

# Combined Assurance Status Report 2021/22



**West Lindsey District Council  
March 2022**

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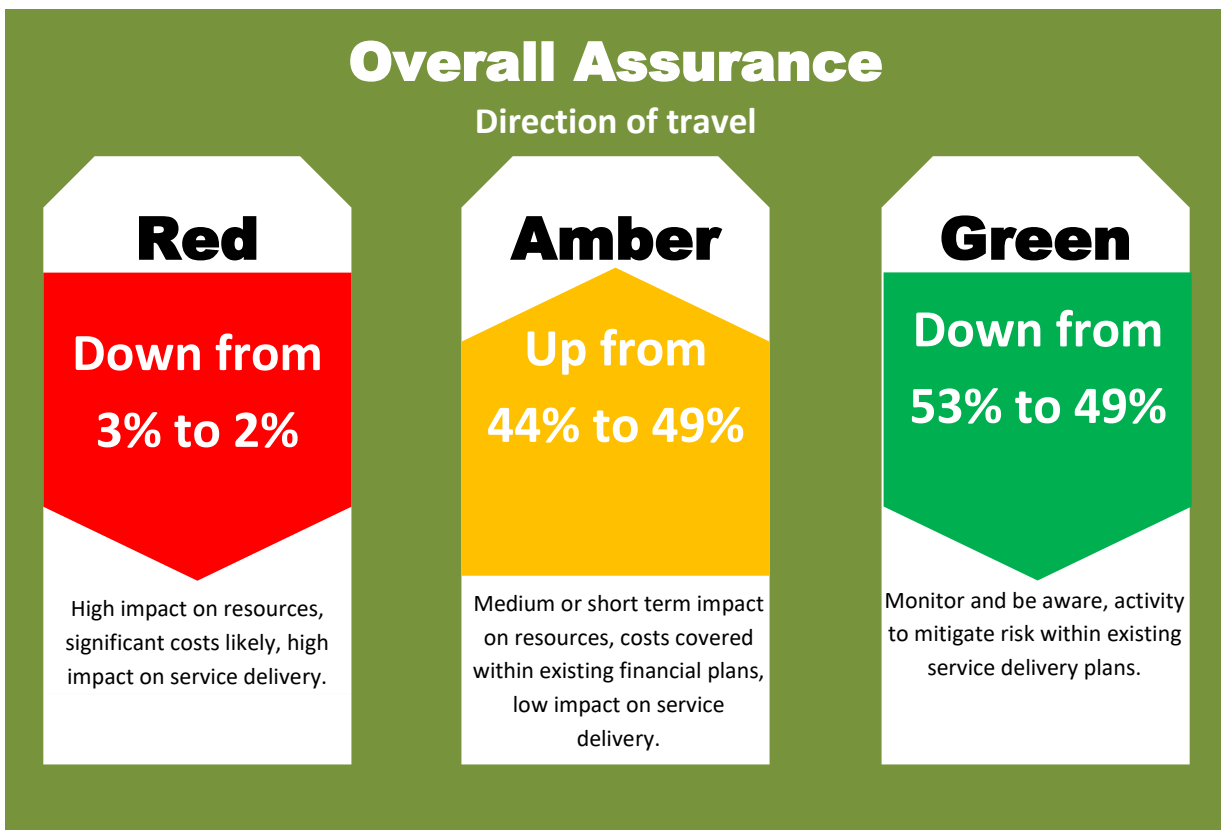
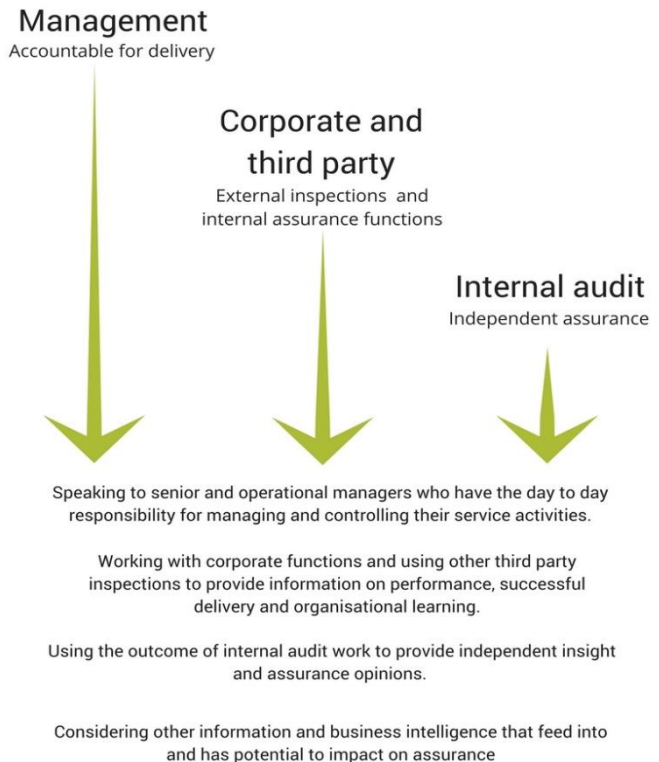
# Overview of Assurance

Combined assurance is a structured means of identifying and mapping the main sources and types of assurance in the council and coordinating them to best effect.

It enhances risk management by providing an effective and efficient framework of sufficient, regular and reliable evidence of assurance on organisational stewardship and management of major risks to the Council's success.

We do this using the 3 lines of defence model.

How do we assure ourselves about how the council is run?



# Summary

## Summary

We thank Assurance Lincolnshire for producing the council's latest Combined Assurance report and also the council's management team for providing their input. The report is something we value, it is extremely beneficial in highlighting aspects of council business that are operating well, while also identifying other areas that require greater focus. The findings represent a comprehensive and accurate view of our assurance position across our services, critical systems, governance processes, ICT arrangements, key projects, partnerships and risk analysis.

The three levels of assurance model has been used to provide assurance that we are operating as effectively as can be expected and key risks are managed appropriately. Internal audit have co-ordinated the overall assurance information and applied some constructive challenge on the assurance opinions.

The last year has seen the majority of office-based staff working from home, with a phased opening of the offices, however this was disrupted by the Omicron variant in December and January, but we continue to work in a flexible approach, remaining open for business. Our ICT infrastructure has provided staff with the necessary resources needed to continue to deliver services to our residents.

The pandemic has placed extra strain on our budgets due to additional activity and lost income, however we have maintained strong financial management across the council.

Despite all of the challenges during the pandemic, the council has undertaken:

A Peer Review review with positive feedback received from our LGA colleagues.

3 staff surveys with high levels of satisfaction given by staff, we are currently conducting the 4<sup>th</sup> survey.

Implemented a new finance system with the ability to add other services in future,

Successful bid for the Levelling Up Fund with an implementation plan and team in place.

Built and moved into a modern and fit for the future depot facility.

It should be recognised that the future is uncertain, and it is clear that the council faces numerous challenges, such as the ongoing response to and recovery from the covid19 pandemic, the potential for economic forces to impact the district and the uncertainty surrounding future funding levels. In response to these issues the council continues to take proactive action to ensure that it remains prepared to respond.

The Combined Assurance report is used to inform the internal audit workplan for 22/23 and the Council's Annual Governance Statement 2021 to 2022.

## Key Messages

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.

Our Strategic Risk Register is regularly reviewed and our risks are being effectively managed.

Risk	Actions for Improvement	Current risk rating	Target risk rating
Health and Wellbeing of the District's residents does not improve	Emerging framework of District Health and Wellbeing Strategy which will set out actions to address health inequalities. New portfolio of Homes and Communities is in place and new team of Home, Health and Wellbeing recruited to with a focus on independent living, reducing health inequalities and prevention. Ongoing promotion of Wellbeing service	9	6
Inadequate support is provided for vulnerable groups and communities	Follow up Vulnerable Communities Audit completed. Further development of Local Access Partnership initiative with funding awarded - major links to health and wellbeing. Development of normalisation strategy for Scampton. Ongoing focussed support for residents of Hemswell Cliff.	9	6
Inability to raise local educational attainment and skills levels	On-going work as part of the Employment & Skills Partnership to deliver against the Employment & Skills Plan and redundancy support actions. Continue to face challenges with face to face delivery due to coronavirus pandemic. Officers due to review action plans in early 2022. Officers continue to keep abreast of new skills and employment initiatives launched at either a regional or national level. A number of triggers for this risk continue to be areas that the District Council has no control or direct influence over.	9	9
The local economy does not grow sufficiently	The council must influence the shape of key regional strategies and the workings of the GLLEP to ensure the District's growth ambitions and needs are fully reflected. The council has distributed almost £30m grant aid to businesses across the District and the programme of support continues to March 2022. Townscape Heritage Initiative launched - £1.96m Plans for new cinema approved	9	6
The local housing market and the Council's housing related services do not meet demand	Housing Strategy enablers to mitigate against the risk. An up to date Local Plan based on robust housing need evidence ensures that appropriate land is allocated for housing delivery. This is monitored through the 5 year land supply which is published annually on the WLDC and Central Lincolnshire website. Current supply stands at 5.35 years.	9	6

## Key Messages

Risk	Actions for Improvement	Current risk rating	Target risk rating
Insufficient action taken to create a cleaner and safe district	Single depot will support the continuing success of the waste service. Council agreement to fund work with schools to promote environmental and sustainability issues. Enforcement and environment teams fully resourced. Member working group established to produce an Environment and Sustainability strategy. All guidance related to covid19 implemented. Restructure of waste management team to ensure future proofing in place. Review of enforcement policies. Review of the Selective Licencing Scheme.	8	4
Inability to set a sustainable balanced budget	Close monitoring of the current spending profile; good performance management and benchmarking coupled with progressive service planning will support the minimisation of this risk. Peer Review findings “sound financial management, robust control and successful implantation of commercial plan” Impact of Covid19 on MTFP assessed and understood.	8	8
The quality of services do not meet customer expectations	The T24 programme is designed to put the customer at the centre of every service and will help to mitigate this risk. Technology led service reviews in all services will address resilience and capacity issues. The development and implementation of a Customer Experience Strategy will further mitigate this risk.	6	4
Inability for the Council’s governance to support quality decision making	Ensuring that all decisions are evidence based and robust governance will continue to minimise the likelihood of this risk. Peer Review findings noted that corporate governance and Member/Officer relations were effective. Governance audit taking place in audit plan 22/23 High assurance received on the Good Governance follow up audit, all actions from the initial audit completed. G&A committee have undertaken an effectiveness survey.	6	6
Inability to maintain critical services and deal with emergency events	Effective business continuity and emergency planning responses are in place. Frequent testing will be a key priority.	8	8
Failure to comply with legislation including Health and Safety matters	This is rated amber due to the impact should issues arise, there are no known health and safety issues, however our H&S co-ordinator will be undertaking a series of audits across services to ensure understanding and compliance. The move to a new operational depot has now taken place, this has created a safer working environment for staff.	8	8

# Key Messages

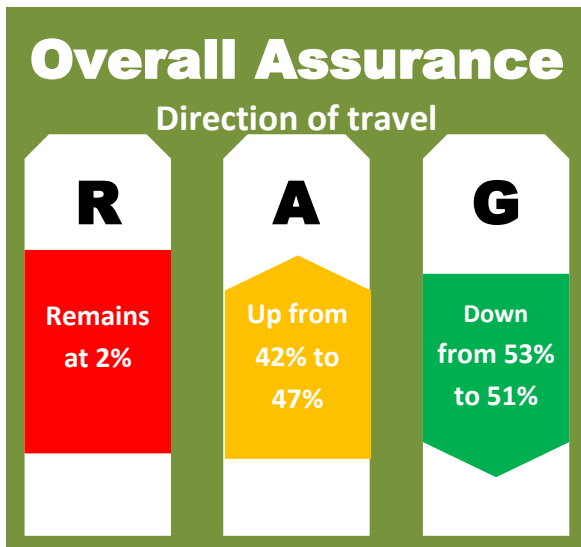
Risk	Actions for Improvement	Current risk rating	Target risk rating
ICT Security and Information Governance arrangements are ineffective	Continuous monitoring of officer training and promotion of incident reporting will further mitigate this risk. The role of Senior Information Risk Owner is with AD People & Democratic Services. SIRO training attended. Recent cyber security audit gave substantial assurance. The need for extra vigilance is regularly relayed to staff. Brexit arrangements may impact on the council's ability to access data of data processors/controllers that are going to store data in the EU. Standard contractual clauses are being incorporated into relevant contracts and agreements. Awaiting confirmation of adequacy on the part of the UK to meet the EU GDPR standards.	12	8
Inability to maintain service delivery with the amount of change initiatives including T24 recommendations and OneCouncil (ERP)	All agreed recommendations will be loaded into the council's project management software allowing for oversight to be given to planned works and reporting through ICT, programme and Portfolio Boards. A business case will inform any identified recommendations with a clear focus on resources to implement/embed as well as an understanding of the associate risk. The council's Progress and Delivery framework will allow for identification of those corporate KPIs that are outside of agreed tolerances for two consecutive periods. Teams are heavily engaged in T24 allowing for the identification of potential issues and risks to be addressed and mitigated.		
Key	Risk		
Red	High impact on resources, significant costs likely, high impact on service delivery		
Amber	Medium or short term impact on resources, cost covered within existing financial plans, low impact on service delivery		
Green	Monitor and be aware , activity to mitigate the risk within existing service delivery plans / management arrangements		

# Key Messages

## Transactional Services

**Objectives** – Transactional services refer to the agreed set of services and functions run by the Council. Each service area should have clarity of its purpose, an understanding of their stakeholders and clear processes for delivery and managing performance.

Development Management
Carbon Management Plan
Community Broadband
Community Services
Regulatory Services External H&S



Critical Activities	
Red	Amber
Gainsborough Market	Fleet Management
	Domestic Waste & Recycling
	Street Cleansing
	Commercial Waste
	Trinity Arts
	Tourism – Growth
	Street Lighting
	Homelessness Prevention
	Lea Fields Crematorium
	Communities at Risk
	Planning Enforcement
	Food Safety
	Property and Estate Management Strategic
	Car Parking
	Building Control

Gainsborough Market has been an area for concern for some time. Following Member direction, Officers commissioned sector-experts Quarterbridge to undertake a review of the function. A new, proposed working methodology was approved by members in January 2022.

It is a time of change for Operational Services. The team have now moved to the new Depot at Caenby Corner, this alongside the embedding of a new structure in the Waste Management Team has meant there will be differences in delivery for Fleet Management, Commercial Waste and domestic waste services. Separate paper and card collections will commence in April 2022, with food waste likely to follow on a couple of years. Whilst Street Cleansing benchmarks really well, there may be an opportunity for further improvements following the Together 24 review.

Trinity Arts Centre has suffered particularly badly throughout Covid. That said, the team have taken the opportunity to make significant improvements to the centre and were successful in attracting CRF Funding. The team are now concentrating on reopening the centre and had a successful panto season. They are also formulating a bid for National Lottery Heritage Funding.

Additional Restrictions Grant used to invest in Visitor Economy platform and will be developed throughout 22/23 with Visit Lincoln. Business Advice in place for 22/23, positive events delivered through the Mayflower programme,



## Key Messages

Events Officer in place and new Visitor Economy strategy being developed.

Streetlight maintenance assurance is high with a shared service agreement with Lincolnshire County Council. Upgrade of street lights to LED has faced challenges with a lack of suppliers interested in the work. further work required during 2022-23 to achieve the required carbon and financial impact savings.

Capacity for Homelessness has been a concern due to officer retention, however additional expertise was brought in for an interim period. Recruitment has concluded to ensure delivery of the Homelessness Reduction Act, and a T24 review will be planned to ensure adequate resources in place.

Lea Fields Crematorium operated throughout Covid, albeit with restrictions. The Crematorium performed more services than expected in year one and two, even helping Boston Crematorium when that facility suffered fire damage. A revised Business Plan will be delivered to members later in 2022.

Communities at risk has received a substantial assurance with minor actions for 22-23 and new reporting against corporate plan measures.

Planning enforcement & Regulatory Service and External H &S continue to be impacted by Covid19, or require attention for separate reasons.

Control of service delivery has remained robust, there is a level of risk around Covid19 and ongoing lack of resilience within the service due to staffing issues, with reliance placed on the use of agency staff. Some service areas are experiencing, capacity issues and the ability to recruit and deliver external health and safety function has been impacted by lack of qualified and competent alongside the increased demand from the changes during Covid19. Food standards agency has set expectations to return to business as usual. Our approach to recruitment has been reviewed to secure staff in developmental roles and from further afield to

increase capacity. Planning enforcement has seen an increased level of demand and a policy review will be undertaken early in 2022 to ensure appropriate response to delivery.

Property and estate management, removed any further spend on capital programme. Government PWLB has stopped borrowing to invest and changes also prohibit purchase outside of the district.

Building Control has performed well in year, with income above expectations. In line with the national picture the team are short of surveyors, are quite reliant on agency staff and hence, lack resilience. There is an ongoing project with neighbouring authorities, to find a more sustainable model.

Capita review of capacity and functioning of development management service area feeding into development of new structure and capacity framework for implementation from April 22. T24 review complete and recommendations for new system being developed for implementation late 22/23.

The council has reduced its carbon emissions by over a third in the last ten years. It has recently published its plan which runs from 2021-2026. The council worked closely with the Carbon Trust to re-calculate the council's carbon emissions and to identify key areas to focus on to reduce further.

The Carbon Management Plan is incorporated into the council's overall Sustainability, Climate Change and Environment Strategy action plan. The newly formed Corporate Policy and Strategy Team are responsible for the implementation and monitoring of both the strategy and action plan, progress is overseen by Members and Officers, as part of established working groups and will report annually.

A new community broadband strategy will be developed with adoption due 22/23. The Executive business plan includes a continuation of resource for this technical role.

## Key Messages

Community Services covers a range of community based business as usual activity including support to communities, parish/town council liaison, engagement and voluntary sector work. The service has continued to support pandemic recovery activity and winter pressure funding through the Household Support Fund.

# Key Messages

## Governance

**Objectives** – This section includes areas such as corporate governance, risk management, partnerships, information governance, procurement and contract management, Human Resources, project management and Member and Democratic Services.

year including fleet maintenance, fleet purchase and the Levelling Up Fund projects.

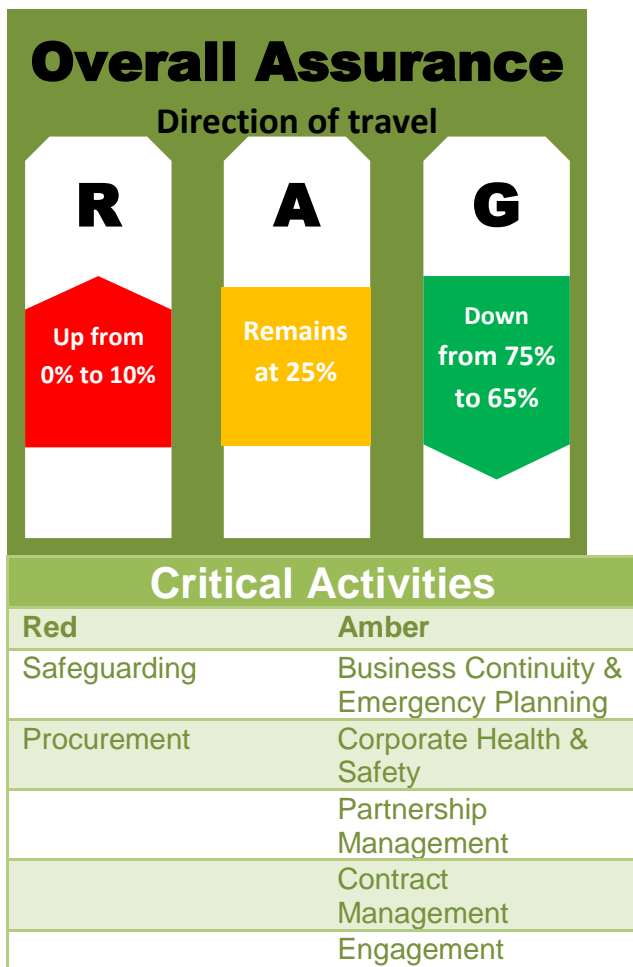
Business Continuity and Emergency Planning have been severely tested in the last couple of years. The updated Emergency Plan was received by Members and a comprehensive training programme is in delivery for both Officers and Members. Management Team also signed off a second emergencies schedule.

Work during the pandemic has been focused on supporting teams and staff to work safely with new working arrangements being the focus of attention. However, focus for the Health and Safety function is now on supporting teams to ensure robust compliance with health and safety standards are in place.

A review of partnerships is being undertaken in 2022, and management team review key stakeholders as part of their development days.

Contract management in general is working well, however there is a need to deliver training to a number of colleagues. Also a new contract management module will be rolled out as part of the OneCouncil finance system.

Engagement was highlighted as Amber due to lack of officer resilience, however additional training is underway to improve resilience.



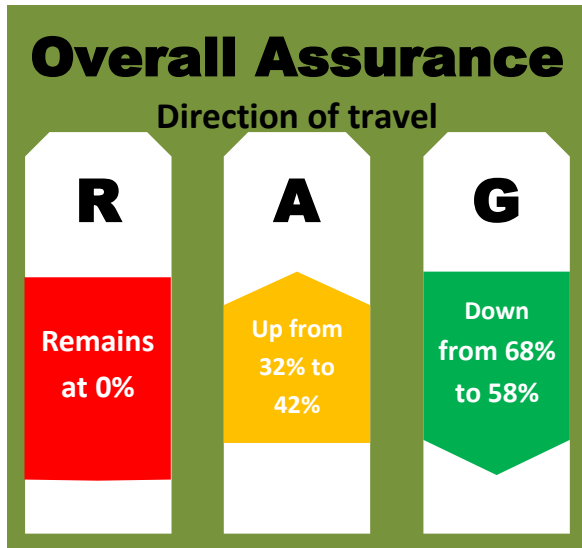
An internal working group has been formed to oversee a review of Safeguarding which will inform future policy development, however robust arrangements are in place, this area is likely to form part of the audit plan for 23/24.

A review of Procurement is underway so Officers can understand how a more sustainable model can be put in place. There are a number of high profile procurement processes to be delivered in the coming

# Key Messages

## Resources

**Objectives** – This aspect relates to the functions that support the running of the Council and ensure compliance with policies and set procedures



Critical Activities
Amber
Council Tax
Housing Benefits and Council Tax Support
NNDR
Accounts Receivable
VAT
Financial Resilience
Insurance

Council Tax, Housing Benefits and Council Tax Support and NNDR. Again, the impact of the pandemic continues to be evident across this aspect of the Council’s functions. These include arrangements overseeing Council Tax, National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR), and Housing Benefits although these have continued to perform strongly over the last 12 months.

Despite continued additional demand placed on Housing Benefits and Council Tax Support, coupled with some capacity issues to administer the Test & Trace support payment, and increased volumes of changes of circumstance due to Covid19 ongoing changes, the service

has continued to perform well. Similarly counter-fraud arrangements remain robust.

Areas to address, that have been rated as ‘amber’ in nature include Council Tax, where collection rates and the capacity within the service have been affected by Covid19.

Administration of National Non-Domestic Rates (NNDR) continues to be undertaken by LiNK via a contract with greater emphasis is required on managing key aspects of the contract through monthly liaison meetings and performance reporting with benchmarking across the Districts.

There continue to be no issues concerning the process of income collection and receipting, a more supportive approach to debtors remains however with the virtual court arrangement now in place this has a small positive impact on recovery rates. Collection rates will also be impacted by the central change due to the reduction of £20 per week for Universal Credit claimants putting pressure on household incomes and ability to pay. Single Person Discount review will be moving to a continuous review across the county during 22/23.

Accounts Receivable the One Council finance system is critical to sundry debtors as this is where all invoices are raised and collection enforced. It is also essential in the delivery of payment to all accounts and refunds for Council Tax and NNDR, system due to go live in February 2022.

VAT appointed a Principal Accountant for this area, ensuring training across officer to ensure resilience.

Developed Financial Resilience model with MTFP, ratios included, routine reporting. Review of earmarked reserves by G&A. this was highlighted as amber due to the long term risk of the unknown. Significant reserves in place and efficiencies made, however extra demand on services could counteract the efficiencies that have been achieved.

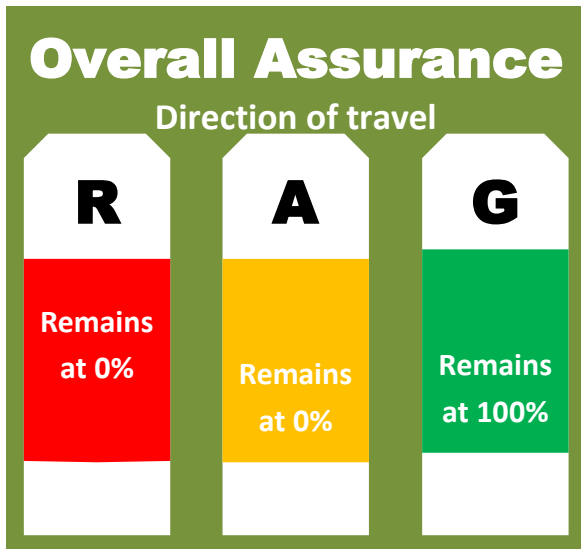
## Key Messages

Insurance more officer resilience in place for oversight of insurance, also administrative support in place, training plan in place.

# Key Messages

## ICT

**Objectives** – The ICT aspect of the report focuses on governance arrangements within the service, the infrastructure, day to day operations, projects, compliance and applications and systems. All aspects have been rated 'green' in nature and are therefore deemed to be performing well



Delivery against 10 year infrastructure development plan ensure the timely implementation of the succession plan for the Data Protection Officer and ensure sufficient support is provided to the new incumbent.

The ICT aspect of the report focuses on governance arrangements within the service, the infrastructure, day to day operations, projects, compliance and applications and systems.

All aspects of the ICT Service have operated effectively over the last year. This has been critical in enabling the Council to function during the pandemic. It has enabled the continued requirement for staff to work from home/remotely, to also support a small number to return to the office each day, enabled Council and other work related meetings to be held

virtually and in person securely and addressed the home and workplace ICT equipment needs.

An important aspect of the service's work has been ensuring that the security of data and information remains a key priority; particularly with regard to the current circumstances that staff are working under. Staff and Members alike are regularly reminded of this and support with practical advice.

The shared ICT Partnership with North Kesteven District Council continues to operate well. Work is progressing against the 10 year infrastructure development plan with the ICT Board and ICT Partnership Board retaining oversight.

The Council received the findings of an audit into Cyber Security during 2020. This provided substantial assurance on such matters, commenting that the arrangements for managing Cyber Security risk are good, particularly at an operational level. The recent Network Security Audit report January 2022 also provided substantial assurance for the new network infrastructure and upgrade to data centre equipment. This provides assurance of core equipment installed across two data centres for resilience; improved security to restrict where connections can be made from and improved monitoring and alerting through a centralised logging system. External assurance through a support contract which provides expertise for active monitoring and support of any high impact issues.

ICT security systems and processes in place include PSN accreditation, up to date infrastructure and back-up arrangements, BCP and policies for ICT usage & information security. Training and staff awareness are re-enforced especially for home working and hybrid arrangements.

Two key systems have been procured for implementation. A new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System and an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. These are

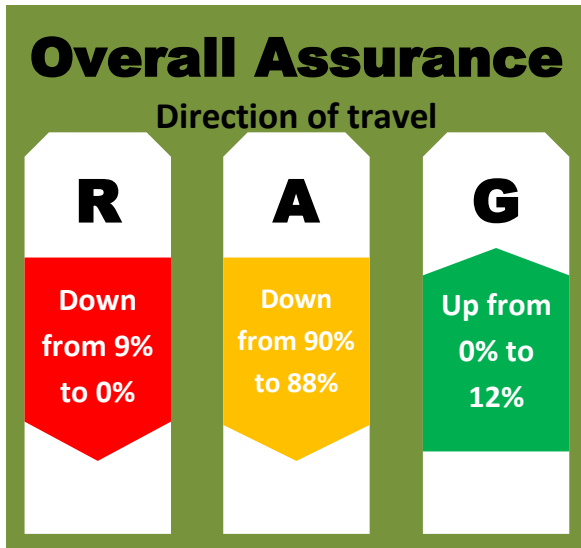
## Key Messages

major investments for the Council, intended to improve service delivery and increase efficiency. Roll-out and implementation is planned over the next few years so a keen eye will be kept on the delivery of

# Key Messages

## Emerging Risks

**Objectives** – It is important all managers undertake effective risk management and attempt to minimise the impact of any risks should they materialise. Looking ahead and horizon scanning to identify any emerging risks is a pre-requisite and it is encouraging that this activity is undertaken across the Council.



Critical Activities
<b>Amber</b>
Delivery of the Levelling Up Fund Programme
Main Office repurposing
Food Waste Collection
Operational Resilience
Housing related support Contract
Covid 19 Impact & Recovery – Managing a remote workforce
Covid 19 Impact & Recovery – impact on statutory compliance
Covid 19 Impact & Recovery – Staffing and future working

Approved governance structure in place for the Levelling Up Fund, overseen by Portfolio Board and business case sign off November 21. Programme risks managed at board level and intervention risks at project level. Newly established area therefore assessed as Amber.

Main office repurposing, a project group is working on considering options for future ways

of working and the office utilisation will be considered as part of this work.

Introduction of separate paper/card and food waste collections are an objective of the Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy. Separate paper and card collections will commence in West Lindsey from April 2022.

The council continues to work hard to sustain and improve its Emergency Planning and Business Continuity plans. In recent months it has further improved its relationship with, and support from the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum. An audit is underway to consider the council’s ability to maintain services during an emergency, not yet complete but no major issues have been raised.

A key area of focus during the pandemic has been on managing a majority remote workforce, at the start of the pandemic the council already had the infrastructure in place for staff to work remotely, with ICT enabling. 3 staff surveys during this time have provided some assurance that our staff have coped well with the situation.

Covid 19 – statutory compliance marked as amber due to a risk that staff and financial resource shortages could be a trigger for failing to meet statutory requirements.

Covid 19 – staffing & future working, work has been undertaken to ensure staff welfare has been considered and addresses, ongoing support in place through EAP, management support and H&S support. Sickness levels are monitored and within target levels. Internal working group considering new ways of working.



# Key Messages

## Key Projects

**Objectives** – During the Combined Assurance mapping exercise, project management was deemed to be working effectively across the Council.

Test and Trace has continued to be managed by the Benefits team in addition to usual service delivery. With the legal duty to isolate ending on 24 Feb 2022 test and trace support payments no longer available from that date.

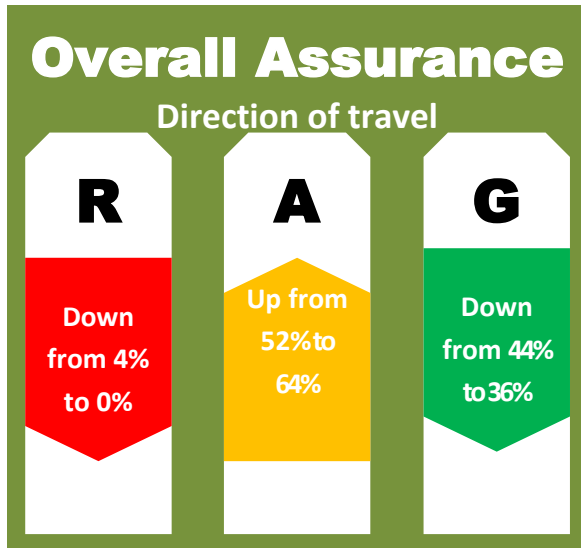
The development of the Garden of Remembrance at Lea Field Crematorium has suffered considerable delays, but is now in the final snagging stages.

The Out of Hours phone service is out-sourced to Serco. There have been a small number of low level service failures which are being resolved through contract management discussions. A project looking at future delivery of this service was put on hold by Commercial Board due to the low level of risk and low value of the contract, so resources could focus on the high level projects.

Recent progress with implementation of the Customer Relationship Management system has been strong, the system is starting to be rolled out in Operational Services where there are some real efficiencies and a much improved feedback methodology for our customers.

A new five year Income Management contract has been implemented which will deliver improved processes for our customers. Work is now starting on procuring a replacement telephony system, the current contract ends in early 2023.

Land Charges was an area that had experienced fluctuations in performance over previous years. This has now improved significantly with long standing improvements as a result of a number of sustained interventions and focused attention. The team have also been fully engaged in a service redesign, new system implementation, digitising all manual records, launching a portal for customer self-service and now working to the national initiative of transferring Local Land Charges category 1's



Critical Activities
<b>Amber</b>
Test and Trace
Lea Fields Crematorium – Creation of Strewing area
Customer Services – Out of Hours provision
Customer Relationship Management (CRM) System
Replacement of key Customer Services systems – Telephony and Income Management
Local Land Charges Service – transfer to HM Land Registry March 2022
Enterprise Resource Planning System (ERP)
5/7 Market Place refurbishment
Carbon Reduction/Energy Saving Projects
Growth & Regeneration Projects
Change 4 Lincs
RAF Scampton Community
Gainsborough Local Access Programme
Flood Management
Together 24

## Key Messages

to Her Majesty's Land Registry which is on track to go live from Q1 2022.

The financial services element of the ERP OneFinance has now gone live, with key control testing to be undertaken as part of the audit plan to inform opinion on financial controls.

The responsibility to facilitate the delivery of the carbon reduction and energy saving projects sits with the newly formed Corporate Policy and Strategy team and is overseen by both Member and Officer working groups. The review of existing projects and scoping of new, in line with the adopted action plan is underway. A key priority is to ensure that all identified projects are prioritised and integrated into strategic and operational plans across the organisation.

The portfolio of Growth and Regeneration projects being delivered by the council with support from partners and external funders is monitored internally through Land Property and Growth with external requirements for monitoring being met by individual projects. Feeds into Portfolio Board, risks are managed at a project and programme level reviewed at Land Property and Growth Board.

The Change 4 Lincs partnership has experienced some staffing and recruitment issues. It is a rough sleeper project supported by Government funding. The increase of Government funding to a 3 year funding period should provide more job security and mitigate the risks in terms of recruitment.

RAF Scampton normalisation strategy is due to be created 2022 setting out actions to support the community during de-commissioning phase. Working group meetings and partnership meetings with key stakeholders taking place.

Gainsborough Local Access delivery continues, the enterprise development began early 2022. Regular board meetings take place and various developments setting our programme delivery, aims and monitoring process. This is an external programme supported by the council.

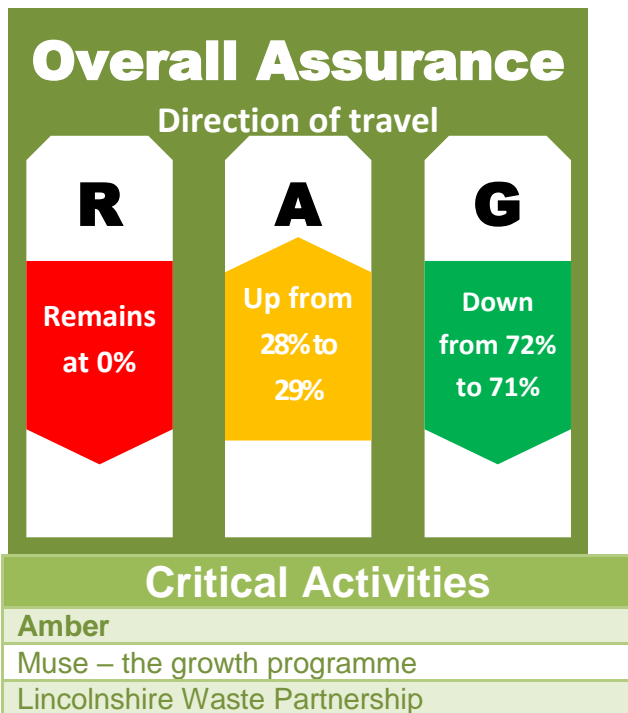
Flooding is increasingly becoming an issue with residents and Members, the Council has responsibilities regarding flood prevention, enforcement and operational response. There is a current initiative to co-ordinate resources internally and influence other flood management organisations to fully protect West Lindsey residents. A report will be heard by Members in February.

The Together 24 programme continues and has achieved some positive outcomes. The project team are taking time to review the programme at an awayday and will reformulate the workplan based on resource availability. It is reassuring that a recent audit gave the programme high assurance.

# Key Messages

## Key Partnerships

**Objectives** – The Council recognises that effective partnership working is key to the achievement of many of its goals and desired outcomes. In that regard it is essential that any partnerships entered into, or are currently in operation, deliver and their on-going relevance and effectiveness are continually evaluated.



There is an ongoing relationship maintained with MUSE and bi-annual review of potential projects that could be delivered through the agreement, this is considered by Land Property and Growth Board.

Strategically, progress continues to be made towards Lincolnshire Waste Partnership achieving its objectives, confirmation of the demands of the Environment Bill will likely place further demands on services.