

# **Annual Report 2019/20**

## **Report of Councillor Ross Henley – Corporate Resources**

### **Governance and Elections Team**

It was an extremely busy year for the team, with District, Town and Parish Council elections in May, followed by Police and Crime Commissioner Elections and a further two by-elections later in the year and the Creech St Michael neighbourhood plan referendum.

Following on from the District elections, there has been a significant level of support from the governance team in bringing new councillors up to speed with how the Council works and introducing new IT, equipment into the committee rooms and inducting all councillors into the new council.

### **Finance**

It has been another challenging year for the council in terms of balancing its budget, with decreasing levels of income from the government and increases in demand on many service areas. However the Executive was able to approve the Financial Strategy for 2020/21 to 2022/23 in September.

Furthermore, the Executive presented its proposed revenue and capital budgets for 2020/21 to Full Council on 19<sup>th</sup> February.

It was extremely pleasing and positive to present a balanced budget position, in the face of ongoing financial challenges and uncertainty for this council and indeed the local government sector as a whole.

### **Customer Services**

Following transformation, the Customer Services team was under-staffed and trying to deal with significant demand from our customers, using new IT and systems. As a result, performance in April was particularly poor with an abandonment rate of 41% for the month and calls taking nearly 4 minutes to answer. We are pleased that through the focus of this team, we have been able to really improve our performance and bring our call abandonment rate to well under 10% and our average response time to around a minute.

The team has received over 170,000 calls since the start of April and over 32,000 emails and firmstep tasks which they have triaged within one working day.

### **Deane Helpline**

We have achieved accreditation under the TSA's new Code of Practice and recognised as a centre of excellence and have also successfully tendered to retain the Aster Homes monitoring contract and Alliance Group Alarm Monitoring contract.

Since April we have handled 290k calls and maintained a consistent 94% of calls answered within 60 seconds with no more than 1% abandonment rate

## **Revenues and Income**

The Revenues function is responsible for the billing & collection of £99m Council Tax and £60m Business Rates which includes assessing entitlement to discounts, exemptions and reliefs. Prompt and accurate billing is critical to minimising debt and maximising income. Collection rates remain high and on target for both Council Tax & Business Rates. Our processing times have improved drastically too. Following transformation we had significant backlogs and were processing Business Rates and Council Tax refunds and direct debits in three weeks. We have now brought this down to three days.

We have hit the collection target for miscellaneous income for this year and are now introducing paperless direct debits for all fund types

Our performance in paying supplier invoices within our payment terms has significantly improved from the start of the year and is now at 94%, just short of our target of 95%.

We have recently sent out bills for all council tax, business rates and Housing rents for 2020/21. This is a significant undertaking and involves sending out tens of thousands of bills.

## **HR**

We are looking to put in place new policies that will improve our recruitment and working practices. The HR and People team are developing a neurodiversity policy with a focus on supporting customers and employees and to help provide guidance on recruitment. This policy will raise awareness and support for people with a range of conditions including autism, ADHD, dyslexia etc. I am proud of all the work that Shari Hallet and the team are doing on this ground-breaking project and also for the support I am receiving from Verity Chester from the Hertfordshire NHS Trust, research associate and network manager radiant who is helping me promote these positive changes and advising me on this subject.

A new Neo-natal policy is also in development so that the Council is able to better support parents who have premature babies.