

29 January 2020	ITEM: 16
Council	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Central Services and Communities	
Report of: Councillor Deborah Huelin, Cabinet Member for Central Services and Communities	
This report is public	

Introduction by Cabinet Member

I am delighted to present to Council my report which details many of the areas of work and achievements within my Portfolio.

The core services covered by my portfolio include:

- Corporate strategy and performance
- Customer services
- Communications
- Transformation
- HR, OD and payroll
- Information governance
- Libraries
- Community development and equalities
- Arts, culture and heritage
- Procurement and contract management
- Internal audit
- Legal, democratic, electoral and Member services

I am passionate about the diverse range of services included within my Portfolio which are delivered across six directorates many of which have been recognised by the industry and nationally for the great work and projects they are delivering.

The Legal Services team has successfully obtained Lexcel Accreditation again this year – making 11 consecutive years of excellence in legal practice.

The Information Governance team won two gold performance awards in the Geoplace Exemplar Awards for management of street and address data.

The council was shortlisted for four awards at the Municipal Journal (MJ) awards in June 2019, including Local Authority of the Year and was commended for Innovation in Communications for the Give a Gift campaign. Give a Gift also won the award for best community and neighbourhood initiative.

The council's award winning Give a Gift returned for its fourth year in December and received, wrapped and delivered presents to more than 2,200 Thurrock children in need. Coordinated by the Strategy and Communications teams, the #GiveAGift store where donations were made was open at intu Lakeside for just 2 weeks from Monday 25 November through to Sunday 8 December. Volunteers saw hundreds of visitors choose a star off the Christmas tree, each representing a child in need in Thurrock before shopping for an age appropriate present to donate.

Customer Services is having a great year following the joint project with the Corporate Programme team to physically and digitally transform and modernise the face-to-face area in the Civic Offices which now includes a private area for those needing housing advice. A private, confidential space for customers to have a personal conversation and get help.

The improved self-service facilities have reduced the average waiting time to around just one minute and enabled increased focus and dedicated advisors for vulnerable residents requiring one-to-one face-to-face support.

Customer Services have received the accolade of Level 7 of the customer service industry standard for their quality framework and have been recognised as an example of leading practice. They have also been shortlisted for UKCCF Improvement Strategy of the Year award.

The Thameside Theatre has also had a successful year with more shows and events being staged and the resident Young Producers group receiving great recognition, including from Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Our work on community development and equalities has also had some very positive results in the last year, including the brand new Engagement HQ consultation portal, which supports a much more interactive engagement with residents, more volunteers, supporting high profile events such as Windrush and the 100th anniversary of World War One. Our continuing good relationship with Thurrock CVS was highlighted at a joint conference last October, at which I had the honour of speaking to a packed audience.

Not only are services being recognised externally for their great work, but staff are also feeding back positively internally. The recent Staff Pulse Survey showed a big improvement in staff feeling valued, being proud to work for the council and recommending the council as a great place to work – all much higher rates than the industry average. There is also a huge 22% increase of those feeling positive about their job security compared with 2016, and very high rates of commitment to council goals. There are of course areas for improvement, and teams will work to identify issues and actions required.

Finally, I would also like to take this opportunity to remind members that Thurrock Civic Awards 2020 is taking place on Friday 28 February 2020 at Thurrock Civic Hall. We are privileged in our roles as ward members to come across some amazing people in our communities, and the Civic Awards is a perfect opportunity to acknowledge and thank those individuals and groups who do so much to improve the lives of others in the borough.

CORPORATE STRATEGY and PERFORMANCE

▶ SERVICE OVERVIEW

This part of my portfolio is primarily concerned with the council's vision and priorities and ensuring the council is delivering against those priorities and objectives through the corporate performance framework.

▶ REVIEW OF PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

The performance of the priority activities of the council is monitored through the Corporate KPI (Key Performance Indicator) framework. The indicators are reviewed every year and have been chosen to be as clear and simple to understand as possible, whilst balancing the need to ensure the council is monitoring those things which are of most importance, both operationally and strategically.

This is the fourth year that corporate performance indicators have been reported simply as having "Achieved" or "Failed" to meet their target with an arrow that clearly shows the direction of travel of the service. This has proved to be much clearer and more transparent than the previous system, as seen by the positive and continual improvement:

At end of 2016/17	59% Achieving
At end of 2017/18	66% Achieving
At end of 2018/19	68% Achieving

To date in 2019/20 we're hitting 74%. It is only right Thurrock Council strives for the best services for Thurrock residents and aims for continual improvement. Our focus must continue and to that aim "route to green" has been introduced for failing areas not on target. This highlights the actions that are being taken to improve the performance and gives more understanding about the issues and processes involved.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank colleagues on the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their ongoing scrutiny as part of the strong governance in place for key performance indicators.

The council does not just measure itself against statistics. The council's projects and outcomes have been recognised many times in the last 12 months, locally, regionally and nationally. This includes:

- FINALIST Municipal Journal Awards, Local Authority of the Year
- FINALIST Municipal Journal Awards, Senior Leadership Team
- FINALIST Municipal Journal Awards, Innovation in Finance
- FINALIST Municipal Journal Awards, Care and Health Integration
- FINALIST APSE (Association of Public Sector Excellence) awards - Best Commercialisation and Entrepreneurship
- FINALIST APSE awards - Best Efficiency and Transformation Initiative (Customer Services)
- WINNER APSE awards - Best Community and Neighbourhood Initiative award (Give a Gift)

One of the council's members of staff has also had their hard work and dedication to the people of Thurrock recognised in HRH The Queen's New Year's Honours List. Natalie Smith, Thurrock Council's Community Development and Equalities Manager, has been awarded a Medallist of the Order of the British Empire (British Empire Medal - BEM) for services to the community in Thurrock. This is a fabulous achievement. For Natalie to receive such a high honour for her work in the communities across Thurrock is one of the best recognitions of the value of working with our residents on projects that affect them.

A full list of the awards which the council has won or been shortlisted for can be found at www.thurrock.gov.uk/how-we-are-doing/awards

► FUTURE

The governance for the corporate performance framework is embedded and as such this approach will continue. This governance is multi-layered – individual teams, lead officers, Directors, portfolio holders and member scrutiny through the Corporate O&S and Cabinet work programme. Teamwork will ensure the “route to green” is achieved and improvements made.

CUSTOMER SERVICES

► SERVICE OVERVIEW

This part of the portfolio includes all front line customer contact including the contact centre, Careline, out-of-hours, registrars and face to face on the ground floor of the Civic Offices. The contact centre staff are able to deal directly with calls rather than residents being transferred to different departments.

► REVIEW OF PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

A major project within this part of my portfolio was the continuation of delivery of the customer services strategy action plan for 2017-2020. Key highlights include the continued cascade of the Right First Time - Customer Excellence Training and approximately 850 employees have already attended this training since April 2018. This has been developed to include service specific scenarios and the flexibility to meet the needs of all services, receiving excellent feedback from attendees.

Our performance has again been recognised externally with accreditation of the CCA (Customer Contact Association) Version 7 new global standard in July 2019, where no non-conformances were reported. We received an excellent audit report from the CCA Standards Board who also recognised our Customer Services Quality Framework as leading practice, which means we can offer training to other organisations. This is an independent audit of our customer services operation against industry developed and approved requirements and includes an assessor listening to calls from residents.

The Customer Services Team were also runners up and achieved silver award for the best public sector improvement strategy in the UKCCF awards in October and in the APSE awards for best efficiency and transformation initiative in September.

The Civic Offices ground floor changes and new customer services delivery model have made significant improvements to customer service with vastly reduced wait times and excellent feedback from residents. The changes have enabled us to dedicate more time and resource to support our most vulnerable residents including those who are unable to utilise online/phone services and need dedicated one-to-one face-to-face support.

We recognised that standard formatted letters have a place – however one size does not fit all and they can appear to lack compassion - the opposite of the council's intention. The Customer Service team often go above and beyond to help, full of care and compassion and are aware that sentiment is not always portrayed in our letters. To this end, we have developed a new writing quality training course 'Better letters – write first time' to help all services improve the standard of letter and email communication to our customers. This training commenced in November 2019 and is continuing via a targeted approach initially.

The Registration Service is now part of Customer Services providing valuable statutory and discretionary registration services to a fast-growing community from its current base at the Thameside Complex, Grays. The Register Office not only registers and issues certificates for all births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships which occur in the Thurrock district, but also conducts a number of ceremonies.

In the last financial year 186 marriage ceremonies were held in the Register Office Statutory Room and 292 at our Approved Premises. There were also 127 private citizenship ceremonies and 16 group ceremonies (25 new citizens and their guests) held last financial year. The service has received 100% Good or Excellent customer satisfaction feedback consistently over the years and our reputation is extremely high.

► FUTURE

Throughout 2019/20 the team is continuing to complete customer services quality assessments with others services utilising our newly developed framework to help guide and implement actions to improve customer service delivery.

We will continue to support and organise activities such as National Customer Service week to ensure we maintain a high focus and momentum on providing good customer service and staff being an ambassador for the council.

We are also continuing with work to support our most vulnerable residents to ensure that all services can be aware of when people are facing particular challenges so that they can be supported in the most appropriate way with early intervention wherever possible. This work will ensure contacts between the different council services and the same customer are joined up, thereby providing a better service for the customer and more efficient use of our systems and processes.

COMMUNICATIONS

▶ SERVICE OVERVIEW

This portfolio covers the council's communications functions including media liaison (proactive and reactive), social media, marketing campaigns, design and the council's website as well as internal communication with staff.

▶ REVIEW OF PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

Between October 2018 and October 2019 the team dealt with nearly 600 media enquiries on a wide range of topics from the local, regional, national and even international media and issued press releases regularly to support priority messaging and specific communication campaigns.

The council continues to make good use of social media with more than 7,000 social media posts shared on Facebook and Twitter over the course of the previous year averaging a daily reach of more than 140,000. The council's Instagram account, launched in July 2018 now has a following of over 1,000 people, has received hundreds of likes and is being used in campaigns including Discover Thurrock to promote events and great places to visit in the borough, and the recently launched plastics recycling campaign.

Over the year the team has created and delivered a number of high-profile campaigns which ran across multiple media channels, including advertising in local newspapers and libraries /hubs and all include a key digital element to ensure messages reach as wide an audience as possible. Campaigns carried out include fly-tipping emphasising the consequences fly-tippers will face and encouraging residents to be the council's eyes and ears in reporting fly-tips; foster carer recruitment building on the huge successes enjoyed with the campaign launched in 2018 which saw a 214% increase in enquiries in January 2019; launched the Bad Behaviour Follows You campaign which encouraged people to think about the consequences of anti-social behaviour; and successfully promoted the award winning Give A Gift initiative for its most successful year yet.

The council's bi-weekly e-newsletter reaches around 13,000 residents with a mixture of news and events. This is one of a range of e-newsletters including Business Buzz, Thurrock careers and issue specific updates like the A13 road widening e-newsletter. The team has also introduced weather and traffic news alert emails which inform residents of adverse conditions for which there are nearly 1,900 subscribers. We regularly post on social media to encourage more subscribers as well as promote the various e-newsletters in other alerts. Internal communications channels include a weekly #TeamThurrock email, printed newsletters for staff who are not office based and the team have introduced a new intranet in October 2019 which will further increase staff engagement.

▶ FUTURE

We'll be continuing with the delivery of the communications strategy with a review due for 2020, increasing the reach of our digital channels and working to make sure that our residents are kept well informed of all council services and new initiatives, as well as having a chance to have their say on major projects via our new on-line consultation portal. I would encourage all councillors to sign-up for our e-newsletters and follow our social media channels to keep updated on the huge amount of work the council is doing.

CORPORATE PROGRAMME TEAM (TRANSFORMATION)

▶ SERVICE OVERVIEW

The Corporate Programme Team is responsible for the delivery of the council's Corporate Transformation Programme. This ambitious programme ranges from enhancing the way residents interact digitally with the council, via Thurrock On-Line, to implementing new ways for employees to work and deliver services more efficiently through agile working and modern HR, Procurement and Finance systems.

To help us deliver the best possible services the Corporate Programme Team are actively engaged in the council's Service Review Programme to look at how we can do things differently, driving continuous efficiency improvements throughout the whole organisation.

▶ REVIEW OF PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

The focus over the last twelve months has been the delivery of the Digital Programme, providing the foundation for transformation:

Thurrock On-Line

Over 92,000 individuals/households are registered with MyAccount, over 95% of households, demonstrating that our residents are choosing to interact with us on-line. Reporting online is the most effective method for issues regarding graffiti, abandoned vehicles, fly-posting, fly-tipping, missed waste collections, litter, overgrown trees/vegetation, grass cutting, dog fouling, potholes, street lights, road markings, noise complaints and pollution, providing residents with a quicker response and the ability to monitor status.

Since MyAccount was implemented we have seen:

- Over 300,000 online views of Council Tax
- 14,000 direct debits set up online
- 13,000 Council Tax moves
- Over 44,000 'reports' online



Our on-line services have been enhanced this year with the introduction of:

- On-line submission of evidence to support benefit claims – this can be managed through mobile phones
- Council Tax change of address – major improvements to mover process
- On-line applications for licences

Oracle Cloud

Going live on 1 April 2019 Oracle Cloud provides the modern technology to support internal transformation. All staff now have access to a mobile App to carry out Employee Self Service tasks such as booking absence/leave, pay slips and claiming expenses.

Automated transactions improve efficiency and governance and as new modules are implemented they will provide improved reporting, people and career management.

Data Modelling

Using a modern, efficient approach to analysing data, Phase 3 of this exciting project has seen:

- A dashboard with a single view of a resident's debt to the council and a link to vulnerability to ensure we offer the most appropriate support
- The Community Safety Partnership testing a dashboard indicating the top 10 ASB areas enabling us to target activity
- Housing supporting potential homelessness with targeted intervention

► FUTURE

Innovation and new ways of working are constantly on our radar in order to deliver the best possible services to the residents and businesses of Thurrock. Over the next year we will be focusing the Transformation Programme on the delivery of three key principles:

- Getting it right first time, every time
- Excellent customer services
- Collaboration and co-production of services

Agile Working

Supporting organisational transformation, embedding agile working across the council to drive the benefits of technology, property and ways of working.

Thurrock On-Line

Commence the market testing for a replacement digital platform to continue to support channel shift and customer services.

HUMAN RESOURCES & ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT (HR & OD)

▶ SERVICE OVERVIEW

The focus of HR & OD is to ensure the Council has the high performing, engaged and confident workforce it needs to deliver excellent services and positive outcomes to our residents. The service consists of:

- HR, Resourcing and Improvement – ensuring the council is effectively resourced with the right people to deliver services to residents and providing the employment framework for excellent people management.
- Pay and Operation – ensuring staff are paid appropriately and the council complies with appropriate legislation and statutory requirements.
- People and Organisational Development – ensuring our workforce is equipped with the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed to deliver the council's priorities and the organisation embraces change.

Activity and interventions are aligned to deliver the Council's People Strategy which is focused on the key themes of **Capacity** – a customer first approach and a workforce that has the capacity to deliver what is required; **Confidence** - a confident workforce who are free to innovate and take managed risks; and **Culture** – a 'one team' culture of inclusion and engagement with excellent management and trust driving a climate of continual improvement.

▶ REVIEW OF PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

Pay Review

The team successfully developed, negotiated and delivered a new, fit for purpose pay structure and agreement that provides a flexible and fair foundation for further modernisation over the next few years and improves our market competitiveness.

Oracle Cloud

Oracle Cloud provides a modern system which will underpin business transformation and improvement across HR & OD. Oracle went live on 1 April and the team have consolidated processes to improve efficiency through automated transactions, improved employee and manager experience, whilst supporting change across the organisation. Once fully functional Oracle will provide:

- Enhanced business intelligence to support workforce planning and talent management
- Improved Employee Self Service through an App
- Improved Manager Self Service and dashboards
- Efficiency in internal processes supporting improved customer service

Capacity

The council has:

- Recruited over 300 staff in nine months
- Reduced last year's spend on agency staff by over £500k
- Exceeded our target for recruiting apprentices
- Re-procured the managed service for agency staff with reduced costs paid to agencies

Confidence

Aiming to have the best workforce and the best and most exciting opportunities for staff we have:

- Built confidence and capability by delivering 544 different learning and development events in the past 12 months reaching nearly 6000 participants
- Improved Customer Services by taking people through the 'Right First Time' programme
- Delivered over 100 sessions of Leadership & Management Development to 650 people

Culture

Organisational culture is critical to success, the way we do things is the ultimate determinate of how we treat our customers. This year we have:

- Developed and published our new organisational values – launched in July they followed extensive engagement with staff to help define both the values and the behaviours that exemplify them
- Conducted our Pulse Survey to determine the impact of our actions and inform the development of our People Strategy
- Improved our wellbeing offer, promoting health and ensuring staff are supported - reducing sickness absence, supporting mental health and improving our staff survey outcomes

► FUTURE

Key priorities for the year ahead include:

- Pay Review Phase 2 – a full review of our reward and benefits package to further modernise our approach and ensure an inclusive approach
- Oracle Cloud Phase 2 – embed Employee and Manager Self Service to realise benefits and efficiencies and underpin business transformation
- Values – embed in our policies, processes and practices
- Talent Management – develop talent management and succession to support effective workforce and career planning
- Review and refresh our People Strategy for the next three years

INFORMATION TEAM

▶ SERVICE OVERVIEW

This team is responsible for ensuring compliance with information governance regulations and protection of the council's reputation, including information security (policies and procedures), data protection, Freedom of Information (FOI), records management, complaints and Geographical Information Systems (GIS) including Local Land & Property Gazetteer (LLPG) / Local Street Gazetteer (LSG).

▶ REVIEW OF PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

During 2018/19:

- Recorded compliments from residents regarding our services have nearly trebled (927 in 2018/19 compared to 356 the previous year) as the team are now capturing those submitted through the contact centre.
- The council processed 95% of the 1093 Freedom of Information (FOI) requests within the legal timeframe. The volume of FOI requests have doubled since 2014/15, however performance remains strong.
- 83 Subject Access Requests (SAR) were received under the Data Protection Act. This is a significant increase compared to the previous year which is due to the removal of the £10 fee in May 2018. Of the 83 requests, 73% of requests were processed within the timeframe (1 month).
- 43% of complaints received were upheld, however complaint volumes have reduced.
- 89% of complaints were responded to within the timeframe, which shows an improvement compared to the previous year.
- During the same period 4400 enquiries were received from MPs, MEPs and Councillors of which 96% were responded to within timeframe.
- As part of the Transparency Agenda and to support a reduction in FOI requests the Information Governance Team is working with all services to ensure an increased amount of data is identified for routine publication online.
- To enhance and improve the council's data protection performance, and protect us from fines, all staff and members have undertaken GDPR training and all new staff have to complete and pass within 5 days.

▶ FUTURE

The focus for the team over the next year will be:

- Driving a learning from complaints culture with robust learning action plans across council services
- To implement changes required as part of the Data Protection Act and Information Governance Legislation
- Progressing a digital approach to complaints to improve the service to residents. This will enable residents to check complaint status online.

LIBRARIES

▶ SERVICE OVERVIEW

Thurrock's Library Service includes nine authority run libraries and one self-serve library within Purfleet Community Hub. The principal purpose of the library is to provide equality of access to accurate and up to date information through provision of printed material and increasingly, access to information online.

▶ REVIEW OF PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

Four hubs now operate from within libraries, South Ockendon, Chadwell, Tilbury and, more recently, East Tilbury. A new build – Aveley Community Hub, incorporating the local library service, will open in the coming weeks.

In December 2018, Cabinet approved the 'Communities First' Libraries and Hub strategy which seeks to place libraries and hubs at the heart of the community.

A Peer Review of the Library Service took place in July 2019. We were delighted to receive positive feedback from the team and praise for our committed, passionate and knowledgeable staff and volunteers.

Recommendations from the Library Peer Review include continuing to develop the hub programme, increasing the profile of Thurrock and its libraries locally, regionally and nationally and recognising the contribution that libraries can make to literacy, digital literacy and educational attainment. A copy of the final Peer Review report is attached to this report. A delivery plan for the strategy has been updated to incorporate the recommendations from the Peer Review.

We have much to be proud about in relation to our library service. We have the highest ratio of members within our comparator group of authorities which is evaluated annually at a national level. Our library service is well regarded by residents. The service continually strives to ensure residents benefit from a range of events and opportunities including the Summer Reading Challenge, literacy competitions with schools, and hosting reading events including the Essex Book Festival.

Supporting the digital agenda remains a priority for the service. Capital funding has been approved to update technology within all libraries from October 2019 through to April 2020. Staff and volunteers continue to assist residents to become digitally enabled supporting completion of online forms including registration and access to MyAccount. Use of our online services has grown with more residents aware that they can access 24/7 free learning courses etc. and borrow e-books and e-audio via their phones and tablets. Support for reading continues to evolve especially encouraging children and young people to read for pleasure and benefit from the opportunities being able to read well can bring.

Provision of information and signposting to support agencies remains a core offer. Library staff receive on-going training and work with the hubs to ensure information is easy to access.

▶ FUTURE

The Library Service will continue to develop alongside the Community Hubs programme. The Communities First Libraries and Hubs Strategy sets out our commitment to keep library services open whilst modernising and aligning the service alongside community hubs. This will support the alignment of community hubs and libraries, ensuring our offer supports a proactive collection of community anchors in Thurrock, helping neighbourhoods meet local needs and providing safe, friendly places to meet and network. I encourage all members to ensure they visit their local library and to keep their membership up to date.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT and EQUALITIES

▶ SERVICE OVERVIEW

The Community Development Team works with services and residents to help people come together to take positive action on what is important to them. The team cover a wide range of functions including community engagement, volunteering, community funding, voluntary sector development and liaison with community forums.

The team provide corporate support to services around equality and diversity, ensuring our decisions and processes are informed by our duties as a public body under the Equality Act 2010. Building strong, resilient communities that enable integration and cohesion in a growing borough underpins the wide and varied work of the service.

▶ REVIEW OF PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

Understanding the aspirations of communities – for their neighbourhood and for specific groups across our borough – is a central requirement of all council services. We are committed to improving community engagement, provision of information, consultation and co-production. In April 2019 we adopted a new, interactive and multifunctional consultation portal – Engagement HQ! I am excited about the potential of the new portal and encourage all residents to sign up via <https://consult.thurrock.gov.uk>

A Collaborative Communities Framework is being developed to set out our vision and commitments to empower citizens and to work together to realise ambitions for our communities and resolve societal challenges with the support of services. Thurrock's rich tapestry of cultural activities, support networks and activities to bring people together around common goals is largely achieved through our voluntary, community and faith sector.

We are exploring how our services can better enable community led action. A joint conference with Thurrock CVS was held on 7 October 2019 to explore this further, and valuable feedback was given for us to consider including reducing red tape when communities want to develop local initiatives, reviewing the Compact with the voluntary sector, and ensuring partnerships are open to all so that communities can raise new ideas to support innovation and improvement.

Supporting communities to access the resources they need to deliver locally is a key aspect of the team's work with grants programmes. The Voluntary Sector Development Fund is administered through CVS and I have been impressed by the flexibility that

working in partnership can achieve through this fund to support a wide range of voluntary sector organisation. The Community Environmental Development Fund is very well subscribed. Applications to the fifth round of bids will open later this year. 15 organisations benefited from the last round of applications including projects from Thurrock Play Network who are improving the space they use to increase activities to support play, and Thurrock Harriers who are remarking their eight lane track. Council can be assured that the funding we make available is allocated fairly, targeting ideas with the greatest impact.

We have supported a wide range of events over the year including Holocaust Memorial Day, the anniversary of the Windrush and centenary of the end of World War One.

Supporting volunteering is a key priority for the service. As well as working with communities to encourage volunteering, the service oversees the council's volunteer programme. As we continue to monitor and streamline the process for involving volunteers, it is anticipated the programme will go from strength to strength.

Thurrock's Community Hub programme is a partnership across communities, the voluntary sector and Thurrock Council led by the Community Development and Equalities team. Community hubs help to articulate a vision for its area's future and this year a great deal of progress has been made including by the Aveley Hub in pursuing the first purpose built hub in Thurrock.

Over 140 nominations for the upcoming Civic Awards were received – and the final shortlist is now being produced for the awards ceremony in February 2020.

► FUTURE

The Community Hub programme will continue to develop alongside the library service where there is opportunity to do so, helping people access support to digital skills and information resources in libraries.

As the Library Service and hubs programme align, we will build on this opportunity for residents to Influence local decisions and shape the future of their borough through hubs. The team will also support the delivery of future Your Place Your Voice engagement activities and help residents with a passion for active citizenship to develop the skills and confidence to take an active role in their neighbourhood.

ARTS, CULTURE AND HERITAGE

Arts, culture and heritage have an important role to play in improving wellbeing, quality of life and place-shaping. The service consists of the Thameside Theatre, a small arts development budget and the Thurrock Museum and Heritage Service.

► SERVICE OVERVIEW

As a council we strive to improve quality of life for our residents. The arts and our rich heritage have an important role to play in this regard, helping us to learn, to engage in our community and to have fun.

I am proud of our local history – from the earliest settlements in the area through our rich maritime and industrial heritage to the present day. Our history helps us to understand who we are. In the past year our Heritage service has sought to share the story of the borough and to act as our guardians of the local history collection and archive.

The service has completed a Heritage Lottery Funded project - Thurrock's Attic – which has focused on improving our understanding of and access to the museum collection and archive. The project included beginning the digitisation of our collection to improve access, training for staff and volunteers and a public vote on local residents' favourite items in the museum collection. The top three items have now been part of a touring exhibition across the borough. The project has left a legacy of trained staff and volunteers who are continuing to digitise our collection and improve access to more than 250,000 years of local history.

Alongside work to improve the management of the museum collection the service has worked with the Royal Opera House Trailblazer programme to offer a number of education enrichment activities at Coalhouse Fort, in the Museum and schools. This includes sessions on history, maths and English delivered using local stories, places and items from the collection.

I am particularly pleased to see more volunteers supporting the service and helping to share our history with residents. Volunteers are now supporting many aspects of work in the museum, from dealing with enquiries to sorting and digitising the collection, conducting research and, most importantly, putting together exhibitions on display in the Thameside and elsewhere. I am sure you will want to join with me in offering our thanks for the work that they do.

The Thameside Theatre is more popular than ever, with more shows and events taking place. The improved ticketing and marketing systems introduced last year are starting to reap benefits, making it easier than ever for residents to book tickets and to see what the theatre has to offer.

While the theatre has focused on income generation to help pay its own way it also takes its commitment to the local community seriously and hosts relaxed performances, Liam's Club for customers of Thurrock Lifestyle Solutions, the Beautiful Minds Cinema Club, foreign language films and other events and activities to engage our whole community.

Like the museum the theatre has been able to attract a number of volunteers to support its work. The Thameside Young Producers are a particular credit to the theatre and to

Thurrock – a group of young people with an interest in the performing arts they have run the stage at the Orsett Show for the past two years and have supported a number of the Mayor's events among many other things. Their good work has been recognised by none other than Andrew Lloyd Webber who wrote a letter of commendation to the group. The lead Producer has also been offered a scholarship at Mountview Academy, London – one of the leading drama schools in the UK - based on her portfolio of work at the theatre over the past 5 years.

► FUTURE

I have been particularly keen to encourage the development of community based arts activity in Thurrock. I am pleased that the Council has been able to work with local artists, community groups and other stakeholders to support the development of a bid for Creative People and Places (CPP) funding which could provide a multi-million pound cash injection to support the arts in the borough. The CPP process is incredibly competitive and the group did so well to reach the final stages of the application process – in the top three for the Arts Council Eastern Region in 2019. While we missed out then, the really positive feedback from Arts Council England means the group are determined to have another go and submit a revised application in the current bidding round.

Work is underway alongside our partners and communities to develop the Creative People and Places proposals, which are helping us shape the shared vision and priorities for the arts in Thurrock.

In the meantime we have been able to work with the Thurrock CVS and combine our arts development funding with some underspend in the Voluntary Sector Development Fund to launch a bidding round and distribute around £25,000 to local artists and arts groups to help deliver community based projects that help build strong and well connected communities. Organisations have been able to submit an Expression of Interest for up to £4,000 and through a shortlisting process a number have been asked to submit a full application. I hope our residents will engage with and enjoy the projects that receive funding which will deliver community based arts activity across Thurrock throughout the next year.

PROCUREMENT and CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

▶ SERVICE OVERVIEW

The service leads on all procurement processes across the council providing a structure to support all areas in adopting a fair, consistent, transparent and robust approach to procurement stretching every pound we spend to deliver great value for money while at the same time delivering the best possible outcomes for residents.

▶ REVIEW OF PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

Key outcomes for the year were:

- Implementation of a challenge process through Procurement Scrutiny Board for contract renewals and significant single source tenders
- Development of a Contract Management Framework and Handbook
- Creation of a Joint Commissioning Board

The upgrade to Oracle Cloud has meant a significant opportunity to review how the procurement team provides support, innovation and cost control on spend activity across all areas. All contracts are timed and dated, so are flagged for renewal in plenty of time to enable the council to get the best value and quality and giving reassurance to our residents. Reduced costs, whilst maintaining standards and quality are built in.

The number of procurement exercises and contracts processed across the council continues to rise.

2016	2017	2018	2019
256	330	360	435

Moving forward, there will be a greater emphasis on the establishment of framework contracts where Thurrock Council can buy quickly and compliantly for a number of services and supplies and ensure that there is no 'off-contract' spend.

Significant tenders completed or progressing during 2019/20 include interim and agency staff, children's transport, redevelopment of the Household Waste Recycling Centre, Living Well at Home out of hours service, corporate building cleaning and a number of school capital projects.

The team continue to work to ensure that local businesses are able to tender for opportunities as appropriate. The training programme, 'What Makes a Winning Bid' continues to be popular. During the past year there have been four sessions of the training course held, attended by SME suppliers, including one specifically for the Voluntary Sector and one to support children's transport providers. The feedback received from attendees has been very positive with a general view that those attending now understand the process and feel better equipped to respond more fully for future opportunities.

To support tendering opportunities further, training on Oracle has been provided to the voluntary sector and will be rolled out more widely free of charge to local (and other businesses) able to attend.

▶ FUTURE

Contract & Supplier Relationship Management

Across the council there are great examples of good contract management, the intention is that the process and practice of contract management will be reviewed across the council in order to identify best practice and recommend a way forward for Thurrock that will ensure high quality and consistent management in all areas.

Procurement Strategy

Following the publication of the National Procurement Strategy in July 2018 the service has reviewed its performance against the criteria set out. Generally results were good, however the remaining areas for improvement will be set out in a new strategy for Thurrock completed during 2020. Key will be performance reporting – which we will address using Oracle, financial risk management in difficult market areas, such as social care, and greater emphasis on reporting of delivery of social value and public value benefits.

Social Value

Leveraging social value through the council's purchasing power is a key priority for the service. In conjunction with the Community Development and Equalities Team and Thurrock CVS, officers are reviewing how and what we ask suppliers to deliver in terms of community benefits through procurement activity, and how performance can be reported and evidenced. A new framework for social value is under development which, it is proposed, will allow bidders for council contracts to select and commit to specific activities across a range of targets and outcomes.

INTERNAL AUDIT

Internal Audit is an independent assurance function that primarily operates in accordance with best practice professional standards and guidelines. It reviews on a continuous basis, the extent to which the internal control environment supports and promotes the achievement of the council's objectives, and contributes to the proper, economic, efficient and effective use of resources.

▶ REVIEW OF PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

The external Chief Internal Auditor's Annual Report confirmed the council's frameworks for governance, risk management and internal control were all "green" (positive). The Internal Audit team has provided regular progress reports to the Standards and Audit Committee on the work carried out and highlighted any key findings.

▶ FUTURE

The 2019/20 plan was developed with senior managers taking into account the key risks identified within the council's Corporate Risk Register, External Auditor's Annual Audit, the Annual Governance Statement and Report and agreed at Standards & Audit Committee. The service will also be undertaking a self-assessment review against the Public Sector Internal Audit Standards, prior to an external evaluation in 2020/21.

LEGAL SERVICES

The restructure of Thurrock Legal Services has addressed the introduction of client aligned team structures, improved reporting lines and a reduction in the level of spend on locum or agency lawyers to build increased legal capacity, resilience and internal expertise and achieve significant savings. There are now four legal teams covering Regeneration, Safeguarding, Litigation and Housing and Legal Practice.

Key activities in the last year have been creating permanent capacity to potentially trade our services to smaller district authorities and successfully obtaining Lexcel Accreditation for the past 11 years. This accreditation has recently been renewed following a full independent inspection of the legal services team. Robust practice management is a key factor in delivering excellence in legal services, retaining good legal talent and consequently giving reassurance to our residents.

► FUTURE

Thurrock Legal Services will continue as an in-house team addressing principally the needs of Thurrock Council but will continue to explore potential collaborations with South Essex authorities where this would be cost efficient and build resilience.

DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

The service continues to support all of the council's public committees. In the 2018/19 year there were additional meetings created to allow Members closer involvement with the Lower Thames Crossing project and a task force was established to look in detail at the Local Plan. The Health and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee also established a time limited task and finish group on the future of Orsett Hospital.

Staff learning is still a focus of the team and two members of staff are currently undertaking study to gain a certificate in Democratic Services awarded by our professional body, ADSO (Association of Democratic Services Officers).

ELECTORAL AND MEMBER SERVICES

The Electoral team successfully ran an unscheduled by-election in March 2019, the scheduled local elections combined with a by-election on 2 May 2019 and the unscheduled European Election on 23 May 2019. Subsequently a snap Parliamentary General Election was called which was managed successfully.

The statutory annual canvass commenced in July 2019. With the possibility of an early General Election, the team took action from September to ensure electors were registered early in the process. A revised register was published in December 2019 with a further revised register to be published in February 2020 as required. The annual canvass will undergo a radical change in 2020 to streamline the process, reducing the heavily paper-based system and the team is working to understand the impact and changes it will bring to the process.

The Members service team work throughout the municipal year to ensure Civic functions are well organised and the Mayor and elected members are supported and receive the assistance they require.

► FUTURE

Planning for the scheduled May 2020 local elections and Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner election is underway although at an early stage. The PFCC poll will be led regionally by Colchester.

The team continues to extensively 'data mine' using other local authority data sources to keep the electoral register up to date and encourage residents to register to vote when they move or become eligible. This is a statutory duty of the Electoral Registration Officer. A statutory Polling District and Polling Place review is also underway.

Members Services team is currently planning the Mayors Civic Dinner in April 2020 to commemorate the end of the Mayor's year in office.

PERFORMANCE 2019/20 – Corporate Performance Indicators

Service Area	KPI Title	2018/19 Outturn	Month 6 2019/20	2019/20 Target	Status
HROD	No of new apprenticeships started (incl current staff undertaking new apprentice standards)	60	39	59	ACHIEVING
Customer Services	Contact Centre - Face to Face average waiting times (minutes)	3:56 mins	0:59 mins	Less than 3:00 mins	ACHIEVING
Customer Services	Contact Centre - Face to Face - no of visitors	68,822	29,964	n/a	n/a
Community Development	No of placements available within the council for volunteers	-	240	210	ACHIEVING

Service Area	KPI Title	2018/19 Outturn	Month 6 2019/20	2019/20 Target	Status
Community Development	% of volunteer placements filled within the council	85%	90%	96%	FAILING

Following unexpected changes within the team leading the on-boarding of volunteers, there have been temporary delays associated with the processing of new applications in the second half of the quarter leading this KPI just failing to reach target.

Route to GREEN

A volunteer recruitment action plan has been developed with adequate resourcing now in place to ensure that the target returns to green in Quarter 3 2019/20. Actions include the allocation of resource two days a week to cover the ongoing on-boarding requirements as well as any backlog. In addition, resource is in place to ensure DBS checks, where applicable, are progressed swiftly.

NB. Latest data shows that since September this has improved and will be GREEN for quarter 3, which will be reported to Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in March.

Service Area	KPI Title	2018/19 Outturn	Month 6 2019/20	2019/20 Target	Status
Libraries	Number of library members (signed up and active within 12 months for loans / PC use)	25,756	25,865	26,785	FAILING

Libraries have joined 2,490 new members July-Sept 2019. This is in comparison to 2,248 in the same period last year which shows an increase of 242 members. However, some customers became 'inactive' as they have not used the service in the last 12 months. The increase in new members is largely due to the Children's Summer Reading Challenge. The vacant post of Children's Learning Services Officer was recruited to in late July.

Route to GREEN

The Summer Reading Challenge took place in August-September and was successful in increasing membership. Class visits have resumed from September and families are encouraged to join their children during these visits. All libraries have a daily new member target and all staff are being reminded to maintain the impetus and continue to promote library membership wherever possible, for example through outreach activities.

FINANCIAL INFORMATION 2019/20

Service Area	Full Year Budget (2019/20)	Full year Forecast as at Month 6	Variance
	£0	£0	£0
Internal Audit	278	238	-40
Legal Services	1773	1692	-81
Democratic Services	217	198	-19
Electoral Services	491	446	-45
Member Services	746	744	-2
Strategy Team	298	298	0
Communications	475	499	24
Customer Services	1036	860	-176
Procurement and contract management	757	795	38
Corporate Programme Team	902	902	0
Information Team	492	492	0
HR, OD and Payroll	3429	3329	-100
Arts Development	13.5	13.5	0
Theatre – Arts (Cultural Services)	143	143	0
Theatre - Promotions	-163	-163	0
Museum	103	103	0
Community Development Projects	670	670	-1
Libraries	1,058	1,058	0

Appendix to report:

Library Service LGA Peer Review report July 2019