

## **Environment and Communities Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> February 2023
<b>Report Title:</b>	Mid-year Performance Review - Environment and Neighbourhood Services
<b>Report of:</b>	Jayne Traverse, Executive Director of Place
<b>Report Reference No:</b>	EC/17/22-23
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All wards

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. The purpose of the report is to provide the Committee with an update on the performance across Environment and Neighbourhood Services for the first half of 2022-23 against the relevant priorities, actions and measures of success within the Council's Corporate Plan 2021-25.

### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1. This report gives an update on performance across Environment and Neighbourhood Services for the first half of 2022-23.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1. That the Committee note the performance of the department.

### **4. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 4.1. The Environment and Communities Committee is responsible for reviewing and scrutinising the performance of the Environment and Neighbourhood Services department.

### **5. Other Options Considered**

- 5.1. Not applicable.

### **6. Background**

- 6.1. Environment and Neighbourhood Services is responsible for delivering a range of Place based front line customer facing services and statutory functions. These include Waste and Recycling, Street Cleansing, Planning, Building Control, Environmental Health, Licensing, Trading Standards,

Leisure Services, Libraries, Bereavement Services, Parks, Play Areas, Playing Pitches and Green Spaces.

**6.2.** Several of our services are commissioned through the Council's wholly owned companies including Ansa and Orbitas, and the independent leisure trust Everybody Health & Leisure.

**6.3.** The Cheshire East Council Corporate Plan 2021-25 sets out our vision for an open, fairer, greener Cheshire East with three broad aims to be an open and enabling organisation; a council which empowers and cares about people, and a thriving and sustainable place. The Environment and Neighbourhood Services department contributes to a number of the priorities under the aim of a thriving and sustainable place:

- A great place for people to live, work and visit
- Welcoming, safe, and clean neighbourhoods
- To reduce the impact on our environment
- To be carbon neutral by 2025

**6.4.** The department provides leadership and management for the Council's Environment Strategy and associated action plans, including the Carbon Neutral Action Plan to deliver the commitment to be a carbon neutral council by 2025. An update on delivery of the Carbon Neutral Action Plan is being provided in a separate report to the Committee on 2 February 2023.

**6.5.** The department also contributes to the priority to be an open and enabling organisation, increasing transparency in decision-making through the Environment and Communities Committee during the year and undertaking borough wide consultations on draft policies and plans. We have also engaged with residents on projects and initiatives at a local level.

**6.6. Environmental Services**

Corporate Plan 2021-25: Key priorities	
Welcoming, safe, and clean neighbourhoods	Improved green spaces for all, enabling people to exercise and socialise in our parks and open spaces
To reduce our impact on our environment	To have minimised overall waste generated in the borough and maximised our levels of recycling  To improve biodiversity and natural habitats in the borough

Key Performance Indicators	2021/22 Mid-year	2021/22 Outturn	2022/23 Mid-year	2022/23 Target
Residual household waste collected per household (kgs)	250kg	477kg*	230kg (estimate)	<510kg
Increase the % of all waste collected sent for recycling, reuse and (to achieve 65% by 2035)	59%	57.5%*	56% (estimate)	>50%
Maintain volunteers in waste awareness	Approx. 100	Approx. 100	Approx. 100	100

(\* pending approval by Defra)

**6.7.** Procurement of the new contract for silver bin recycling processing is underway to commence 2023.

**6.8.** The Council awaits confirmation from Central Government on its consistency in collections proposals which may have significant effects on the way the Council is required to collect waste and recycling in the future. Further information on government’s proposals is expected by the end of December 2022.

**6.9.** The Public Health / NHS Green Spaces for Wellbeing programme has gone live, with the successful delivery of the taster demonstration session including a mixture of NHS health professionals, voluntary sector representatives and Cheshire East Officers and Elected Members. The satisfaction survey received 30 positive feedback responses, all of whom suggested the event met their expectations with pledges to recommend and endorse the scheme.



**6.10.** The Pocket Parks scheme is progressing and the Crewe Town Fund Department for Levelling up, housing and communities Government grant has been secured with works on the first four of eight parks to commence in 2023 with the remainder to be fulfilled over the next four-year period.

**6.11.** A substantial package of works has been delivered comprising play infrastructure & landscaping enhancements at Little Lindow play area. This was a collaborative effort, with a generous funding contribution from Wilmslow Town Council with the remainder of the funds having been provided from local developer contributions.

**6.12. Planning**

Corporate Plan 2021-25: Key priorities

A great place for people to live, work and visit	Enable access to well designed, affordable, and safe homes for all residents  New development to be appropriately controlled to protect and support our borough
To reduce our impact on our environment	To improve biodiversity and natural habitats in the borough
A transport network that is safe and promotes active travel	Improvements in the strategic infrastructure that support sustainable and inclusive growth across the borough  Safer and well-maintained roads  More residents to use walking routes
Thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all	Delivery of a strategic regeneration plan for Crewe  Delivery of a strategic regeneration plan for Macclesfield  Maximise the commercial and regeneration opportunities associated with HS2 for the whole borough

Key Performance Indicators	2021/22 Mid-year	2021/22 Outturn	2022/23 Mid-year	2022/23 Target
Number of major applications registered	61	126	55	-
Number of non-major applications registered	1,869	3,329	1,374	-
Major applications determined within 13 weeks or agreed time	95%	96%	95%	>90%
Non-major applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed time	83%	81%	83%	>90%
% Planning appeals allowed	36%	36%	40%	<30%
Supply of deliverable housing land	-	6.3 years*	-	5 years

(\*base date March 2021)

- 6.13.** Planning application performance against statutory performance measures (including agreed extensions to time) is above target for major applications but below for minors at 83%. Application workloads remain high and the 'backlog' of planning applications remains however progress is being made to reduce

this was a series of officer fast track sessions which have been very successful in determining high numbers of applications over recent months. As a consequence of this applications held in the backlog are now being allocated to planning officers earlier – at the time of writing this report this is currently at 9 weeks, down from 13 weeks in September. Further fast track sessions are planned in the coming months to continue to make progress with this and application workloads in general. Staff retention and recruitment difficulties remain across all aspects of the Planning service which continues to impact timeframes for determination and customer service.

- 6.14.** The number of live applications in the backlog reduced slightly to 2,504 at the end of Q2 but the majority of applications are still taking 4-6 months to determine. For context, the normal level of live applications is approximately 1,300. Minor application submissions have noticeably started to reduce from the peak during Covid, but major applications which are resource intense and take the longest to determine, have remained at high levels. Cheshire East continues to be the busiest Planning Authority in the North West and in the top ten nationally for planning applications.
- 6.15.** The number of appeals allowed has increased slightly. Inspector's decisions are being carefully reviewed for any trends or changes in approach but there is no real pattern to those being allowed with the majority being householder applications where just a different, more permissive, view is being reached by the Planning Inspectorate. Further analysis will continue going forward.
- 6.16.** The holding pattern for new applications continues to be implemented meaning applications are allocated to a named officer later in the process, however this time to allocation is reducing. Customer expectations continue to be managed through updates to the Council's website and direct correspondence. This will be reviewed and updated in the coming months. Pre-application services remain suspended for all but major applications to enable a focus on delivery of the core statutory requirements.
- 6.17.** A report updating on the progress of the Planning Service Deep Dive Review was presented to Environment and Communities Committee on 31 October 2022. The report detailed service improvements needed to reduce the backlog more quickly and detailed actions necessary to modernise the service. A Transformation Board, chaired by the Executive Director of Place, is to be established to oversee the delivery of the Modernisation Plan for the service. Progress with the Modernisation Plan continues to be made whilst balancing resources with day to day service delivery. Implementation of a new IT system in the service is currently being prioritised – once implemented this will deliver improvements for the service which will benefit all users – including customers.
- 6.18.** Despite the ongoing challenges in managing demand and reducing the backlog, the team have assisted in delivering significant major development schemes on identified allocated sites across the Borough. This has enabled large employment development and job creation in Middlewich and Wardle

and residential developments at Poynton, Macclesfield and Wilmslow providing both market and affordable homes for the future. It has also facilitated smaller regeneration schemes in Crewe and school extensions in Holmes Chapel. The emphasis on design quality of development schemes and wider place making remains key. While the need for Biodiversity Net Gain, appropriate landscape mitigation, tree planting and wider environmental benefits such as sustainable drainage systems (SUDS) from developments is increasingly being pushed.

- 6.19.** The final Inspector's report was received advising that the Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD) could be adopted subject to inclusion of main modifications. The decision to adopt was made at Full Council on 14 December 2022. This represents a significant achievement for Cheshire East meaning the legacy Local Plans from the three previous district Councils can be finally laid to rest.
- 6.20.** The Environment and Communities Committee has also approved the first draft Cheshire East Mineral and Waste Development Plan for public consultation. A number of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) are also in progress with Developer Contributions being the latest to go through consultation and the Housing SPD being adopted.
- 6.21.** Enforcement complaints have reduced to 440 in comparison with 592 for the same period last year. This could be because more people have been returning to the workplace, but also because some of the very minor complaints have been dealt with on a 'first response' basis rather than being formally logged. There have been some significant successes with 5 Enforcement Notices, 3 Planning Contravention Notices and 1 Listed Building Enforcement Notice. There has also been a successful prosecution during the reporting period. Recruitment continues to be difficult with the team 25% down on establishment and the inevitable pressures on customer service as a result.
- 6.22.** The Building Control team have dealt with 798 new applications whilst also inspecting 7,080 elements of work through 4,131 visits. Of the elements inspected a total of 1,488 (21%) were unsatisfactory at the first visit, identifying contraventions present requiring attention. The team continued to turn around 83% of full plans within 15 working days and attended 30 reports of dangerous structures.
- 6.23.** Planning Support has consistently achieved over 90% of planning applications registered within 10 days for a total of 2,496 received together with all associated comments and plans. Additionally, the team has supported 101 appeals. As a result of the service review planning support officers are now working more closely with Planning Officers to manage processes and workflow. Land charges continue to turn around 100% requests in under 10 days and 99% under 5 days.

**6.24.** Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans for Alderley Edge, Macclesfield Town Centre and Ollerton School Lane have been approved by Environment and Communities Committee on 29 September 2022. These provide a more detailed level of protection for heritage with additional planning guidance and are a material consideration in determining planning applications.

**6.25. Regulatory Services**

Corporate Plan 2021-25: Key priorities	
Welcoming, safe, and clean neighbourhoods	<p>Crime and anti-social activity and anti-social behaviour to be reduced</p> <p>Victims of crime and exploitation to be supported effectively by the council and partners through collaboration</p> <p>To protect residents and improve our environment</p>

**6.26.** The Corporate Enforcement Policy has been reviewed and was approved for adoption by the Environment and Communities Committee on 10 November 2022. The Regulatory Services service specific enforcement policy has also been reviewed and was also approved for adoption by Environment and Communities Committee on 10 November 2022.

**6.27.** A procurement exercise for the design, supply and implementation of a new wireless CCTV network has been completed and implementation work is underway.

**6.28.** The CCTV team have received positive feedback from Cheshire Police for their role in disrupting county lines activity through camera surveillance across the Borough. County lines is a reference to a form of criminal activity in which drug dealers in major cities establish networks for the supply and sale of drugs to users in towns and rural areas. Organisations often use young and vulnerable people to carry, store and sell the drugs. Recent referrals from the CCTV unit have led to the arrest of a number of individuals and the confiscation of class A drugs.

**6.29.** £141,150 of detriment has been saved for residents from rogue trading and scams interventions. Aftercare visits to victims of scams completed including the installation of call blockers.

**6.30.** Operation Juniper involved testing 24 premises for compliance in relation to age restricted goods sales including alcohol, knives, tobacco and vaping products. Five under age sales were made during the operation which are being followed up with further investigation work.

**6.31.** The 2022 Annual Air Quality Status Report has been approved by Defra and received positive feedback on its detail and demonstrable commitment to local air quality management. Objectives within the Air Quality Action Plan continue

to be delivered, including a series of highway network improvements and a new education campaign highlighting the impact of vehicle engine idling and domestic fuel burning.

- 6.32.** Using Defra grant funding the air quality team are currently leading an awareness campaign around domestic fuel burning and vehicle engine idling, both of which can have negative impacts to the air quality environment.
- 6.33.** Environment and Communities Committee approved an updated Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing policy to reflect national standards, effective from 1 November 2022. There is currently ongoing work to communicate relevant changes to the licensed trade and ensure that licensing staff are trained in any new administrative processes.
- 6.34.** A revised Statement of Gambling Principles was recommended for adoption by the Environment and Communities Committee on 10 November 2022, and subsequently adopted by Full Council on 15 December 2022.
- 6.35.** The Animal Health and Welfare Team have responded to three Avian Influenza (AI) outbreaks within Cheshire East working closely with neighbouring authorities where outbreaks extend across borders. This work is done in conjunction with national agencies including the Animal Plant and Health Authority, Defra and UKHSA.
- 6.36.** A revised template for the Contingency Plan for Exotic Notifiable Disease has been introduced and the Cheshire East Plan and associated annexes (Avian Influenza and African Swine Fever/Classical Swine Fever in particular) are currently being reviewed.
- 6.37.** An Animal Welfare Licensing Policy is under development and will be shared with the Environment and Communities Committee in February 2023. The aim of the Policy is to consolidate the fundamental aspects of the animal welfare licensing regime into one document including national legislation and guidance and local policy and procedure.
- 6.38.** Work is underway with DEFRA and the Animal Plant Health Agency (APHA) to raise awareness with Ministers regarding the impact of the cost of living crisis on livestock keepers, abattoirs and processors. This includes the potential impact on food security and local authority resource should livestock have to be seized on welfare grounds and/or abattoirs and processors close leading to potential impacts on the slaughter/food supply chain and the risk of illegal slaughter activities.
- 6.39.** A recent 'temperature check' against the Food Standards Agency Recovery Plan indicates that we are meeting the necessary intervention requirements of the plan. In addition, our intervention work with lower risk premises continues with the support of external inspectors and ensures ongoing involvement with our local food businesses. We are currently awaiting information from the Food Standards Agency on the proposed intervention delivery model post the recovery plan period to March 2023 and prior to the

new Food Delivery Model implementation scheduled from 2024-2025 onwards.

- 6.40.** The service continues to struggle with the recruitment of permanent qualified staff and is carrying several vacancies within the environmental health and licensing functions. Succession planning is key to maintaining the service and we are currently supporting two student environmental health trainees and three trading standards apprenticeships, two of whom have just passed their Stage 1 qualification.

**6.41. Neighbourhood Services**

Corporate Plan 2021-25: Key priorities	
A great place for people to live, work and visit	<p>A high-quality accessible library service that remains relevant to the changing needs of Cheshire East residents and delivers value for money</p> <p>High quality leisure and sports provision across the borough that delivers good value for money</p>
Welcoming, safe, and clean neighbourhoods	<p>Crime and anti-social activity and anti-social behaviour to be reduced</p> <p>Victims of crime and exploitation to be supported effectively by the council and partners through collaboration</p> <p>To protect residents and improve our environment</p>

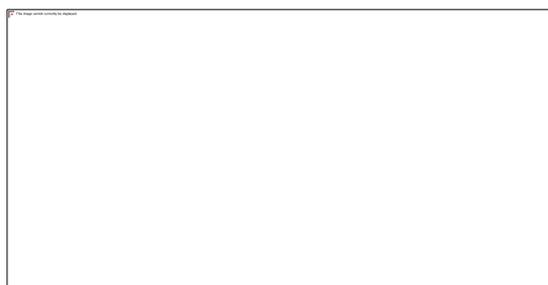
Key Performance Indicators	2021/22 Mid-year	2021/22 Outturn	2022/23 Mid-year	2022/23 Target
Number of visitors to libraries	272,477	684,574	668,323	1,000,000
Number of visitors to leisure centres	910,111	2,082,213	1,204,211	2,020,000

- 6.42.** Usage within Libraires continues to bounce back following the Pandemic the table shows several measures:

Description	Annual target	Measure to date (end of Nov)
Number of visitors to libraries	1,000,000	668,323
Number of physical book issues	1,850,384	1,030,664
Number of 'E' downloads (books, Audio books, Magazines)	N/A	159,359
Number of users accessing online subscriptions	187,457	105,431

Number of events held in libraries	7,000	3,569
Number attending library events	100,000	46,793
Number of children participating in Summer Reading Challenge	7,262	5,627
New library members	N/A	12,593

**6.43.** Children's usage of libraries continues to grow and 5,627 children participated in the summer reading challenge supported by 116 volunteers of which 102 were young volunteers. 5 libraries have recently undergone refurbishment to their children's libraries.



**6.44.** The libraries services continue to support residents with basic ICT tuition and are trying to recruit additional ICT Buddies (volunteers) to help with this.

**6.45.** Cheshire East libraries have helped numerous residents apply/upload evidence for their £150 Council Tax rebate. We have taken on DBS checks for Taxi Drivers, Chaperones and Escorts and continue to initiate DBS checks for any families hosting refugees.

**6.46.** The library is also helping support refugee families that have arrived in Cheshire East through the Homes for Ukraine scheme, distributing school back packs, toiletries and Vicki a Librarian at Macclesfield library sourced an amazing treasure trove of Bookmark goodies for 5-9 year old refugees. These packs contain a tablet with translation apps, games and e-books pre-loaded, SIM card, dual language books and diaries, puppets and games.



**6.47.** Staff at Nantwich library were filmed by the BBC for an item documenting how public libraries were responding to the cost-of-living crisis.



**6.48.** The children's events have been extremely popular. Many of our young residents loved learning new Science Technology Engineering Arts Maths (STEAM) skills as part of our Gadgeteers theme.



- 6.49.** Staff at Disley library were recently awarded a civic commendation for their work in supporting the local community



- 6.50.** Library staff have to date distributed 117 SIM cards containing 12 months of free data to help those experiencing digital poverty and have recently secured additional supplies.
- 6.51.** All our libraries are part of the Warm Places initiative and have increased their programme of free or low-cost activities to support residents struggling with the cost-of-living crisis.
- 6.52.** There have been more than 1.2 million visitors to the Council's leisure centres in the first half of the year. The Learn to Swim Scheme has grown to 9,700 swimmers participating in weekly lessons.
- 6.53.** The redevelopment of Congleton Leisure Centre, despite some recent issues, is due to re-open in spring 2023. Significant progress has been made and the photos below give a flavour of what the final scheme will look like.



- 6.54.** Two new Chlorine Hydrolyser units have been installed in Macclesfield and Crewe leisure centres, this is an environmentally friendly means of producing chlorine and comes with lower operating costs.
- 6.55.** The community enforcement team continues to make a significant impact in and around the alleyways in Crewe. During this period 149 investigations have taken place, enforcement action has taken place in 8 of the cases via means of Fly tipping fines or formal warnings, 26 x stage 1 section 46 warnings, 16 stage 2 section 46 notices of intent, 7 x £60 fines issued for breach of section 46 notice. The fantastic work was recently recognised nationally by winning the 'Best Partnership' award by the Local Authority Recycling Advisory Committee (LARAC), this is down to the outstanding work that has taken place on the Cleaner Crewe project by all the partners involved in the initiative.



- 6.56.** The Multi Agency Action Group (MAAG) continues to meet on a quarterly based. It most recently met to discuss issues with anti-social behaviour (ASB) in a park in Poynton. Through collaboration with partners, mitigation measures have been instigated which will reduce the significant levels of ASB that has been affecting the lives of the residents living around the park.
- 6.57.** The community enforcement team have increased their enforcement actions through the introduction of a team leader post and have successful recruited 2 new members of staff one of which is a funded post via Macclesfield Town Council to assist with enhanced patrols and community links. This is in addition to the funded post from Crewe Town Council that is supporting the cleaner Crewe project
- 6.58.** The team have investigated 430 cases, of which 386 were closed. They have issued 27 Fixed Penalty notices covering all areas of environmental crime they are responsible for investigating, keeping a high payment rate in relation to the fines that have been issued. The team also had a successful prosecution heard in the magistrates Court for breach of our Dog Fouling and Dog Control Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) in July 2022, the offence was committed last year and was a repeat offence. The defendant was found guilty and was ordered to pay charges totalling £754.00. The table below shows the type of offence and fines issued at midyear point

Type	Number of FPN's Issued
Flytipping	10
Abandoning a vehicle	11
Household Duty of Care	2
Dog Fouling and Dog Control PSPO	4
<b>Total:</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Paid:</b>	<b>21 – 77% payment rate</b>
<b>Withdrawn</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Progressing to prosecution</b>	<b>1</b>

- 6.59.** The Anti-Social behaviour team have recently undertaken a LEAN system review with the council's business improvement team. The review looked at how to improve case referrals, case management and triage of enquiries.

Several areas of work have been identified for short-, medium- and long-term improvements. The team during the first half of this year has reverted to three areas to align with the new policing areas, which will allow for more local, focused work to take place. In addition, the ASB Team have issued their first Community Protection Notice (CPN) as part of our pilot procedure.

## **7. Implications**

### **7.1. Legal**

7.1.1. There are no legal implications arising from this report.

### **7.2. Finance**

7.2.1. The financial implications of changes in performance requirements or responding to current performance levels is provided in separate Finance Review reports to the Committee.

### **7.3. Policy**

7.3.1. The report sets out how the department is contributing to the Cheshire East Council Corporate Plan 2021-25.

### **7.4. Equality**

7.4.1. There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

### **7.5. Human Resources**

7.5.1. There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

### **7.6. Risk Management**

7.6.1. The performance reporting process provides opportunities for the Council to identify and focus on areas for improvement to support achievement of its strategic ambitions. Timely performance reporting mitigates risk of the Council not achieving its outcomes by providing the opportunity to review outputs, identify trends and areas for improvement, and introduce corrective and/or preventative actions wherever necessary to address areas of poor - or under – performance.

### **7.7. Rural Communities**

7.7.1. There are no implications for rural communities arising from this report.

### **7.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children**

**7.8.1.** There are no implications for children and young people arising from this report.

**7.9. Public Health**

**7.9.1.** There are no implications for public health arising from this report.

**7.10. Climate Change**

**7.10.1.** An update on delivery of the Carbon Neutral Action Plan is provided in a separate report to the Committee.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
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Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None