Northern Lincolnshire Business Connect

Annual Report 2019/20- Addendum

Introduction

This addendum to Shared Services Annual Report 2019/20 provides an on how the shared service teams have responded to covid-19 and an update any significant service updated which has occurred to date in 2020/21 in each of the shared teams.

Audit and Assurance

Audit and Assurance have responded well to Covid-19 both by continuing to provide its services to external and internal customers,   and by providing support to the councils' overall response to the pandemic including:

- Ensuring that the insurance service responded efficiently and effectively to customer requirements with improved performance
- Maintaining the delivery of the audit plan, but at the same time re-prioritising the audit programme to focus on those areas impacted by Covid-19
- Introducing the council tax single person data matching exercise which is anticipated to increase the council tax base at each council by £100k
- Providing assurance and advice to the councils in relation to the design and operation of controls relating to new processes introduced due to covid-19, such as new government grants, stock control around PPE and the shielding hubs and national guidance on procurement

Finance

Finance has accelerated its migration to a more digital based service delivery and dealt with the challenges that Covid has brought. The service's achievements include:-

- Achieved unqualified opinions from external audit on Value for Money and the Accounts for both councils. In common with most council's accounts our external auditors have included an Emphasis of Matter paragraph in their opinions on both sets of accounts highlighting the uncertainties around the value of council and pension fund assets.

- Restarted the Systems implementation project utilising various applications to undertake work collaboratively and undertake meetings, training and workshops remotely.

- Developed processes for making payments to businesses and individuals in need under the various Government Covid grant schemes. This involved working with colleagues from amongst others, Audit and Assurance, Local Taxation and Benefits and Economic Development

- Transitioned to a new operating model for the Finance Service desks and is in the process of transitioning Treasury Management.

Health and Safety

At NELC the Safety team provided support to the organisation by physically visiting sites and carrying out COVID-19 Secure checks. This entailed putting up posters,

placement of cleaning stations and use of social distancing markings (tape). The safety team have continued to develop safe systems of work, risk assessments and guidance for each service, enabling them to adapt to new guidance. In addition each of the maintained schools was visited twice to offer advice and to help the head teachers to carry out risk assessments and adapt the classroom. The Occupational Health and Safety Manager has supported all services but specifically the social care service, to develop safe systems of work and risk assessments.

At NLC the team has carried out COVID-19 secure checks of each building and have helped each service to mark out one way routes, social distancing and review local practise. They have supported the schools network by carrying out COVID-19 checks as part of a planned rota and when the schools needed specific help. The team have attended key meetings to recommend and sign off COVID-19 secure documents and worked with senior leadership to ensure this was done in a timely way. They have assessed large public spaces including the Scunthorpe Market and worked with the corporate landlord to ensure that it is COVID-19 secure and compliant with statutory obligations

ICT

ICT initiatives were successfully introduced that enabled widespread virtual/agile working at both councils within a very short space in time, testament to correct strategic decisions made previously in terms of MS-Teams investment, seamless VPN technology and adopting a cloud first strategy. The implementation of M365 products has put each Council in a good position so far, and the implementation and integration the full product suite will continue, building around cloud-first principles.

The pandemic and organisational- homeworking has shown just how technology ca enable working in an agile manner- Each Council will be assessing what the future working practice will look like, and our approach to technology will need to make sure it can support and enable that in the best way possible.

Initiatives have included:

- **NELC Always on VPN** – Successful migration from Cisco AnyConnect to Microsoft's AoVPN enabling working from home seamlessly, with device authentication as in the office

- **Exchange Cloud Migration** – Rapid migration to the cloud for all NELC Microsoft Exchange (email/calendar/etc.) pushed through to remove bottlenecks and improve performance and resilience. NLC Exchange migration is also underway.

- **NELC 'P' Drive Cloud Migration** – Local datastores migrated to Microsoft 'OneDrive' to fit in with Cloud first strategy

- **NLC M365 Implementation –** Continued development and implementation of MS tools – MS Edge as the default browser, OneDrive, Forms, MS Teams telephony planning.

- **GovRoam Migration** – GovRoam (Connectivity from partner organisation buildings) provider switched from Doncaster Royal Infirmary to NyNet (North Yorkshire County Council)

- **ICT Drop-ins:** Hugely successful pre-pandemic, however support has moved to the traditional approaches of online / solution centre supported by local offers of equipment swap / provision based out of Civic Offices at Cleethorpes and Church Square House in Scunthorpe. This has been supplemented by pro-active communication of ICT Changes and local MS-Teams groups set up for homeworking / help through a community of practice.

Between April 2020 and end-November 2021 there over 22.5k requests for ICT support. These requests include the provision of new hardware, such as agile devices and resolution to technical faults. These requests are part of the business-as-usual activity and do not include other projects carried out, or anything handled through MS-Teams channels. Since April 2020, all key IT systems (Inc. core data/voice infrastructure, websites and social care) remained accessible and within availability targets

Further activities for 2020/21 include:

- **Storage Area Network (SAN) replacement** – The current shared SAN is becoming end-of-life (unsupported) and will need a support package / replacement implementing at each Council.

- **NELC – Mobile Phone MDM Transition** – ENLC has a need to migrate from their existing 'Sophos' Mobile Device Manger (MDM) to Microsoft's 'InTune' that is part of the Microsoft license that is in place – this will enable access mobile access to email, calendars, MS-Teams, OneDrive, MS-Office products (from the cloud)

Local Taxation and Benefits

In response to the Covid 19 outbreak, the service has demonstrated excellent business continuity and service wide agility to adjust and support local businesses and residents, as well as the workforce.

- Covid 19 recovery plans which were developed and implemented at the outset of the pandemic around collection of money, customer welfare support, service delivery and staff welfare and working practices have been adhered to and updated accordingly throughout the year.

- The service continues to work in collaboration with economic development teams as part of the Covid-19 response around Business Grants. This has encompassed two national lockdown grants as well as local lockdown grants, pub grants and several discretionary grant schemes.

- The Business Rates team also continue to award Covid 19 related reliefs to qualifying customer accounts.

- The service continues to work to develop supportive strategies to help residents who are struggling financially due to Covid 19. This has included additional payments of up to £150 for working age LCTSS customers.

- Flexible and robust collection and recovery procedures have been employed throughout the year, facilitating amended Council Tax instalment plans to assist residents experiencing financial difficulties.

- In April and May no reminder notices were issued for non-payment of Council Tax or NNDR and a 'soft' reminder was then introduced from June until October, when a return to 'standard' procedures was initiated.

- The service has taken on responsibility for the administration and delivery of the Track and Trace Self-Isolation payments, which were introduced in late September.

Next Steps

The shared service arrangements are continually evolving. Future configuration will be dependent on any opportunities which become available to the shared services. The shared services will also continue to look to the use of digital technologies to deliver additional capacity and resilience.