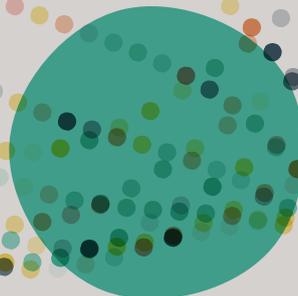


# Annual Delivery Report

| 2021



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## **Introduction**

In December 2017 the County Council agreed a four-year Strategic Plan and Outcomes Framework to 2022. The Plan focused on the things that will make life better for people in Leicestershire. We also developed a shared vision across the Council of what we want people to experience in their daily lives. The vision and outcomes were aspirational, outlining the end results we wanted to see for the people of Leicestershire.

In July 2020 the Council agreed an updated Strategic Plan to 2022 to reflect its declaration of a climate emergency. This Plan strengthened our commitment to protect the environment and tackle climate change. The five strategic outcomes in the Plan are outlined below.

### **Strategic Outcomes (2018-2022)**

- **Strong Economy** - *Leicestershire's economic prosperity benefits everyone and supports resilient, clean growth.*
- **Affordable and Quality Homes** - *Leicestershire has a choice of quality, sustainable homes that people can afford.*
- **Wellbeing and Opportunity** – *that the people of Leicestershire live in a healthy environment and have the opportunities and support they need to take control of their health and wellbeing.*
- **Keeping People Safe** – *that people in Leicestershire are safe and protected from harm; and*
- **Great Communities** – *that Leicestershire communities are thriving and integrated places where people help and support each other and take pride in their local area.*

### **Draft Strategic Outcomes (2022 to 2026)**

Work has progressed, following the County Council election in May 2021, on an updated vision and outcomes for the Council. The new draft Plan, covering 2022-2026, sets out the Council's approach to meeting the many challenges now emerging post-Covid-19 and to support the wider levelling up agenda. It is being consulted on from late 2021 to early 2022.

**Clean, Green Future:** *People act now with urgency to protect and enhance the environment and meet the challenges of climate change*

**Great Communities:** *Leicestershire has welcoming and inclusive communities in which people take responsibility for their local areas and support each other*

**Strong Economy, Transport and Infrastructure:** *The local economy is flourishing with resilient, clean growth delivering increased prosperity for all*

**Keeping People Safe and Well:** *People are safe and well, living active, independent, and fulfilling lives in a healthy environment*

***Improving Opportunities:*** *Everyone, regardless of their background or personal characteristics, has access to the opportunities they need to aim high and achieve their aspirations*

In addition, we have approved a separate Recovery Strategy with two key aims; to aid short-term recovery of services following lockdown, and also to support services to move to better ways of working and new efficient models of delivery in the long term. As part of the Recovery Strategy, it was noted that given the significant impact of Covid-19 there would need to be a review of the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy as well as the new and updated Strategic Plan 2022-26.

The Council is here to make a positive difference to the lives of Leicestershire people. We want Leicestershire's economic prosperity to support clean growth that creates the best life chances for all. That Leicestershire is a place where people are well and safe, living in a healthy environment as part of great communities where people enjoy life and work together to enhance their local area. That there is a good supply of quality, sustainable homes that provide maximum independence and are affordable to own and run. We aim to be a carbon neutral organisation by 2030, use natural resources wisely and contribute to the recovery of nature. We are a green council and as a key place leader we will work with our partners to deliver our ambitious environmental goals.

The global coronavirus pandemic which took off in early 2020 has further highlighted the vital role that we play in keeping people safe, particularly vulnerable people, supporting public health and wellbeing and working closely with communities and partner agencies to support communities. The aftermath of the various coronavirus waves has also underlined the importance of our efforts to help business and rebuild a strong and sustainable economy.

The last 18 months has provided the biggest challenge of a lifetime and the challenge continues. The Council has supported the efforts in many ways including ensuring that thousands of volunteers and communities needing help were brought together, distributing a communities fund to help sustain local community groups, supporting people on the Government's shielded list, providing daily support to care homes, keeping vulnerable children safe, advising and supporting schools and working to ensure that businesses were supported to comply with Covid-19 guidance and regulation.

Indeed, in 2020, the Communities Secretary praised the "absolutely heroic job" done by councils during the crisis, saying they had played a central role. In September 2020 the Prime Minister paid tribute 'to everybody in local authorities who had been the unsung heroes of our fight against the pandemic'.

This Annual Delivery Report summarises the work that the Council has undertaken over the last 12 months to both progress its priorities, but also to continue to manage the response to and emerging impact of this once in a generation public health and economic crisis.

A separate and related Performance Compendium sets out our current comparative performance data using a wide range of performance measures. The compendium also includes information on the Council's low funding position, impact that the virus has had in terms of the service pressures and risks now faced and the effect this is likely to have on our finances, and our campaign for Fairer Funding. Soaring demand for services plus uncertainty over the national economy and funding means that the Council is needing to look at all options to respond.

## **Financial Context, Challenges and Fair Funding Campaign**

Delivering on priority outcomes and ambitions for Leicestershire continues to be hampered by low funding levels, and the coronavirus pandemic has added significantly to the service and financial challenges faced. The Performance Compendium sets out our comparative low funding position and how this translates into low funding for local services. The Council now faces a critical financial scenario. Over the medium term the combination of an ageing and growing population and reduced income means there is a need to continue to save money. The Council has already saved £223m since 2010 with a further £79m to save by 2024/25.

The coronavirus impact on the wider economy and council income and expenditure has added to the seriousness of the council's financial position and threatens the continued provision of services and delivery of outcomes. Over the last year the coronavirus pandemic has further escalated the crisis in local government finance with many authorities warning of significant job losses, further major budget reductions and formal notices of the inability to balance budgets.

**Covid-19 Impact** - our previous four-year financial plan set out the need for £79m savings. £30m of detailed savings have been set out and a plan to reduce SEND costs by £26m leaves a gap of £23m. Further savings are under development and others will need to be identified. However, the longer-term financial impact of the pandemic, increasing demographic growth and cost pressures and possibly a continuation of austerity-driven cuts to Government funding could see the budget gap grow significantly.

The financial position faced by the County Council is extremely serious and challenging. This is a particularly difficult situation for a low-funded authority such as Leicestershire as room for further savings is limited. The financial difficulties experienced pre-Covid, relating to demand for services, have not gone away and the mitigations have been disrupted by the crisis. Additional financial pressures are expected to continue after the current financial year due to reduced council tax and business rates income, a continuation of costs to maintain infection control and the economic impact upon suppliers who may request further support, for example bus operators.

Based on current information, it is very unlikely that the County Council, when it rolls forward the MTFs into 2025/26, will be able to identify sufficient savings to bridge the funding gap in the later years. To balance the budget without a significant impact on services will require major efficiency initiatives and a successful outcome to the fair funding campaign. The financial situation also requires the Government to deal with the structural national issues such as funding for social care and the relentless growth of demand for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services. The

Council has already made savings of £223m (excluding DSG), to the end of 2020/21. Therefore, the identification of new savings will be very challenging and is likely to require much more radical service transformation. Further efficiency/productivity targets for services will drive the focus for identifying where additional savings can be delivered. Inevitably, though, further service reductions will be needed to ensure the Council can operate within the increasingly tight budget envelope.

**Fair Funding** – given low comparative funding and the financial crisis it is vital the Council is given a fair share of overall national resources for local government services. A number of low-funded councils have got behind the call for fairer funding from the Government. The County Council's Network has also backed the campaign for reform.

The Council report, looking at the issue of Fair Funding, showed that if we were funded at the same level as Kensington and Chelsea, we would be £366m a year better off or £135m compared to Cumbria. The current system of funding is broken, and we need a new approach which matches funding with need, based on a smaller number of cost drivers, which produce a fairer distribution of resources.

With social care pressures rising, a new fair system matching funding with need is essential. We've drawn up a new model which would unlock millions of pounds for under-funded councils, including £132m for Lincolnshire and £29m for Kent. The funding crisis is leading councils to service and financial failure. Our proposed new model allocates money using factors such as the number of older people, the length of roads travelled by HGVs and the number of school-age children.

National funding reform remains key to future plans. Our campaigning secured a Government review and it is very disappointing the Government has delayed plans to implement a new model. We are continuing to do all that we can to shape a new funding formula and get a better deal for residents. A move to a fairer funding model is an urgent requirement to help tackle the Council's financial challenges.

## **A Strong Economy**

The strong economy outcome focuses on ensuring that there is a thriving, balanced and inclusive economy in Leicestershire that manages resources sustainably, and provides employment, business opportunities and growth that works for everyone. Leicestershire remains well placed to become a centre for jobs in science, technology, and engineering. Ensuring access to the latest digital infrastructure and the development of skills will support uptake of digital technologies, enabling businesses to improve productivity and remain competitive in future markets.

### **Impact of Covid-19**

The impact of Covid-19 on the tourism, hospitality, retail, creative and other sectors has been significant. However, the diversity of the local economy has provided some resilience, and there have been fewer job losses compared to the national average.

As elsewhere, the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted workers on low pay and facing job insecurity the most. 117,000 jobs were classified as 'vulnerable' due to Covid-19, of which 58,000 are in hospitality, tourism and retail and 30,000 are in manufacturing. Local business intelligence gathered at the start of 2021 has shown there was a contraction in job vacancies and hiring, with young people particularly affected by a reduction in entry level positions and places on apprenticeships. This has led to further inequalities and concentrations of disadvantage and has increased the future risk of unemployment and job insecurity facing lower skilled residents and workers. However, it should be noted that more recent evidence shows that businesses are reporting recruitment difficulties with job vacancies at a high.

Covid-19 has also impacted business continuity, resilience, supply chains, and market demand. The capacity and capability of many SMEs has been significantly stretched in terms of their resilience and financial health. The pace of acceleration in the digital transformation of businesses, public services, and skills has meant that changes occurred in months that would otherwise have taken years. Rural areas have also been significantly impacted, with disruptions to both harvesting and the demand for agricultural produce, as well as supply chain disruptions in the food and drink sector. Access to the countryside has also played a significant role during the Covid-19 lockdowns and curtailment of international travel and tourism. Business Intelligence through the Business Tracker Survey suggests businesses are relatively optimistic and confident about the future.

Extending superfast broadband to hard-to-reach rural areas, attracting more visitors to the area and building a low-carbon and sustainable economy are part of our recovery plans, as well as boosting local tourism by supporting future campaigns including the uncover the story campaign, designed to attract visitors and potential new businesses.

**Economic Growth Strategy** - in June 2021 the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) began consulting on a new draft Economic Growth Strategy, which details a path out of the challenges posed by Covid-19 as well as offering a longer-term vision. The key aim is to use local capabilities, innovation, and skills to build a productive, innovative, and inclusive economy at the cutting edge of science and technology that supports and promotes healthy people and a sustainable planet.

The Strategy sets out ambitions, objectives, and priorities for the next ten years – it sets out the short-term measures that we need to undertake to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic and transition to new trading arrangements after leaving the EU. We have successfully delivered a range of transformative local and national policy initiatives, such as our Enterprise Zone sites and intend to further capitalise on initiatives such as the East Midlands Freeport.

Pre-Covid, Leicester and Leicestershire generated £24.5 billion in GVA, with 42,000 businesses and 538,000 jobs, and testament to its resilience and growth potential, we expect this to increase to £30.2 billion and 568,000 jobs by 2030. With the opportunity to create up to 60,000 new skilled jobs in the East Midlands Freeport. Alongside a reputation for a high quality of life and mixture of a dynamic city and vibrant rural towns and areas, Leicester and Leicestershire provides some of the best sites in the UK for science, technology, professional services and logistics businesses in the most central, accessible location in the UK.

**Midlands Engine** – is a coalition of local authorities and LEPs set up to help the region compete with London and the South East as well as the Northern Powerhouse. We are continuing to engage fully with, and influence, the Midlands Engine, raising the profile of the Midlands both nationally and internationally and securing increased government funding to boost economic growth. The Midlands Engine Partnership has produced a ‘Vision for Growth’ focusing on five areas of collaboration which support economic growth and prosperity across the East and West Midlands. These include: Connect the Midlands; Invest in Strategic Infrastructure; Grow International Trade and Investment; Increase Innovation and Enterprise and Shape Great Places.

### Infrastructure for Sustainable Growth

To support economic recovery and growth, people and businesses need infrastructure that provides excellent connectivity to meet their everyday needs. Building quality premises will enable firms take their first step on the ladder, and to grow. We had committed to spending £289m on roads, schools, broadband, supporting new homes and boosting the local economy, funded by one-off government grants and land and property sales. We set out our largest ever capital investment programme in vital infrastructure. However, the crisis in local government funding means we are having to revisit a number of areas moving forwards.

Leicestershire’s population is projected to rise to 860,618 by 2043 – an increase of 162,350 (23%) from 2018. Just under 200,000 new homes are set to be built in the city and county by 2050. There is a need to ensure that the growth is matched by new roads, schools, transport, and other infrastructure – which are estimated to cost £600m over the next 25 years.

Progress on infrastructure has resulted in the delivery of a range of modern science, technology and business sites – with HE, R&D and enterprise support built-in – including the Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park, MIRA Technology Park, Charnwood Campus Life Sciences Opportunity Zone, SEGRO Logistics Park, and Leicester International Gateway.

**East Midlands Freeport** – the Government has invited local partners to develop and submit outline and full business cases for the establishment of a Freeport based around East Midlands Airport in Leicestershire, the current Ratcliffe on Soar power station in Nottinghamshire and a site owned by Severn Trent close to the Toyota plant in Derbyshire. The Freeport could create up to 60,000 new skilled jobs in the region and bring significant investment to develop and drive innovation, alternative energy sources and green technology supporting SME's and large regional employers. An independently chaired interim East Midlands Freeport Board has been established to oversee the development of the business cases, involving the site landowners and operators and host local authorities. An outline business case was submitted in September 2021. The Council has taken on the key roles as lead authority and accountable body for the Freeport and in support of the interim Board has put in place the capacity and expertise to progress this initiative.

This is an exciting opportunity for the East Midlands and the Freeport provides an exceptional opportunity for the area to capitalise on our strengths in the areas of advanced manufacturing, automotive and logistics and build on emerging opportunities for green growth to create new jobs, aid the economic recovery from Covid-19 and contribute to the levelling up agenda.

**Access Group HQ** – in November 2020 the Council and Loughborough University welcomed The Access Group to its new 80,000 sq ft HQ at Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park. The Council has invested in the new office space at the University in an innovative move which will see revenue of £1.6m a year to support vital front-line services. It is believed to be the largest, single-occupier office deal in the county this century.

**Loughborough Town Deal** - in September 2019, the government invited 100 places to develop proposals for a Town Deal, as part of the £3.6 billion Towns Fund. The Towns Fund is part of the government's plan for leveling up the UK economy. In June 2021 Loughborough was successful in securing £16.9 million to deliver projects in the Town Investment Plan and the Council is working with partners in supporting the development and delivery of these projects which both support innovation and ensure benefit to the town.

**Apollo Court, Coalville** - in October 2019 a new £5.5m industrial park in Coalville, set to create 120 jobs, opened for business. Apollo Court aims to boost business in the town by supporting start-ups and firms looking to expand. A range of high-spec industrial units ranging from 1,000 to 4,500 sq. ft. were built by construction company, Willmott Dixon. The venture is part-funded by a £2.4m allocation from the Local Growth Fund, a pot of government funding awarded to the LLEP for projects that benefit the local area and economy. During its construction £437k was invested into local communities through engaging with schools and colleges and ensuring 91% of spend and 78% of staff were within 40 miles of the facility. The first business, Sella Controls Ltd, moved into the site in December 2019 with all units leased by May 2021.

**Airfield Business Park** - in March 2021 we reported on ambitious plans to boost the local economy and raise money for front line services. The £9.5m scheme would expand further the authority's property portfolio by building the next phase of development at Airfield Business Park, north of Market Harborough. The initial phase completed in December 2019 saw 12 new units filled by July 2021 and now another 27 commercial units are planned. If the scheme gets the go-ahead, construction

should begin early in 2022 with the aim of completion by early November 2023. Our portfolio of properties continues to perform well, and the intention is to continue investing in projects which not only boost the local economy, but also provide much-needed revenue.

**Leaders Farm Development** – despite proposals being approved for the £8.2m development of the Leaders Farm site near Lutterworth to make provision for a 50,000 sq. ft light industrial unit, and two drive through restaurants, due to planning issues it was decided that the light industrial/B8 units would not proceed. The site will continue to be marketed for office use and the fast-food occupiers will be submitting a planning application in the near future

**Superfast Leicestershire Broadband** – to address rural isolation and connectivity, there is a need to improve rural broadband, wi-fi and 5G connectivity, focussing on specific rural blackspots. Ensuring that Leicestershire is equipped with the latest digital technology will drive economic growth and innovation. In April it was announced that some of Leicestershire's most rural primary schools were using new, full-fibre broadband to connect teachers, students, and parents during the coronavirus lockdown. The schools, all part of Learn Academies Trust (Learn-AT), were keeping essential services running following an upgrade to full fibre gigabit capable connectivity. The improved connectivity was made possible through a grant scheme from the Department of Culture, Media, and Sport, Openreach and the Council. This was the largest broadband grant given to a single organisation in the UK. Across the county, 97% of premises now have access to high speed broadband.

**M69 Junction 2 Strategic Development Area** – in March 2020 we agreed a proposed approach to the promotion and delivery of the M69 Junction 2 Strategic Development Area. By collaborating with others, the Council can ensure that the appropriate infrastructure is provided for any development. The proposals would support delivery of growth in line with the Strategic Plan and Strategic Growth Plan.

## A Highly Skilled and Employable Workforce

Our aims include to create a resilient, adaptive workforce where all residents have access to skills and career progression. With informed choices and routes to job and skills progression, improved skills and qualifications, attainment for all and improved incomes, reduced economic exclusion and poverty.

**European Social Fund** – we have worked with key partners, including the LLEP, to help influence priorities and effective delivery of the current European Structural and Investment Fund programme. We are strategic delivery partners in a number of projects that support people to enter the labour market and upskill once in work, these include MoneyWise Plus, Work Live Leicestershire (WiLL) and The Leicester Employment Hub.

**Skills for Local Development Sites** – the Council works closely with partners to ensure that local people are able to access new job opportunities through large scale development sites. SEGRO Logistics Park East Midlands Gateway is a 700-acre site and includes the creation of a Strategic Rail Freight Interchange. An Employment and Skills Group is supporting apprenticeships and work placements on the site during the construction and end user phases. HS2 is another key development and the Council

is supporting the HS2 Skills and Supply Chain Delivery Board to make sure local people have the skills required to access future employment opportunities.

**Skills for the Future** – the Council works with the LLEP to forecast future skills needs, including considering new and growth sectors, and skill requirements emerging from advancements in technology and artificial intelligence. The role of Universities and Colleges is crucial to link business to knowledge and to local talent. Universities and colleges are integral to much of the partnership work we undertake in relation to key sectors and developments.

**Adult Learning** – funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, our Adult Learning Service (LALS) aims to engage adults and provide the learning they need to progress into work and deliver courses that support personal development and wellbeing. During 2020/21 LALS enrolled 4,110 learners to programmes, down from 6,749 the previous year. Courses, delivered in 34 venues across the county, provided targeted support to those with low skills and furthest away from the labour market. In March 2020 most activities were moved online following the closure of learning centres. Where this was not practical, tutors continued to provide other forms of remote support. To encourage those who had the opportunity during lockdown to study, a range of free online resources were uploaded and promoted through the GoLearn website. Our Family Learning teams also developed packs of resources to support parents to deliver home schooling.

**Work & Skills Leicestershire** - in June 2021 a new scheme was launched to offer support, advice and information to anyone actively seeking to secure paid employment, training or volunteering. With the pandemic having changed the working lives of so many, we launched the scheme to help residents get back on track, with help available to those seeking paid work or training for a new role. Work & Skills Leicestershire is a free one-to-one service offering support, the chance to learn new skills or to find out more about volunteering or becoming self-employed. Qualified personal advisers offer impartial and professional advice to people from all backgrounds and support people on a one-to-one basis. Everyone who signs up to the scheme can have a tailored work plan drawn up for them, including clear targets and steps to achieve their goal. Help is given with CV and letter writing skills, job searches, interview techniques and digital training, self-employment advice and business support. The Work & Skills Leicestershire team also works directly with employers who may be in the unfortunate position of making redundancies and want to support their staff to find new employment. The service can be accessed remotely through an online platform or on-site through the Work & Skills Leicestershire Employment Hubs at council and community managed libraries.

**Kickstart Scheme** - in February 2021 the Council committed to supporting the national Kickstart scheme, designed to offer young people aged 16-24 receiving universal credit and at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, a 6-month work placement. In addition, the Council agreed to extend the placements to 12 months, helping boost their chances of getting permanent work. To date 24 roles have been identified across the organisation, offering desk-based opportunities such as in finance, administration and project management and more practical roles such as surveying, park ranger, road maintenance and waste operatives.

**Apprenticeships** – the LALS apprenticeship programme delivers apprenticeship training to a number of employers, including the Council. The service is currently training 29 Council employed apprentices in roles such as administration, payroll and teaching assistant. A further 26 LCC apprentices trained by LALS have successfully completed their apprenticeship this year. In addition, the service is currently providing training for 37 apprentices working for external employers and a further 7 have successfully completed this year.

**Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme** - LALS has continued to work with Charnwood Borough Council to resettle refugees through the Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme. A range of discrete courses have been provided in a variety of locations across the county, complimented by online sessions where learners have not been able to access on site delivery for health or family reasons. These classes are designed to support families develop their language skills and have proved valuable in helping individuals access employment and become independent.

**Information, Advice and Guidance** – we have commissioned service providers to ensure that vulnerable 16 to 19-year olds are able to remain in education or find suitable employment or training. Through our Matrix accredited Adult Learning Service, adults are provided with individual support to enable them to make informed choices about their best options to find work and progress up the career ladder.

### Supporting Business to Flourish

We aim to support activities which encourage and support businesses to invest, grow and flourish in Leicestershire. It will be particularly important as the economy recovers from coronavirus that we work with partners and businesses to plan effectively for changes in trade, regulation, and workforce.

**Supporting Businesses** – we are working with the City Council, LLEP and East Midlands Chamber to ensure there is high quality and targeted business advice for local SMEs. Collectively we have secured over £5.5m European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) to provide 1-2-1 business advice, a series of workshops covering a wide range of subjects, and £2.5m for business growth grants. Work has progressed to secure further ERDF funds that will enable partners to deliver intensive and targeted business support to 2021.

The Council also provides ongoing advice to a wide range of new and existing businesses and with varying complexity through its Trading Standards service and is an active partner in the Better Business for All Programme which aims to reduce the regulatory burden on businesses. Our Business Continuity and Resilience Team supports local businesses to prepare for disruption in order to increase resilience in the event of major incidents. Additionally, the Council encourages local businesses to maximise the benefits of public sector procurement and we therefore attend and host events which promote the opportunities available.

**Digital Growth** – the Council is a partner in the Digital Growth Programme, which is delivered by the East Midlands Chamber, using ERDF funding. To date the programme has 1745 businesses registered, of which 1139 are in the county. The programme offers free webinars and 1-2-1 business support, to help businesses improve their digital skills and introduce technology to increase productivity. 214

businesses have received a grant through the programme of which 142 were in the county.

**Leicestershire Business Recovery Fund** – small businesses were given a helping hand to bounce back, through a £750,000 Leicestershire Business Recovery Fund. Applications were available for grants between £2,000 and £10,000, to ensure business recovery, through projects to help the business diversify, improve skills, or new technology or equipment. All small businesses from every sector were encouraged to apply including those from the tourism, retail, agriculture, and creative sector. The Fund received 207 applications and assisted 106 businesses with £709k of grant aid that has safeguarded 234 jobs and will support the creation of a further 94 new jobs.

**Creative Industries** – Creative Leicestershire, a Council initiative providing advice, support, and growth for creative enterprises across the area ran an online one-year professional development programme for 90 subscribers. Webinart, a one-year professional development programme connecting new and improving creative businesses with industry leaders and mentors ran from July 2020 – July 2021 with a grant from Arts Council England. It offered support in everything from financial and business growth advice, to confidence building and help with Covid-19 related concerns. Successes of the programme included creative businesses being able to pivot to survive, increasing their markets with several alumni becoming professional creative mentors.

**Rural Framework** – the Leicestershire Rural Partnership which has a membership from the public, private and voluntary sectors is currently renewing its Rural Framework which will set the priorities for the next 5 years for the work of the group. Priorities will be in-line with the Economic Growth Strategy. The Rural Partnership has overseen the successful delivery of the LEADER grant programme which has supported 44 projects with £1.5m of funding. 19 projects supported increasing farm productivity, 16 supported SME's including diversification and 6 supported rural tourism.

**Place Marketing** - our joint Place Marketing Team with the City Council delivers place marketing, inward investment, and strategic tourism services across the sub-region. A Tourism Growth Plan was agreed in 2019 which provides a framework for future sector growth by setting down key priorities, activities and projects that partners feel offer the best prospects to increase competitiveness of the destination and the wealth it can generate. One of these activities is the Business Tourism Service launched in 2020 with 50 member venues and which promotes the area as a key location for business events through trade shows and other targeted marketing activity.

**Inward Investment and Trade** – the County and City Councils work collaboratively to provide an Inward Investment service for businesses (foreign and domestic) looking to expand, locate and invest in Leicester and Leicestershire. Recent activities have focused on raising the positive profile of the sub region's investment strengths and unique selling points in key growth sectors through website, promotional brochure, key development sites map and sector propositions.

There have been successful bids to the Department for International Trade's (DIT) High Potential Opportunities programme, to promote niche opportunities to foreign investors to increase inward investment, retain investment and develop research and business collaborations. Between April 2020 and September 2021, 26 new companies

(18 in the County) have been supported to locate or expand within Leicester or Leicestershire with 978 new jobs created, of which, 708 are in the County.

**Tourism** - cultural, leisure and tourism industries generated £1.88bn for the local economy in 2019 but have been highly disrupted by the pandemic and social distancing measures. Tourism, hospitality, and retail accounted for 58,000 (50% of all) covid-19 vulnerable jobs in Leicester and Leicestershire. Prior to the pandemic there were plans in place to develop the visitor economy further by developing awareness of Leicester and Leicestershire as a destination. Now, support is needed for the sector's recovery as well as strengthening and differentiating it in the long-term.

The Tourism Advisory Board was established 4 years ago. During the pandemic it continued to champion the tourism and hospitality sector, supplying valuable sector intelligence and lobbying DCMS and Visit Britain to raise awareness of the impact of the extended local lockdown on the sector. The Board aims to raise the profile of the sector's positive contribution to the local economy, identifying key priorities for future investment and lobbying Government and local stakeholders to ensure that policies and plans are in place to support the tourism sector.

**New Tourism Campaign** – in July 2021 a major new tourism campaign launched to promote Leicester and Leicestershire as a fascinating UK destination for national and international visitors. 'Uncover the Story' developed by the County and City Councils uses a range of intriguing stories corresponding to both city and county tourism offers that promote the city and county as a compelling and distinctive destination to visitors. Inspired by the discovery of King Richard III, it features a wide range of eye-catching artwork that will feature on websites, advertising, social media channels and other platforms.

**EU Exit** – in November 2020 the Local Resilience Forum called for local businesses to enhance their preparations for EU exit at the end of the year. Businesses were asked to use the Government's tools and information to check businesses preparedness, and if further assistance was needed, local authorities and the LLEP stood ready to support. The Business Gateway Growth Hub service also ran one to one support sessions and webinars to give tailored and in-depth advice to those needing help on a weekly basis.

## **Economy – Transport**

People and businesses need infrastructure that provides excellent connectivity that meets their every-day needs. Transport infrastructure is a key enabler, providing access to opportunity and opening up sites for growth. We aim to ensure good connectivity within the county, the region and across the UK by working closely with partners, such as Midlands Connect, National Highways and Network Rail, to deliver improvements to rail services and the strategic road network. We also continue to progress delivery of our local transport priorities to help business recovery and growth, reduce congestion and emissions, allow safe travel and support more sustainable travel options.

**Midlands Connect** – we have provided input into the refresh of the Midlands Connect Strategy to ensure that it continues to provide a robust basis for securing investment in the region’s transport system. We are currently involved in a number of Midlands Connect projects that will greatly enhance people’s ability to travel efficiently and safely around and through Leicestershire in the context of much needed houses and jobs to meet the demands of the area’s growing population. These projects include provision of direct Coventry to Leicester rail services; improvements to the speed and frequency of rail services between Leicester and Birmingham; and upgrades to the A5, A42, A46 and A50 corridors.

**Transport for East Midlands (TfEM)** – through our involvement in TfEM we have set out our top priorities for transport improvements across the East Midlands including making the most of any HS2 development, securing a Midland Mainline fit for the 21st century, improving access to East Midlands Airport, the A5 Improvement Corridor and transforming East-West connectivity.

**Leicester and Leicestershire Strategic Transport Priorities (LLSTP)** – jointly developed with Leicester City Council the objective of the LLSTP is to ensure that Leicester and Leicestershire’s transport system is capable of addressing the significant challenges that we face over the coming years. In November 2020 we approved a blueprint setting out the key, long-term approach to transport priorities for the county and city for the next 30 years. The LLSTP sets out where the city and county will work together, particularly around tackling poor air quality and the effects of climate change, alongside continued support for the local economy and jobs and the delivery of new houses. Improvements in rail (such as the Midlands Connect projects) and public transport and better provision for walking and cycling schemes are among the priorities set out. The LLSTP acknowledges a drive to attract greater numbers of car users on to public transport and on to cycling and walking routes. The ambition is to continue to encourage use of the commercial bus network of electric vehicles and to increase the number of bus lanes and cycleways/pedestrian routes developed.

**Network Management Plan (NMP)** - in December 2020 we approved a refreshed NMP. The NMP describes the positive on-going work the County Council undertakes, as the local highway authority, to keep all forms of transport moving safely and efficiently on the county’s road network. This includes how we collect and use data and intelligence, how we manage planned and unplanned events, how we manage the impact of growth and how we manage network demand and encourage sustainable travel.

**Leicester and Leicestershire Rail Strategy** – developed with the City Council and LLEP it sets out rail priorities up to 2043. We have used it as a basis for working with Midlands Connect on its projects and to inform our input into the HS2 project and the wider considerations of the National Infrastructure Commission who have been asked by Government to consider an integrated package of rail improvements that would be associated with delivery of the HS2 Eastern leg. Potentially this package could include completion of the Midland Main Line electrification, which we are continuing to push for both the service improvements that it would deliver and also the carbon reduction benefits.

**Ivanhoe Line** - we are providing our support, including financial, to the Campaign for Reopening the Ivanhoe Line (CRIL) who are currently working with the Department for Transport to develop a business case to reintroduce passenger services on the line.

### Major Road Schemes Supporting Growth

The Council has a strong record of securing funding to deliver transport infrastructure to enable growth, supporting the delivery of outcomes to promote a strong economy and ensure a supply of quality and affordable homes. We will continue to work to secure vital funds to invest in homes, regeneration and infrastructure across Leicestershire. A total of £21.7m has been spent on the preparation and delivery of major projects in 2020/21, including:

**Interim Coalville Transport Strategy (ICTS)** - in September 2021 we approved the ICTS. A key element of the ICTS is the Coalville A511 Growth Corridor scheme and the importance of its delivery to the enabling of growth in the A511 corridor. It also highlights complementary highway schemes and sets out how work will be taken forward to develop proposals for improving passenger transport provision and active travel provision in the area.

**Coalville A511 Growth Corridor and A511 Major Road Network Scheme** – in March 2021 major plans to develop junction and road improvement schemes through an estimated £49m programme of work between Ashby and Coalville were considered. The Council's A511 Growth Corridor is one of seven schemes across the region put forward to a national £3.5 billion Major Roads Network (MRN) fund by Midlands Connect. The scheme proposes improvements to eight junctions along the A511, including a new link road off Bardon Road and a dual carriageway between Thornborough Road and Whitwick Road. Leicestershire is growing and needs the right infrastructure in place to manage that growth. The A511 has suffered from congestion for many years and tackling it with this scheme will also have benefits environmentally in leading to a reduction in exhaust emissions. It will also provide the opportunity, as part of a wider transport strategy for Coalville, to address public transport improvements and promote walking and cycling initiatives. Prior to submitting a Planning Application for the new link road off Bardon Road, further informal consultation will take place in Autumn 2021 to give local residents and stakeholders a further opportunity to provide comment and shape this element of the project.

**Interim Melton Mowbray Transport Strategy (IMMTS)** - in July 2021 we approved the IMMTS, which sets out a wide package of measures and further work required to help address the town's existing traffic problems, support the growth of the town and to achieve wider objectives, including environmental and health factors, such as

encouraging more walking and cycling. Among the proposals outlined in the strategy are further work to explore potential improvements to the walking and cycling network and the possibility of a 'bus hub' to support passenger transport provision; along with measures to re-classify and re-sign town roads as well as re-route lorries to encourage as much traffic as possible to use the Melton Mowbray Distributor Road.

**Melton Mowbray North and East Distributor Road** – the project to build the distributor road to the north and east of Melton Mowbray to ease congestion in the town centre and facilitate growth commenced in 2017/18. Further development of the project post approval of the planning application in May 2019 has focussed on detailed design and securing the necessary land to deliver the scheme through the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) process. The CPO and Side Roads Order (SRO) notices were submitted to the Secretary of State for confirmation in October 2020. A number of objections to the CPO and SRO were received and the Secretary of State gave notice in January 2021 of the intention to call a Public Inquiry to consider the objections. The Public Inquiry took place at the end of September 2021. Subject to the outcome of the Public Inquiry, it is anticipated on site advance works will start in 2022.

**Melton Mowbray Distributor Road South** – positive progress is being made with Homes England to secure funding via the Housing Infrastructure Fund towards the cost of this project. Project activities also include starting to engage in house design/technical services along with procuring external project planning and environmental services.

**Hinckley Junctions** - a scheme to improve two key junctions on Rugby Road, alongside a range of improvements to existing cycling and pedestrian routes in Hinckley, will begin in early 2022. Work on the £5m scheme was due to start summer 2020, however, was rescheduled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Once work commences, there will be improvements made to both the Rugby Road/Hawley Road and Rugby Road/Brookside junctions. The scheme will also implement pedestrian and cycling improvements at Granville Road, Spa Lane, London Road and Coventry Road and also proposes introducing a 'residents parking zone' and reviewing town centre parking facilities. Once delivered, the scheme will improve sustainable transport options in and out of the town with quicker and more reliable journeys and encourage more people to walk and cycle.

**Hinckley Road Improvements** - in June 2021 a project to improve road and footway condition in the Hinckley area began with work on the A47 Dodwell's Road/Normandy Way, Hinckley Bypass. Work between the A5 roundabout near McDonalds and the roundabout connecting with Roston Drive began in September 2021 and will last for around three months.

**Ashby Road, Coalville** - in January 2021 work began on a series of improvements to Ashby Road in Coalville with a £250,000 scheme aimed at improving the highway environment in the area. The works involved removing outdated traffic-calming features, such as chicanes, providing more on-street parking and making the area safer for pedestrians. The project also provides safer access to the main entrance to the revamped Snibston Country Park and a petrol station as well as complementing the recent regeneration of the former Snibston Colliery site.

**M1 J23/A512**– the detailed design and construction of improvements to ease congestion and provide access to the West of Loughborough housing development commenced in 2017/18. Work on this major scheme has continued throughout the

pandemic and was completed in June 2021. In February 2021 the Council and Morgan Sindall were highly commended for outstanding teamwork on the highways improvement scheme on the M1 J23 and A512. Judges agreed that the partnership work excelled in many areas, especially community engagement, which led to many local people welcoming the project and understanding its value.

**A46 Anstey Lane** – the detailed design and construction of improvements to ease congestion and mitigate the Aston Green housing development commenced in 2017/18 with the works being completed in 2020/21. The scheme has won a number of awards including Construction News award for Health, Safety and Wellbeing Excellence as well as Considerate Constructor Site award.

**Lutterworth East** - ongoing work has continued on the design of highway infrastructure to provide access to the proposed new housing development in Lutterworth.

### Traffic Management and Safety

**Average Speed Cameras** – in October 2020 we agreed to introduce a further 7 average speed camera sites across the county. The proposals will see the average speed cameras move locations yearly to change driver behaviour across our towns and villages. This follows a successful scheme which saw cameras installed at seven locations, Sharnford, Walcote, Oadby, Groby, Measham, Woodhouse Eaves and Freeby. Sites where communities have previously raised concerns about speeding. The scheme highlights our commitment to make our roads as safe as they can be. The cameras have proven that they can make a difference in communities, whose lives can be blighted by the effects of speeding motorists as well as make a positive change to driver behaviour. We also continue to press the Government to consider a new approach to funding the camera sites. At present, funds generated through camera fines are retained by HM Treasury.

**Reducing Rural Speeds** – in March 2019 we announced that we were expanding our speed reduction scheme to include a further 24 rural routes. The project sees stretches of roads with a speed limit of 60mph reduced to 50mph. The move follows a study in 2017 which found that around 60% of collisions which caused injury on rural routes involved motorists exceeding the 60mph limit and the routes chosen all had well evidenced collision reduction reasons to reduce the speed limit. The speed limit reductions also incorporate reviews of the existing road markings and signs to ensure that they provide adequate warnings of the road conditions.

**Driver Education** - in 2020 our popular pre-driver days designed to promote safety to novice drivers and our older driver scheme, Safer Driving with Age (SAGE), had to be paused. Both schemes have practical driving elements and as such it was impossible to run these courses safely during the pandemic. SAGE opened again for bookings in the autumn of 2021 and it is envisaged that a programme of pre-driver course dates will be developed for 2022. Driver education remains an increasingly important part of speed management and driver behaviour change. We were able to continue to run national driver education workshops on behalf of Leicestershire Police by switching from classroom presentations to presenting virtually via video call. In 2020/21, 18,200 drivers opted to attend courses as an alternative to receiving a fine and points on their

driving licence. The courses help drivers understand the adverse consequences of their driving behaviour and give tips and advice to improve compliance and safety.

**School Keep Clear Scheme** – in September 2019 schools across Leicestershire were encouraged to sign-up to a scheme to combat the problems of inconsiderate parking. The School Keep Clear scheme aims to address concerns that parents, residents, and teachers have about parking during the school run by using a camera car to enforce mandatory zig-zag zones outside school entrances. A total of 68 schools became enforceable in September 2019, in time for the new school term. Since it launched in September 2018, the scheme has seen 146 schools sign up, with a further 11 schools set to join the scheme later this year, subject to consultations. We know that inconsiderate and dangerous parking outside schools can be a real problem, and the School Keep Clear scheme has gone some way to alleviate concerns in communities. Since the beginning of the scheme, 22 warnings have been issued and 241 penalties have been processed to motorists parking illegally.

**Parking Enforcement** - with traffic levels rising, our parking enforcement teams have been increasing patrols to keep vehicles moving and keep the roads safe.

**Motorcyclist Safety** - we remain supporters of The Shiny Side Up Partnership (SSUP), an East Midlands motorcycle safety partnership. Originally set up to try and drive down casualties relating to sports-bike riders, this has now broadened to include lower capacity scooters and motorcycles. We use a variety of roadside posters at sites that have a poor motorcycle casualty history. These messages include Bike Crash Site Ahead and Think Bike. The roadside posters are bright yellow and have become a regular seasonal way of reminding riders and other road users to take extra care and look out for each other. The regional website has been refreshed and updated with new training resources.

**Community Speed Watch (CSW)** – due to the pandemic, we were unable to run community speed watch with volunteers in 2020 and 2021. We adapted the delivery approach and ran a successful free volunteer scheme, where educational roadside boards were placed at various key sites of community concern to remind drivers to check their speed. The boards remained in situ for 8 weeks and have been located in various communities across the county. Planning ahead for 2022 we are inviting expressions of interest in running a fully supported volunteer run CSW scheme. The aim is to support communities to use speed detection equipment under our supervision. Volunteers will capture speeding vehicle details and, rather than prosecution, drivers will receive an educational letter from the police helping to underline the community's commitment to reducing speed.

## Sustainable Travel

**Transforming Cities Fund and Air Quality** – in October 2019 we supported proposals by Leicester City Council for a bid to the Transforming Cities Fund in response to the Government's Air Quality Directive. The City Council has been awarded over £32m, which will enable initiatives in Leicester to improve public transport, cycling and walking provision to improve overall air quality. This will benefit both city and county residents.

**Personal Travel Planning (PTP)** – in June 2021 we announced that personal travel plans were being launched in the Glenfield, Anstey and Westcotes areas. Around 5,000 households in Glenfield and Anstey, and 5,000 households in the Westcotes area of the city will be targeted to encourage residents to reduce their car journeys and use more sustainable forms of transport, including walking, cycling and taking the bus. Information includes advice on walking, cycling and public transport, maps and guides, information on electric bikes and cars, along with several incentives. These include activity trackers for up to 50 residents, 20 e-bikes and 10 pedal cycles available for loan, along with cycling equipment. Reducing the number of car journeys and travelling more sustainably has huge benefits to physical and mental health, as well as helping the environment. 17% of participants from previous PTP projects have sustained behaviour change, for example switching from car use to cycling and walking.

**Bus Service Partnership** - in June 2021 we announced plans to create an enhanced partnership with local bus operators as the pathway to improving public transport in the county. The plans to work more closely with bus operators to develop a Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) will help to unlock significant Government funding through the National Bus Strategy. We aim to work closely and swiftly with local bus operators to deliver benefits such as simpler fares, contactless payments, more services at the right times and ticketing so people can easily inter-change across public transport. The BSIP will also be a vital strand of our Environment Strategy, to help reduce the environmental impacts of travel and transport. There's also a need to reverse the recent shift in journeys away from public transport as a result of the pandemic and encourage passengers back on to public transport.

**Electric Buses** – in June 2021 a new £5m fleet of near silent electric buses powered entirely by renewable energy hit the streets of Leicester and Leicestershire. Eleven of the new vehicles transport shoppers and commuters between the three park and ride sites at Enderby, Birstall and Meynell's Gorse and the city centre. The distinctive green buses are equipped with on-board digital screens and USB charging points at every seat and provide passengers with free Wi-Fi. People waiting for the bus will benefit from real-time arrival information and smart new bus shelters. The project has involved the County and City councils working closely together and is part of a wider agenda around decarbonising transport and investing in electrified buses to help reduce our carbon footprint and contribute to our aim to be carbon neutral by 2045.

**On Demand Travel** - a new demand led bus service was launched in April 2019 in New Lubbethorpe, funded by Section 106 monies. The Arriva Click service operates every day (except key bank holidays) from 06:00 to 23:00 using high specification Mercedes Sprinter minibuses. Passengers book journeys using an app showing their preferred pickup point and destination and are matched with others. We have also been successful in securing £1.3m of the Government's Rural Mobility Fund to introduce a new 3-year pilot of a modern demand responsive transport (DRT) service which is anticipated to start early in 2022. The service will operate within an 85km<sup>2</sup> area to the south west of Leicester and to the east of Hinckley, covering 17 communities and providing a total resident population of 43,000 with the opportunity to be able to book a journey on a shared accessible minibus, via an app or phone call. The new DRT will seek to fill the gaps in the existing network and aims to improve access to employment, education, healthcare and other services. This pilot provides an excellent opportunity to trial a modern rural DRT service, as part of work to explore

the evolution of our approach to supporting passenger transport services, helping to meet the needs of local communities.

**E-Bike Scheme** - electric bikes for loan to workplaces across the county is another initiative by the council to encourage active and sustainable travel to and from work. The loan scheme proved to be a hit at fashion giants Next, with 10 bikes used by staff at their Enderby base. The bikes were available for staff to use to commute to work as well as for travelling to meetings or events during the working day and for leisure purposes. This resulted in 20% of participants going on to purchase their own e-bike. The council is encouraging businesses to take the opportunity to borrow the electric bikes free of charge. In 2021 we also offered residents incentives on electric bikes. A series of try-out events were held over the summer explaining the benefits of e-bikes. The Council also provided the opportunity for people to attend a training session and then apply for a voucher which gave them £300 off the cost of an electric bike. Electric bikes are great for people making longer journeys who may not be used to cycling or need more assistance when they cycle.

**Cycling and Walking Strategy** – in July 2021 we unveiled plans to boost cycling and walking by creating more networks, revamping routes, and teaming up with schools and workplaces. The Cycling and Walking Strategy sets out a vision to upgrade and provide cycle routes, cycle parking, and pedestrian facilities to create healthy streets and spaces. It will also include the provision of traffic education measures and cycle training for schools and workplaces to increase the number of cyclists and walkers. Initial priority areas will include Loughborough, Oadby, Wigston and Blaby. The new strategy aims to help more people to make more sustainable and healthy travel choices, by increasing the number of journeys by bike or on foot.

## Highways Maintenance and Management

The Council faces significant challenges in looking after its highways' assets. Present levels of government funding are insufficient to maintain even Leicestershire's A roads in their current condition.

**Highways Maintenance** – in 2020/21 a total £21.6m was invested in Highways Asset Maintenance including £17.3m on carriageways, £2.0m on footways and rights of way, £1.0m on bridge maintenance and strengthening, £0.6m on street lighting maintenance, £0.4m on flood alleviation, £0.1m on traffic signal renewal and £0.2m on other activity including joint sealing.

**Incentive Fund 2021/22** – we were successful at securing Incentive Funding by demonstrating a band 3 (Highest) level of Asset Management which enabled us to drawdown the maximum level of funding available to us under this mechanism.

**Green Highway Improvements** – in March 2021 we reported how we were working to become cleaner and greener by using recycled and carbon friendly products in highway improvements. Around 5000 recycled tyres were used in a special asphalt mix on the A426 Blaby bypass, which is expected to save 10 tonnes of carbon. The white lines were marked out using a cold plastic product which is environmentally friendly and should last three times longer than the traditional thermoplastic products used. It is not just the new products which help to cut emissions, all of the bituminous material removed from the carriageway construction is also recycled elsewhere.

**Road and Community Investments** – in June 2021 we allocated an extra £5m investment into Leicestershire’s roads and environment, supporting both safety and environmental improvements in communities. The money is being spent on extra maintenance including road repairs, looking after verges, cleaning signs, emptying drains and gullies, and improving rights of way with more going to flashing signs, supporting average speed cameras and other measures to deter speeding motorists. The plan is also about improving green spaces in communities. Protecting verges adds to an area’s visual appeal and helps efforts to tackle climate change as well as protecting and enhancing biodiversity. The cash injection also includes a £25,000 fund for every county councillor – see below - enabling communities to get involved in influencing the improvements they want to see where they live.

**Members Highway Fund** – the new Members Highway Fund will provide each Council member with £25,000 to use on small scale highway and environmental improvement works in their own divisions. We recognise how important small-scale highway works can be to our communities and therefore this additional funding will cover a range of highway improvement works. Examples will include the provision of village gateway measures, flashing speed signs, vegetation clearing and minor improvements to roads and footways. Officers will support members in developing proposals for their areas so the measures can be delivered quickly.

**Winter Gritting** – during the 2020/21 winter our gritters and drivers were out treating key routes to keep the county moving, spreading approximately 10,772 tonnes of rock salt over 1,240 night-gritting runs to combat the drop-in temperature. Keeping the county moving and motorists safe is our top priority each winter. Our gritting crews are on standby 24 hours a day, seven days a week from October to March – including Christmas and New Year – and ready to respond to the forecasts. We monitor the weather constantly and if freezing temperatures are forecast, our fleet of gritters go out at night to treat major roads and key routes which equates to almost half of the county's road network. The Council has a fleet of 23 gritters available, three of which were recently replaced with new state of the art vehicles. The other twenty vehicles have also been fitted with the latest sat-nav technology, to ensure all routes are gritted correctly. This year, the council’s salt barns were stocked with up to 18,000 tonnes of rock salt.

**Snow Wardens** - in addition to winter gritting, there are also a number of snow wardens based in communities across the county who grit paths, as well as farmers who, during deep snow, fit ploughs to their tractors and assist the council in clearing roads. The authority is working with parish and town councils to train and encourage more people to sign-up to its Snow Warden Scheme to help keep the county moving during the winter. We also have a team of carers and health visitors who can reach their patients if there is prolonged heavy snowfall.

**Gully Cleaning** - to tackle blocked drains we apply a ‘risk-based’ approach to gully cleaning that increased the number of roadside drains treated from 64,000 per year to 92,000 without costs rising. The change followed a trial to find a more cost effective and focused way of cleaning the county’s 130,000 gullies. The trial found that it would be beneficial for more regular visits to roads at high risk of flooding due to the drains filling faster with silt. Previously drains were cleaned on an 18 to 24-month fixed programme, whether the road was at risk of flooding or not, the highest priority drains are now cleaned every 10 months.

**Flooding** – during 2021 we responded to over 430 flooding related incidents. We received 10 yellow weather warnings and one amber warning for potential disruption caused due to flooding. There were also 69 road closures implemented in response to flooding to protect the travelling public on the network. We constantly monitor the weather situation based on alerts from the Met Office. Resources are available 24/7 and we are able to re-deploy additional highway maintenance teams to deal with flooding emergencies.

**Grass Cutting** – in April 2021 our annual programme of grass cutting started across Leicestershire. Teams mow the equivalent of 28 football pitches a day in towns and villages across Leicestershire, cutting the equivalent of three million square metres of grass. Our urban programme sees the grass cut six times throughout the season. These routes are mainly on roads with a speed limit of 30mph or less and is cut primarily for safety rather than aesthetic reasons. The rural programme focuses on cutting back of the verges on roads between villages and is carried out three times a year to help with visibility and safety.

**Biodiversity** - we've changed the way which we manage our rural verges after many residents said that they would prefer less grass to be cut and wildflowers allowed to thrive. We left a significant number of wildflower verges across Leicestershire uncut as parish councils prepared them to bloom during the summer.

## **Affordable and Quality Homes**

Housing is a key enabler to delivering other outcomes as a secure, quality, and affordable home in the right location is essential for a good quality of life. Housing matters, it influences people's security, resilience, health, access to education and employment and can enable the effective provision of care.

To provide planned and sustainable housing growth to support the needs of its expanding population, Leicester and Leicestershire will support the implementation of the Strategic Growth Plan (SGP) to deliver the 187,096 new dwellings that it is estimated will be needed by 2050. This will include a Priority Growth Corridor which would form an orbital transport solution to the south and east of Leicester, Leicestershire International Gateway, A5 Improvement Corridor, regeneration and growth of Melton Mowbray. Additionally, areas of managed growth in Local Plans, mostly focused on our market towns and adjacent to Leicester will contribute to the SGP.

Our aim is that Leicestershire has a choice of quality, sustainable homes that people can afford, and that development contributes to the health and wellbeing of existing communities. Ensuring that there is enough suitable housing to support independence for those with care needs, and that both existing and new homes will be low carbon and environmentally sustainable are also priorities.

**Impact of Covid-19** - in the short term, a package of government measures has protected tenants from eviction, mortgage lenders have offered payment holidays and the "Everyone In" scheme helped to house rough sleepers. In the longer term, however, the impact of Covid-19 on the wider economy is likely to have a negative impact on a wide range of housing issues.

**Strategic Growth Plan for Leicester and Leicestershire** (SGP) – the ten partners (City Council, County Council, seven Leicestershire districts and the LLEP) have worked collaboratively to produce and approve the SGP in late 2018. The SGP sets out a long-term strategy for the delivery of planned growth up to 2050. Thousands of new homes will be needed in the city and county between 2031 and 2050, and the strategy enables us to help choose locations, protect environmental and historic assets, and bid for money to put the right roads, transport and other infrastructure in place. Failure to plan ahead could lead to dispersed, developer-led development, making it harder to put the right infrastructure in place and secure funding for it.

**New Homes Needed** - the Strategic Growth Plan states that Leicester and Leicestershire need 96,580 new homes and 367-423 hectares of employment land between 2011-2031. Some of these homes have already been built or have planning permission. Beyond 2031 the plan identifies the need for a further 90,500 dwellings and additional employment land, which is why further land needs to be unlocked. Local Plans deal with the detailed allocation of which sites will be brought forward.

**Areas for Housing Growth** - key areas for potential growth are the city of Leicester and land to the south and east of Leicester. A secondary area for growth is identified in the north of the county, called the Leicestershire International Gateway. New housing would be built closer to where people work, to minimise congestion from commuters. In spring 2019 the Whetstone Village proposal was announced by Government as a successful Garden Village, one of two garden villages in the

Midlands. This proposal will be considered through the emerging new Blaby Local Plan.

**Supporting Infrastructure** - draft proposals put forward in the Strategic Growth Plan include major infrastructure improvements on which new growth is dependent. These include new infrastructure to the south and east of Leicester. The A5 and A42 would also be upgraded, supporting growth in these areas. Rail improvements are also proposed. These road and rail improvements would require significant Government investment and would relieve congestion pressures along the M1 and more widely across the Midlands. It would also unlock land for the required housing and employment.

**Developer Contributions** - in February 2021 we reported that over £17m of housing developer money had been collected to help fund new school places, road improvements and other important community facilities. The report showed that during 2019/20 the council also invested nearly £5.5m in creating extra classrooms or refurbishing 22 schools, buying new books and equipment at 25 libraries and wide-ranging road improvements, including traffic calming, cycle schemes and junction changes. We also negotiated another £10m and have secured £45m of contributions over the next five years – this is allocated to projects including over £30m for education. The community facilities required to support new homes cost many hundreds of millions of pounds and the council is working closely with developers to agree contributions from them.

**Affordability and Affordable Homes** – the Housing and Economic Development Needs Assessment (HEDNA) considers the extent of households who require financial support to meet their housing needs and thus who would be eligible for affordable housing. This identifies an annual net need for 2,238 such households per year across the housing market area for 2011-36. The HEDNA identified that to deliver the affordable housing needs of 2,238 new homes per year with an average delivery of affordable housing of 24% would require 9,293 homes per annum. This is over twice the need shown in the demographic analysis, justifying upward adjustments to boost affordable housing delivery in all of the local authorities in the housing market area. A new HEDNA is currently being produced and will be published in due course.

**Promotion of Development Land by the Council** - over the past three years consents for in excess of 700 houses and 170,000sq ft of employment space has been achieved. Planning permission is also expected for the East of Lutterworth SDA comprising 2,750 houses and 1m sq. ft of employment space on completion of the necessary Section 106 Agreement for the site, which is now wholly owned by the Council. Further opportunities, including a number where planning applications have been submitted or are in the course of preparation (with the potential to deliver an additional 3,250 houses and employment space on Council owned sites) have been identified. Working either independently or with development partners the Council is progressing these sites through the planning system thereby supporting long term housing delivery into the next two decades.

**East of Lutterworth Expansion** - in April 2020 the Council's plans to help deliver 2,750 new homes, community facilities and business space near Lutterworth were put forward. The 550-acre development on land east of the town will deliver nearly 250 acres of green space, two new primary schools, a community hub and a network of foot and cycle paths connecting to the town centre. Sustainable design, community

and life-long living are at the heart of the plans. The development would offer a broad range of high-quality houses, including around 1,100 affordable homes. It also incorporates a wide-range of green features designed to maximise renewable energy and support low-carbon living, underlining our commitment to tackling climate change.

**Rural Housing Enabler** – the Council together with the District Councils, EMH Group, Waterloo Housing Group and Nottingham Community Housing Association jointly fund the Leicestershire Rural Housing Enabler Service. This service was retendered in 2020 for one year and was secured by Midlands Rural Housing who have managed the programme since 2014 and has led to the development of a robust rural housing need evidence base for Leicestershire and facilitated the delivery of rural housing where a need is identified. Since its establishment the Rural Housing Enabler Service has helped secure homes for local people, completed local housing need surveys, supported neighbourhood plans and raised awareness of rural and affordable housing needs across the county. The new contract will focus on finding suitable sites rather than needs surveys.

**Mitigating the Impact of Development** - the Council's Planning Obligations Policy (revised July 2019) sets out a variety of requirements to help mitigate the impact of new developments on local communities and the environment. This ensures that developments make a positive contribution to services and infrastructure in the area. In May 2019 the Council made a commitment to become carbon neutral by 2030 in all its own operations. The Council aims to 'lead by example' to deliver services in a carbon neutral way including working with developers and others to build 'green' new homes. It is expected that the Planning Obligations Policy will be reviewed in late 2021/22.

### Housing to Support Independence

The Council has developed strategies for older people and working age adults which aim to ensure that people with social care needs have access to well-located and suitable housing which promotes their independence. The number of older people is forecast to increase significantly over the next few years, leading to a greater need for specialist accommodation. Both dementia and mobility problems are projected to increase significantly. Some of these households will require housing adaptations to meet their changing needs, some will need more specialist accommodation or support. Determining what appropriate housing provision might look like for adult social care client groups and how this will be delivered is overseen by the Council's 'Place to Live Board'.

**Social Care Accommodation Support** - in 2019 we adopted a Social Care Accommodation Development Plan and Investment Prospectus 2019-2037 to increase the supply of social care accommodation-based support services.

**Extra Care Housing** – the HEDNA estimates a need for an additional 9460 specialist dwellings for older people in Leicestershire over the period 2011 to 2036. The Council is looking to extend our offer to older adults seeking to live independently in accessible, telecare enabled housing with flexible on-site care and support, as an alternative to residential care. A contribution was made towards the provision of new extra care places in Loughborough, with the scheme opening on schedule. We will make an important contribution to the allocation process for a new Extra Care Housing scheme

in Ashby-De-La-Zouch developed by East Midlands Homes with support from our colleagues in North West Leicestershire District Council, first tenants moved in, in Spring 2021. Our social care investment strategy includes opportunities to extend our extra care offer in Leicestershire further.

**Social Care Investment Plan (SCIP)** – where people cannot remain within their own home, community-based accommodation options in the form of extra care and supported living can provide a cost effective and positive alternative to residential care. We agreed an additional £10m capital to fund properties to meet needs identified within the Social Care Investment Plan. The money is supporting priority supported living properties and a specialist dementia care facility. Five schemes were secured offering up to 50 units of accommodation and a further three schemes are being explored offering a further 14 units of accommodation.

**Markfield Supported Housing** - the project consists of four self-contained bungalows in Markfield, each with its own garden and round-the-clock support from the Affinity Trust. The bungalows will be specially adapted for people with learning disabilities, and the whole site has been designed with their safety in mind. Building work started in March 2020 and, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, work progressed on schedule with the new residents moving in during Spring/Summer 2021. Over the past 12 months, around 90 adults have moved into supported living services from residential care. The new facility is testament to our commitment to help improve the lives of local people with learning disabilities.

**Warm Homes** – in January 2021 the Council continued work with E.ON to provide people with free, first-time gas central heating installation, and urged eligible residents to apply. Households not connected to mains gas and relying on inefficient ways of heating their homes can be eligible for the measures, which are part of the Leicestershire Warm Homes Fund Project. Residents on certain income levels or those in receipt of certain benefits, including child benefit, or those who are now receiving Universal Credit due to the pandemic, may also be able to apply for the support. Qualifying homes could also receive a free gas network connection through the Affordable Warmth Solutions programme. The project follows a successful funding bid by the Council to the £150m Warm Homes Fund. Eligible residents may also be able to receive free insulation measures for their homes, including loft and cavity wall insulation, further improving the warmth and comfort of homes across the county.

**Lightbulb** – the project offers practical housing support, keeping vulnerable people independent in their homes, helping to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions, and facilitating timely hospital discharge. It offers a range of help with issues such as aids and equipment, major adaptations, assistive technology, and advice and support to choose the right housing option. The Lightbulb Housing Support Co-ordinator offers a holistic housing need assessment, single point of contact for practical housing support, signposting and helps to arrange solutions in response to any needs identified. They work at each site across the districts in conjunction and supported by Occupational Therapists. The Lightbulb Hospital Enabler Team offer housing specialists, working directly with patients, relatives and hospital staff to identify housing problems that are a barrier to discharge and putting in the right steps to address this. They also assist with the transition from hospital to home and provide support with setting up a new tenancy or managing the existing home, support with furniture packs and rent deposits, working across 3 hospital sites and the Bradgate Mental Health Unit.

**Homelessness Prevention** – being homeless has significant negative impacts on both physical and mental health. We currently commission services to support people at risk of becoming homeless in Leicestershire. This includes a hostel in Loughborough, an outreach service and an in-house community-based service which provides a range of specialist, holistic support to individuals and families most in need.

## **Health, Care and Wellbeing**

We want people to be enabled to take control of their health and wellbeing throughout their lives and to be as independent as possible. To do this, people need the right support in the right place at the right time. We are achieving this through a balance of commissioning appropriate services and encouraging an asset-based approach. This strategy enables people and communities to help themselves – through maximising their strengths and those available in their community.

### **Health and Care Integration – Better Care Together**

Better Care Together aims to reshape the provision of health services in LLR by integrating the activities of NHS organisations and local authorities to improve outcomes for patients, and to deliver care more efficiently. The health and care system is changing. Increasing demand, driven by a growing and ageing population with increasing numbers of people living with long-term and complex conditions necessitates that we plan and manage our resources differently. Leicestershire's model of care is designed to deliver more care outside of hospital, provide integrated and holistic services and work in partnership to maintain health, wellbeing, and independence for as long as possible.

**Better Care Fund** - our Better Care Fund (BCF) plan, that includes both the NHS and local government, supports the joining up of health and care services so people can manage their own health and wellbeing independently in their communities for as long as possible. This involves providers and commissioners of health, care, and housing services to ensure integrated services are planned and delivered effectively in partnership. We agreed a refreshed BCF plan for 2020/21 worth c£62.4m, setting out our approach to integrating care around the person; integrating services at county and neighbourhood level; effective use of disabled facilities grants to help meet housing needs and changes to the wider health and care system.

**Person Centred Approaches** – the current jointly commissioned domiciliary care service has integrated, person centred approaches built into the process of assessment, placing and review of care packages. This service has been redesigned with a view to a new service being implemented from the autumn of 2021 that is better aligned to our vision for integrated services. The operating model of integrated teams is focused on person-centred care planning for patients who are frail, multi-morbid or who have high health needs, investing further in care coordinators for this cohort of patients. The multiagency frailty check has been adopted into assessment and care planning in the acute sector and integrated teams.

Leicestershire's model of personalised care includes the 'home first' philosophy, LLR Carers' Strategy, supporting learning disabilities through the LLR Transforming Care Programme and council's accommodation strategy, and personal budgets and direct payments. There is also the Unified Prevention Board, Local Area Coordinators, First Contact prevention hub and approach to social prescribing.

**Unified Prevention Offer** – the Leicestershire BCF has, since its inception, placed a high priority on developing a Unified Prevention Offer for local communities, making the best use of community assets and building community capacity. It is recognised that many of these interventions should be non-medical and can be provided by a range of partners, including the voluntary sector. The menu of prevention interventions

includes lifestyle services, housing support, local area coordinators, support for carers, home safety and falls prevention.

**Hospital Discharges** – hospital discharge continues to be a significant area of focus. Leicestershire is one of eight areas nationally working with Professor John Bolton of the Institute for Personal Care, Oxford Brooks University, to understand demand and capacity, and identify and develop ideal discharge pathways.

**Integrated Discharge Team** – the Integrated Discharge Team (IDT) encourages and promotes an integrated way of working across all organisations to ensure smoother and faster resolution of delays to discharge. There has been a significant improvement to multi-agency working with a discharge hub where all professionals working on discharge can be co-located.

**Integrated Domiciliary Care** – home care in the county is delivered principally through the Help to Live at Home service, which is commissioned jointly by the Council and Leicestershire CCGs with independent sector providers appointed to deliver enablement-focused home care and health services. During 2021 the new Home Care for Leicestershire framework is being developed.

### Adult Social Care

We commission and provide a wide range of services to support people to maintain their independence, enable them to be part of society, protect them and meet a variety of care needs. Ensuring that eligible support needs are met, and people can exercise choice and control over their lives. We have used extra resources provided through the Improved BCF to meet increased pressures on adult social care, tackle delayed transfers of care and help stabilise the local social care provider market.

In October 2020, we launched a new Adults and Communities Strategy. The aim is to improve wellbeing and opportunity for people and communities including happier, more prosperous, connected and fulfilled lives.

**Technology Enabled Care** – ‘Care TEC’ is emerging as an inclusive term to describe a range of IT and digital solutions that can be used to support service user outcomes across the care pathway. It includes assistive technology, aids and adaptations, telecare, and telehealth. We are planning to modernise and increase the utilisation of digital solutions that help service users achieve their planned outcomes. Work is being undertaken in partnership with Hampshire County Council and PA Argenti to work in partnership with our Assistive Technology Team in a new improved and wider reaching service. This service is currently expected to launch in late autumn 2021.

**LLR Carers’ Strategy** – unpaid carers are invaluable, and this year’s situation has really highlighted the need to continue to develop the ways we support them. The joint LLR carers strategy was due for renewal in 2021 however Covid-19 has impacted plans for engagement and consultation throughout the year. Plans are to now complete this engagement over the rest of 2021 and roll out the renewed Carers’ Strategy in 2022. The current strategy is still very relevant and respective organisations are working consistently to ensure unpaid carers of all ages are identified early and feel valued, respected and supported.

Carers have been updated with relevant Covid-19 changes to guidance via a webpage updated regularly for their information, while the commissioned provider for carers support continued to provide much needed support for Leicestershire Carers via online

group meetings and use of their telephone befriending line. We partnered with the provider to develop a “Carers Passport” as a response to the difficulties carers faced, as well as providing important recognition, particularly during the current pandemic. Carers are being encouraged to apply to help ensure they receive the right support at the right time as they continue in such a valuable role. The authority continues to provide support to individual carers via Personal Budgets and are seeing the number requests for carers assessments return to numbers similar to pre-pandemic.

**Improving Care Quality** – ensuring that high quality care and support is being delivered by providers is a priority, providing important reassurance to relatives and friends. We monitor all contracted services to ensure they are compliant with their contract, and seek feedback from people who use the services, staff and family members. We monitor information from a range of other sources including provider staff, whistle-blowers, and from partners such as the CQC and health. Quality and Contract officers support providers with areas of non-compliance and improving the quality of services. The Quality Team offers training in falls management and positive behaviour support. Providers can access best practice support in any area of care delivery including the Mental Capacity Act, medication, support planning, health and safety and auditing. The team is currently running a pilot with care homes on improving care for people who are living with dementia.

**Social Care Investment Plan (SCIP)** – we have seen investment of £3m across several properties, including purchase and refurbishment works. Additional works are planned to take place in 2021/22. These sites will provide new accommodation for both transitions and supported living service users.

**Inspired to Care** – in October 2020 a recruitment drive to help social care providers recruit to vacant posts was starting to pay off. The council has worked hard throughout the pandemic to ensure that providers have the staff they need to provide vital services to the vulnerable and those having to self-isolate. The Inspired to Care team launched a recruitment initiative in April 2020 to support all social care providers, including those meeting the needs of older people and working age adults, so they could carry on their vital work during the pandemic. Within three months of operation, the team placed over 60 candidates with social care providers across the county.

In March 2021 the Inspired to Care team joined forces with Job Centre Plus to train jobseekers on universal credit to embark on a rewarding career in adult social care. With the aim of completing a Level 1 health and social care qualification along with employability training and virtual work experience. In July 2021 an inspiring film which showcases the role of adult social care professionals across Leicestershire, began screening to thousands of people. The minute-long film, with powerful narration in the form of a poem, was created by the Inspired to Care team. The video celebrates the amazing work care professionals carry out day and night – particularly during the recent Covid-19 pandemic - and is also a call to attract more professionals into the private care sector.

## Helping People Stay Well and Independent - Adults Aged 18-64

**Transforming Care** – meeting the housing and support needs of individuals presenting with complex learning disabilities, autism and mental health difficulties under the Transforming Care agenda is a priority for us and the wider LLR Transforming Care Partnership. During the year a four-unit specialist housing scheme was developed in Markfield by Affinity Trust and completed in spring 2021, offering housing and support to Leicestershire people traditionally excluded from housing due to their complex needs.

**Learning Disabilities** - the LLR joint health and social care Transforming Care Programme continues to work with providers of social care and housing to support individuals with complex learning disability and/or autism spectrum disorder, with behaviour that is challenging, to resettle within the community from an in-patient setting. Through co-ordinated work across statutory, non-statutory, third sector and local community provision, individuals are enabled to live as independently as is possible for them and be a tenant in their own home. Furthermore, work is ongoing to put in place the awareness, processes and interventions needed to prevent individuals from being admitted into mental health in-patient units. The programme is being supported by significant investment from the Better Care Fund.

In March 2020 we agreed a new partnership arrangement with the CCGs to manage a pooled budget to improve the health and wellbeing outcomes for people with learning disabilities in Leicestershire. The Council under the arrangement acts as lead commissioner and manager of the pooled budget. The current budget supports the health and social care of c200 people with a learning disability in Leicestershire.

**Mental Health** – we are working with partner agencies to improve the accommodation pathway for working age adults with mental health needs. Working to the strategic vision that by 2025 no working age adult with mental health as their primary need will be placed in permanent residential care. To achieve this, significant work has been undertaken on the supported living service to increase our ability to offer supported living placements to this cohort and work is being undertaken to jointly commission a “floating support” service to enable people with mental health and substance misuse issues to be supported in their own home. We have also completed a commissioning review of the preventative Mental Health Wellbeing and Recovery Support Service in 2020/21 which has resulted in contracts for the three providers being extended for the final year.

**Autism Support** – during 2020/21 the Council joined forces with the City Council to encourage autistic people, their families, and carers to share their experiences of being diagnosed with the condition and receiving support. The ‘Every Voice Counts’ initiative, which launched in June 2021, asked residents to share their personal experience of health and social care services from the day of their diagnosis through to their ongoing support. Their experiences will help to improve the care which autistic people receive in the county and city.

**Supported Living** – in March 2021 we set out revised multi-million-pound plans to boost short breaks and supported living services for families in Coalville and Hinckley. Despite the financial pressures facing the council as a result of the pandemic, we’re committed to investing in adult social care across the county. We want to provide the

best care that we can and provide people with the right services to meet their needs, particularly around maintaining their independence.

New commissioning arrangements for supported living were developed during the year, going live in April 2021. We have moved from a framework with five providers, each covering a specific geographical lot, to a Dynamic Purchasing System that has 53 providers available. This change provides significantly more choice and specialisms in the provision of supported living and will enable more people to access the independence promoting benefits of supported living rather than residential care placements. This will promote independence for clients and also provide a reduction in costs.

**Short Breaks Services** – plans for consultation were developed during the year and launched in May 2021 to consolidate short-breaks services at The Trees social care facility in Hinckley. The Trees, which recently underwent a £1.1m refurbishment, is being considered to be developed to provide an extra 8 short-break rooms for adults with learning difficulties. Alongside the proposed new rooms at The Trees, short breaks facilities are also available in the county in Wigston and Melton.

**Community Life Choices** – the Council provides support to around 650 individuals of all ages to maintain and build on existing roles and skills, natural support and community involvement, through the delivery of tailored support activities. Delivered via group-based or individualised support, individuals are encouraged to gain more independence, actively engage within their local community, and develop confidence and skills to move into employment, education, training or volunteering. The Covid-19 restrictions required providers to adapt their support, with many services being delivered remotely through zoom. Gradually face to face services have reopened and through community life choices support, individuals are working within social enterprise schemes, taking part in land-based activities, singing and disability sport. The Council ensures that the Community Life Choices framework reflects people's needs and interests.

**Shared Lives** - shared lives involves a carer using and sharing their home and their family (or community) life with the person using or living in a shared lives arrangement. It can be offered to any adult with any type of care and support needs. Around 120-300 service users benefited from shared lives. Support for all shared lives carers now includes manager visits to all carers within their own home, an ongoing interactive training programme, a quarterly carer network meeting, telephone advice, local carer support groups, support to complete carer assessments and signposting to other useful services. An ongoing active recruitment programme is in full implementation and to date we have recruited 6 new carers and we have 5 more carers coming through to approval. We currently have 77 carers offering CLC, short breaks and long-term care to our communities.

## Helping Older People to Stay Well and Independent – 65+

**Frailty** – our approach to frailty across LLR includes a number of proven interventions that should take place in the community, in hospital, and on hospital discharge if someone is assessed as having certain frailty markers. The LLR area has adopted the Rockwood scale for assessing frailty consistently across the health and care system, and all practitioners will be using the same set of prompts to check how someone's care could be managed most effectively at every opportunity.

**Dementia Support** - in September 2020 the Council, in partnership with five district councils began looking for people with dementia and their families to take part in a pilot project designed to provide greater support in the home. Sixteen participants with dementia and their carers were recruited to help test a new assistive technology system. The test concluded with some positive feedback albeit hampered by the Covid-19 pandemic. Lessons learnt will be taken forwards in the Technology Enabled Care service with Hampshire County Council and PA Argenti. The Dementia Support Service was also recommissioned in partnership with the City Council and CCGs and provides information, advice, and guidance to anyone with dementia and their informal carers in Leicestershire. The re-commissioned service started on the 1<sup>st</sup> April 2021.

**Extra Care Housing** - our social care investment strategy includes opportunities to extend our extra care offer in Leicestershire. We are also continuing to work on our advice and information offer for prospective extra care applicants and existing tenants, to promote extra care as a positive alternative to residential care in later life. We work in partnership with community health and hospital discharge teams to avoid hospital admissions, offer care focused on enabling and optimising independent living within extra care, and speed up discharges for those returning to extra care following a period of treatment or ill-health. Extra Care Schemes are linked into their local area enabling them to be actively involved in their local communities.

## Adult Social Care - Covid-19 Response

**Winter Plan** – in October 2020 we agreed a plan setting out how social care providers would continue to be supported over the winter months to prevent the spread of Covid-19 and to support people who receive social care, the workforce and carers. The council had at that point, so far, also spent £3m to support shielding, PPE purchases and food packages to people coming out of hospital. Through developing the winter plan, the council secured an additional £6.1m from the Infection Control Fund to allocate to adult social care providers in the county. Care home providers were facing financial challenges due to a reduction in overall occupancy.

**Covid Response PPE** – the Council and Local Resilience Forum (LRF) partners have worked tirelessly throughout the year to support the provision of personal protective equipment (PPE) for key workers across adult social care and children's services, including care homes, domiciliary care, special schools, domestic abuse and homeless shelters. Support was also provided to people on direct payments and personal healthcare budget holders who employ personal assistants and to unpaid carers.

Once the national portal for accessing PPE provision came online in September 2020 for regulated provision, the LRF continued to support services unable to access PPE via this route. Partners across LLR actively worked with these areas to ensure that they had the PPE stocks needed to ensure the safety of staff, service users and

customers as part of their infection prevention and control (IPC) best practice. LRF partners also continued to find ways to ensure that IPC and associated PPE practice was refreshed through on-line and local training and auditing.

**Infection Control and Testing** - the national Infection Control Fund was first introduced in May 2020, to support adult social care providers in England to reduce the rate of Covid-19 transmission within and between care settings. It was extended in October 2020 and, in April 2021, it was consolidated with the existing Rapid Testing Fund, to support additional lateral flow testing (LFT) of staff in care homes, and enable indoors, close contact visiting where possible. The funding is critical in supporting care providers to reduce transmission and re-enabling close contact visiting and has been extended until September 2021. This brought the total ring-fenced funding for infection prevention and control and support for testing to almost £21m in Leicestershire care settings.

**Supporting Care Providers** - a support service, run by our public health team, continued to provide a programme of rapid testing for front-line social workers; infection prevention and control advice in care homes; quick-response to calls and emails from care homes with concerns; and contact and support for care homes that have not had an outbreak of Covid-19 by providing guidance should there be one. This has enabled our Care Homes to operate as safely as possible during the pandemic.

### Adult Social Care – Covid-19 Impact

Even without a pandemic, Adult Social Care services were under pressure, due to the lack of a long-term funding solution, together with increasing demand for social care. In response to the pandemic, in line with Government guidance, Adult Social Care services have been reviewed and reorganised to enable continued service delivery. New ways of working have been established to respond to short term pressures brought about by the emergency period, but also to address the longer-term impact and learning from our experiences to date. There are very few, if any, areas of the Adults and Communities Department that have been unaffected by the pandemic. A few areas have been impacted greatly and in turn impacted on our residents across the county. A new Integrated Care System is due to be implemented in April 2022 with uncertainty over how that will impact future service commissioning. The care system has staff shortages and capacity issues. If there is not a sustainable health and care system that means vulnerable people don't have their health and care needs met, then there is potential for increased demand on social care.

**Care Homes** - there are 180 registered care homes within Leicestershire. Of these, 121 (66%) experienced a Covid-19 outbreak since March 2020. Some care homes experienced more than one outbreak. Providers have been managing the impact of the virus, preventing and containing infection in both residents and staff, implementing government guidance around testing and visiting and have experienced the sad loss of many residents. Care homes have also been presented with the challenges of the increased costs of care and increased numbers of vacancies across the sector. Care homes have played an integral part in facilitating hospital discharges including providing designated and interim placements. There has been a significant increase in short term residential care leading to increased costs in 2021/22.

**Home Care** - despite a high level of workforce fragility across the county, home care services have proved to be extremely resilient throughout the pandemic. Working with

providers the Council ensured that essential services could continue throughout the pandemic and providers increased capacity to meet the changing demands for care at home. Providers continued to support individuals effectively regardless of their Covid-19 status throughout the pandemic and the impact of the virus on staffing was minimal. Providers adapted quickly to the change in processes implemented to facilitate hospital discharges. There has been a significant increase in service users in Home Care with ongoing financial implications for 2021/22.

**Community Services** - many community and day services, and short breaks services, were closed or significantly reduced during the earlier months of the pandemic because of social distancing and infection control measures. Recovery plans and individual risk assessments progressed to allow safe access for people to services to ensure people had support and to reduce stress on carers.

**Hospital Discharge** - in response to the pandemic a new approach to hospital discharge came into operation at the end of March 2020. The new arrangements meant that people who began to receive post-discharge support or support to avoid admission in the emergency period (19 March-31 August 2020) became eligible under the new Hospital Discharge Scheme for NHS funding. The funding was time limited and individuals were subsequently assessed with regard to their ongoing health and care needs and their ability to pay. Where continuing services were required, those individuals not eligible for continued health funding then either transferred to the Council or became self-funding. This change in approach from the Government to discharge significantly increased the demand for social care which resulted in higher spend than had been budgeted across all services, particularly home care. The authority received £17m in funding during 2020/21 from the NHS for this additional expenditure. Low pay and staffing shortages are also impacting on social care capacity to meet increasing demand as well as on budgets, and this could increase further as the NHS looks to tackle its backlog and waiting lists.

**Care Workers** - many staff continued to work outside of their normal working environments doing jobs they have not previously done and working flexibly to meet the needs of the service. In addition to County Council staff, there are 15,000 people employed in the care sector across Leicestershire in care homes, in home care and in other settings. These care workers often paid on minimum wage are on the frontline of the pandemic. The Council ensured as far as possible that all appropriate PPE could be accessed and was in place and that everyone was aware of and is implementing proper infection control.

**Finance** - there was a significant financial impact on adult social care which in 2020/21 caused an overspend of £6m and the ongoing impact could be an overspend in the region of £13.5m for 2021/22. The main areas which have ongoing additional costs in 2021/22 due to significant increases in service users or costs are homecare (£11.5m), residential care (£7m) and supported living (£5m). Increased demand is also impacting on care market capacity. These costs are slightly offset by additional income from NHS to support discharges (£4m), other income (£4m) and reduction in overheads. During the first wave of the pandemic care providers were supported with around £3m for additional costs being incurred and £11m in an advance payment to support business cashflow which is repayable. There have been a number of specific government grants to support providers with Covid-19 costs totalling £15m in 2020/21 and £6m in 2021/22. This, together with access to free PPE, provided the care sector with additional resources for the 2020/21 financial year.

## **Public Health**

The Council's vision is for residents to be able to make informed and healthy choices for themselves, contributing to a reduction in health inequalities and an improved healthy life expectancy. We support the population to stay well through prevention and early intervention and through influencing the wider determinants of health and wellbeing such as the environment, housing, employment and education. Our public health function plays a key role in contributing to these aims. A number of public health issues are prioritised in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, a statutory responsibility of the Health and Wellbeing Board that is being refreshed for 2022 – 2032.

**Covid-19 Response** - this year the vital importance of effective local public health services has been highlighted by our response to the Covid-19 pandemic. There has been a significant workload in communications and engagement, testing, enforcement and compliance, as well as supporting the clinically extremely vulnerable. Other work includes the local contact tracing services and the detailed outbreak investigation and control. A new health protection team has been established to provide support to a variety of settings with outbreaks, including care homes and schools. The rolling out of testing for those without symptoms who are unable to work from home and then to widen this out to all residents over the age of 12 has also been a key focus of the work of our Public Health Department. Within the space of 4 weeks, seven sites were operationalised across the County and over the course of the service, 44,000 tests were carried out. To put in place a service operating across the County with over 200 newly appointed staff is a real testament to the hard work of the Council. The service has now transitioned to a mobile model, taking testing to our communities and enabling the provision of home test kits. To date, the service has handed out over 110,000 home test kits.

A significant amount of work has also been completed to support increasing Covid-19 vaccination uptake in the local authority workforce and underserved groups/populations. A separate covid section sets out the overall timeline and some of the key actions the Council has been involved in.

**Incident Management Teams (IMTs)** - have been established in areas in the County where there has been a high incidence of Covid-19 positive cases, these meetings have been led by the Director of Public Health involving colleagues from different organisations to implement rapid local actions to restrict further spread of infection including: communications, testing, contact tracing contacts of positive cases and outbreak management.

## **Public Health Services**

The Council has been moving to a social model of public health, with greater involvement of public health across other services and a strong emphasis on prevention, for a number of years.

**Online Health and Support Information Hub** - we want people to get support as quickly as possible when they need it. Our online information hub provides an access point for immediate support. First Contact Plus enables people to search from their own home through a broad range of wellbeing information, all in one place. The service

includes information and links to organisations which provide support around topics such as health, falls, feeling safe, living independently, debts and benefits, work, learning, volunteering and families and relationships. First Contact Plus also signposts people to community groups, national charities and public health services.

**Unified Prevention** – the Unified Prevention Board (UPB) is a sub-group of the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB), overseeing the development and delivery of Leicestershire’s prevention offer. Although the board did not meet through the pandemic, the UPB coordinates activities across a wide range of partners, ensuring everyone collaborates to deliver our prevention priorities, services, and communication plans. The UPB has continued to develop links between the prevention/social prescribing offer and the new Integrated Neighbourhood Teams. Work has focussed on strengthening engagement between partners and Integrated Teams in each locality. District Council and Public Health representatives are now part of each Integrated Team’s board, helping shape the prevention focus in each area. The HWB is being evolved to become the place-based Board for health and care. The UPB is being redefined into a wider staying Healthy Partnership to ensure it addresses primary prevention and the wider determinants of health.

**Social Prescribing** - the Board has worked on the social prescribing model for Leicestershire. Work has progressed to develop the social prescribing model as the wrap-around prevention offer to support Integrated Teams. This initially focussed on the needs of 3 cohorts of people, those who are frail, those who have multiple long-term conditions, and those with high health and care costs. The UPB partners are focusing on achieving a joined up social prescribing model across Leicestershire that supports the framework for social prescribing in primary care in the NHS Long Term plan. Continuing the development of the wrap-around prevention offer for Integrated Teams is one of the core activities of the UPB with Social Prescribing Link Worker roles starting to be established within the new Primary Care Networks.

**Integrated Healthier Lifestyle Services** - helping people live healthy lifestyles is vital. Our weight management and stop smoking services are designed to give people the right support that will have a positive impact on their overall health and wellbeing. The services include the support of friendly advisors offering free, tailored support to help with weight loss, giving up smoking and becoming healthier in general, either via text, Skype, phone or face-to-face appointments. The weight management service offers tailored support and intervention for people who are overweight that can fit into daily routines straight away. The team offers advice to people struggling to achieve and maintain a healthy weight and nutritional advice together with becoming more physically active. The service consists of a two-part approach and includes adult and children weight management services. The Quit Ready stop-smoking service offers a range of behavior intervention, medication and support. Both services consist of a 12-week intervention with the patient.

**Weight Management** - the Weight Management Service offers support to Leicestershire residents who are overweight. Its programmes set a 5% body weight loss goal, giving a results-focused approach that enables service users to track their progress. The service features a team of nutritionists who help those looking to manage their weight, through a 12-week intervention programme. The service also offers low level support for those who are not in need of intensive support. Clients can take advantage of food plans, nutritional information, and advice on factors such as emotional eating, all of which are based on the individual’s lifestyle and dietary

preferences. We successfully launched our pregnancy in weight management service in March 2021.

The Children's weight management programme supports children who are overweight and provides group interactive sessions called Healthy Eating, Healthy Activity. This group support offer provides parents and children with advice and support on making healthier food choices, nutritional information and recipe ideas to maintain a healthy weight. This is also in collaboration with the National Child Measurement Programmes and working with schools and school nurses in providing support to children who are considered to not have a healthy weight. This, together with the Cooks4Life programme in schools, provides for an overall healthy eating offer for families.

**Stop Smoking** – in 2020 our Quit Ready Stop Smoking Service had 2475 people set a quit date of which 1721 went onto stop smoking. Smokers are three times more likely to quit for good if they are engaged with a stop smoking service and are on stop smoking aids. Quit Ready has been part of the Council since January 2017 and has a stop smoking success rate of over 60%. Those who sign up to Quit Ready's 12-week telephone support programme work with a dedicated stop smoking adviser who provides free, personalised advice and support, as well as access to free stop smoking medication and quitting aids. Covid-19 has acted as a catalyst for some increases in demand for the service.

**Local Area Coordinators (LACs)** – LACs support vulnerable people by developing networks of community-based support and utilising existing community assets. They operate in local neighbourhoods, closely linked to housing and community health services and to recreational and social opportunities. There are now 16 LACs covering 23 locations. By improving the quality of life and independence of individuals and building stronger community links, LACs help to prevent people from reaching crisis point and reduce demand for health and social care services.

**Outbreak Response and Community Recovery** – during the pandemic, our Public Health Department introduced two new teams to support the management of individuals who have a positive test result for Covid-19. The teams undertake contact tracing over the phone or at the door, at an enhanced level, identifying individuals travel routes and places and contacts they may have visited or been in contact with. The national system is updated daily. Individuals are contacted to ensure they also have their basic needs met to support individual or household isolation whether this being food parcels or access to pharmacy support. Since the introduction of the teams they have received 15889 positive cases and 2394 visits have taken place.

**NHS Health Checks** – this is part of a national programme in England. It is aimed at 40-74-year-olds to help reduce their risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke, kidney disease and some forms of dementia. In Leicestershire, residents who are GP registered are invited every 5 years to take up their free health check via an invitation from their GP. It's free, and helps people understand the chances of getting health problems as they get older and what they can do to improve their health. The health check programme in Leicestershire is the responsibility of our Public Health Department. It is acknowledged that due to the pressures on primary care, performance on Health Checks has been lower than previous years. However, work is starting nationally and locally to review the Health Check offer and link into wider prevention programmes.

**Healthy Diet** – good nutrition is an essential part of a healthy lifestyle. Diet combined with physical activity can help people reach and maintain a healthy weight, reduce the risk of chronic disease and promote overall health. As part of the weight management offer, we provide the Cooks4Life programme that works with schools and families in Leicestershire and the Master Gardeners programme helps people to learn to grow nutritious food. Food is important for Leicestershire’s health, economy, and sustainability. In December 2018 we approved a Good Food Charter and Plan for Leicestershire. The Food Plan provides a strategic approach that values and prioritises sustainability, local provenance, and healthy food in policies and procurement, whilst also developing community capacity and assets in relation to food growing, cooking, and eating. To aim towards alleviating food poverty and improving access to affordable healthy food. Work is progressing towards achieving Sustainable Food Places Bronze status.

**Substance Misuse** - all areas within the Integrated Substance Misuse Service have adapted well to the pandemic. There are some practices that will remain going forward such as allowing service users to have a choice of how they will interact. Having online options has increased engagement for group work. Peer mentors contacting service users to check in on them during lockdown has continued as an everyday added value support resource. Currently the Integrated Substance Misuse Service is being re-commissioned and will be a joint service with Rutland. The contracts will start in April 2022 and the service will then include detox and residential rehab (rehab for Leicestershire only).

Leicestershire have been successful in bidding for two grants, the Universal grant and Detox grant. The universal grant has been utilised to enhance the harm reduction provision via a needle and syringe program, provision of Naloxone and an outreach worker. Increased integration and improved care pathways around the criminal justice cohort and continuity of care for prisons are included. The Detox grant has been used to enhance the current alcohol and substance detox provision; enabling the provider to adapt their building to bring in three additional beds that are available to service users along with Rutland and Lincolnshire as part of a Joint Consortium. A digital alcohol and substance misuse platform has been commissioned for the residents of Leicestershire and Rutland to utilise. This allows for general information, detailed information and a structured brief intervention offer for users as well as an option to self-refer into the integrated service around alcohol and substances.

**Sexual Health Strategy** – poor sexual health can affect anyone, often when it is least expected. In June 2020 we agreed a new Sexual Health Strategy for the next three years. The service focuses on giving people the right information to make positive decisions about their sexual and reproductive health and reducing health inequalities, by focusing on the needs of people at high risk of poor sexual health. There is continued focus on supporting schools in their work around relationships and sex education and in accessing services through new technology. A new integrated sexual health service model has been implemented, incorporating more self-service access such as online services and vending. This provides a good base to promptly respond to service changes required in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Workplace Health Programme** - the top priorities for our workplace health programme include poor sleep management, low physical activity levels and poor fruit and vegetable consumption. The programme is addressing these priorities with organisations to achieve better outcomes for the Leicestershire workforce, with a workplace health tool developed for use by partners and staff within their organisation and the workplace charter. Work is to take place to map workplace need across Leicestershire to inform a targeted approach to support those experiencing the most inequality due to the impacts of Covid-19. The work will be undertaken by a new post that will commence late 2021 to widen engagement with local businesses and the scope of the offer based on need and impacts of the pandemic on our workplaces and workforce. There will be an increased focus on the wider determinants of health to support our working age population stay healthy.

**Homelessness Prevention and Housing Related Support** - we agreed a revised approach and model for homelessness prevention and housing related support. The model provides a combination of 30 beds of hostel-based accommodation and outreach housing-related support for people at risk of, or experiencing homelessness, with 3 full time specialist housing-related support workers.

**Wider Determinants Action Plan** – the Action Plan was approved in July 2021 and covers the natural and built environment, jobs and work, warm and safer homes and strong communities, wellbeing, and resilience. The themes contain a number of objectives to improve health and reduce health inequality within communities. Actions include the completion of a health impact assessment in planning pilot, a review of need and expansion of our workplace health offer (focused on post-pandemic need), embedding health within the Carbon Zero work within the county, supporting a Health in All Policies approach and embedding a Trauma Informed Practice approach. There are also a number of actions that identify opportunities to work with partners to meet our objectives around the wider determinants of health. Examples are work with housing providers to consider health impacts within the existing housing stock, driving countywide uptake of Domestic Abuse and Housing Alliance Accreditations and work with the ICS to support development of community health plans. There are also links to the work of other groups, such as the Air Quality and Health Partnership and other strategies.

### Children Get the Best Start - Child Health

Ensuring that our children get the best start in life is a priority and also an investment in our future. We want to support parents to get it right in the 1001 critical days after birth and to ensure that children are prepared and ready for school, whatever their background.

**0-19 Healthy Child Programme** - our service model for the Healthy Child Programme comprises a combined health visitor and school nursing service. The service prioritises the health of looked after children, children with SEND, traveller families and those at risk of exploitation.

**Breast Feeding and Maternity Support** – low breastfeeding rates are linked with inequalities in health, deprivation and reduced life expectancy. Breastfeeding peer support services are available in 6 areas and breastfeeding champions have been nominated in both health visiting and family wellbeing centre teams. The ‘baby buddy’ app and ‘meals on heels’ app have been embedded across the county.

**Early Years Support** - we have brought together our Early Years Special Educational Needs and Inclusion Service, our Early Learning and Childcare Service and our Early Years Autism Team into a single Early Years and Child Care Service in order to pool our early years expertise. The single service provides support to ensure that young children get the best start in life and that their health, development and learning are the best they can be. The service works directly with children and families as well as with early years' providers and schools.

**Healthy Tots and Healthy Schools** – the Leicestershire Healthy Schools programme (LHSP) is launching a new and updated accreditation process. The process is aligned with the most recent evidence and guidance and provides schools with the best guidance to improve pupil wellbeing. Both LHSP and Healthy Tots programmes continue to provide a range of evidence-based workshops for school staff, including staff and pupil mental health, bereavement, and much more. LHSP is also supporting the delivery of the DfE Wellbeing for Education Recovery to ensure pupils mental health and wellbeing is supporting during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Oral Health Promotion** – the Oral Health Promotion Team moved to our Public Health Department in August 2018. The service provides oral health training in supervised tooth brushing for pre-school settings, training for frontline staff, oral health resource library and advice and displays. The service works with professionals to promote oral health and prevent tooth decay.

## Mental Health

The considerable burden of mental illness means that strengthening individual resilience and helping people with mental illness to recover remain priorities for us. We are a partner in the Better Care Together Mental Health work-stream. The supporting programme incorporates a range of interventions aimed at helping people avoid becoming mentally ill and at mitigating the impact of mental illness in those who experience problems.

**Mental ill Health Prevention** - our RU OK? website provides information about sources of support. As part of the local Mental Health Partnership group we have developed supporting practices. Mental Health First Aid training is offered to front line staff. Our adult learning service has also designed a number of opportunities for adult social care users including those anxious and depressed. Healthier in Mind is progressing a mental health strategy for LLR owned with local communities. Tailored mental health information, advice and support is available via the Start a Conversation website on a three-tier basis: for those in crisis, who require urgent or emergency help; for those experiencing symptoms of depression or anxiety, who are struggling to cope; and for those who are more worried than usual and wish to improve their mental wellbeing. The resources help to signpost people to the most appropriate support for them in a clear and effective way. We have recently commissioned a new Self-Harm Service for Leicestershire, provided by Harmless CIC. This service will focus on reducing self-harm prevalence in a preventative approach, as well as providing a lower level service to prevent self-harm escalation.

**Children's Mental Health** - as part of the approach a toolkit has been launched for schools and an emotional wellbeing curriculum pack developed by young people on our County Youth Council. The pack has been launched to Leicestershire Secondary

Schools as part of their Mental Health Awareness campaign and includes a variety of activities for work with young people aged 11 to 18. Through 'routes to resilience' we have supported an evidence-based approach to helping schools and families in their work developing the character, resilience and emotional wellbeing of children and young people. The programme has been offered to all state maintained and state funded primary schools, secondary schools and colleges across the county.

**Suicide Prevention** - local suicide prevention plans are led and delivered by the LLR Suicide Audit and Prevention Group (SAPG). The group consists of key partners and stakeholders from the Council, local NHS trusts, Leicestershire Police and many more. The group also lead the collective suicide awareness and prevention campaign, Start a Conversation. Start a Conversation is a suicide prevention campaign that aims to build a community that is committed to the mental health and wellbeing of residents. A non-judging environment where care and support are available to those in distress or those bereaved or affected by suicide. Through raised awareness and open and honest conversations about suicide we believe that every person has the potential to make a difference and save a life. The campaign is led by the council, working in partnership with a number of organisations that have come together with a commitment to prevent suicide. We would like residents and communities to be more aware of the warning signs of suicidal behaviour and to have an open and honest approach to conversations about suicide. We are currently working with CCG and the City Council on the NHS Wave 4 Suicide Prevention Programme. We were successful in our bid to NHS England, which will see the employment of Suicide Prevention Officers and the delivery of mental health training and development of mental health friendly communities.

### Physical Health - Sport and Physical Activity

2020-21 was a challenging year for physical activity delivery due to Covid-19. However, it has provided the opportunity to be innovative and has stimulated conversations with new partners who have been open to working in partnership to support people to build physical activity into their daily lives. Working with the Council, Leicester Shire and Rutland Sport (LRS), in partnership with a wide range of partner organisations, has developed a number of innovative interventions.

**Adapted Physical Activity Offer** - due to Covid-19 all face to face delivery of physical activity programmes was put on hold and, as a sector, we were facing barriers that we have never encountered before. A specific URL was created called Healthy at Home which hosted resources and videos to support people of all ages to be active at home during the lockdown periods. To complement this, over 5,000 Healthy at Home packs were distributed through a network of partners, to support vulnerable individuals to stay active whilst at home. Alternative ways of delivery have included, live online sessions, video libraries and a telephone service. These have been used to engage with many participants across LLR and have received positive feedback. Working collaboratively with our partners we focused on interventions that supported medium to high-risk individuals who suffered with a long-term health condition.

**COVID-19 Vaccination Centres and Health Improvement Opportunities** - LRS in partnership with public health and leisure services teams worked with the CCGs and wider health professionals, to identify simple and Covid secure ways that healthy lifestyle messaging could be on display in and outside vaccination centres, GP

practices and pharmacies, to act as a call to action to patients to find out more about locally available services.

**Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF)** – during Easter 2021 HAF was delivered at 28 school sites across Leicestershire, for children aged 5 to 16 years who were eligible for benefits related free school meals. 542 children were supported at face to face holiday clubs, with a focus on eating more healthily, being more active and taking part in engaging and enriching activities. 100% of those surveyed said that they enjoyed the holiday club and would tell their friends to come along.

**Tackling Inequalities** – LRS distributed £146,000 to 31 organisations through the Sport England Tackling Inequalities Fund. This has supported local clubs, groups, organisations, and communities to continue to offer both virtual and phased return to face-to-face physical activity and sport opportunities.

**Workplace Wellbeing** - the Wellbeing at Work Charter was launched in Autumn 2020, to recognise the efforts of workplaces in LLR in supporting the health and wellbeing of their employees. 83 workplaces have now achieved the first level of accreditation by signing the Wellbeing at Work Pledge, demonstrating their commitment to employee wellbeing, and providing access to a free Employer Resource Library to enable them to share positive public health messages with their workforce.

**Virtual School Sport and Physical Activity** - the last year has seen the introduction of School Games, Team Leicestershire, and Daily Boost themed virtual challenges to inspire, motivate and support schools to provide fun and engaging school sport and physical activity for their young people. The Virtual School Games Summer Championships ran in June 2021 and engaged over 2,5000 young people and the Virtual School Games Paralympic Festival in May 2021 saw 14 Special Schools take part in the virtual Boccia Tournament.

**'Move this March# #ThisGirlCan** - the new 'Move This March #This Girl Can' consisted of 56 activity sessions delivered throughout the month and attracted 188 participants. Women and girls accessed a wide choice of activity, at varying times of the day to suit different personal schedules, different age groups and varying levels of fitness. Moving to a virtual delivery also meant participants from a wider reach of communities were attracted to the campaign and 77% of those taking part had not been involved in previous This Girl Can events.

**Sports Organisation Support** – the Sports Organisation Support (SOS) fund delivered immediate funding to sports clubs and organisations who were most at need, to help them emerge from short term financial hardship or the ceasing of operations due to the ongoing impact of coronavirus. The lockdown of 2020 hit many organisations hard, and 45 clubs and organisations from across LLR received support from the SOS fund to keep operating.

**Steady Steps** - £253k was secured from the 3 CCGs to deliver the Steady Steps programme for 2020/21 across LLR. Due to Covid-19 the face to face service was put on hold and we developed alternative ways of delivering such as a telephone service and virtual sessions. During this period over 4,000 wellbeing calls were made to participants, 13 virtual classes were delivered and resources such as therabands, booklets and DVDs were sent out to all participants.

**Active Together Campaign** - whilst central coordination of the Active Together campaign is driven by LRS, it was designed to be utilised by a wide range of partners to promote consistent physical activity messages which link to their own programmes and outcomes. The initial focus has been on developing a public campaign supported by partners. Active Together along with the straplines of "My Way", "Let's Do This" and "Welcoming You Back Safely" have been used via digital platforms to promote being active in your local place, return of the leisure facilities and active travel to school. The LRS Virtual Conference delivered 14 sessions, attracting over 200 attendees, exploring Supporting Mental Wellness utilising Physical Activity and Sport. Our residents survey surveyed 2,400 residents to understand the effects of Covid-19 restrictions. The results of this insight are shaping the delivery of tailored interventions and messaging.

## **Covid-19 Response - Timeline**

Towards the end of **July 2020** public health officials urged residents to get tested for coronavirus following a rise in positive cases, particularly among younger people. The Council's Public Health Team worked closely with the local districts to get messages out. The council also delivered leaflets to 13,000 people and contacting GP surgeries to highlight the need for people with symptoms to get a test. In **September 2020** new **restrictions** were also introduced by the Government to try to bring down surging rates of coronavirus across Oadby and Wigston. The Council delivered over 20,000 leaflets across the Borough and Blaby District and brought in an **extra mobile testing unit**.

In early **October 2020** new figures signalled the arrival of a second wave of coronavirus. Updated figures revealed that there were just under 1,000 coronavirus cases in Leicestershire over the prior two weeks.

A new wide-ranging campaign was launched across the county and city called 'it's down to us'. The drive, launched on social media, encouraged people to change their behaviour during the pandemic such as social distancing, mask wearing and hand washing. The campaign included posters and banners for pubs, shop safe posters for businesses and posters for sports clubs.

Also, in early October, cases were 10 times higher than in September. The Council has been **monitoring data** to spot trends and **target hot spots** and taking **enforcement action** against businesses. Local government also took the lead role in keeping people safe, delivering food parcels and shielding and safeguarding vulnerable children and adults. We wrote to businesses across the county with **information and advice** to help them ensure that their premises were Covid-19 secure, and to shared homes to provide practical advice.

On Thursday **5<sup>th</sup> November** a **new national lockdown** came into effect following a period of localised restrictions. Museum and heritage sites closed for a month-long national lockdown and people were told to stay at home apart from attending school, college, university, work or to go food shopping. Libraries stayed open for people who did not have a PC at home to access a computer with booking of one-hour slots. Adult education also continued to be delivered on site. Recycling and household waste sites also remained open, for appointments only.

On **20<sup>th</sup> of November**, senior council, health and police figures came together with a commitment to drive down infection rates and plea to the public to follow the guidance and restrictions. A range of community leaders and well-known figures also broadcast video clips as part of a campaign to urge residents to do the right thing to combat the virus.

At the **end of November**, it was announced that Leicestershire would move into the **top tier 3 as national restrictions ended** on 2 December. The Council continued to lead the fight against this deadly virus. By keeping people safe, delivering food parcels, pinpointing hot spots, taking enforcement action and more, we did everything we could to bring rates down. We also got ready to roll out the **new lateral flow test kits** in hot spots.

**Lateral Flow Tests - in November** it was announced that the County Council was to be part of a pilot to trial lateral flow tests. The Government would send the council up

to 80,000 kits a week as part of its plan to expand asymptomatic testing across the country. The Council was keen to try every means possible to defeat the virus and enable life to become more normal.

On **1 December** we welcomed the arrival of the first batch of kits – up to 16,000. The test kits put the county at the forefront of the plan to expand asymptomatic testing across the country with pilot schemes running across more than 60 local authorities. The tests meant we could begin to test high-risk groups, help identify cases and get people to self-isolate quickly to break the chain of infection. The trialing of the tests also supported the work done by the Council's own test and trace teams who use networks to identify people who may not have been tracked down.

On 12 December we announced that **community testing** would begin in hotspot areas in early January. **Lateral flow test pop-up testing** was deployed in communities across Leicestershire with the highest rates. We remained at the forefront of the battle against coronavirus, as one of the first in the country to localise test and trace.

**Vaccination Programme** – on **12 December** a hospital vaccination hub at Leicester General Hospital started vaccinating priority groups of people aged 80 and over as well as care home workers and NHS workers who were at higher risk. The Leicester General Hospital vaccination hub was the first of a range of sites across Leicester and Leicestershire. It required detailed planning, managing the complexities and logistical challenges of the new vaccine. Over the winter period a number of communication and behavioural change resources/tools were implemented to encourage health and social care staff to receive their vaccinations. This included supporting people to have healthy conversations around the vaccination using the Healthy Conversations toolkit.

On 17 December an increase in covid-19 infection rates over the week meant that Leicestershire was maintained in **tier 3**. Leicester's hospitals were treating more people with covid than during the first wave of the pandemic. The public health director made a renewed plea for people to think long and hard about plans for Christmas and keep gatherings small and local.

On **30 December** 2020 the Health Secretary announced that Leicestershire would move into **tier 4** on 31 December due to rapidly rising infection rates and a need to drive down infections as we headed into the new year. On 4 January a **full new national lockdown** was announced. The Council committed to still doing everything it could to support communities and businesses. From supporting the vaccine roll out to working round-the-clock to keep people safe, and to giving much-needed funding to businesses and struggling rural pubs.

On **8 January** agencies came together to request residents to comply with the new rules and public health guidance. On 12 January in person appointments were suspended at registration offices until the end of January to reduce face to face interactions and help protect the public and staff. Marriages and civil partnership ceremonies were not allowed unless there were exceptional or urgent circumstances, such as terminal illness.

Community testing got underway in the first area to take part, the **Wigston Fields area, on 7 January**. People living in Wigston Fields were invited to book the new-style test. The tests took no longer than 40 minutes including registration. Results were sent by text by the end of the day.

On **20 January 2021** we announced that we aimed to have **one rapid test centre open in each district** over the next few weeks, with the current test centre in **Wigston Fields** available to key workers from 20 January. Key workers had a vital role to play in supporting us all during the pandemic. Rapid testing for these workers helped to protect them, their colleagues and customers by identifying cases and stopping further spread of coronavirus. On 27 January a second rapid community test site opened in **Blaby**, with rapid testing for key workers.

At the end of January, the Director of Public Health sent an open letter to **Oadby and Wigston** residents thanking them for their efforts in bringing down the number of Covid-19 cases by about a third. At one point there were more people getting tested for covid in Oadby and Wigston than anywhere else in the country and getting tested, following the rules and isolating helped to flush out cases and drive down numbers.

In early **February**, 3 new rapid covid testing sites opened in **Swannington, Melton Mowbray, and Loughborough**. A new centre also opened on February 8<sup>th</sup> in **Hinckley**. On 12 February, a site opened at **Harborough** Leisure Centre.

Later in February the Council's public health team, working closely with the District, lead a coordinated response to a covid hotspot in **North West Leicestershire**. All warehousing and distribution premises received a visit from a Covid compliance officer and key workers in the area were offered regular rapid tests to flush out cases without symptoms.

On **7 March 2021** a **week of reflection** marked a year since the first covid case in the county. A year on from 7 March 2020, there had been over 77,000 cases across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland and sadly just under 2,300 people had lost their lives. As we marked 12 months of living and coping with the pandemic, we remembered those we had lost, and our thoughts went out to everyone living without a loved one and all those living with the long term effects of covid. As the **vaccination programme** reached more and more people, the message remained that people should continue to follow the rules around hands, face and space.

Also, in **March 2021** the Council became one of three local authorities in the East Midlands to pilot a scheme offering residents access to **rapid lateral flow tests**. The scheme was for those in regular contact with a school-aged child and available through the Blaby site. The scheme was expanded across all sites later in March.

On 8 March **Leicestershire schools supported the return** of thousands of children and young people to full time education. Schools put in measures to make them as covid-safe as possible including deep cleaning, careful planning of seat layouts, updated guidance and social distancing measures. Children in secondary school were offered a lateral flow test before their return, 3 tests in school and then moved to home testing. School staff in schools would continue to take tests twice weekly.

By 8 March more than 13,000 rapid community tests had been carried out at the county's seven sites. 152 positive tests had been recorded, with positives at all of the sites despite people having no symptoms. Rapid testing of those without symptoms has been a vital part of the fight against Covid-19.

At the start of **April 2021** lateral flow tests were opened to all residents across Leicestershire as lockdown restrictions started to ease. Anyone without symptoms could take a quick swab test at one of the seven community test centres.

The Council's heritage attractions and cafes were fully back in business reopening their doors to visitors from **17 May**, with libraries also resuming normal hours. Showpiece heritage sites, including the Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre, the 1620s House and Garden at Donington-le-Heath, as well as Harborough and Melton museums, began welcoming visitors on a pre-booked basis. Also resuming services were the cafes at Beacon Hill Country Park and Snibston Colliery Park and the 1485 Tithe Barn at Bosworth as they welcomed their first visitors inside the facilities for the first time in more than six months. All the council-run heritage sites, including Charnwood Museum run by the district council, and cafes were awarded the national 'We're Good to Go' safety mark, a guarantee that visitors could return with confidence knowing that Covid measures are being followed.

In **June 2021** we announced more steps to prevent the spread of coronavirus after a concerning rise in cases. With then more than **50 new sites** across the county where rapid home test kits were available, including libraries, leisure centres and community bases. As part of a national programme, there were also around 140 pharmacies across the county offering the rapid home test kits.

In July caution was urged as Covid-19 restrictions were lifted. Fresh artwork featuring the '**it's down to us**' slogan appeared on social media and across the Council's buildings reminding people to think about continuing to do the basics – such as 'popping on a mask when shopping' and 'to socially distance as much as you can'. Infection rates across some parts of Leicestershire were continuing to show a steep rise.

In July a **campaign launched to encourage young people** to get their Covid-19 vaccinations. The campaign developed for younger people and with younger people (aged 18-29) aimed to help them feel safe and confident as they begin to enjoy activities that had been restricted in a bid to help prevent the further spread of Covid-19. A total of 534 local young people across LLR took part in a survey in June which was followed by a series of online focus groups.

In July 2021 **community vans** took to Leicestershire's roads aimed at making it even easier for people without symptoms to get tested for covid, collect home test kits and seek advice from professionals. The three mobile vans, operated by the Council, were set to travel across the county visiting everywhere from parks and community events to markets and fairs in a bid to keep communities safe and doing the things they love. Each van was staffed with trained team members on hand to carry out rapid flow tests for those without symptoms, give out home testing kits and provide guidance.

## Keeping People Safe

In 2020 we agreed a new Children and Families Plan setting out our priorities for the next three years. We want Leicestershire to be the best place for all children, young people and their families. We also want children and young people to be safe and living in families where they can achieve their potential and have their health, wellbeing and life chances improved within thriving communities. We want to ensure that all children are given opportunities to be happy, healthy and to achieve their best outcomes. We also want children to enjoy positive experiences in safe and supportive families, well connected to their local communities and where necessary well supported by a wide range of targeted support services.

## Safeguarding

We continue to work in close partnership with other agencies through the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership to implement strong interagency arrangements for the protection of children from harm and provide a range of support for children in need.

**Safeguarding Children** – in September 2021 we approved a report on the work of the Safeguarding Children Board during 2020/21. Workers and managers in organisations had worked hard in difficult circumstances to support the welfare and safety of children, and their wellbeing has been a key concern. Safeguarding partners were swift to adapt to the impact of Covid-19 by setting up a regular weekly meetings of safeguarding leads with a view to a collective understanding of the impact of Covid-19 on safeguarding children, to share information about the impact of Covid-19 on services, and to address any emerging issues. This Safeguarding ‘Sub-Cell’ allowed timely and flexible sharing of information, issues, and solutions for safeguarding children across the partnership in response to Covid-19. The group also identified and responded to a range of concerns. Domestic abuse became a more significant factor in cases during the pandemic and many repeat plans were related to domestic abuse. The Partnership carried out 4 Rapid Reviews following a Serious Incident Notification or referral in the period of the report. The Board has also identified 6 key priorities for focused work in 2021/22.

The partnership has ensured procedures are in place for multi-agency safeguarding in line with Working Together 2018 and has specifically revised procedures in response to learning from local and national reviews and assurance processes. The SCP training programme re-commenced in September 2020 with a diversified approach delivering training in a more blended way, offering film clips, recorded webinars, live pdfs, and self-directed learning alongside virtual-only delivery. Along with a core safeguarding offer we have also linked with the local Violence Reduction Network to support a programme of delivery on ‘The impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Trauma on Children and Young People’. In addition, we ran training and development sessions for Safeguarding leads in schools and early years establishments in the area, incorporating learning from the SCPs. From September 2020 to March 2021 the SCP programme delivered training to 988 people over 58 training events. This number of attendees is almost equivalent to the face to face training of the previous year, which totalled just over 1000.

During the pandemic children's social care teams continued to carry out vital visits and online contacts to keep vulnerable children safe. Schools staff continued to provide innovative teaching with on-line programmes and opened schools including school holidays so essential workers could continue to work. Schools have also provided support to families in need. Our educational psychology service also helped parents and carers support children during lockdown.

We successfully maintained and supported our workforce throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to continue to provide services to the most vulnerable children and their families. Department for Education fortnightly returns were requested from the start of the pandemic until July 2021 and these showed good rates of contact with the children we support. This included inventive use of virtual contact and for the most vulnerable face to face contact.

**Ofsted Improvements** – in November 2019 Ofsted published a report on the Council's children's social care services. The report identified considerable progress made since the inspection in 2017 with ratings for supporting children in care and leadership improved to good. The report also identified that services for children in need of help and protection and overall effectiveness of the service were still undergoing further improvement to be good. In February 2020 we considered a report on the inspection and agreed an action plan to address the recommendations in the report. Action is being taken to address issues identified, including more consistent oversight of care plans, quality of case recording, and tackling the timeliness of assessments for children, who are not identified as being in immediate risk of significant harm. This is driven through our continuous improvement plan – Road to Excellence.

**Child Protection Plans** - we currently support c500 children who are subject to child protection plans. We did see a big increase in the numbers subject to plans in the first wave of the pandemic. In August 2020 the number stood at 699. The increase was in part due to lack of family network support to some of the most vulnerable children due to lockdown restrictions. Also, limited visibility to some key agencies, which resulted in child protection conferences being less confident to end some plans and for new cases, less confidence to manage cases at child in need level. The situation stabilised as we moved to some lifting of restrictions and a return to the support of family networks and key agencies.

### Keeping Children Safe and Cared For

Our aim is that all children are living in stable environments and have secure attachments and that families are self-sufficient and able to cope. Like other local authorities we have seen the number of children in care increase significantly over the last few years. Children considered to be at risk of significant harm or in need are referred into the service through First Response, who screen contacts and if they meet the threshold for intervention assess their needs. First Response is also the front door into Children and Family Wellbeing services. Children and Families requiring longer term social care involvement are supported via Locality based children's social care teams or the disabled children's teams.

Support to children in care has remained a key priority. Placement stability has remained good. Our in-house foster carers have been tremendous in supporting our children. We have successfully maintained children at home where it is safe to do so and our numbers of children in care, whilst raising to 680, are below the number we expected to see. However, the complexity of need of some children is great. We have maintained contact and support to children via the Children in Care council, SYPAC (supporting young people after care) and participation/children's rights staff. Engagement of children in virtual activities has been good, although we needed to postpone our annual celebration event. We did, this summer, successfully run the summer playscheme for a number of children in care.

The Service has continued to work with partner agencies to identify and support children at risk of criminal exploitation (including child sexual exploitation), and children living with the risk of domestic abuse via the Vulnerability Hub based at Wigston police station. Out of hours services are also based at The Hub. Children whose long-term plan is to be in care are supported by dedicated Children in Care teams. The Care Leavers team supports our older children post 18 to successfully transition into adulthood.

**Defining Children's Services for the Future** – we have commissioned a major project in partnership with consultants Newton Europe to ensure that our services are the most effective and efficient they can be in improving outcomes for vulnerable children. The project has analysed all of our data, engaged with professionals and studied our processes and approach. The project has identified a range of improvements which will further focus our resources and services on achieving the best possible outcomes for children.

**Children's Innovation Partnership** – since forming a partnership with Barnardo's to work together on the Innovation Partnership we have successfully bid for £798k for the Holiday Activity and Food Programme to specifically focus on school hunger and to run holiday activities. Youth engagement funding has also been secured to work with around 3,000 children over 2 years on advanced life-skills for 11-14 years olds. We have also secured £234k DfE funding for 18 months to deliver 102 Family Group Conferences, though implementation was delayed due to Covid-19.

**Children's Placement Strategy** - the placements and homes where children, young people and their families live are key to achieving our priority outcomes. For our children in care we provide good quality care and placements to help them reach their potential. Our Care Placement Strategy outlines how we design and commission services of a high quality that place children and their needs firmly at the centre. Our Care Placement Strategy also determines what services may be necessary to meet the needs of children both on the edge of care and in care and how permanence for children and young people can be achieved at an earlier stage in the child's journey. Our Innovation Partnership with Barnardo's has recently focused on residential redesign. We have redesignated use of one property, purchased two other properties and a new build is in progress. Work is also now underway with the design phase 2. By the end of 2022 this will see the Council have inhouse residential provision of a high standard based in the county, enabling more Leicestershire children who are in care to remain near to home.

**Care Placements Support** – our well-established dedicated placements support team has been instrumental in targeting improving placement stability for young people living in foster care who present the most challenging behaviour. There has also been an expansion of the specialist foster carers scheme and increase in capacity of the independent visitor scheme. Providing children with additional support, mentoring and role models.

**Care Proceedings** - children subject to care proceedings have continued to be supported and their plans in court progressed via the Public Law outline. Meetings with the Lead Judge for the Leicester Court have taken place and she has praised our social workers and legal staff for supporting the court process to progress and children's plans to have progressed during difficult times.

**Fostering** – we aim to ensure that Leicestershire children in care remain locally in the county and to recruit more in-house foster carers. We have been working hard to increase the number of foster carers, recruiting carers for specific groups and to retain carers once they foster. The Council has 112 inhouse foster carers who provide a home and care for our children in care and 35 supported living providers who provide a home for our care leavers. Over the last 18 months these carers have gone above and beyond to provide support for our children and young people over the pandemic. This has included taking on additional responsibilities such as home schooling, managing contact virtually with children's families and supporting them through this, in addition to maintaining face to face contact where it was safe to do.

**Place to Call Home** - in October 2020 another initiative launched that is supporting recruitment of foster carers, named a Place to Call Home. This is a joint project of nine East Midlands local authorities led by the Council. It aims to place unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in homes in the county in which they arrived. The project came about following the growing recognition that a lot of these young people ended up in placements at a distance from the local authorities and social workers who care for them. The project seeks to recruit 40 foster carers and supported lodgings providers across the region. At the end of March 2019, there were 310 young unaccompanied refugees who were in the care of local authorities in the East Midlands. Foster carers support these young people day-to-day, providing safety, security and a family environment.

**Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)** – in July 2021 Leicestershire agreed to join the voluntary national transfer scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The new scheme will introduce a rota across the East Midlands where unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who arrive on the south coast will be placed in accommodation and supported by local authorities across the region. The Council is taking five children a year from the rota. In addition to this, we are also taking three unaccompanied asylum seeking children to support the critical position that Kent was in due to the number of children who have arrived in Kent and who needed placing in accommodation with support provided to them.

**Adoptions** – during national adoption week in October 2020 the council took the opportunity to shine a spotlight on some of the specialist support available in relation to the life changing difference adoption can make to children and families. 34 children were waiting for adoption in Leicestershire, including four sibling groups. The Council has a strong support package available to adopters, to help ensure the best outcomes for adopted children and families. Leicestershire has also been working in partnership

with Leicester City, Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire and Rutland to establish a formal partnership to meet the requirements of a Regional Adoption Agency. The Partnership formally launched in October 2020 following extensive collaborative working over recent years to align practice and processes. The Partnership will ensure a strengthening of work across the partnership to provide high quality adoption services.

**Corporate Parenting Strategy** – in February 2020 the Council approved the young people’s version of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, underlining the Council’s commitment to its responsibility to be a good parent to children and young people in care and care leavers, so that they grow up happy, achieve well and lead successful lives. Children in care and care leavers worked closely with us in developing the strategy. The approach supports the role of elected members as corporate parents with ‘champions’ looking at three areas, education, training and work, housing and accommodation and health. The strategy outlines the vital role played by the council’s Virtual School in promoting the education of children in care through working closely with schools, alternative settings and wider services within and beyond Leicestershire.

**Care Leavers** – the Leaving Care Team is well established and has been working hard to support Care Leavers. Care leavers across Leicestershire also supported their communities in key worker roles during the coronavirus pandemic. Vital areas the county’s young people worked in include roles in healthcare, delivery services and retail. We support them in a number of ways, including with finances and housing as they leave care and begin their adult lives, starting careers and having families of their own. Care leavers are visited regularly by their personal assistant/social worker who will provide advice, listen, and signpost to the right services if they are experiencing difficulties.

**Leicestershire Virtual School** – the school, known as The Fox Academy, promotes the education of children in care, working with schools, alternative settings and wider services within and beyond Leicestershire to secure prompt access to quality education, appropriate to their needs. The virtual school support this work through personal education plans, and monitoring including the use of Pupil Premium Plus. The school also leads a broad spectrum of engagement and learning opportunities including music workshops, university experience days, theatre trips and independent living courses.

**Homelessness** – we provide timely responses to young people who are 16/17 and homeless to support them to remain in their friends and family network. We have worked with housing commissioners to improve the range of options available to ensure the individual needs of young people can be flexibly met and to assist transition to adulthood.

### Support for Vulnerable Children

We have an established SEND and Inclusion Strategy setting out our vision and priorities for developing support and provision for children and young people with SEND or otherwise at risk of not being fully included in school or college. The Strategy is overseen by a strategic SEND and Inclusion Board to improve outcomes for our children and young people and strengthen support for children with SEND following the local area SEND Inspection.

**SEND Improvement Plan** – following the local area SEND inspection in February 2020 and the issuing of a Written Statement of Action (WSOA), in October 2020 Ofsted wrote to the Council and CQC deeming the WSOA action plan as ‘fit for purpose’. The WSOA Action Plan was drawn up with our health and the Leicestershire Parent Carer Forum partners, along with discussions with children and young people and parent/carers. Ofsted noted that the Action Plan was comprehensive, provided clear timescales and focused on tackling the two concerns raised in the inspection report: the lack of a Joint Commissioning Strategy and the quality of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. We continue to meet monthly with the DfE Advisor to monitor progress against the WSOA and there have been a number of formal monitoring meetings. Feedback from these meetings is positive and the DfE and NHSE/I are satisfied with progress.

**SEND and Inclusion Strategy** – in September 2020 we agreed a new SEND and Inclusion Strategy to improve support services and help us give SEND children a good start in life and access the best possible education. These include the introduction of a handbook for parents and professionals working with SEND children, plans to improve the way education and health care (ECH) plans are delivered and the development of the inclusion service, which offers early support to children and young people. Priorities include supporting schools to improve their knowledge and understanding of the local offer to develop their provision to support their pupils prior to becoming SEND. Developing local specialist provision to ensure sufficient places across a variety of needs. We have invested around £30m to build new schools and specialist SEND resource bases in our schools. Improving the experience for children, young people, parents and carers who go through the process of needs assessment for EHC plans is a key focus of changes across the SEND system.

**SEND Commissioning Strategy 2021-24** – as a response to recommendations by Ofsted in our Local Area SEND Inspection, and as set out in our SEND and Inclusion Strategy, work has taken place to develop, and consult with the public on and finalise a Joint LLR SEND Commissioning Strategy, 2021-24. The strategy has been developed across LLR, covering the work of CCGs and Local Authorities. It contains a high-level vision for joint commissioning that ‘we will work together across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to improve the outcomes for children and young people with SEND’ and a set of priorities for the focus of joint work in the coming 3 years. Work commenced in Summer 2021 to start work on the priorities identified in the strategy and this is overseen by a delivery group, with representation drawn from the three CCGs and local authorities.

**SENA Restructure** – in May 2021 in response to various factors, including an increase in demand and findings from the SEND Local Area Inspection, the SENA service had a significant restructure and introduced a new operating model. The new structure has increased the service’s capacity to manage and improve the timeliness and quality of EHCPs. The structure and operating model went live in May 2021 and there has been a positive start with a focus on relationships with parents and carers and child-centred planning. Alongside this we are reviewing all EHC Needs Assessment processes and have introduced a ‘Decision to Assess’ Panel that considers all requests for EHC Needs Assessment to ensure consistent decision making, with input from Health and Social Care. This will ensure that capacity to undertake assessments is focussed upon the right children, whilst at the same time

providing detailed feedback to schools/parents and carers regarding what more can be done to support children at SEN Support.

**High Needs Block Programme** – since Autumn 2018, this programme has developed strategies to enable SEN and Inclusion services to manage significant growth in SEN and demand for EHC Needs Assessment. The programme brings together sufficiency provision, practice improvements, pathway modelling, revised funding models, joint commissioning with health and social care and quality and learning frameworks to ensure that educational outcomes can be met within the DSG.

**New SEND Provision** - over the last three years we have invested £30m of capital to deliver over 500 new places for children with SEND in Leicestershire. The provision developed includes resource bases in mainstream schools, 2 new schools (Foxfields SEMH and Fusion C&I Academies) with a third, Bowman Academy (SEMH) also in the pipeline, a new post 16 provision in Loughborough, expansion projects for all existing Leicestershire special schools, 2 satellite classroom facilities run by existing special schools on nearby mainstream school sites, 1 new specialist pre-school and the expansion of another specialist pre-school. Further developments are planned to continue to develop high quality local provision to meet the needs of children with SEND in Leicestershire.

**SEND Local Offer and Advice** – our local offer brings together details about local health, education and social care services in one place for children and young people aged 0-25. This one stop shop provides a valuable resource and experiences of services and facilities can also be submitted via the site. In addition to the Local Offer pages on the internet there is also a regular SEND Newsletter for families and regular ‘road-shows’. Our SENDIASS service continues to provide free, impartial and confidential advice and support on all matters relating to SEND including education, health and social care issues. Its aim is to empower parents, carers and children to voice their thoughts about the support they need in place.

**Children with a Disability** - we are working with the Leicestershire SEND Hub (Parent Carer Forum) to review our short breaks offer to families where a child has a disability. The review will ensure that all support is based upon a high-quality assessment and that decisions are transparent, outcome focused and supportive of steps towards independence.

**SEND Family Support Team** – our SEND Family Support Team has been established to support parents and carers of children and young people aged 0-19 who have a disability. SEND Family Support and Assessment Workers help with information and advice, applying for early help short breaks and specialist summer play schemes and parenting support including managing family routines and boundaries.

**Specialist Teaching Service** – we reviewed our Specialist Teaching Services in 2019 and brought them together into a single service including the Autism and Learning Support Team, Hearing Support Team and Vision Support Team. The Specialist Teaching Service has supported children with SEN over the last academic year to successfully engage with education and to reach their outcomes during the covid period. The Service has contributed substantially to our SEN Support Handbook, which sets out clear guidance about support available to schools and other providers to help children effectively through early identification and support.

**Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service** – we are currently reviewing our Educational Psychology Service (EPS) to ensure that we maximise the opportunities for schools and other providers to benefit from expert psychological input into whole school activity as well as timely statutory support. The Council are currently facing challenges in terms of available capacity to undertake statutory EP assessments as part of the EHC Needs Assessment process. This reflects a significant national and regional shortage of educational psychologists. We are committed to maintaining a strong EPS that focusses upon pre-statutory work for the benefit of children and schools. The EPS continues to offer a variety of activity including helping children with emotional needs through a very successful emotional literacy programme (ELSA).

### Supporting Families and Early Help

We seek to intervene early, when children are assessed as requiring services above universal provision and provide a range of targeted early help and preventative services to support children and families and ensure that problems don't escalate. Doing this helps save the costs of more expensive interventions for a range of agencies.

**Children and Families Wellbeing Service** – our Children and Families Wellbeing Service focuses on supporting the most vulnerable families in Leicestershire. The integrated service is delivered from 21 family wellbeing centres across the county and provides targeted support to families in need in a more joined up way. Making the best use of staff and resources. The 0-19 service is delivered through drop-in clinics, group work and/or casework. The service, including the Supporting Leicestershire Families Programme, helps people tackle a range of issues including drugs, truancy, unemployment, domestic violence, health problems and anti-social behaviour.

Like many other services, CFWS moved swiftly to different forms of service delivery to minimise the risk to children and families and staff through home visits. Whilst home visits did continue throughout the pandemic where they were needed, other forms of support, such as group work and parenting programmes, moved to on-line delivery. Staff quickly adapted to working differently with children and parents using creative methods to deliver services and keep everyone safe – this included doorstep and park visits, on-line groups, workbooks delivered and worked through by phone or video conferencing. During the year CFWS launched the evidence-based parenting programme, 'Triple P'. Support is delivered through either themed discussion groups and seminars, or group work programmes. CFWS is able to provide this support to parents of disabled children aged 0-12, parents of primary age children and parents of teens. We continue to provide the Solihull Parenting Programme for parents of children under age 5.

**School Readiness Campaign** - in June 2021 a short video was launched explaining what it means for a child to be 'school ready' and including practical suggestions on how families can get involved. The school readiness campaign forms part of a shared priority of 'school readiness' developed by the Leicestershire Children and Families Partnership, where families, early years providers, 0-5 services and schools work together to ensure that all children get the best start in life.

**Free Early Years Child Care** – in December 2020 the Council called for working parents and carers of three and four-year olds to apply for their 30 hours free childcare to avoid missing out in the spring term. The extended entitlement supports working

parents with the cost of childcare and enables them to return to work or to work additional hours. Working parents who meet the criteria can get 30 hours per week for up to 38 weeks per year of funded childcare. In August 2021 parents and carers were again encouraged to apply for 30 hours funded childcare. The scheme is a big help to many families, enabling some to return to work and significantly reducing existing childcare costs for others. A childcare setting can also have a positive impact on a child's early learning and development.

**Free School Meals** – in October 2020 we announced that £500k pounds was being earmarked to extend free school meals during holidays for the rest of the academic year. The move was designed to ensure that children didn't go hungry during the Christmas, half-term and Easter breaks and benefited the 12,000 pupils across Leicestershire eligible for free school meals. During the pandemic the Council also gave over £500k of Government funding to food banks and community groups. We were awarded £1.46m through the Covid Winter Grant Scheme to provide support to families with children with the costs of food, fuel and utilities over the winter. We provided food vouchers in school holidays for families of over 12,000 pupils that are eligible for Free School Meals. In addition, we are providing support to vulnerable families with children under 5, support with fuel bills for vulnerable adults and additional support to our traveller community.

**Free Holiday Clubs** – in June 2021 we announced that free holiday clubs would be available in summer 2021 for children and young people eligible for free school meals. People could access up to four sessions a week, for four weeks, throughout the summer holidays free of charge. The holiday clubs involved helping young people learn new things from sport to music, dance, drama, art, cooking and gardening. Free nutritious meals were also provided. The Council, together with Leicestershire and Rutland Sport, offered the places to both eligible primary and secondary school pupils as part of the government's Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme.

**Voice and Influence Strategy** - in Autumn 2020 we launched a Voice and Influence Strategy as part of our commitment to put children at the heart of all of our activities, through involving them and their families in the decision-making, planning, commissioning, development and delivery of services that affect their lives. Over the last year we have continued to engage with and seek the views of children and young people and whilst the Covid-19 pandemic presented real challenges to participation it has also offered some new opportunities to engage in different ways. In February 2021 over 2,000 young people across the county made their voices heard on issues that matter most to them through the online 'Make Your Mark' Ballot. The top three national issues were supporting mental health, free university education and stopping plastic pollution. The top local issues were domestic violence, homelessness and access to training and jobs.

**County Youth Council** - we continue to support the County Youth Council Leicestershire members and the 3 elected Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) to progress their campaign activity on improving cancer care for young people, the environment and poverty. The MYPs have been supported to meet with members of parliament, local councillors and senior managers from the Council and organisations, including health, to discuss their ideas and share their views.

## School Support and Place Planning

Schools and early years' providers have continued to support children and young people through the Covid-19 pandemic. Schools and childcare providers continued to provide care for vulnerable children and youngsters whose parents were key workers. Teachers and support staff generously took care of families in need – by providing care, food and vital supplies when it was required. Staff at the County Council helped to support Leicestershire's schools to keep going through advice and guidance, round-the-clock, to ensure the county's children could go to school if they needed to.

**New School Places** – we continue to provide new good quality school places to meet the needs of our growing population. During the year we have created 860 additional school places, successfully completing projects at 9 different schools. 700 new primary school places and 160 new Secondary school places were delivered. Work is complete on the new Ashby Hastings Primary, which opened in September 2021.

**Shepshed Schools Transformation** - in June 2021 work began on the first phase of a £17.5m extension and refurbishment project which will provide hundreds of new school places in the Shepshed area. The transformation of the Shepshed schools' campus will help meet increasing demand for school places arising from new housing developments in the area, as well as the need for further places for pupils with SEND. The redevelopment will see Iveshead Secondary School moved to a single building and St Botolph's CE Primary School relocated to the former Shepshed High School's building. The final stage will see the Department for Education (DfE) build a new 50-place school to be called 'The Bowman Academy' on the current St Botolph's school site for children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs.

**First Choice Primary** – in April 2021 it was announced that 98% of children across Leicestershire had been offered a place at one of their top three school choices with 7115 applications received. 93% of youngsters secured a place at their first-choice school, 4.1% their second and just 1% their third.

**First Choice Secondary** – in March 2021 figures confirmed that 88.9% of young people had been offered a place at their preferred secondary school with 5.2% their second choice. The admissions process in Leicestershire adheres to central government rules and gives parents the right to have an appeal heard by an independent panel.

## Safer Communities

We place high priority on keeping Leicestershire communities safe by helping minimise crime and anti-social behaviour, reducing youth offending, supporting victims of crime and providing consumer protection services.

**Community Safety Strategy** – in February 2020 we agreed a new Community Safety Strategy. Priorities to reduce crime and disorder are coordinated by the Leicestershire Safer Communities Strategy Board. The Council's Community Safety Team works with other agencies to plan and coordinate the work and helps provide a coordinated response to emerging threats such as serious organised crime, child exploitation and cyber-crime. The Strategy sets out a number of priorities including protecting the most vulnerable, reducing crime and the fear of crime, reducing anti-social behaviour, reducing harm from alcohol and substance misuse, reducing the risks of cybercrime

and bullying, increasing reporting of domestic abuse and protecting the vulnerable and increasing confidence in reporting hate crimes.

**Youth Crime** – young people being drawn into violent crime is an issue of huge concern for communities across the country. In October 2019 the Council was awarded c£480K over two years, through the Home Office's Youth Endowment Fund, to tackle violent youth crime. The funding supported the innovative Advanced Life-skills programme in schools across Leicestershire. From intensive family therapy to street-based and school mentoring programmes, 30,000 young people between the ages of 10-14 benefited from the interventions.

**Youth Justice** – during 2019/20 our youth offending team was integrated into a new Youth and Justice Service, embedded within the Children and Family Wellbeing Service. In relation to youth justice, services continued across the partnership to ensure that those children most at risk of offending or causing harm were appropriately supported, especially during times when schools and education provision were closed and managing the implications of lockdown. The Service continued to work in partnership with the Courts, Police and Social Care to provide robust responses and support. Youth Workers worked in collaboration with the Child Exploitation hub to ensure that every child reported missing was offered a return interview and that their ongoing needs were met with a focus on preventing further missing episodes.

**IMPACT Project** – the IMPACT project continues to work with young people involved in Anti-Social Behaviour. The IMPACT team carries out street-based work with young people in areas where ASB has been identified as a problem. The team undertakes work in relation to drugs, knives, sexual health, risks of exploitation on-line and on the street. YOS has also worked with the Police and other partners to develop a response to knife crime. A knife crime awareness programme has been developed and is being delivered in schools. Multi-agency work has also progressed to seek to tackle 'county-lines' drug dealing activities.

**Domestic Abuse** - focused work on domestic abuse has continued, championed by the Domestic Abuse Strategic group, and driven and supported by involvement in national research. A Domestic Abuse toolkit has been developed to assist practitioners in work with families where there is concern regarding domestic abuse. This is an innovative piece of work and was launched across the workforce in September 2021. In November 2020 the Council marked White Ribbon Day and shared information, advice, and guidance across social media channels together with County Hall being lit up orange, to show the council's commitment to eradicating domestic abuse. Since the beginning of the year, reported levels of violence experienced by victims across Leicestershire had increased by 63%, totalling 5,278 cases so far this year. The coronavirus pandemic has amplified the domestic abuse crisis in the UK and the impact of two lockdowns has seen a surge in victims seeking refuge.

In April 2020 we were selected to receive a £700k share of government funding to support survivors of domestic abuse. The funds are supporting the Hope Project, a multi-agency provision that delivers an all-round support service for men and women from all backgrounds with complex needs, together with dedicated specialist services for BAME groups who may be at risk from honour-based violence and forced marriage. The services include refuge provision for women and their children within the city and county, outreach domestic abuse support for men and women across LLR, mental

health support to suit a variety of needs, substance misuse support and emotional management programmes.

**Hate Incidents and Crime** – the Council operates alternate reporting centres for hate incidents through local libraries. There is also a ‘Stamp IT Out’ website which has online reporting. Leicestershire Police has a dedicated hate crime officer who provides advice and support to those dealing with hate crime and incidents. In the latter months of 2020-21, work began on the ‘Relationships Matter’ project. This project draws on an evidence base around the impact that parental conflict can have on the wellbeing and positive outcomes of children. Whilst all households will experience conflict from time to time, where conflict is unresolved and frequent it can have a significant impact on children’s mental health, educational attainment, and ability to form positive relationships.

**Prevent** – our Leicestershire Corporate Prevent Group delivers our responsibilities for stopping people becoming involved in or supporting terrorism, in support of the Government’s Prevent Strategy. The group leads on the departments work on Prevent and associated counter terrorism under the national counter-terrorism strategy Contest3.

**Safeguarding Adults** - in September 2021 we noted a report on the work of the Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB). The SAB set a joint Strategic Plan for 2020-2025 with the Leicester SAB which provides the framework for forward priorities. The pandemic however has impacted on the Safeguarding Adults Boards work for 2020-2021. Partnerships and local communities lived and worked through a year of high, often unpredictable demand and unprecedented situations. Partnership working has been strong during the pandemic. The government allowed some aspects of local councils’ Care Act responsibilities to be ‘eased’ during a period in 2020. None of the local councils needed to enact these easements despite the very difficult context.

During 2020/21 the SAB had 14 referrals for Safeguarding Adults Reviews (SARs), significantly more than any previous year. From these the SAB commenced seven SARs during the year, and continued work on two others. The pandemic and response to it significantly impacted the SABs ability to carry out training. However, the SAB continued to support up-to-date training in single agencies, including all key partners and many care providers through disseminating learning from reviews and updates to procedure and legislation through its Trainers’ Network and Safeguarding Matters newsletter.

Partners worked together to respond to the changing situation and consider safeguarding risks and the changing needs of adults with care and support needs. One example of this is a partnership set up in response to an increase in unplanned closures of care homes to develop an approach to identify and provide appropriate support to safeguard residents. Intelligence from this has shaped the SABs forward priority regarding care homes. The Board also explored the following themes in response to emerging concerns during the year- safeguarding those with complex needs (Transforming Care cohort), hidden harm, safeguarding those shielding and domestic abuse, learning from Learning Disability mortality reviews, modern slavery and cuckooing. The Board has identified 3 key priorities moving forwards including Covid-19, care homes and hidden harm.

**Keep Safe Spaces** - with the recent lifting of restrictions the Keep Safe Places areas became fully available again, with staff on hand to help if people felt overwhelmed,

anxious or scared while out and about. Knowing there's a place of security close by can provide the confidence necessary to go out freely. A number of venues are available in busy retail areas across the county.

### Consumer Protection

Our Trading Standards Service continues to play a key role in ensuring a good level of consumer protection, that businesses are able to trade in an environment that is fair and that consumer goods are safe. The Service has also played an enhanced regulatory role as a result of a range of new Covid-19 regulations that have affected businesses in a variety of ways.

**Intelligence-led enforcement** - the Trading Standards Service adopts an intelligence-led approach in supporting local businesses by identifying and proactively engaging with those that produce or supply high risk products. Complaints levels are monitored to ensure that we can intervene as early as possible to reduce the risk of non-compliance, addressing causes of harm and prevent a recurrence.

**Safer consumer goods** - we are active members of the national borders project, overseen and financed by the Office of Product Safety and Standards (OPSS). We work very closely with the Border Force to target high risk products being imported into East Midlands Airport. In 2020-21 we seized and recycled more than 305,000 items with a value of over £10 million, measured in terms of a national approved measure of savings in preventing those goods entering society. Our numbers for consignments checked and unsafe items detained and recycled is consistently the highest in the country. Items detained tend to be for online selling platforms, they include electrical chargers, jewellery, cosmetics, toys and PPE. The latter items had a peak through the airport during the first quarter of 2020-21, as importers rushed to bring these items into the UK as quickly as possible, during the start of the pandemic.

We are also active in preventative measures and advise Leicestershire based businesses, particularly in the complex area of product safety law. EU exit led to an increase in the number of requests from Leicestershire businesses for compliance advice and we envisage demand remaining high for the foreseeable future.

**Protecting the food chain and food hypersensitive consumers** - officer's complete inspections of farm businesses and undertake the sampling of feed for farmed animals to ensure it is safe and high standards of animal welfare are maintained. This work also ensures that traceability within the food chain is maintained to help prevent or control the spread of disease. Work continues with food business operators to ensure they understand their legal obligation to supply accurate information about allergens in the food they sell so that hypersensitive customers can make informed decisions about whether food is safe for them to eat. Samples of food are also taken to confirm that correct allergen information has been provided.

**Covid-19 – identifying compliant Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)** - in the early months of the pandemic during 2020 over 1300 hours of officer time at almost all levels within the Trading Standards Service were spent undertaking the review of PPE items offered to the Council or associated activities, including advice to local businesses seeking to enter the market place or diversify their business model.

**Covid-19 – ensuring businesses comply with restrictions** - the Service has played an important role working with Environmental Health, Leicestershire Constabulary and

Public Health as a result of the range of evolving Covid-19 regulations aimed at regulating trading premises, public outdoor spaces and events. Officers have been tasked to investigate matters that in the opinion of the Director of Public Health pose a serious and imminent threat to Public Health. The investigations have required the service to issue, enforce, monitor and review business closure or restriction notices.

**Weights and Measures** - routine inspections are carried to verify scales, average quantity and measurements such as at petrol pumps, and are undertaken by qualified weights and measures officers.

**Scams and financial abuse** – scams continue to target the most vulnerable and those socially isolated, following the impact of Covid-19. Our Facebook page reached out to the public to raise the alarm on current scams including romance, prize draw and covid issues. Scammers continue to impersonate reputable businesses such as banks, HMRC, DVLA, and delivery companies including DHL and Hermes. Financial or identity theft scams around Covid passes and vaccinations continue to prey on peoples' vulnerabilities. Working with Adult Social Care and Leicestershire Police, resources are allocated to prevention and intervention initiatives. We produce quarterly newsletters informing partners and charities of scams and continue to provide scams awareness resources such as door stickers and advice cards.

Complaints from vulnerable consumers continue to be a high priority where they have been a victim of home improvement rogue builders. The long-term effect on this type of crime can be significant in terms of the mental health and wellbeing of the victims, requiring the service to collaborate with other support agencies. False or misleading environmental claims continue to emerge as consumers become more influenced by the climate change agenda and criminals seek to exploit this growing marketplace.

Trading Standards are aware there has been a significant rise in the sale of unsafe counterfeit goods via social media, in particular, with prolific offenders choosing to continue to trade online despite the risk of prosecution. The service has responded by adopting disruption tactics, including engagement with Facebook to remove the seller from the platform. Demand for enforcement in this area continues to create significant challenges for investigators. Trading Standards has an important role, post pandemic, in ensuring local businesses have confidence that the Leicestershire marketplace is not undermined by fraudulent trading.

**Registration Services** – our Registration services have been considerably impacted by Covid-19, regulations. Wedding compliance issues and cancellations have impacted on many peoples plans. The service has made considerable efforts to meet the demand backlog caused by the cancellation of weddings and also to adjust services to new processes for death registrations.

## **Great Communities**

We want Leicestershire communities to be thriving and inclusive places where people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities participate and help each other, feel included, are resilient and safe and take pride in their local area. We also want to support communities to embrace diversity and maintain a strong sense of place, celebrating culture and heritage.

Over the past year we have worked with and supported communities in Leicestershire, in tackling one of the most difficult periods in our history. Whilst the pandemic has presented enormous difficulties for Leicestershire communities, it has also offered many examples of positive community spirit, the willingness of people to volunteer to help others and provide support to their neighbours, particularly those who are most vulnerable, and the value of what can be achieved from within our communities.

**LLR Resilience Partnership** - the local Resilience Partnership Team during 2020/21 has played a major role in coordinating and supporting the response to the Covid-19 pandemic. This has involved working within individual councils, collectively with LLR local authorities and across the wider Local Resilience Forum partners on a wide range of work including support for shielded residents, provision of PPE and arrangements for increased mortuary capacity. Later in the year support was also provided for planning for the recovery phase of the pandemic. In addition to supporting the Covid-19 response the Resilience Team also provides a 24/7 365-day emergency response first point of contact for local authorities, assesses and coordinates community emergency information such as flood alerts, flood warnings and severe weather warnings and supports communities in responding to and recovering from incidents. The Team has also responded to several flood events and an avian flu outbreak as well as planning for and responding to the implications of the EU Exit Transition.

**Leicestershire Communities Fund** - in March 2020 the Council announced a £1 million fund to support voluntary and community sector organisations in the county to manage the financial impacts of the coronavirus outbreak. The hardship fund was established to enable local groups, impacted by reduced income from sales/trading, room rental or donations, to keep on providing essential support to vulnerable people, including those isolating and with reduced social contact. The grant fund was subsequently increased in value and extended through two further rounds of funding. In total, over 3 rounds of funding, 379 grants were awarded, totalling nearly £2.6m from the Council. In recognition of the efficient and responsive way the Communities Fund was administered, the Council received an award from the charity Leicestershire Cares, which highlighted the difference the funding had made to community organisations in such a short timescale, during a time of significant challenges.

**SHIRE Community Grants** – the 2021/22 SHIRE Community Grants programme was launched in June 2021. SHIRE Grants continue to be a successful initiative which provides grant funding to VCSE sector organisations for projects that improve the health and wellbeing of people experiencing vulnerability and disadvantage. SHIRE Grants provide a vital source of investment for VCSE organisations, enabling the delivery of services which help to reduce demand on council and other public services. The SHIRE Grant programme for 2021/22 has awarded 74 grants, totalling £396,654 to date, with two further rounds of funding to follow.

**Supporting Volunteering** - has been a key theme throughout the last year and one which we have continued to co-ordinate, promote and support. A strategic volunteer advisory group was formed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and this has ensured that Volunteer Managers and their volunteers have been able to access consistent messaging and support for volunteering to safely continue and adapt to ever changing circumstances. Many volunteers have continued to offer support to our service delivery and communities throughout the pandemic through their traditional roles or by adapting to new ones. There has also been overwhelming volunteer support for the emergency response which supported shielding and vulnerable members of the community. During and after the initial lock-downs volunteers took part in new and creative projects supporting mental health and wellbeing in communities and also returned to essential roles such as helping Country Parks to enable safe access to outdoor spaces and supporting vulnerable young people and their families with home schooling.

**Voluntary Sector Infrastructure Services** - support for the VCS in Leicestershire is provided by an infrastructure service contract held by Voluntary Action Leicestershire (VAL). It is aligned to the shared objectives of the Council and CCGs, specifically around managing demand through early/community level intervention and prevention, increasing community resilience and more effective delivery of services by community groups. During 2020/21 the Service has focused on Covid-19 response and recovery and contributing to the work of the LLR Resilience Partnership. A key part of this work has been co-ordinating volunteering across the sub-region, building on the role of VAL as the Volunteer Centre for the County. In addition to supporting volunteering for voluntary groups, VAL has recruited over 1,000 Covid-19 volunteers to support vulnerable people. All these volunteers were offered at least one volunteering opportunity and 56% were mobilised to support vulnerable people with food and medication, provide transport to and from medical appointments/hospital discharge for patients, provide shopping for vulnerable people, distribute information about support available and provide befriending/checking-in support. Later in the year VAL also recruited around 1,250 county volunteers to support the vaccination programme.

**Leicestershire Communities Website** – provides a range of useful information to help support and facilitate social action in communities and help people to actively participate in their communities. It includes resources around setting up a community group and accessing grants and funding, case studies of successful community projects, Neighbourhood Planning and Community Managed Libraries, information on 'Asset Based Thinking and Doing' and a Community Engagement Toolkit for Parish Councils. Use of the website has grown steadily and for the year to March 2021 the site attracted over 100,000 page-views and just under 25,000 users.

**Social Enterprises** - the Cooperative and Social Enterprise Development Agency (CASE) provide a social enterprise support service across Leicestershire. In 2020-21 CASE supported over 40 existing and emerging social enterprises to develop their businesses through help with strategic planning, partnership links, developing robust income streams and accessing other sources of funding. As a result of CASE's input, over 100 jobs were created or saved in the social enterprise sector.

**Community Buildings** - are the essential physical fabric from which community activities take place, where people meet and where services are delivered. We have continued to work with the Rural Community Council to provide an ongoing programme of support for groups that run village halls and community centres and to

support the development of new facilities and service delivery arrangements. During the Covid-19 pandemic support for community buildings has focused on providing information, advice and guidance on lockdown restrictions, compliance with covid requirements, covid related funding, foodbanks, Trustee meetings, risk assessments and covid secure measures etc. Training programmes for community building providers have continued to be delivered via webinars covering topics such as effective management of village halls, reopening of halls, safeguarding and loneliness.

**Citizen's Advice Bureaux** - services are supported by the Council jointly with all district councils. Citizens Advice Leicestershire and Charnwood Citizens Advice Bureau provide community advice and support with a focus on issues relating to benefits, debt, homelessness and employment. Between them the Citizens Advice Bureaux provide advice services across the County to help people to manage debt and money, remain in employment, improve their health and well-being and stay in their homes. Over the past year Citizens Advice has supported continuing high numbers of people despite the change to predominantly phone and on-line support by both staff and volunteers. A broad range of assistance has been maintained but with an increased focus on employment advice, especially the self-employed who have been unable to work and need to understand the support they can get. There has also been an increase in working people needing to claim in-work benefits because of layoffs, zero hours contracts where no hours are being given, and furlough. Help with Universal Credit claims also increased significantly during the year.

**Signposting and Community Support Service** - SCSS provides predominantly re-used/graded furniture and electrical goods to enable people to move out of temporary accommodation, access tenancies etc, together with emergency short-term food and fuel support to people in hardship and crisis. The service also delivers preventative support focused on debt and money management and is provided by a partnership involving all District Councils, Charity Link, Citizens Advice Bureaux, The Bridge (East Midlands), Leicestershire and Rutland Reuse Network and Women's Aid.

**Healthwatch** - exists to give local people an effective voice about their health and social care services. The service for Leicester and Leicestershire has been jointly commissioned with Leicester City Council and is delivered in an integrated way across the City and County. The local Healthwatch service has established positive relationships with health and social care providers to highlight patient and carer's concerns and secure improvements. Achievements from 2020/21 have included providing community advice and signposting regarding the pandemic, access to health and care services via website updates, social media and phonenumber support; championing the involvement/interests of communities in changes to services (Hospitals and Maternity Reconfiguration), especially marginalised groups and supporting engagement with these groups and gathering community feedback on experiences of Covid-19 and reporting to health and care commissioners and providers to support enhanced service adaptation, communications and delivery. Providing volunteering support for shielding and vulnerable people during periods of lockdown.

**Community Libraries Support** – there are 35 community managed libraries embedded in local areas and offering a wide range of hub services including adult learning, work clubs, keep safe places, café facilities, meeting areas for community groups and bases for Local Area Coordination, in addition to traditional library services. The Communities Team has continued to work with colleagues in the

Communities and Wellbeing Service and with Voluntary Action Leicestershire to support service delivery, collaboration between libraries, sustainability and financial management.

**Parish and Town Councils** – in partnership with Leicestershire and Rutland Association of Local Councils (LRALC), we have continued to support Parish and Town Councils in their role as community leaders and as providers of community managed services. As part of the Council's response to the pandemic, and the support offered, LRALC conducted a 'Financial Impact' project to establish what support was most needed amongst Town and Parish Councils. In response, the LRALC provided a briefing for all Parish and Town Councils, provided two Zoom sessions offering financial advice and guidance, and provided 1:1 support to councils that needed more in-depth support. The introduction of two new on-line resources on Environment and Transport has been well received by Parish Clerks. The 'Information for Parishes and Communities' webpage offers up to date information and advice on topics including recycling, the broadband connectivity programme, grass cutting and HS2. A new Highways Website, 'A Roads to Zebras' offers parishes and community's information and advice around Traffic Calming, HGVs, Crossings, Parking and School Parking. We have also worked closely with the LRALC to advance understanding, interest, and involvement in the Climate Emergency throughout the last year including through a 'Climate Emergency Action Day' for Parish and Town Councils and follow up discussion and resources.

**Parish and Community Fund** – in March 2021 it was reported that new cycle racks, cleared vegetation to create wider footpaths and speed reduction signs were helping communities to stay safe and get exercise through the County Council's highways parish and community fund. More than 90 parishes expressed an interest in the fund.

**Neighbourhood Plans** – the Communities Team continue to support Neighbourhood Plan development. Well-designed plans help communities to take responsibility to develop a shared vision for local neighbourhoods and to shape the development and growth of local areas. There are now 125 active neighbourhood planning groups in Leicestershire which have produced 38 Adopted Plans and 105 designated areas. There are also 250 members signed up to the Neighbourhood Planning Network.

**Leicestershire Rural Partnership (LRP)** - the Partnership brings together a range of stakeholders to improve services and support rural communities and businesses. The LRP has been working towards renewing its Rural Framework which sets out priorities for the next five years, together with an accompanying action plan. The LRP are working in partnership with the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership to ensure the needs and priorities of rural Leicestershire are included in the Economic Growth Strategy.

**Leicestershire Business Recovery Fund** – with the onset of the pandemic the Council repurposed £750,000 of funding to develop the Business Recovery Fund, which was delivered over a 5-month period. The Fund received 207 applications and assisted 106 businesses with £709K of grant aid that has safeguarded 234 jobs and will support the creation of a further 94 new jobs.

**Rural Pubs** – in December 2020 it was announced that the Council was to offer a one-off payment of £1,000 to support small village pubs. The initiative – thought to be the only one of its kind in the country – was designed to keep people in jobs, maintain the role of the pub as a community hub and help them to diversify by providing extra

services for residents. Pubs are often at the heart of a rural community and hospitality had taken a big hit during the pandemic. The scheme was backed by major trade body, the British Beer and Pub Association, which represents around 20,000 of the country's pubs. 138 pubs were assisted with £1,000 each.

**Time-banking** - an innovative scheme where residents are rewarded for helping others in their community launched across Leicestershire in 2020. Time4Leicestershire is a skills exchange initiative which sees people carrying out good deeds for others and being rewarded in return by having somebody do a good deed for them. Part of the national Time-banking UK initiative, Time4Leicestershire is run by the Public Health team, who encourage people to sign up, register what skills they can offer and see what expertise they could benefit from. The scheme is designed to help people swap skills, connect with their community by meeting new people, contribute to their local community and receive help or support with practical tasks, such as gardening. The benefits for people from being connected within their community include improved mental health and wellbeing as well as improved physical health from engagement in activities.

**Friendly Communities of Leicestershire** – this innovative scheme aims to support social action and scale up existing initiatives such as the Friendly Bench, autism friendly environments and dementia friendly communities, to help lessen isolation and loneliness. During the year the Communities Team have continued to work with communities to support inclusive community initiatives. The Friendly Communities Working Group aims to integrate the Friendly Communities approach into community engagement opportunities, seeking greater cooperation and communication with communities. To recognise the value of what communities are doing using the Friendly Communities approach, a yearly 'award' is being promoted and awarded through VAL. The aim is to reward the efforts that communities have undertaken, using the Friendly community model to develop and sustain more inclusive, participative as well as more resilient communities across Leicestershire.

**Equalities** – in July 2020 a new Equalities Strategy and supporting action plan was agreed. This aims to make Leicestershire a place where equality is at the forefront of Council services as well as the lived experience of local communities. Through high levels of leadership, the Council will continue to improve performance in advancing equality of opportunity and celebrating diversity and inclusion. We are also striving to ensure Leicestershire is a place where there is equality of opportunity and good relations with and within its communities. The Council has been proactive in enabling discussion on the issues arising from the Black Lives Matter movement. Key achievements during the year include holding staff forums on issues such as Black Lives Matter, access for deaf and hard of hearing service users, and support for transgender colleagues and service users. We commemorated Holocaust Memorial Day and celebrated diverse religious festivals. The Council continues to be a Disability Confident, Mindful Employer and is in Stonewall's 100 top employers' index.

**Armed Forces Covenant** – the Council was proud to be awarded the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) gold award in 2020; one of only 17 employers in the East Midlands to achieve this. The Ministry of Defence award encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same. Through the last year the focus of work has been on supporting the regional Civil and Military Partnership Board to develop and deliver a regional action plan co-ordinating the work of local authorities, universities, military charities and our armed forces. Hosting a Council

armed forces employee network which supports forces family employees and explores ideas about how we can better improve service delivery to this cohort. Maintaining ties with the Ministry of Defence Employment Engagement Team including attending Partnering with Defence training and events and commemorating several important remembrance events.

**Consultation and Engagement** – the Council undertook a wide range of engagement activity during 2020/21 including 16 formal consultations and 3 sizable informal engagement projects. The Covid-19 pandemic had a strong impact on the Council's consultation activity including an initial reduction in the volume of consultation along with a shift to almost exclusively online engagement activity which has also enabled the Council to test new approaches to engagement as well as develop a better understanding of how digital poverty, literacy levels and other barriers continue to prevent many people from getting involved. To support this the Council undertook a project specifically aimed at understanding the impact of the pandemic on communities that may not have had their voice heard. 'Conversations about Covid' targeted groups with existing links to the Council and individuals who wanted to share their story of the last year. Informal and open conversations were held with groups of older Asian women, parent-carers of young people with autism, artists, pub managers and young people in care, amongst others.

A strong corporate support offer has continued to ensure that that staff continue to maintain high standards of public engagement in all the work undertaken. Following discussions with local communities, the approach to engagement has been reviewed and refreshed, resulting in a focus on key areas of activity. A Council Engagement Strategy has been developed, accompanied by an Annual Report on engagement over the year. In addition, the Council has signed up to a charter of best practice developed by the Consultation Institute, the UK's national body on consultation and engagement.

## Communities – Libraries, Heritage and Culture

Our aim is that our cultural and historical heritage and the natural environment are enjoyed and conserved.

**Volunteering** - new volunteering roles were developed during the pandemic to harness community spirit and enable people to continue to shape and support our heritage services. Remote digital opportunities included oral history research to commemorate 800 years of Loughborough Market, Zoom Into Family History supporting ancestry research, telephone befriending for Home Library Service clients, Shared Reading Online, a digital 'Heritage Youth Forum' and a Foster Carers Reading for Pleasure support network.

**Libraries Following First Lockdown** – in September 2020 new figures showed that Leicestershire's main libraries had received over 5,500 visitors since a browsing service was re-introduced in August. We also announced that opening hours were being further extended with the aim of encouraging more people to use an appointment system for visits. The move built on the success of a 'click and collect' service, which allowed members to request a selection of books as recommended by library staff, and which received more than 1600 orders since it launched in early July 2020. Other figures showed that over 95,000 e-books and audiobooks had been loaned out 'virtually' (during Apr-July 2020), a significant increase on pre-lockdown usage. In October 2020 the 16 main libraries ran digital sessions via social media, including how to borrow eBooks and eAudiobooks, how to trace a family tree online and how to write a personal statement for a job application. The programme of digital events helped mark 'Get Online Week' and residents to get more out of life when they are online. Figures show around 4.1 million people across the UK are not online at home.

**National Libraries Week 2020** - this focused on how libraries engaged communities through reading, particularly during lockdown. While libraries remained closed during lockdown, library staff in Leicestershire used social media to signpost followers to useful information and activities, as well as providing online coding sessions, a virtual book club and Wriggly Readers at Home, to help parents to keep children entertained. Our digital library also experienced a surge of sign-ups and downloads and more than 5,000 eBooks and eAudiobooks were added, including many new titles for children.

**Community Managed Libraries (CMLs)** – the service has continued to support CMLs throughout the pandemic, offering support and advice around re-opening safely and this helped see all 35 CMLs reopen by July 2021, with the majority having resumed their pre-covid opening hours. In September 2020 we agreed a one-off grant towards CMLs running costs, on top of the existing contributions we make as part of our overall financial support. The grant of nearly £60,000 was to support the libraries to emerge from the pandemic, with many acting as community hubs supporting the needs of local people. We have supported the CMLs with a package of measures since they were launched back in 2015, including support with some running costs, with the contributions reducing over seven years. The Council has also encouraged them to make bids for tourism, leisure and hospitality government grants, with 19 libraries receiving support ranging from £10,000 to £25,000.

**Poet Laurate Tour** – in April 2021 the Poet Laurate, Simon Armitage, began a tour of libraries at Ashby library. The event sought to celebrate the physical space of libraries and take his work back into places that had given him so much. His experience of reading and writing began in the village library, then in the nearby town library, then in libraries at various places of study. For many people they are an invaluable aspect of everyday life, giving access not just to books but to services, learning, conversation and creative thinking. He decided to start his tour at Ashby as its full name (Ashby de la Zouch) has letters which both start and end the alphabet.

**Winter Reading Challenge** – in December 2020 Leicestershire libraries encouraged children to take part in the Winter Reading Challenge by preparing selection bags of mystery books to encourage them to discover and enjoy over the Christmas/New Year period. The Winter ‘grab bags’ were available from Leicestershire’s 16 main libraries and contained six mystery books, chosen by librarians based on genres and age groups. Research suggests that primary aged children had lost an average of 57-183 days of learning in reading this year as a result of the pandemic. So, it made it especially important for us to do everything we could to support children’s continued reading during the school holidays.

**Reading Friends** – in March 2021 parents around the county were invited to join virtual Reading Friends groups to meet new people in their local area. The Service was awarded funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and The Reading Agency to take part in the new initiative ‘Read, Talk, Share’ aimed at tackling loneliness, including a national rollout of the Reading Friends scheme. Reading Friends is a reading befriending programme that helps to start conversations and connect people who are lonely and isolated. Virtual groups appear on Facebook, providing support for parents, particularly first-time parents, who may feel more isolated without close family support and regular library activities.

**Festival of Stories** – in August 2021 an exciting project celebrating all things about stories, aimed to inspire and unite people of all ages across libraries, community venues and adult learning centres throughout Leicestershire. The Festival of Stories programme saw 50 family-friendly events featuring 30 different specialists in the arts, including storytelling, theatre workshops, author talks, writing workshops, dance, art and music. The events brought together families and friends to be inspired, to be creative and to enjoy each other’s company.

**Heritage Grant** – in October 2020 our five heritage sites and museums secured £71,500 from the government’s £1.57bn Culture Recovery Fund to help the heritage sector face the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. The grant was to further develop the education programme, review existing programmes in response to the challenges of Covid-19, and look at new ways of delivering the work, making more use of digital platforms to create new and sustainable ways of telling the many stories surrounding the county’s rich history.

**Snibston Regeneration** - in mid-December 2020 the Snibston Colliery Park was officially opened following an ambitious £3m regeneration scheme. The collections management and conservation team rationalised collections on the Snibston colliery site, supporting the selection of objects for the new colliery heritage trail and managing the complex task of moving and re-siting coal mining machinery and equipment. Documentation and digitisation of collections was made a priority during lockdown. The scheme includes a new environmentally friendly café, mountain bike trails, cycle

route, children's play area and a new interpretation of the historic colliery site. Further development is planned including a new heritage trail, improved country park, open space and picnic site. Once finished, the site will feature solar panels and electric vehicle charging points, which go towards our commitment of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. By opening up access to the area around the colliery buildings visitors can learn more about the story of Coalville. Residents were invited to celebrate Snibston during the summer to mark the completion of the regenerated Colliery Park, with a special week-long programme of events.

**Covid Memorial at Watermead Park** - in June 2021 the tree trail in Watermead Country Park, that will provide a space for reflection and remembrance for those whose lives have been affected by coronavirus, was formally opened. 58 trees have been planted along a 2.6 mile route that links the city side of Watermead Park with the county side, to form a tranquil trail through the park. A small plaque on each bench has been engraved with lines of poetry, or a quotation from literature, to provide words of comfort or hope. The memorial walk will last as a tribute to them and the thousands of key workers who risked their lives for others during the pandemic. Local people and businesses helped raise the £60,000 needed to create the walk, following the launch of a crowdfunding campaign in December 2020. Plans also progressed to dedicate a tree at County Hall in remembrance of those staff who lost their lives.

**Full Steam Ahead Exhibition** – in July 2021 a new exhibition at Melton Carnegie Museum showcased the golden age of steam trains including a recent painting addition to the collections showing Melton Station and goods yard circa 1848.

**Bosworth Medieval Medley** - in August a week of exciting on-site and digital events was held to mark the anniversary of the Battle of Bosworth. Bosworth Medieval Medley ran at the Council's Heritage Centre and featured a wide range of events and activities including a Knight School, themed evening guided walks and daytime family-friendly walks led by a costumed guide. The Medley also incorporated several online events, including a craft competition, history talks and a chance for people to share their pictures of previous festivals.

**Charnwood Museum Exhibition** - in August 2021 a new exhibition charting the 800-year history of Loughborough's market was displayed at Charnwood Museum. The Market 800 exhibition was created by our Communities and Wellbeing Team, working with Loughborough Library Local Studies Volunteer Group, Charnwood Borough Council and market traders. The colourful panels in the display charted the history of the town's market from the first Royal Market Charter of 1221.

**Festival of Archaeology** – in October 2020 the county's three market town museums hosted an online experience as part of the Festival of Archaeology. Charnwood Museum, Harborough Museum and Melton Carnegie Museum invited art and heritage expert, Deborah Miles, to choose an object from each site's collections. She led an online archaeological Illustration workshop, where visitors learned more about the fascinating objects carefully excavated from around the county.

**Heritage Commendations** – in August 2021 two of Leicestershire's top visitor attractions received glowing reports following inspections by national tourism body Visit England. Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre and the 1620s House & Garden, which are both managed by the Council, received high marks – bettering their already high scores from the last inspections in 2019. Bosworth received an 88% score and was rated very good. The same inspector also visited the 1620s House & Garden and

was so impressed with the attraction that he gave it an 89% score, which qualifies the site for both Visit England's Welcome and Hidden Gem accolades.

**Creative Learning Services (CLS)** - found its normal delivery of library, museum and art resources and activities in schools and colleges compromised by their closure due to Covid-19 control measures. Initially they created digital resources which were free to use for Leicestershire children who were learning at home. As schools developed their own support for their pupils at home, CLS created new tailor-made digital solutions to give access to the wealth of books, museum objects and works of art which make up the CLS collections – these included information downloads, videos and live-streamed interactive learning sessions. As schools came out of the first lockdown, physical resources were quickly delivered to schools to support curriculum-based learning across a wide range of subjects. School staff training has continued to be delivered by CLS throughout this period as has support for other service priorities including the work of the Audience Development team, children and family initiatives and the 'Whatever It Takes' project in schools.

**Green Plaques** — on 29 July 2021 a green plaque was unveiled in Market Harborough to honour the boxer Jack Leonard Gardner. Jack became British Heavyweight champion in November 1950 and also held the European title. The plaque was unveiled by the Chairman of the County Council and Jack's daughter. On the 30<sup>th</sup> September a green plaque was unveiled to honour Captain Robert Gee VC MC, in Hinckley. Born in 1876 Robert was sent to the workhouse and then Countesthorpe Cottage Homes for orphaned children. He joined the Royal Fusiliers and in November 1917 single handedly attacked a German machine gun post, for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross. He later served as MP for Bosworth

**Leicester Cathedral** – in June 2021 we backed Leicester Cathedral's plan to create a heritage learning centre that will enable visitors to find out more about the 2,000 year history of the site. Following the discovery and reinterment of King Richard III in the cathedral, visitor numbers to the site have soared and the new centre will provide a much-needed learning and exhibition space where the story of King Richard, the cathedral and Leicester's rich history can be better told. The new building will help to protect the historic setting of the cathedral and free up the spaces inside for their original purpose.

**Armistice Day** – in November 2020 the Council paid tribute to the fallen, on Armistice Day, by lighting up County Hall and the Stand Easy Memorial as well as publishing a short film of wreath laying at the memorial.

## **Environment, Climate Change and Waste**

Our aim is to ensure that we protect our environment by minimising our environmental impact as a council, tackling climate change and embedding environmental sustainability into what we do. In May 2019 the Council declared a climate emergency and made commitments to achieve carbon neutrality for its own operations by 2030. We also committed to work with others and lobby government to achieve carbon neutrality for Leicestershire by 2045. We want to create a clean and green future which will bring economic, social and environmental benefits. By the end of last year, we had reduced greenhouse gas emissions from council operations by 67%.

**Environment Strategy** – an Environment Strategy was approved in July 2020 reflecting our new commitments. We have agreed a £16 million package of measures over the next four years to reduce carbon, such as generating clean renewable energy on the council's estate and increasing the efficiency of our buildings and streetlighting.

**Clean Air Pledge** – Global Action Plan report that every year air pollution causes up to 36,000 deaths in the UK. Supporting national campaigns such as Clean Air Day encourages residents to think about their own contributions to air pollution and carbon emissions, and to pledge to take action to help us make Leicestershire a greener, healthier, happier place to live together. In October 2020 the Council marked Clean Air Day by renewing its pledge to continue to tackle air pollution and reduce carbon emissions. In June 2021, for the third year running the Council marked Clean Air Day UK.

**Net Zero Carbon** – initial plans to deliver net zero for the council's operations were agreed in July 2020 and a more detailed Net Zero Council Delivery Plan is being developed. In December 2020 the County Council joined the UK100 coalition of the most ambitious local leaders in the UK, pledging to achieve 'net zero' across the county by 2045, five years sooner than the government target of 2050. This reflects our commitment to tackle climate change and drastically cut emissions.

**Energy Strategy** – in March 2021 we set out plans for further energy saving over the next decade as we move towards being carbon neutral by 2030. The revised Strategic Property Energy Strategy will involve tailoring energy upgrades with new digital ways of working in mind. The targets include making a 30-to-50% further reduction in energy consumption from council buildings, compared with last year, along with a 50% increase in onsite renewable or zero-carbon energy generation.

We were successful in applying for £3.6m funding from the Government's Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme which will pay for an ambitious programme of works to cut our carbon footprint. Among the projects planned for the next year are increasing the number of solar panels and LED lighting at County Hall, introducing solar panels and electric vehicle chargers at Snibston Colliery Park and investigating low carbon heating solutions at other council-owned properties. It is also hoped to install large scale energy generation schemes such as solar farms on council land. Schools, academies, tenants and developers will also be encouraged to implement low carbon solutions.

The council is also purchasing green electricity to support its net zero ambitions while continuing to improve its energy efficiency and increasing its energy supply from renewables. Additionally, successful electric vehicle trials have been completed to identify suitable alternatives for the council's fleet operations. A new procedure for

vehicle procurement considers whole life costs and environmental impacts to identify the best available options and to accelerate the transition to electric vehicles for appropriate journeys. Further, a new project to improve the energy efficiency of low level streetlighting through trimming the hours of illumination and dimming the power of the lights will deliver further carbon reductions from streetlighting.

**SHIRE Environment Grants** – in October 2020 community groups and organisations were invited to apply for the latest round of SHIRE Environment Grants of up to £3,000. The scheme aims to help projects that minimise household waste, reduce carbon emissions and improve biodiversity. A virtual workshop was held in January 2021 to encourage and support groups in applying for the grants. A simplified application process is also available for smaller grants of up to £300. One organisation to benefit from a grant is Countesthorpe Parish Council. The grant enabled them to install two 5000L water harvesting tanks in the village hall grounds. The tanks collect run-off rainwater that is used by the parish council for such things as watering planters around the village, keeping the area in bloom without negatively impacting on the environment.

Burbage Parish Council used the money to plant hedges in popular green spaces to create new habitats for native animal species. South Kilworth Parish Council ran another of the projects which benefited. Their bird box scheme saw a total of 94 RSPB birdboxes placed around private houses, the church and the school in time for the 2021 breeding season. Cotesbach Parish Council improved the village pond to improve biodiversity, Melton's 103 'The Eye' ran a radio recycling and repair scheme and the Loughborough Wellbeing Centre are running textile reuse and upcycling sessions.

**Litter Picking Equipment** – in February 2021 the Council offered support to local litter picking groups by helping them to access the equipment they need. Across Leicestershire, there are hundreds of groups who collect litter from Leicestershire streets, parks, verges and other public spaces. Practical support was offered through a new fund which supplied these groups with road signs and hi-vis jackets to help keep them safe, and extra-long litter pickers to reach under bushes and hedgerows. The benefits are numerous, litter-picking keeps our public spaces clean, aids wildlife, promotes walking and increases recycling.

**Tree Strategy** - last year we agreed a Tree Strategy and Action Plan with the aim of significantly increasing tree coverage in the County. Leicestershire is one of the least wooded counties in the country and this will only get worse as we deal with the effects of Ash Die Back. Our Strategy will make a significant contribution to increasing tree planting working with partners and landowners and help to deliver our commitment of planting 700,000 trees, one for every resident in the County.

**Tree and Hedge Planting** – the Tree Strategy identifies the need for a substantial and sustained programme of tree planting to offset the effects of tree loss throughout the County. In November 2020, during National Tree Week, the Council once again teamed up with the Woodland Trust to offer free packs of trees to local landowners and farmers, to help restore Leicestershire's woodland and hedgerows. Trees are an essential resource that provide a wide range of environmental, economic and social benefits, and our focus is to continue to build upon our ever-growing green infrastructure.

In July 2021 we kicked off our new plan to make Leicestershire greener by planting 700,000 trees. We currently manage around 321,000 trees (including 404 hectares of woodland), but with diseases such as Ash Die Back placing more trees under threat, the authority's strategy and action plan will see the number of trees across the county increase dramatically. It has already started to improve, thanks to the National Forest, which has increased forest cover in the north west corner of the county to 21%. Tree planting will also support the council's pledge to become carbon neutral by 2030. Trees and woodlands enhance our quality of life: they support wildlife, help combat climate change and add beauty to our towns, villages and countryside. Research also shows that a walk among trees reduces stress and improves mental wellbeing.

**New Biodiversity Plan** – in June 2021 we agreed a new approach to protecting and improving Leicestershire's natural environment and biodiversity. Called 'Action for Nature', the plan sets out key areas to focus on, including rivers and wetlands such as the River Anker and parts of the River Soar near Quorn, and a decline in mature trees and grassland areas. It also identifies a number of areas for action including improving land management practices on land owned or managed by the council and supporting tenants of council land to do the same. We aim to ensure biodiversity is included in the development of council policies and plans and those of other partner organisations. We also continue to support awareness raising and education on biodiversity.

**Wildflower Initiative** – in September 2020 the Council became the first local authority in the midlands to join the BLUE campaign, which aims to promote biodiversity by re-introducing wildflowers and plants to roadside verges. The BLUE campaign was started in 2014 by wildlife film maker, Fergus Beeley, in response to a report on the State of Nature published by the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology that year, which highlighted the dramatic decline in biodiversity and biomass across the UK. A blue heart symbol, made out of recycled materials, is placed in the ground where rewilding is taking place. Currently there are 12 wildflower verges across Leicestershire, with the Council hoping that the BLUE campaign will inspire more communities to get involved. This year also marked the largest reduction in the areas of rural verges the council have cut, to allow wildflowers to thrive and encourage pollinators. We are working with our parish councils to roll out our wildflower verge scheme, improving the biodiversity of our communities and providing vital habitats for our native species.

## Waste Management

**Environment Bill** - the Environment Bill introduces a series of measures that will fundamentally change the way government, businesses and individuals produce and consume products, including new legal powers allowing resource efficiency standards to be set for new products and clear labelling, enabling citizens to make fully informed purchasing decisions. The Bill will also provide a domestic framework for environmental governance and contain specific environmental policy areas including waste, air quality, nature and biodiversity.

**Leicestershire Municipal Waste Management Strategy** – this strategy guides delivery of a range of waste and recycling services to Leicestershire's residents, including kerbside collections, provision of Recycling and Household Waste Sites, and a range of initiatives designed around the principles of the waste hierarchy (in order of preference: to prevent waste, reuse materials, recycle and compost, treat waste and

finally dispose of what's left). The Leicestershire Waste Partnership commenced the review of the Strategy in October 2020.

**Resources and Waste Strategy** – the National Resources and Waste Strategy sets out how the Government will preserve material resources by minimising waste, promoting resource efficiency and moving to a circular economy. During May 2021 we responded to a second round of consultations including Extended Producer Responsibility for Packaging, a Deposit Return Scheme for drinks containers and consistency in household and business recycling collections.

**Waste Education** – in Summer 2021, we provided theatre sessions to schools with the aim of inspiring the next generation of recyclers to think about reducing, reusing and recycling and to encourage more sustainable behaviours. We offered 50 two-hour sessions to all primary schools in Leicestershire who received an interactive and fun workshop. We also offered free educational workshops, activities and talks to community groups in Leicestershire. Owing to the pandemic most were held online with some held in person where social distancing allowed. Classes included Healthy Eating – Zero Waste where residents learnt how to cook healthy meals from scratch and how to make the most from leftovers, and textile reuse classes exploring how reusing old garments to make new items can be good for the environment and also help save money. In 2021 we also launched a new public newsletter covering a range of waste and environmental topics and opportunities to get involved.

**Take - Charge Campaign** – from November 2020 we highlighted the risks involved in disposing of batteries and their potential to cause fires. We ran a social media campaign and displayed posters at our Recycling and Household Sites reminding people to recycle their batteries correctly.

**Food Waste Prevention** – in March 2021 the Council joined with WRAP, the UK's leading sustainability charity, to promote its inaugural Food Waste Action Week. Food Waste Action Week aimed to highlight easy, everyday actions to avoid food wastage and halt its contribution towards climate change. 70% of all food wasted in the UK is from our own homes, with each year seeing households throw away 4.5m tonnes of food which could have been eaten. The council's Adult Learning Service hosted an online cooking course, "Let's Cook Tea", which ran during March 2021 and featured lots of food waste prevention tips. People were also asked to reduce the amount of food they waste at home and take part in activities hosted throughout the week on Love Food Hate Waste's Twitter and Facebook platforms and the Love Food Hate Waste website.

**Composting** – each year Leicestershire residents produce more than 300,000 tonnes of rubbish and recyclables, some of which is uncooked fruit, vegetables and garden waste which could have been composted rather than put in the residual waste bin. We continue to offer cut-price compost bins to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill. We also supported Compost Awareness Week in May 2021, an annual event to promote all aspects of home composting. Residents can also call on the support of a Master Composter; volunteers who use their skills to raise awareness of the benefits of home composting.

**Recycling** – in September 2020 we teamed up with Recycle Now as part of Recycle Week to create a video, thanking residents for continuing to recycle through the pandemic and to keep reducing contamination. Just under half of all household waste in Leicestershire is currently recycled or composted, however items such as used

nappies and food waste are still being disposed of incorrectly in recycling bins across the county which can spoil recycling. The council also joined forces with Keep Britain Tidy to back its #TedSays campaign to encourage residents to recycle responsibly and not put nappies in recycling which can result in loads of good recycling being rejected. Digital contamination messaging was also utilised with the use of a 'digital van' sent to targeted areas and seen by over 67,000 residents.

**Environment Action Volunteers** – the Environment Action Volunteers specialise in a variety of topics such as food waste prevention, composting, biodiversity and carbon reduction and help Leicestershire residents establish positive environmental behaviours. Due to the coronavirus pandemic our engagement activities have been suspended with more digital events and engagement opportunities being developed and delivered in order to inform and engage on waste prevention, reuse and recycling and home composting. As restrictions are eased our volunteers will once again be attending events and delivering talks.

**Waste Treatment** – the Council continues efforts to reduce reliance on landfill and increase the use of waste treatment. We have also commenced the procurement of additional waste treatment capacity. This will ensure the Council's reliance on landfill as a disposal method for residual waste continues to reduce and we will be able to meet targets set in the National Resources and Waste Strategy.

**New Waste Transfer Station** – in July 2021 we began building a new waste transfer station at Bardon Business Park to help manage household waste and reduce the amount of rubbish sent to landfill. The new waste transfer station is being built on land at Interlink Way South, Bardon by Willmott Dixon. The development will include a warehouse style building and associated weighbridges, outside bays, office space and parking. With the county's two current waste transfer stations at Whetstone and Loughborough operating at capacity, the new site is much needed. The site will have solar panels and an energy efficient office building including sensor lighting and water saving taps and toilets. This is in line with the council's pledge of reducing energy consumption throughout its buildings alongside reducing the amount of carbon produced through its operations. There will also be electric vehicle charging points at the premises. It is hoped that the new site will open in 2022.

**Waste Infrastructure Improvements** – maintenance and improvement schemes have continued to be delivered at Leicestershire's Recycling and Household Waste Site (RHWS) and waste transfer stations (WTS). In April 2021 work was completed to replace an ageing section of bay walls at Coalville RHWS to ensure customer safety. In the same month the pushwall at Whetstone WTS was rebuilt to prolong the life of facility, which is essential for day-to-day disposal services. A planning application was submitted in June 2021 for the redevelopment of Kibworth RHWS, which if approved would result in a much improved split-level site, making it easier for residents to recycle whilst also improving health and safety on site. Planning was secured to allow improvements to be made to the drainage at Bottesford RHWS, and a new staff welfare facility was provided at Somerby RHWS in August 2021.

## **Corporate Enablers – Ensuring a Sustainable and Successful Organisation**

Over recent years the Council has been dealing with major funding cuts and pressures by transforming service delivery and working with partner agencies to integrate and share services. The Council has over the last 18 months also had to respond to the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has had and continues to have a profound impact on local government and on the Council's finances. The Council has worked closely with the police, NHS, and other partners, to do everything it can to support and protect residents.

**Strategic Change Portfolio** – a programme to transform local services continues in order to deliver significant savings whilst seeking to maintain or improve outcomes. However, the scale of the financial and transformation challenge is increasing. The simple changes have been made and the straightforward savings long-since delivered. What remains is complex change, often involving multiple partners and many risks. The savings requirements contained within the MTFs remain the central driver for the Council's change portfolio. The work contained within the portfolio, refreshed annually, currently represents future savings targets in excess of £50m, including £25m for SEND. This will be aligned to the MTFs refresh to 2025/26 and the implementation of the Council's new Strategic Plan 2022-26.

The refresh of the change portfolio includes four primary programmes, each representing key drivers for change. Alongside the need for financial sustainability, change priorities include a reduction in carbon usage, a commitment to service efficiency and improvement through our Customer and Digital programme and a revised 'Ways of Working' programme which will see integrated working across the use of estates, IT and a refreshed People Strategy, to ensure the authority builds back stronger as an organisation. Covid-19 has given greater urgency to the underlying drivers for change set out in the Strategic Change Portfolio.

**Corporate Asset Investment Fund** – the Corporate Asset Strategy sets out the basis on which the Council invests some of its financial resources to generate income to support front line services. The Strategy was updated in 2019 to reflect our declaration of a climate emergency and future developments will now be energy efficient with a low carbon impact. In September 2021 figures showed that the investments are expected to generate £6.5m in net income in the current financial year. The approach of bringing new life to old commercial sites and building new workspaces is also creating jobs and boosting the economy. The portfolio of properties is performing well, as demonstrated by the swift take-up of new industrial units at Airfield Business Park in Market Harborough and Apollo Business Park in Coalville.

During 2020/21 the following investments were made as part of the Corporate Asset Investment Fund: £11.4m land acquisition and associated costs for planning and consultancy services as part of the East of Lutterworth Strategic Development plan and £5.4m for the final phase of works at Loughborough University Science and Enterprise Park (part of a £22m project). Over the year, the fund, valued at £187m at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021 generated net income returns of 2.5% (or 3.1% if those schemes currently in development are excluded).

**Commercial Services** – the Council approved a Commercial Strategy in June 2018. Many commercial services were closed or significantly affected by the impact of Covid-19. Beaumanor Hall, cafés and the Century Theatre were closed. School food continued a limited service providing meals to the children of key workers, while LEAMIS continued providing their services remotely. Over time, venues reopened in line with Government Guidelines and school food continued to work closely with schools to ensure meals were provided. The team also worked to provide free school meal vouchers over the school holidays.

**Strategic Property** – Strategic Property Services continue to proactively manage all property and land to ensure the Council has the property it needs to support service delivery in the most effective and efficient way, supporting performance improvements and increasing productivity. Recently the role played by asset investments has supported housing, infrastructure, and economic development. In June 2021 the Council won a prestigious global award for the pioneering 100,000 sq ft office project at Loughborough Science and Enterprise Park. The Council worked in partnership with Loughborough University to create the new building. The development will also generate £1.6m a year which will go towards supporting front-line services.

**Workplace Strategy** – the Workplace Strategy sets out how the Council will maximise the use of its property portfolio and reduce operational property costs. Savings are progressing through the rationalisation of our use of satellite offices and increasing usage of County Hall, as well as the potential to rent out further areas of the building. The Strategy supports the Ways of Working Programme.

**Digital and Information Technology** – last year saw pressure on IT budgets due to £1.5m extra spend incurred on ICT equipment and software to support working from home during the lockdown, offset by savings on vacant posts held pending action plans and delays to recruitment as a result of Covid-19. As a response to Covid-19 laptops were issued across the workforce to enable people to work safely and effectively from home during government restrictions. Costs of £2.5m were incurred, representing an acceleration of the existing programme whilst paving the way for a more ambitious roll out of our future Ways of Working programme than previously anticipated. We also invested in the ICT infrastructure by £0.7m including completion of Local Area Network Edge Refresh, Adaptive Security Appliance Firewall Replacements and Cyber security mitigations

**Customer Programme** - the Council launched a new Customer and Digital Programme with a vision to put customers at the heart of everything we do and provide quality services at a reduced cost. The intention is to use modern, innovative, digital methods and guide the customer to the right channel at the right time in the most efficient way. To create simple customer journeys as well as easy digital processes. A dedicated programme is identifying priorities for work. A Digital Initiatives Growth Fund has been created for an Incubation Team to provide more efficient services and introduce digital ways of working.

**Website** – there were 4.9m visits between March 2020 and March 2021 to the Council website, a 50% year on year increase. With 678k visits to coronavirus information online and 583k to waste site bookings.

**Business Intelligence** - in 2020 a new Business Intelligence Strategy was launched for the Council which sets out our vision and priorities for the next four years. Significant progress has been made since the first data and business intelligence

strategy was introduced in 2015. A modern and effective approach to business intelligence centred on the use of Tableau dashboards has been embedded. The Service provides daily data to support the delivery of front-line services as well as producing insight to inform strategic decision making, planning, and commissioning. The Council is a data rich organisation and maximising the insight that can be gained from the data assets enables better decisions and planning for the future. The Strategy sets out how the Council intends to build on the firm foundations established over the last four years.

**People Strategy** - following an evaluation of the previous People Strategy to 2020, a new People Strategy 2020 -24 has been agreed, with three broad themes, each with clear action plans and deliverables. The themes are leadership and management, workplace and culture, and staff performance management.

**Staff Wellbeing** – the number of days lost to sickness absence during 2020/21 was 7.51 per full time equivalent (FTE) (against a corporate target of 7.5 days) which is a significant improvement compared to 10.07 the previous year. During 2020/21 a total of 3,868 FTE days were lost to Covid-19 related absence, representing 11.1% of FTE days lost. The number of referrals to the staff counselling service reduced from 217 in 2019/20 to 122 during 2020/21 with 1,738 counselling sessions provided during the year. The counselling service moved from face to face to a telephone service and has received excellent feedback from users. Work continues on the implementation of extra support to employees as well as Attendance Management Support Action Plans, to help staff with reducing sickness.

**Equalities** – we are committed to challenging discrimination in all its forms, providing inclusive and responsive services and strengthening community relations. Our Equality and Diversity Strategy addresses workforce issues, service delivery issues and community engagement. There has been a special staff newsletter, a “Big Conversation” staff seminar, e-training on unconscious bias, and services specific events. Work continues to focus on improving equalities evidence, BAME staff progression, improving EHRIA processes, making information accessible and stronger and more visible communications.

During the year we commissioned an external review of progress for Black, Asian and Minority Employees (BAME). This led to a new task group being established and a commitment to sign up to the Race at Work Charter which sets standards for the retention and development of BAME Staff. This commits the Council to 5 calls to action: appointing an executive sponsor, capturing ethnicity data and publicising progress; committing at board level to zero tolerance of harassment and bullying; making clear that supporting equality in the workplace is the responsibility of all leaders and managers; and taking action that supports ethnic minority career progression. The Council also participates in the Stonewall Workforce Equalities Index and is a Disability Confident employer. There were staff seminars during the year on the experiences of trans-gender service users and those who are deaf or hard of hearing.

**Financial Planning and Strategy** - our last four-year financial plan in February 2021 showed that Covid-19 had led to around £85m in extra costs and lost income in the previous year alone and it is likely to impact services, including public transport and adult social care, for years to come. The combination of lack of reform of local government funding (including how to address the ever-increasing pressures around social care services and special education needs and disabilities), Covid-19 and rising

demand for other services is pushing us closer to the edge. In total, growth pressures on services totalled £60m alone - including £14m this year. To balance the budget, a requirement for £79m of savings was required with £56m identified, which allowed a balanced budget to be set for two years. However, £23m remained unidentified. A one off £28m Covid-19 fund was included as well as a 4.99% council tax levy (including a 3% levy for adult social care). Investment in services included children and family services, adult social care and environment and transport as well as a £450m capital programme. The MTFs is currently being refreshed in light of the latest information.

**Capital Programme** – the four-year capital programme agreed in February 2021 has recently been through a refresh which means that it has grown from £450m to £539m. The increase is due in part to activity planned in 2020/21 slipping into 2021/22 but also due to cost escalations on a number of the key transport schemes due to nationwide cost pressures arising from shortages and price rises for materials as well as wider demand for construction skills. The programme sets out plans for sustainable investment across the county including £71m to improve and maintain existing roads and bridges and £171m for improving transport infrastructure. £87m for extra school places, including specialist provision for SEND students. £28m to boost adult social care accommodation that supports people to live independently, £17m for recycling and household waste initiatives and specific carbon and energy reduction projects. £71m to invest in property to generate money for front line services.

**Most Productive Council** – in November 2019 the County Council was named as the most productive council in the country for the third year running in the table compiled by consultancy firm IMPOWER. The Index measures the performance of 149 councils against outcomes per pound invested, through seven different service lenses. The Council is one of the lowest funded in the country and this has meant it needs to ensure innovation to drive down costs to get the most out of each pound spent.

**Overview and Scrutiny** – it was a varied and busy year for Overview and Scrutiny despite the challenges faced due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Committees operated remotely from April 2020 until May 2021 with meetings webcast live throughout. This ensured scrutiny bodies continued to provide public oversight across all service areas and hold Cabinet Members to account during a period of great uncertainty. The level of public interest has been very positive with an increased number of questions and petitions received and representations from members of the public.

During 2020/21 the impact of Covid-19 dominated the work of all scrutiny bodies as they considered each departments response and recovery plans. The financial implications for the Council were also closely monitored, with scrutiny supporting the use of reserves and a reduction in the Council's capital programme to help address some of the difficulties faced. Other critical work continued, including a scrutiny review panel on flooding which made a number of recommendations to improve partnership arrangements and ensure residents are properly signposted before and during a flooding event. A full summary of the breadth of work carried out by all scrutiny bodies is detailed in the Annual Scrutiny Report for 2020/21.

## **Covid 19 Corporate Response**

Towards the end of 2019/20, a global pandemic was declared in connection with the Covid-19 virus. Emergency responses were triggered, and lockdown measures were introduced from 23 March 2020. Business continuity plans were implemented across the Council, this included the identification of the most vulnerable service users to ensure there was capacity to support them. Non-essential work was risk assessed and put on hold to free staff capacity to enable the Council to deploy rapid responses to ensure core services were delivered and that residents and businesses continued to be supported.

The **Local Resilience Forum** (LRF's) Covid19 Strategic Co-ordinating Group (SCG) met throughout 2020/21, initially bi-weekly then weekly. The Council's Director of Public Health chaired the SCG until a major incident was declared locally at which point chairmanship transferred to the Deputy Chief Constable and then subsequently to the Chief Executive of the CCGs. The SCG co-ordinated the response to Covid-19 across LLR with increasing focus on preparations for recovery (co-ordinated by a Recovery Co-ordinating Group), including community and economic recovery being given a high priority alongside the response.

The Council's **Crisis Management Group** (CMG), chaired by the Chief Executive, met frequently to oversee the Council's response across key issues. Initially it met daily, then three times each week and then weekly but with flexibility to call ad-hoc meetings when circumstances required, for example to respond to changes in guidance. CMG was supported by a corporate **Resilience Planning Group** (RPG) which met regularly including dedicated meetings focused on preparing for 'recovery'. The Council has worked closely with partners on a range of challenges including the imposition and easing of lockdown measures, related enforcement activities, supply of PPE, shielding of vulnerable people, co-ordination of volunteering, test and trace, excess deaths planning, and supporting the vaccination strategy and has been chaired many of the LRF cells responding to specific issues.

Covid-19 has had and will continue to have a significant adverse effect on the economy, it is also affecting the services that the Council delivers and its finances. These financial implications will continue beyond the current financial year adding to the financial gap identified in the MTFs. The impact is across the board, covering additional expenditure, increased project and capital costs, and reduced income levels. The Council has taken a number of measures to ensure the impact on the financial position is minimised where possible in the immediate crisis period and medium-term recovery.

As a result of the pandemic, in March 2020 all attended meetings of members and officers ceased. Regulations made under the Coronavirus Act (2020) allowed authorities to conduct meetings and take decisions in ways other than face to face so that decisions could still be made to maintain good governance, principles of openness and accountability. By 4th April 2020 the Council was able to put in place measures to allow meetings to be held remotely. As a result of this and extending delegation to the Chief Executive the decision-making process respected the principles of good governance and lawfulness. With effect from 7th May 2021, it was no longer possible to hold council meetings remotely and steps were taken to reintroduce Covid-19 secure in-person meetings where this was required. The constitutional arrangements for member decisions in place before the Covid-19 lockdown proved to be robust and

once the Government issued regulations regarding virtual meetings, it has been possible to conduct the vast majority of business including scrutiny and briefings for all members.

**Demands on IT systems and staff** have been considerable, and most office-based staff worked from home throughout 2020/21. The **Ways of Working programme** is considering longer term working arrangements likely to involve for many staff a hybrid of office-based and home-based working. Regular Covid-19 senior manager briefings continue to be provided as well as health and wellbeing support across the Council, informed by an authority wide survey which has been held several times. Work has also been carried out and continues relating to returning to the workplace recovery and PPE staff risk assessments.

The move to **working from home**, for those staff who were able to, has been supported by work on revised HR policies, health and safety risk assessments, guidance and support for managers regarding the leadership of remote teams, FAQs on key HR issues, a managers' charter giving advice on what employees should be able to expect from their managers, and regular clear communication. The Council also took the decision to use the furlough scheme to maximise income, and at its peak, around 1000 staff who met the criteria were placed on furlough, with the Council continuing to top up salaries to 100%. Three wellbeing surveys have been carried out, and targeted action plans created. The Council's wellbeing offer was a good one but needed to be re-assessed to deal with specific challenges caused by the pandemic.

**PPE** – the response to the pandemic meant that PPE guidance has been subject to change and officers across the LRF have worked hard to ensure that local practice is kept up to date. When the guidance regarding PPE was updated for aerosol generating procedures, partners across the system were quick to respond. Staff undertaking this role needed to wear face masks formally tested to ensure a secure and safe fit. Officers working in CCGs and local authorities were trained to be fit testers. Officers from our Environment and Transport Department also participated in the effort to ensure that all staff involved in these activities (from personal assistants to those working in special schools, care homes and domiciliary care) were able to be fit tested and thereafter be assured that they were protected whilst undertaking these activities. The support provided by administrative staff from across LRF organisations cannot go unheeded as all went above and beyond to facilitate this initiative.

In recognition of the need for staff to effectively communicate whilst wearing surgical masks, the LRF participated in a **national pilot** to aid the development of transparent masks, this work continues. Throughout the LRF has managed stock, prioritised and distributed PPE, ensuring that all that is used meets required technical and scientific standards - supported by Leicestershire Trading Standards, the Commissioning Support Unit and Corporate Resources staff.

## **Covid Financial Impact**

There has been a significant financial impact due to Covid-19 on adult social care which included making additional payments in the region of £29.2m to care providers to cover additional costs (£3.5m), assistance with cashflow (£11m) which is being repaid by providers, passporting the Infection Control Fund Grant (£12.6m), Rapid Testing Grant (£1.2m) and Workforce Capacity Grant (£0.9m). Other additional Covid-19 expenditure of £0.8m included supporting shielding, PPE purchases for council services, supporting the management of Covid-19 and food packages for service users being discharged from hospital.

These and other additional service user costs (including loss of income) were offset by income of £16.8m from the NHS to support service users being discharged from hospital. The level of demand from the service users for commissioned services was constantly changing with lower numbers for some services and increased costs. As the approach to Covid-19 management changes nationally, the impact of all of these changes are being monitored and are continuing to make accurate forecasting of demand for commissioned services very challenging.

However, there was an underspend following lockdown and the closure of Community Life Choices bases within the independent sector and service users either receiving no service or a vastly reduced service. There was an underspend from closure of residential and short break bases following lockdown and vacancies being held pending an action plan.

Transformation Unit - £3.3m overspend, mainly due to reductions in planned contributions from the earmarked fund as the team and some projects to be funded from the fund were diverted to supporting the response to the impact of Covid 19 on services.

Commercial Services - £1.8m overspend. Commercial Services faced significant challenges during 2019/20 resulting in a budget overspend. Difficult trading conditions continued in 2020/21 and were seriously compounded by the lockdown forcing the scaling back or temporary closure of a number of commercial services, primarily school food. Options are being developed to address continuing operational losses and develop an optimum portfolio of commercially sustainable services in 2021/22. This may result in some services discontinuing. The overspend is net of £2.4m furlough income and £1.1m of sales, fees and charges compensation income from the Government.

Information and Technology - £1.1m overspend, due to £1.5m spend incurred on ICT equipment and software to support working from home during the lockdown period, offset by savings on vacant posts held pending action plans and delays to recruitment as a result of Covid-19.

There has also been some underspend arisen as a result of lower spending due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This has affected a range of areas including fewer events, less work in schools and reduced grant applications. Work within the community on food waste prevention has also been impacted. Learning and Development had a £0.2m underspend as a result of reduction in face to face courses due to Covid-19 lockdown.

**The Council has been hugely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, despite the challenges, the Council has maintained consistent essential services for residents, whilst adapting to provide alternative virtual services wherever possible. The Council's strong collaborative approach has been effective at achieving a unified response, working with key partners in the NHS, police and voluntary and community sectors. Recovering from Covid-19 may take considerable time, years rather than months, to address the enduring social, emotional, physical and economic consequences of the pandemic; acknowledging that some things may have changed forever.**