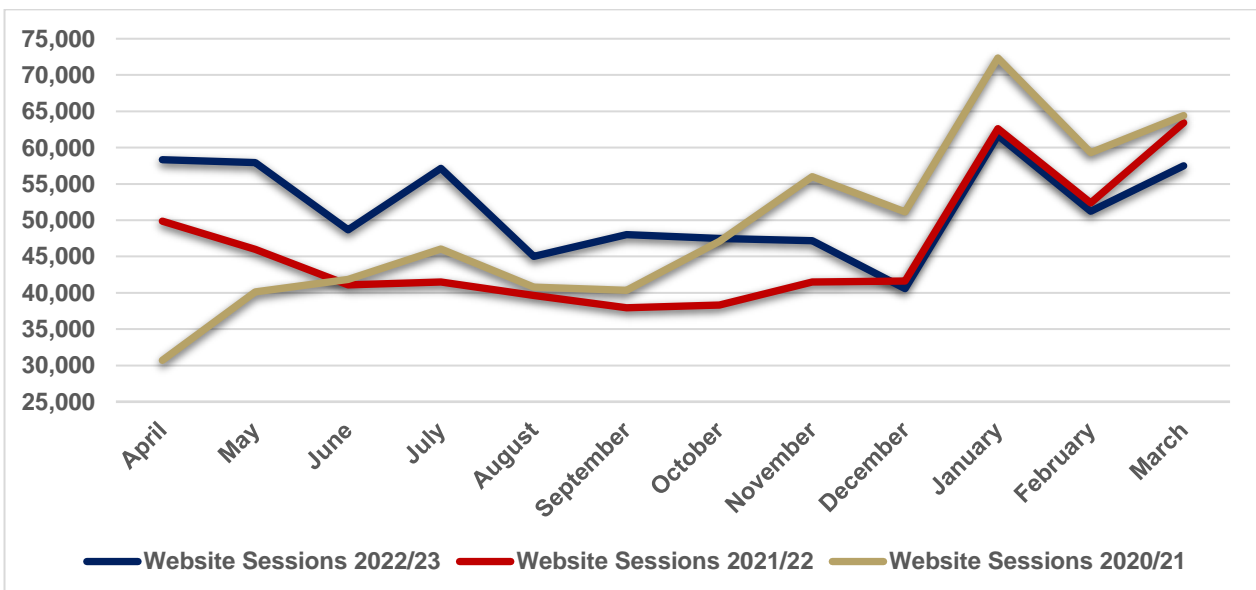
West Lindsey District Council Website Usage

5.20 Via Google Analytics we are able to track users of the West Lindsey District website where they have consented to cookies being enabled which monitors their activity.

5.21 The graph below illustrates the number of individual website users each month compared to the previous two years. As you can see there was an increase in the number of users during the first six months of the year and overall, for 2022/23:

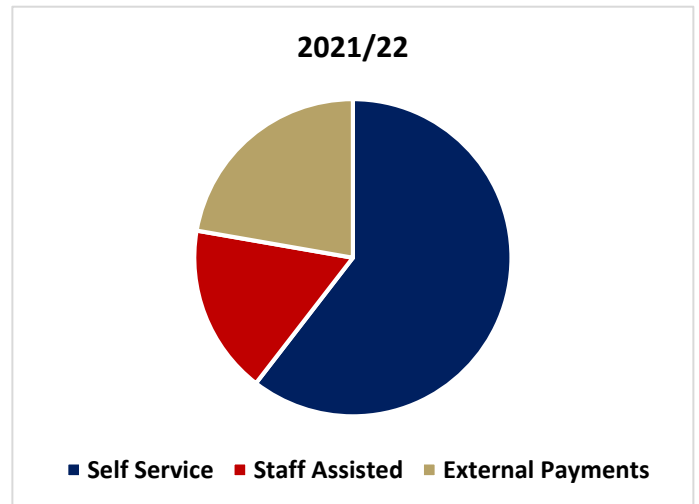
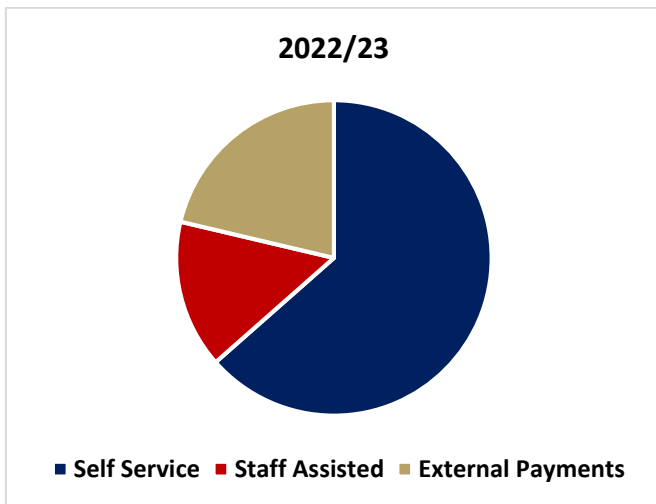


5.22 The graph below illustrates the number of website session per month. As with the number of website users, during 2022/23 there was an increase overall. Customers are becoming more confident in using the Council website to access our information and services and the information provided is becoming more informative and helpful. It is important that our customers' needs can be met via our website and that they can access the services they require 24/7.



Payment Methods

- 5.23 Various services across the council accept payments from customers. The methods in which customers make payments to the Council can be classified into three categories; Self-Serve, Staff Assisted Payments and External Payments.
- 5.24 Self-Serve payments include payments taken over the website, the kiosk in reception and the automated telephone payment line. Staff Assisted payments include payments over the phone, postal cheques and small amounts of cash taken face to face. External Payments include bank account payments (but not direct debit payments), Post Office payments and PayPal.
- 5.25 In the 2022/23 period 77,108 payments were taken (not including direct debit payments) the payments consisted of 63.50% Self-Serve Payments, this is an increase compared to last year which is due to the implementation and more frequent use of the automated payment facility. 15.19% of payments were Staff-Assisted, this has decreased slightly compared to the previous period and involves customers paying over the telephone. The volume of External Payments has decreased compared to the previous period at 21.31%. The breakdown of payment methods is illustrated in the charts below:



6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 The 2022/23 year was a busy year for all West Lindsey District Council services, the new recycling service that started in April 2022 led to a big increase in customer contact and customer feedback and a decrease in customer satisfaction but this was to be expected as residents got used to the new service.

Despite an increase in complaints and a decrease in satisfaction at the start of the year, there has been an increase in the number of positive feedback received in the form of compliments and messages of thanks.

Although more complaints were received the percentage of upheld complaints has reduced compared to the previous year. Where improvement actions were identified in upheld complaints the Customer Experience Officer has worked with the relevant service to make the changes needed to improve the overall customer experience.

Self-service online and telephone continue to be the preferred methods of contact with the Council with over 90% of customers choosing to interact with us in those ways. More online self-service methods are being utilised by customers which means that we need to ensure that the information on our website is accurate, informative and up to date.

Our customers live, work, or conduct business within our district usually for extended periods of time; and therefore the Council needs to build a positive relationship with customers for long term success. We need to make it as easy as possible for our customers to interact with us seven days a week and 24 hours a day.

The information within this report provides important input into the delivery of the in progress Customer Experience Strategy (which will be presented to members before implementation), providing baseline data, enabling the Council to look through the customer's eyes at the services provided and to think, act and plan from the customer viewpoint which will be essential in making service improvements.

Work is also continuing on the T24 service redesign work, the data in this report will assist the redesign process. The service redesign work examines all elements of how each individual service operates from processes and procedures to how customers make contact with the service.

A customer wants to be seen as an individual, and wants to find or obtain what they need quickly and easily. The Council's role is to help customers do what they need to do, with the least possible effort. The data in this report will allow the use of customer analytics to predict customer behaviour, personalised services and continually evaluate the customer journey leading to an improved customer experience overall.

This will enable the Council to deliver excellent customer services, ensuring that it is operating and using its resources in the best way possible to provide 'right first time' speedy, efficient and effective services.

Appendix A - Compliments received per Service 2022/23 compared 2021/22, 2020/21 and 2019/20

COMPLIMENTS	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Waste Services	243	177	145	81
Planning and Development, Trees and Conservation	242	211	172	171
Customer Services	162	212	168	145
Street Cleansing	97	76	44	47
Licensing	80	53	6	11
Home Choices	45	24	15	10
Environmental Protection	41	20	12	11
Revenues (Council Tax)	37	29	26	15
Arts and Leisure	29	22	7	17
Customer Experience	26	15	13	7
Member and Support Services	19	10	3	36
Local Land Charges	13	6	8	5
Communications Team	13	1	7	0
DFG's	12	12	9	2
Benefits	11	18	14	11
Building Control	11	15	14	21
System Development	9	9	11	6
Property Services	7	6	4	8
Community Safety	6	2	0	7
Planning Enforcement	5	7	9	6
Communities	4	11	5	10
WLDC in general	4	9	6	1
Growth and Regeneration	3	12	55	12
Cemetery	2	2	2	2
Food, Health and Safety	1	84	8	19
Housing Enforcement	1	7	3	3
Financial Creditors and Debtors	1	1	2	1
Revenues and Benefits (combined)	0	59	0	0
Electoral Services	0	3	0	1
Management Team	0	1	7	1
Totals	1124	1114	775	667

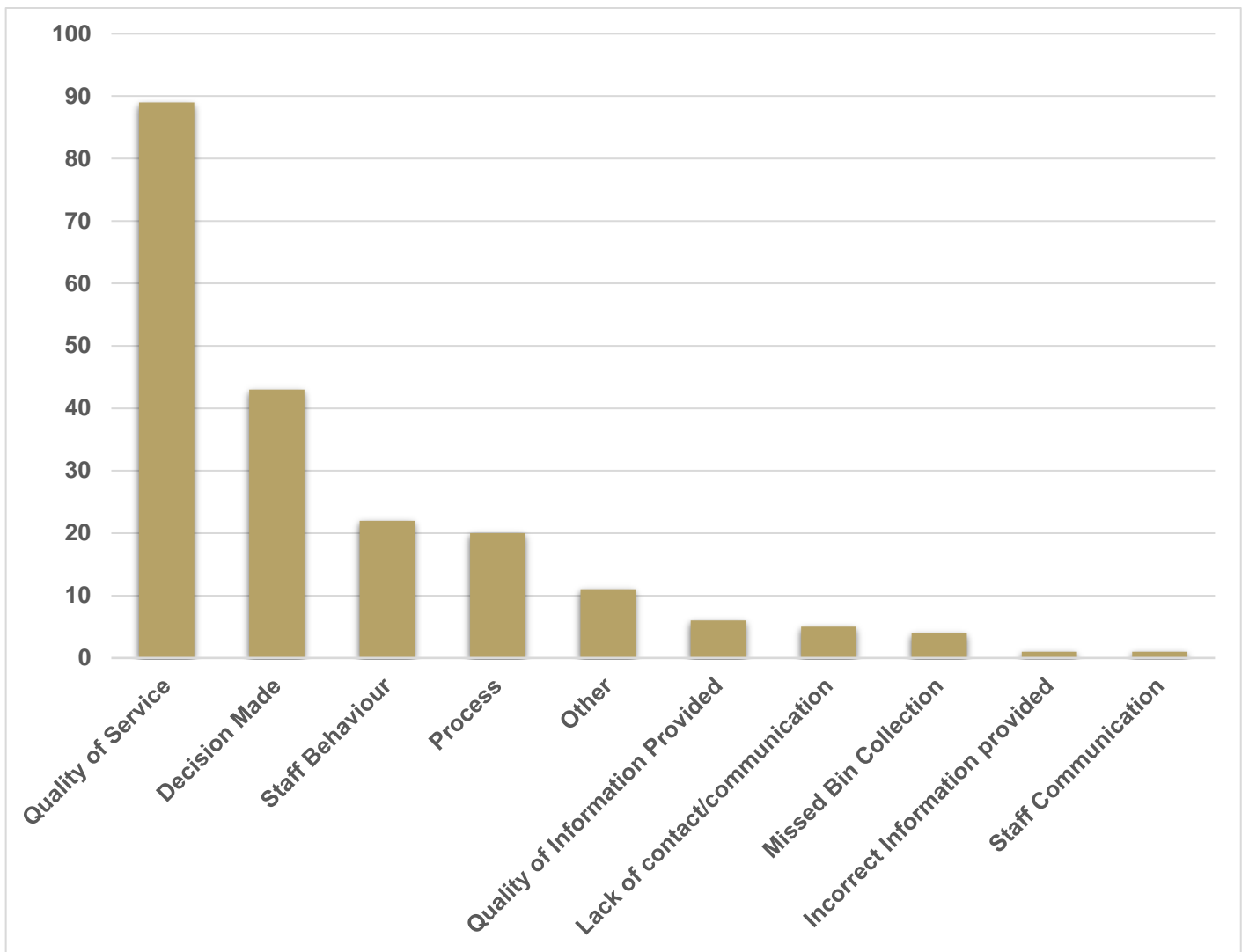
Appendix B - Comments received per Service 2022/23 compared to 2021/22, 2020/21 and 2019/20

COMMENTS	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Waste Services	70	96	26	33
Customer Services	5	4	5	2
Arts and Leisure	5	3	1	14
System Development	4	12	8	4
Street Cleansing	4	7	2	0
Growth and Regeneration	4	1	0	2
Planning and Development, Trees and Conservation	3	5	4	2
Property Services	3	4	2	2
Out of Scope	2	2	8	3
Revenues (Council Tax)	1	2	3	4
Home Choices	1	0	0	0
HR	1	0	0	0
Licensing	1	0	0	0
Food, Health and Safety	0	7	1	0
Community Safety	0	5	1	0
Electoral Services	0	2	0	0
WLDC in general	0	2	1	0
Communications Team	0	1	0	0
Communities	0	1	0	1
Environmental Protection	0	1	0	1
Totals	104	155	62	68

Appendix C - Complaints received per Service 2022/23 compared to 2021/22, 2020/21 and 2019/20

COMPLAINTS	2022/23	2021/22	2020/21	2019/20
Waste Services	107	38	45	58
Planning and Development, Trees and Conservation	17	21	42	22
Revenues (Council Tax)	17	14	9	6
Customer Services	11	4	4	8
Out of Scope	9	18	20	22
Planning Enforcement	9	14	14	12
Home Choices	7	7	2	4
Street Cleansing	5	5	4	3
Property Services	5	2	2	3
Environmental Protection	4	3	9	6
Arts and Leisure	3	3	1	19
Benefits	2	4	3	5
Housing Enforcement	2	2	2	10
System Development	2	1	2	0
Finance	2	0	0	0
Community Safety	1	7	5	1
DFG's	1	4	3	0
Food, Health and Safety	1	2	2	0
Communications Team	1	1	0	1
Management Team	1	1	0	0
HR	1	0	0	0
Internal Confidential Issues	1	0	0	0
Licensing	1	0	0	0
Local Land Charges	0	2	0	0
Electoral Services	0	1	0	0
Member and Support Services	0	1	2	0
WLDC in general	0	1	2	0
Totals	210	156	173	180

Appendix C Continued - Complaint Categories (topics/reasons) 2022/23



Appendix D – Upheld Complaints per Service 2022/23

	Number of complaints received	Number of Partially upheld complaints	Number of Fully upheld complaints	Number of complaints where some fault was identified	Upheld complaint % by service
Waste Services	107	2	22	24	22.43%
Planning and Development, Trees and Conservation	17	2	0	2	11.76%
Revenues (Council Tax)	17	1	4	5	29.41%
Customer Services	11	1	7	8	72.73%
Planning Enforcement	9	0	1	1	11.11%
Home Choices	7	0	0	0	0.00%
Street Cleansing	5	1	2	3	60.00%
Property Services	5	1	0	1	20.00%
Environmental Protection	4	1	0	1	25.00%
Arts and Leisure	3	0	0	0	0.00%
Benefits	2	0	0	0	0.00%
Housing Enforcement	2	0	0	0	0.00%
System Development	2	0	0	0	0.00%
Finance	2	0	2	2	100.00%
Community Safety	1	0	0	0	0.00%
DFG's	1	1	0	1	20.00%
Food, Health and Safety	1	0	0	0	0.00%
Communications Team	1	0	1	1	100.00%
Management Team	1	0	1	1	100.00%
HR	1	1	0	1	100.00%
Internal Confidential Issues	1	0	0	0	0.00%
Licensing	1	0	0	0	0.00%
Totals	201	11	40	51	

* Out of Scope Complaints are excluded from this table

**Appendix E – Complaints referred to the LGSCO by service 2022/23
(Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman)**

Service	Number of complaints referred to the LGSCO	Status or Decision Made
Planning Enforcement	4	2 complaints were investigated by the LGSCO, no fault was identified so they were not upheld
		The LGSCO decided not to investigate the other 2 complaints
Planning and Development	3	The LGSCO decided not to investigate any of these complaints
Housing (Home Choices)	2	1 complaint was investigated, fault was identified so it was upheld by the LGSCO - recommendations were made
		The LGSCO decided not to investigate the other complaint
Revenues (Council Tax)	1	The LGSCO decided not to investigate this complaint
Environmental Protection	1	The LGSCO decided not to investigate this complaint
Housing Enforcement	1	This complaint is still open and under investigation - the outcome will be included in next years reports for 2023/24
Waste and Recycling	1	The LGSCO decided not to investigate this complaint
Total	13	

Agenda Item 6d



**Governance and Audit
Committee**

Tuesday, 25 July 2023

Subject: Annual Counter Fraud Report 2022/23

Report by:

Director of Corporate Services

Contact Officer:

Emma Foy
Director of Corporate Services
Emma.Foy@west-lindsey.gov.uk

Purpose / Summary:

To appraise Members with details of identified fraud and counter fraud activity during the year 2022/23 and to propose that a fraud risk assessment is procured to take place in 2023/24.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

1. That members endorse the contents of this report and support the ongoing counter fraud work to protect the Authority's interests.
2. That a full Counter Fraud Risk Assessment is procured and carried out in Quarter 2 2023-24 with the results reported back to the November 2023 Governance and Audit Committee.

IMPLICATIONS

Legal:

(N.B.) Where there are legal implications the report **MUST** be seen by the MO

Financial: FIN/45/24/PD

The Council historically up until 2023-24 made a £3k per annum contribution to Lincolnshire County Council for Counter Fraud Support. This service is no longer available. It is best practice for Councils to complete a detailed fraud risk assessment which will generate a fraud risk register and fraud action plan. Once the first iteration has been completed this can be updated on an ongoing basis. The Council does not employ any specialist counter fraud staff and Lincolnshire County Council does not have the resource to carry out this work. Funding is available via the project management reserve to complete this work. Costs are estimated to be approximately £10 - £15K and this work would need to be completed every four years.

Staffing: The Section 151 Officer, and the Management Team have the responsibility for countering fraud, and ensuring staff and members are informed of their obligations in this regard.

Equality and Diversity including Human Rights: None from this report.

Data Protection Implications: Our cyber security measures provide protection for our data.

Climate Related Risks and Opportunities: None from this report

Section 17 Crime and Disorder Considerations: No specific Section 17 considerations however, this report is consistent with duties to protect the public purse and provide value for money.

Health Implications: None from this report

Title and Location of any Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

N/A

Risk Assessment:

The Council has not completed a Fraud Risk Assessment and does not hold a specific fraud risk register. These are both good practice.

Call in and Urgency:

Is the decision one which Rule 14.7 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules apply?

i.e. is the report exempt from being called in due to urgency (in consultation with C&I chairman)

Yes

No

Key Decision:

A matter which affects two or more wards, or has significant financial implications

Yes

No

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 Leaders of public service organisations have a responsibility to embed effective standards for countering fraud and corruption in their organisations. This supports good governance and demonstrates effective financial stewardship and strong public financial management.
- 1.2 Published in October 2014, the CIPFA Code of Practice on Managing the Risk of Fraud & Corruption sets out the principles that define the governance and operational arrangements necessary for an effective counter fraud response.
- 1.3 It is these principles that underpin the Council's approach to support the management of the risk of fraud and corruption.
- 1.4 The Council promotes a zero tolerance culture to fraud and corruption
The following Strategy Statement is currently being considered;
“West Lindsey District Council is determined that the culture and tone of the organisation is one of honesty, openness and absolute opposition to fraud and corruption. The Council's expectation on propriety and accountability is that members and staff at all levels will observe the highest standards in ensuring adherence to legal requirements, rules, procedures and practices.” (WLDC - Anti Fraud & Corruption Strategy v2 2022)”
- 1.5 The Council maintains a suite of strategies and policies to support the effective management of the prevention, detection and investigation of fraud and corruption (Anti-Fraud & Corruption Strategy and Response Plan; Whistleblowing Policy and Anti Bribery Policy) See Appendix A
- 1.6 Counter fraud activity during the year has delivered a programme of proactive and reactive work to complement the internal audit strategy and annual plan focusing resource against assessed fraud risks in addition to new and emerging threats.
- 1.7 Up until 2023/24 the Council subscribed to a Counter Fraud service provided by Assurance Lincolnshire (Lincolnshire Fraud Partnership). This service provided support to County Wide fraud prevention exercises and provided guidance and advice. This service is no longer available from the County Council although some exercises will continue. It is essential that West Lindsey District Council procures a programme to replace that service to ensure that all duties and responsibilities can be fulfilled.

2. Purpose of this report

- 2.1 The report provides an overview of counter fraud activity during 2021/22 and any identified fraud.
- 2.2 It seeks to inform members of counter fraud activity and to provide assurance and demonstrate that the Council continues to have a robust counter-fraud culture and effective counter-fraud arrangements in place to ensure fraud risks are managed effectively.

- 2.3 Whilst the Council, through its policies, procedures and internal controls makes efforts to protect itself, fraud is considered a growing concern, therefore vigilance is required at all times.
- 2.4 The report requests that a Fraud Risk Assessment is carried out and following this a Fraud Risk Register and Action plan are reported to Governance And Audit Committee.

3. Background

- 3.1 Fraud is defined as a deception deliberately practiced in order to secure a gain (or cause a loss).
- 3.2 The areas particularly considered in the context of risks from financial crime are in relation to fraud, corruption, theft, bribery, and money laundering.

Fraud – ‘the intentional distortion of financial statements or other records by persons internal or external to the authority which is carried out to conceal the misappropriation (misuse) of assets or otherwise for gain’. Through false representation, failing to disclose information or abuse of power

Corruption – ‘the offering, giving, soliciting, or acceptance of an inducement or reward which may influence any person to act inappropriately’.

Theft – ‘appropriating property belonging to another with the intention of permanently depriving the other of it’.

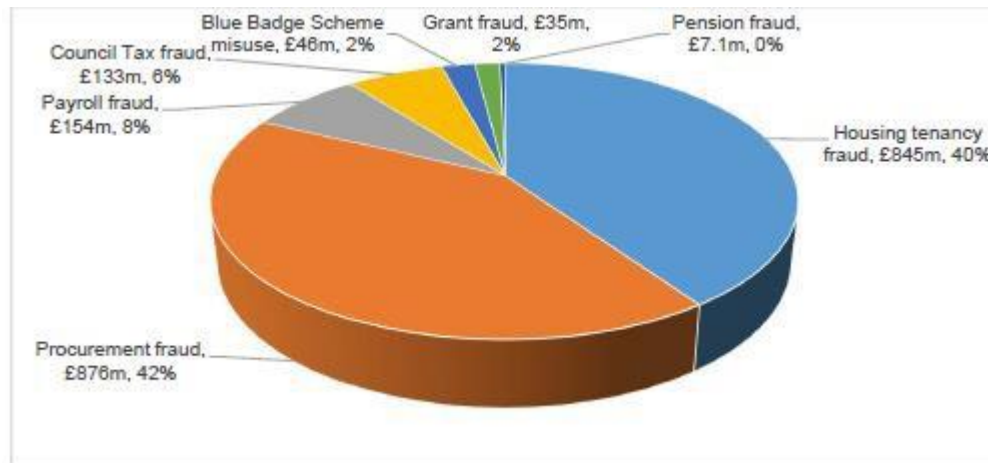
Bribery – ‘is an inducement or reward offered, promised or provided to gain personal, commercial, regulatory or contractual advantage’.

Money laundering – ‘an activity which falls within the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, (as amended by the Serious Crime Act 2015 and new regulations 2017) whereby criminally obtained money or other assets are exchanged for clean money or assets with no link to their origins’.

Whistleblowing – ‘when a person reports suspected wrongdoing at work. Officially this is called ‘making a disclosure in the public interest.

- 3.3 The cost of fraud to local government is estimated at £2.1bn (money which could be used for local services).

The illustration below breaks down these estimated losses;



4. Counter Fraud Activity 2022/23

4.1 There have been no instances of fraud identified during the year in relation to internal Council activities.

4.2 Activity in relation to Revenue and Benefits fraud is detailed below:

- **Three** Council Tax Reduction sanctions (£70 as per penalty charge).
- **17** – Single Fraud Investigation referrals were referred to DWP Fraud and Error Service for Criminal / Compliance investigations.
- **17** – Not yet looked at by the DWP or ‘No outcome/result known’ to date because DWP are prioritising other tasks, more focusing on UC overpayments
- **Cases referred** were: 1 x Housing Benefit claim, 15 x Universal Credit claims and 1 x Income Support claim).
- **455** – Housing Benefit Matching Service referrals in total were received.
- **16** were positive outcomes.
- (Since April 2022, Claim Interventions via NEC/Northgate for each HBMS Match case only records whether the outcome of each HBMS match to show if the benefit had increased, or decreased or no change to entitlement. It does not record any value of an overpayment, the DWP now obtain that direct from our system calcs)
- National Fraud Initiative (NFI) – Data Match release on 02.03.2023
- For **Housing Benefit** claimants’ cases, they were categorised in **(10)** High Risk, **(0)** Medium Risk, **(7)** Low Risk and **(3)** NIL Risk
- For **Council Tax Reduction** Scheme cases, they were categorised in **(18)** High Risk and **(134)** Medium Risk, **(15)** Low and **(30)** Nil.

4.3 The following Internal Audits were undertaken during the year which are relevant to countering fraud;

- Financial Controls – Substantial Assurance

5. Countering Cyber Crime

5.1 West Lindsey District Council is enabling change to reduce the workload on colleagues and increase our counter fraud capability. We are making improvements, including the procedure, the process, the people, this is iterative because we are a learning organisation becoming better each day and that's a great opportunity to protect our assets and the communities we serve.

5.2 Cyber security governance across the council is viewed as good and sufficient at present to manage the cyber risks facing the council, while at the same time we are taking the opportunity to secure funding that will reduce our future costs and increase our positioning:

- The ICT team have completed a PSN Compliance Review that received accreditation (PSN is the connection to central government from Cabinet Office).
- The ICT team have completed a PCI-DSS Compliance Review that received accreditation (PCI-DSS)
- The ICT team also had the benefit of being included in the Network Security Audit, that received Substantial Assurance.
- The ICT team also had the benefit of being included in the Cloud Hosted Services Audit, that received Substantial Assurance.

5.3 **Sector Improvements (reducing our costs and improving our capabilities)**

Local Government Association

Leading the Cyber 360 Peer Review for Local Government Association for Dorset Council

Local Government Digital Committee

The Local Government Digital Committee was set up to represent local public services in the development and implementation of local and national digital outcomes where central and local government come together.

Cyber Tactical Advisory Group Deputy Chair

Developing and coordinating cyber advice and guidance for Local Government at a National level with LGA, Central Government; MHLG, GDS, GSG, NCSC and all devolved administrations.

Cybershare East (WARP) Chair

The group brings together Information Security, Assurance and Governance practitioners on a regional, subregional or partnership

basis. We exchange views, listen to guest speakers, undertake training or exercises.

Local CIO Council SOCITM

The Local CIO Council was set up to represent local public services in the development and implementation of national IT strategy, policy, and programmes. It provides challenge, capacity, and leadership in support of the National Government CIO Council.

- a. The ICT Team has received further positive feedback from Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (The Rt Hon Michael Gove MP) who funded us to work with HM Revenue and Customs previously and have offered to fund further cyber security work to enhance our position and ultimately arrangements nationally.
- b. We are the first Local Authority's to use the powers available within the Digital Economy Act having identified over £29 million pounds worth of transactions and will be able to help other local authorities implement the same anti-fraud solutions, and more.
- c. The Council has progressed with the work to help define the future requirements for the Nightsafe sector program. The programme will define best practise for the Local Government sector.

5.4 Technical Improvements

We have data loss prevention solutions, backup solutions, offline backup solutions, plans, policy, procedures (that are tested), Intrusion Detection Systems (IDS and Intrusion Prevention Systems (IPS). We have infrastructure support contracts, cyber support contracts in place that will help us if needed.

The IT Team have multiple copies of our data in multiple places that are secured along with an approved business continuity plan that is refreshed and tested robustly. As part of this we have an ICT Management Plan that includes our standard responses to a cyber-attack including responses for:

- Denial of Service Attack
- Malware Attack
- Phishing Attack
- Ransomware Attack
- Phishing Attack

We have undertaken two full off site recovery exercises with further tests scheduled (multiple Councils and services, with external governance from Cabinet Office Cyber Expert) and have undertaken a full recovery test twice in three years off site, using different officers (to share the knowledge and experience) this knowledge is currently being used to recover every system as part of a current technology

process change.

No business is 100% secure from every attack, however we have a robust level of understanding in the business that is actively being supported by colleagues in IT. We have process and procedures that are tested, and the business is engaged in that process. We have active cyber defense and technology controls.

6. Counter Fraud Policies

The Council has the following policies in place as part of its Counter Fraud arrangements:

- Prevention of Financial Crime Policy;
- Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy;
- Anti-Bribery Policy.
- Financial Crime Response Plan

The Corporate Policy & Resources Committee are responsible for approving any changes to these policies.

These policies will all be reviewed and updated in Quarter 3 as part of the new requirements of the Economic Crime Bill which will propose a new “failure to prevent fraud, false accounting or money laundering”.

7. Proactive Work Programme 2023/2024

Risk Area	Planned For	Current Status	Responsible Officer
Various fraud areas	2022/23	NFI bi-annual exercise	Financial Services Manager
Fraud Awareness Training - Members	Ongoing	Delivered as part of Member inductions	Director of Corporate Services
Fraud Awareness Training - Staff	Ongoing	Now part of onboarding and induction.	Director of Corporate Services
Full Fraud Risk Assessment producing Fraud Risk Register and Fraud Action Plan	September 2023	Seeking approval from this Governance and Audit Committee	Director of Corporate Services
Mandatory Training – Cyber Crime Fraud Awareness Anti Money Laundering	Ongoing	E-learning available on training platform Now part of on-boarding requirements. Annual completion.	ICT Manager/ Financial Services Manager

		Weekly advice provided in staff newsletter.	
Bi-Annual Policies Review	September 2023	Review reported to Governance and Audit November 2023 (or as soon as new legislation is confirmed)	Financial Services Manager
Joint procurement of Single Persons Discount Review 2022	Commenced	This is a County wide process; results to be reported Quarter 3 2023/24	Director of Corporate Services

Governance and Audit Committee Workplan as at 17 July 2023

Purpose:

This report provides details of reports scheduled for committee for the 2023/24 electoral cycles.

Recommendation:

1. That members note the report.

Date	Title	Lead Officer	Purpose of the report
25 JULY 2023			
25 Jul 2023	Internal Audit Quarter 4 Report 2022/23	Claire Goodenough, Head of Internal Audit and Risk Management, Lincolnshire County Council	To present the Quarter 4 report from Internal Audit from 2022/23.
25 Jul 2023	Internal Audit Annual Report 2022/2023	Claire Goodenough, Head of Internal Audit and Risk Management, Lincolnshire County Council	To present the internal audit annual report for 2022/23.
25 Jul 2023	Annual Voice of the Customer Report 2022/23	Natalie Kostiuk, Customer Experience Officer	To summarise customer feedback received during the year 2022/23 and analyse customer contact demand data to provide a clear view of the voice of the customer.
25 Jul 2023	Annual Counter Fraud Report 2022/23	Emma Foy, Director of Corporate Services and Section 151 Officer	To inform members of counter fraud activity, instances of fraud during the year and future
26 SEPTEMBER 2023			
26 Sep 2023	Report to those Charged with Governance - External Audit Completion Report (ISA260)	Peter Davy, Financial Services Manager (Deputy Section 151 Officer)	To present to those charged with governance, the External Audit report on the quality of the Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement 2022/23
26 Sep 2023	Annual Governance Statement 2022/23	Jeanette McGarry, Interim Assistant Director, People	To present the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 in conjunction with the Audited Statement of Accounts

and Democratic Services 2022/23

26 Sep 2023	Audited Statement of Accounts 2022/23	Peter Davy, Financial Services Manager (Deputy Section 151 Officer)	The 2022/23 Audited Statement of Accounts is presented for scrutiny
26 Sep 2023	Internal Audit Quarter 1 Report 2023/24	Claire Goodenough, Head of Internal Audit and Risk Management, Lincolnshire County Council	To present the Quarter 1 report 2023/24 from Internal Audit.
26 Sep 2023	6 Month Review of Strategic Risks	Katy Allen, Corporate Governance Officer	To present the 6 month review of strategic risks
26 Sep 2023	Member Development Annual Report	Ele Snow, Senior Democratic and Civic Officer	To review the 2023 induction programme and upcoming plans for years 1 - 4 of the Member Development Programme
26 Sep 2023	Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Review Letter Report 2022/23	Natalie Kostiuk, Customer Experience Officer	Report on the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) Annual Review Letter 2023 covering complaints referred to and decided by them between April 2022 and March 2023. Examining upheld complaints, learning actions and benchmarking with other similar authorities.

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28 NOVEMBER 2023

28 Nov 2023	Internal Audit Quarter 2 Report 2023/24	Claire Goodenough, Head of Internal Audit and Risk Management, Lincolnshire County Council	To present the Quarter 2 report 2023/24 from Internal Audit.
28 Nov 2023	Annual Governance Statement Update	Jeanette McGarry, Interim Assistant Director - People and Democratic Services	To update on the Annual Governance Statement 2023-24 Action Plan
28 Nov 2023	Review of Whistleblowing Activity	Jeanette McGarry, Interim Assistant Director - People and Democratic Services	To present data on Whistleblowing Activity in the past Civic year.

23 JANUARY 2024

23 Jan 2024	Draft Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25	Emma Foy, Director of	To present West Lindsey District Council's Draft Treasury
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Corporate Services and
Section 151 Officer

Management Strategy for 2024/25.

23 Jan 2024 Internal Audit Quarter 3 Report 2023/24

Claire Goodenough, Head
of Internal Audit and Risk
Management, Lincolnshire
County Council

To present the Quarter 3 Internal Audit Report.

12 MARCH 2024

12 Mar 2024 Accounts Closedown 2023/24 Accounting
Matters

Emma Foy, Director of
Corporate Services and
Section 151 Officer

To review and approve the accounting policies, actuary
assumptions and materiality levels that will be used for
the preparation of the 2023/24 accounts

12 Mar 2024 External Audit Strategy Memorandum (Plan)
2023/24

Emma Foy, Director of
Corporate Services and
Section 151 Officer

To present the 2023/24 External Audit Strategy

12 Mar 2024 Internal Audit Draft Annual Plan 2024/25

Claire Goodenough, Head
of Internal Audit and Risk
Management, Lincolnshire
County Council

To present the Draft Annual Plan for Internal Audit for the
2024/25 committee year.

12 Mar 2024 Combined Assurance Report 2023/24

Claire Goodenough, Head
of Internal Audit and Risk
Management, Lincolnshire
County Council

To present the Report from the Combined Assurance
aspect for 2023/24