

Environment and Communities Committee

Date of Meeting:	11 th November 2021
Report Title:	Mid-year Performance Review - Environment and Neighbourhood Services
Report of:	Paul Bayley, Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services
Report Reference No:	EC/24/21-22
Ward(s) Affected:	All wards

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report gives an update on performance across Environment and Neighbourhood Services for the first half of 2021-22.

2. Recommendations

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

3. Reasons for Recommendations

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

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. Not applicable.

5. Background

- 5.1. 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. A number of our services are commissioned through the Council's wholly owned companies including Ansa and Orbitas, and the independent leisure trust Everybody Sport & Recreation.

5.2. 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

5.3. 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 will be provided in a separate report to the Committee in January 2022.

5.4. 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	Mid-year (20/21)	2020/21 Outturn	Mid-year (21/22)	Target 2021/22
Residual household waste collected per household (kgs)	239kg*	481kg*	250kg (estimate)	<510kg
Increase the % of all waste collected sent for recycling, reuse and (to achieve 65% by 2035)	60.5%*	57.5%*	59% (estimate)	>50%
Maintain volunteers in waste awareness	Approx. 100	Approx. 100	Approx. 100	25

(* pending approval by Defra)

5.5. The pandemic has placed great strain on the waste collection system but despite the numerous pressures Ansa have been able to continue to empty

all three bins at all times. Many local authorities across the country have ceased one of their collections to cope with the pressure.

- 5.6. A clear result of the lockdowns has been to increase the tonnage of all waste streams – residents are at home and therefore carrying out more gardening/DIY, eating at home and not disposing of items at their workplace. As a consequence, we have not succeeded in minimising overall waste generation in the borough, but our recycling levels remain encouragingly high.
- 5.7. The strain is also clear on the supply chain for our bins. There has been a world shortage of plastics and therefore contingency measures have had to be taken to ensure a consistent supply of new and replacement bins. This issue, along with staffing pressures, have resulted in the bin delivery times having to be extended. Our third sector partner who provide the bulky waste service have begun to assist with delivery of bins.
- 5.8. The waste prevention team have succeeded in retaining an enthusiastic band of volunteers who are actively involved in waste prevention activities. The pandemic has limited community engagement, but this has not prevented the team reaching out digitally. The lifting of restrictions has, amongst other things, enabled engagement at a stall in the indoor market in Macclesfield, talks to secondary schools, WIs, Brownies and Cubs and Tatton Foodies Festival.
- 5.9. A key project during this quarter has been the closure of the Congleton household waste recycling centre, as a result of the landlord not agreeing to a lease extension. The site has now been cleared and handed back. During the process there have been no incidents of fly-tipping outside the site and arrangements are ongoing for the placement of two additional recycling banks in Congleton.
- 5.10. The playing field improvement project, jointly funded by the Football Foundation, CEC and ANSA is making real progress. Funding of £200,000 has enabled the purchase of a fleet of modern maintenance machinery, which will give pitches a new lease of life, creating much improved surfaces, resilience, and better drainage. Since the arrival of the new pitch maintenance equipment during last autumn, ANSA have prioritised the 5 strategically important multi-pitch playing fields, but improvements are also now being reported by teams playing on other Council playing fields.
- 5.11. Seven of our parks across the borough have retained their Green Flag Awards this year. The scheme recognises and rewards well-managed parks and green spaces, setting the benchmark standard for their management across the United Kingdom and around the world. **(Subject to news embargo until 14th October)**. Visitor numbers in our parks grew significantly during the pandemic and they remain high demonstrating their value to our diverse communities.
- 5.12. Over recent months the Parks Team have established good working relationships with colleagues in Public Health and the NHS. We all recognise

the value of parks in supporting community health and we are all hopeful that we can jointly find ways to make the most of this resource to make positive inroads into delivering healthier communities.

- 5.13.** Strong partnerships are being built between the Council and a range of environmental organisations aimed at delivering greater biodiversity and environmental improvements in parks and green spaces across the Borough. Work is underway to review and refresh the Parks Strategy to maximise the benefits from these emerging partnerships. Tree planting schemes are under development for this winter's planting season. We have trialled 'no mow' areas within some parks. The reaction from the public has been really positive and the visual impact has been great. It is an approach we will look to expand on next year.
- 5.14.** The Parks team are heavily engaged in developing projects to be funded through the Crewe Towns Fund. Primarily we are focussed on the Pocket Parks Improvement Initiative, but we are also involved in the Valley Brook River improvement projects.
- 5.15.** There are a number of park improvement projects that are in progress or recently completed including:
- Hassall Road, Alsager – Following on from the new play equipment installed earlier in 2021, a second phase is due to commence in October to install a footpath connecting with the entrance gates and installing an additional piece of equipment.
 - Rotherhead Drive, Macclesfield – Work is due to start on a full replacement of the play area and new connecting footpath to make the equipment more accessible.
 - Queens Park, Crewe – A £100,000 has been awarded by the FCC Communities Foundation to update and refresh the play area, with the work due to commence in the autumn.
 - Lansdowne Road, Crewe - Crewe Town Council have provided £100,000 funding to upgrade play equipment on this Cheshire East Council owned play area. The work will be completed this year.
 - The Carrs, Wilmslow – A new Masterplan public consultation was launched in September.
 - Meriton Road Park, Handforth – Following a Masterplan consultation earlier this year, feedback is now being reviewed and projects identified in the plan being prioritised. A new path is being installed this month to provide access from a new housing estate into the park.
 - Banbury Close, Macclesfield – Macclesfield Town Council have provided £50,000 to improve accessibility to both the Multi-Use-Games-Area and the open space by installing better drainage.
 - Wynbunbury Road, Willaston – Resurfacing work is being undertaken to improve accessibility to the play area.

- Rugby Drive, Tytherington – New fencing has been installed to protect the improved football pitch areas. A new drainage system was installed and completed earlier this year.
- Station Road, Wrenbury – Play area fencing has been improved. The old timber fence has been replaced with new play safe steel fence.

5.16. Planning

Corporate Plan 2021-25: Key priorities	
A great place for people to live, work and visit	<p>Enable access to well designed, affordable, and safe homes for all residents</p> <p>New development to be appropriately controlled to protect and support our borough</p>
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	<p>Improvements in the strategic infrastructure that support sustainable and inclusive growth across the borough</p> <p>Safer and well-maintained roads</p> <p>More residents to use walking routes</p>
Thriving urban and rural economies with opportunities for all	<p>Delivery of a strategic regeneration plan for Crewe</p> <p>Delivery of a strategic regeneration plan for Macclesfield</p> <p>Maximise the commercial and regeneration opportunities associated with HS2 for the whole borough</p>

Key Performance Indicators	Mid-year (20/21)	2020/21 Outturn	Mid-year (21/22)	Target 2021/22
Number of major applications registered	64	130	61	-
Number of non-major applications registered	1,539	3,410	1,869	-
Major applications determined within 13 weeks or agreed time	96%	95%	95%	>90%
Non-major applications determined within 8 weeks or agreed time	88%	87%	83%	>90%

% Planning appeals allowed	42%	34%	36%	<30%
Supply of deliverable housing land	-	6.4 years*	-	5 years

(*base date March 2020)

- 5.17.** The Planning Service has faced significant challenges over the first half of the year initially caused by ongoing Covid impacts but now coupled with significant increases in the volume of applications. Total applications have increased by over 15% for the period Jan-Sep 2021 compared to the previous year (5085 applications over 4300), with particular increases in submissions of smaller householder and prior approval applications. The figures reported above only include applications which are reported to DLUHC (former MHCLG) and so does not include prior approvals which have increased due to recent changes to permitted development rights.
- 5.18.** The increased demand has resulted in a significant increase in the number of live applications to 2,876 at the end of September – more than double the normal level of 1,200. This is somewhat reflected in the key performance indicator shown in the table above that reports a decrease in the number of applications determined within the agreed time. However, this includes applicants who agree one or more extensions to time and in reality many applications are taking much longer than 8 or 13 weeks to be determined.
- 5.19.** A number of measures have been introduced to effectively manage officer caseload in the short term and address the backlog and reduce determination timescales in the medium term.
- 5.20.** Applications are being validated and registered as normal but they are not being allocated to named officers until much later in the process to ensure individual case officers are not overwhelmed. Pre-application services have been suspended since the start of the year for all but major proposals. Customer expectations are being managed through updated correspondence on receipt of applications; targeted communications to agents and Members and also regular updating of information on the Website.
- 5.21.** To help address the backlog of applications an external provider, Capita, have been procured to provide additional capacity of 4-5 officers to assist with the backlog of householder applications. The contract covers up to 1,000 applications over a 9-12 month period.
- 5.22.** The Service has also continued to try and recruit staff to fill vacancies, although it is currently a challenging market for recruiting experienced planning officers. Three new Planning Assistants started in September and one additional Senior Planning Officer joins in October. There remain two vacancies at Planning Officer level. There is some long term sickness which is also hindering service recovery.

- 5.23.** A dashboard has been developed to enable regular monitoring and reporting of the impact of these measures on the application backlog.
- 5.24.** Enforcement complaints have also increased (592 in comparison with 548 for Apr-Sep last year) with more people 'working at home' and having greater awareness of the environment around them. However, there have been some significant successes with 5 Enforcement Notices, 5 Planning Contravention Notices and 1 Breach of Condition during the reporting period. Recruitment continues to fill a current vacancy with the enforcement team.
- 5.25.** To help develop greater capacity and resilience within the service in the longer term, a review of the resourcing structure is under way. Benchmarking has been taking place with other Local Authorities, and retention and recruitment policies are being reviewed. A review of the Customer Experience has also begun to understand current demands and performance from a customer perspective. A Service Improvement Plan will be developed once the review is complete.
- 5.26.** Notwithstanding the pressures on the Service, it continues to approve significant strategic developments in accordance with development plan policies to ensure they are sensitive to their surroundings but also achieving good sustainability. Key strategic housing developments at Leighton, Crewe, and employment sites in Middlewich. A strong emphasis on the urban design quality of schemes has been embedded over the last few years, particularly for the larger housing sites. Focus on the character of the area, hierarchy of streets, alongside landscaping, Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points and good connectivity/accessibility will provide more sustainable places to live and work. Poor design and developments which do not meet our necessary standards or appropriate policies are being rejected. Although Planning Appeal performance has slightly decreased for the quarter the Service is making soundly based decisions with the first half of the year not showing any adverse trends.
- 5.27.** The five year housing supply figure remains at a robust level of 6.4 years with 2,376 net completions during the 20/21 monitoring year.
- 5.28.** The decision to submit the revised Publication Draft Site Allocations and Development Policies Document (SADPD), part 2 of the Local Plan, was made at a meeting of full council on 19th April 2021. The Examination by a Planning Inspector commenced in mid-October running until early November. It is hoped that the Plan will be adopted in late Spring/early Summer 2022. Work continues on the Minerals and Waste Development Plan Document (MWDPD), part 3 of the Local Plan. The initial draft should be ready for consultation early in the New Year.
- 5.29.** The Tree Risk Management Strategy was approved by Cabinet in April, following appointment of a new Principal Forestry & Arboricultural Officer who will be responsible for ensuring the strategy is implemented. During this initial phase there has been good progress in establishing solid lines of communication with colleagues in Highways, Green Spaces (ANSA) and

Assets to provide clarity in identifying risks, appropriate inspection regimes and how information should be recorded in accordance with the Strategy. An action plan has been formulated and will be regularly updated as a means of ensuring all stakeholders are actively working towards compliance with the strategy.

- 5.30.** The implementation of the new IT system for Planning, Building Control and Land Charges has picked up pace in recent months with good progress being made on the difficult tasks around data mapping and data migration. While there is still a significant amount of work to be done it is hoped that the new systems will be fully operational by the summer of 2022.
- 5.31.** Finally, while both Planning and Building Control face challenges in terms of resources they must also adapt to on-going changes in legislation. As such, Planning has responded to yet further legislative changes to the permitted development regime and also a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) produced in July which has taken on board the 'Beautiful Buildings' and the introduction of the National Design Guide and Design Codes.
- 5.32.** Building Control has also had to take on board the first stage of the Building Safety Regime (post Grenfell) whereby the Health & Safety Executive (HSE) act as a consultee on residential applications above 18m. Further competencies for professional Building Control staff are now also required.
- 5.33.** Performance in Building Control remains high despite challenges with resources similar to the planning service. The number of fee earning applications dealt with during the first half of the year is 895 with 94% of full plans assessed within 15 days. Officers have also responded to 29 dangerous structures. On average the Building Control officers are dealing with 240 applications per year which is significantly higher than the sector benchmark of 148 applications per officer per year.

5.34. 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>

- 5.35.** The Regulatory Services team were responsible for ensuring local businesses complied with the Covid-19 restrictions introduced by government to help reduce transmission of the virus. Between April and September, the service dealt with over 500 service requests relating to Covid-19. We continue to respond to all complaints and concerns from members of the public and employees about the adequacy or otherwise of

covid control measures. Although most specific legislative requirements were removed on 19 July 2021 the service is able to provide advice and guidance to encourage businesses to maintain ongoing control measures to minimise the risk of transmission. The service is also working with the Health and Safety Executive who are carrying out spot checks on local businesses with referrals for further action provided to the authority as appropriate.

- 5.36.** The team are also continuing to work with Public Health colleagues on the local Test, Trace, Contain and Enable programme. In response to details of positive Covid cases that have an impact on local businesses, either an employee or a visitor to a site, direct contact is made to understand potential transmission routes and provide any necessary support and advice. This approach continues to be positively received.
- 5.37.** The Licensing service is steadily returning to normal operations following the impact that the pandemic had on service delivery during 2020. In order to strike a balance between public safety and supporting the local trade and businesses, a number of changes had to be made to operations and some aspects including the acceptance of new driver applications, driver knowledge tests and licensed premises debt collection were suspended. These elements have now resumed albeit with some changes to delivery methods. The team continues to investigate complaints made against all licence holders although the number of complaints being dealt with have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels and there has been no requirement for any formal enforcement action to date this year.
- 5.38.** The Licensing Team has been progressing with a comprehensive update of the Cheshire East Taxi Licensing Policy in response to the release of the Department for Transport's 'National Minimum Standards' document. The amended draft policy has been approved for consultation with the trade, public and other relevant stakeholders. Proposed changes include setting emission and age limits for vehicles and extending our data sharing arrangements with partner agencies to support safeguarding.
- 5.39.** The Food Safety/Standards Teams have been consistently working to guidelines issued by the Food Standards Agency throughout the duration of the pandemic. These guidelines have offered a deviation from the statutory inspection programme identifying priority areas for local authorities to focus their efforts. The latest guidance issued in June this year provides a recovery plan for the return to normal operations which runs from 1 October 2021 to 31 March 2023. The Food Law Enforcement Plan outlines how the service will achieve these requirements and ensure the safety and integrity of our locally produced food.
- 5.40.** Away from inspection based work the Commercial Services Team are continuing with their reactive work including the investigation of service requests, workplace accidents and food poisoning/infectious disease notifications which have remained at a consistent level to that experienced pre-Covid. The Team are also having to respond to an increased number of

enquiries relating to export requirements since our EU Exit and having to issue a higher number of Export Health Certificates; this work is particularly complex and the service is waiting further training to be delivered by the Food Standards Agency to improve both the local and national response.

- 5.41.** Work has been ongoing to promote 'Natasha's Law' to businesses that sell prepacked food for direct sale (PPDS) in advance of changes to allergen labelling requirements that come into force on 1 October 2021. This work is led by Trading Standards but will also be incorporated into the day-to-day work of the Food Safety team as part of routine inspections and business interactions.
- 5.42.** Work continues with the former Macclesfield Town Football Club, now Macclesfield Football Club, who have begun their first competitive season in August 2021. The focus is to ensure that they meet their obligations and that the grounds are safe for all who attend. This has included 'During Performance Inspections' to monitor safety management procedures in a match day environment. This work is supported by the wider Safety Advisory Group including representatives from Police, Fire and Ambulance services.
- 5.43.** The Trading Standards Team continue their activities to stop fraudulent, illegal, and unfair trading and the first six months of the year have seen extensive activity. Activities include the seizure of over 2,500 counterfeit items from two business premises in Knutsford and Nantwich, the successful sentencing of a prolific rogue trader for 32 months following offences in Cheshire East and the NW region and a Proceeds of Crime case requiring the repayment of over £70,000 following imprisonment for illegal money lending.
- 5.44.** The Team also has a focus on protecting the most vulnerable from predatory crime including mass marketing and scams. In the first half of the year, the Banking Protocol project has helped to save over £500,000 of bank customers in Cheshire East when requests to withdraw unusual amounts of money are challenged and referred to the police if criminality is suspected. Individuals who have found themselves the victim of scams and doorstep crime are subsequently supported by the Older Person's Scams Awareness and Aftercare Project (a joint partnership between Age UK and Cheshire East) where they are provided with aftercare, support, and advice.
- 5.45.** The Team have also dealt with a number of referrals from colleagues working within port authorities where consignments of unsafe products bound for Cheshire East have been identified and stopped at port. Follow up activity has included engagement with businesses to rework their product into a compliant state as well as destruction of products where this has not been possible.
- 5.46.** The Environmental Protection Team deal with complaints in relation to issues such as noise, smoke, dust, and odour from both domestic and commercial premises. During the pandemic period there has been a significant increase in the number of these complaints, many linked to an

increasing number of individuals working from home; 2020-2021 saw the highest level of noise complaints in the history of Cheshire East Council with a total of 1680 complaints received, an increase of 35% on the previous year (1245); complaint numbers for April – August 2021 have already reached 987. To cope with demand the service has had to increase its 5 working day first day response time to 20 working days. The increased demand has impacted response times and during the first quarter of 2021-2022 68% of complaints were responded to in 5 working days a reduction from 84% for the same period the previous year.

- 5.47.** The Air Quality Annual Status Report and Air Quality Action Plan have been submitted to Defra for comment in line with statutory requirements. The annual status report focuses on what is being done to improve air quality locally and provides an update on monitoring undertaken and progress towards the actions set out in our action plan.
- 5.48.** The updated Contaminated Land Strategy was approved by Committee in July. This strategy sets out our approach to dealing with contaminated land issues including matters relating to Council owned land and the team are working closely with the Assets Team on a number of local historic landfill sites.
- 5.49.** A revision of legislation relating to Private Water Supplies has led to a wholesale review of our work in this field including accreditation training for all of the officers involved. The team are currently developing an updated programme of sampling and risk assessment work for the supplies captured by the legislative requirements.
- 5.50.** Changes to Animal Welfare Legislation in 2018 are continuing to impact upon the work of the Animal Health and Welfare Team. The Team have seen an increase in the number of applications linked to the impact of the pandemic; this includes an increase in dog breeding licence applications fuelled by the high demand for pets during the lockdown periods and a corresponding increase in home boarding and day care facility applications for those who are returning to the workplace and need additional care for their pets. After extensive investigation work, two licensing applications have been refused; in one case the decision was upheld at the First Tier Tribunal whilst in the second instance the applicant withdrew their appeal and are reviewing their business model with a view to a revised submission.
- 5.51.** The service is also dealing with an increasing number of complaints, including reports of unlicensed breeders, irresponsible dog ownership and farmed animal welfare. People have continued to visit the countryside as a leisure activity beyond the coronavirus lockdown periods and are keen to report what they perceive to be welfare issues. The service is addressing these matters in a range of ways including, in the case of pet ownership, the development of school education resources that can be delivered to local school children.

5.52. The CCTV service provides 24 hour a day visual oversight to our towns and works closely with the Police to share information, review specific areas on request and provide recorded evidence as appropriate. Work is ongoing to replace our ageing analogue system to a wireless infrastructure. This will improve our response to system faults, reducing the amount of down time and reducing service costs.

5.53. The CCTV service is currently preparing for an October inspection by the Security Systems and Alarms Inspection Board. This Audit hopes to build on our accreditation by the National Security Inspectorate in 2020 moving us closer to BS 7958 accreditation for CCTV Management and Operation. This accreditation would support plans for the service to expand its range of chargeable services in the future.

5.54. 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	Mid-year (20/21)	2020/21 Outturn	Mid-year (21/22)	Target 2021/22
Number of visitors to libraries	160,347	286,040	272,477	800,000
Number of visitors to leisure centres	169,249	426,651	910,111	2,000,000

5.55. The Community Enforcement and Anti-Social Behaviour team saw a considerable increase in reported incidents of ASB since the lifting of restrictions earlier in the year. The team continues to work closely with the police in responding to reports.

- 5.56.** The Multi-Agency Action Group (MAAG) has continued to meet bi-monthly basis and proposals to tackle ASB in Macclesfield will be presented over the coming months.
- 5.57.** New enforcement policies for Community Enforcement, Anti-Social Behaviour and body worn cameras were approved by the Committee in July.
- 5.58.** Patrols by the Community Enforcement Officers continue to engage with and educate members of the public. 26 fixed penalty notices were issued in the first half of the year in response to significant breaches or a failure to cooperate in relation to dog fouling, fly-tipping and abandoned vehicles.
- 5.59.** The Cleaner Crewe project, a pilot scheme to make our streets and alleyways in central Crewe cleaner and tidier, has so far been extremely successful with 6 alleyways being cleaned and further enhanced with plants, artwork, and new and replacement signs. The project has seen collaborative working between various departments within the council, the local MP, Crewe Town Council, and residents. The Town Council have agreed to fund an extra Community Enforcement Officer to further support the project.
- 5.60.** Libraries re-opened from 19th April in line with step 4 of the government's roadmap to recovery. Covid secure measures remain in place to protect customers and staff. Visitor numbers and participation in activities are encouraging with most customers reassured around the safety of our library premises. 802,194 books have been issued since reopening
- 5.61.** Digital and STEAM skill activities and initiatives to build skills, knowledge and creativity and encourage informal learning have restarted. (STEAM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, Math). Work clubs have restarted at 3 libraries.
- 5.62.** All libraries are now offering a range of pre-school activities on a weekly basis such as Baby Bounce or Rhyme-time. Bollington library recently welcomed 50+ pre-school children and their parents/carers to their Library Bear Hunt, developing early language, literacy, and social skills in a fun environment. The Summer Reading Challenge ran from July to September over the school holidays with over 4,700 children participating in person or online.
- 5.63.** Many of our activities in libraries for adults have returned albeit in a slightly different but Covid secure way. For example, Macclesfield library has seen many of their regular groups return including Macclesfield Historical Society and Macclesfield Writers Group who have booked speakers for the next six months. Several yoga and meditation sessions are now back up and running successfully. Several other informal groups designed to combat social isolation such as Knit & Natter and afternoon Tea start again at the beginning of October
- 5.64.** Crewe library has secured an Arts Council England grant of £14,995 to deliver Luminate - a series of 8 digital art workshops and 2 holiday activities

run in conjunction with Mako public engagement specialists to help re-fresh our STEAM skills programme in the Crewe area.

- 5.65.** Reading Friends, our new befriending project funded by a Reading Agency grant has proved extremely popular. One of our 92-year-old customers from Sandbach who has been blind for a few years describes her Reading Friends activity as “the highlight of my week”. Prior to the calls she says she felt like a bird in a cage, but she now feels free. Listening to reading helps to take her mind off her various ailments and out of herself.
- 5.66.** The uptake in E-resources has been considerable. Usage for April to September showed that 47,532 E-books were checked out, Find my Past was up by 33%, British Newspaper Archive up by 91%, and Newsbank up by 34%. There have also been 16,506 e-magazine and 26,356 audio book checkouts to date by 1,369 new users.
- 5.67.** Libraries have introduced a new way of letting people know about what’s on in their local library with new style bulletins sent to 17,000 subscribers on a wide range of topics. The aim is to showcase the wealth of services that the library offers and share information about a wide range of support and help available locally and nationally.
- 5.68.** Leisure Centres were able to fully re-open from 19th July at step 4 of Government’s roadmap to recovery. Everybody Sport and Recreation (ES&R) are reporting an encouraging position in terms of recovery of memberships and participation, with more ‘pay as you go’ swimming and an earlier than anticipated return of school swimming as well as an increase in outdoor bookings. Further information will on the performance of ES&R and their broader impact on public health outcomes will be reported to the Committee in January 2022 through the presentation of the ES&R Annual Report 2020-21.
- 5.69.** The investment in the borough’s leisure centres continues. Since April work has started on the refurbishment of Nantwich swimming pool which is due for completion later in the year and will be renamed ‘Nantwich Leisure Centre’ to reflect the enhanced offer. Work has also started on the refurbishment and new pool at Congleton Leisure Centre, which is due for completion late 2022. In addition, a planning application had been submitted to extend and enhance the leisure and sports provision at Sutton lane in Middlewich.

6. Implications

6.1. Legal

- 6.1.1.** There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6.2. Finance

- 6.2.1.** The financial implications of changes in performance requirements or responding to current performance levels will be included in the Mid-Year Finance Review provided in a separate report to this Committee.

6.3. Policy

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

6.4. Equality

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

6.5. Human Resources

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

6.6. Risk Management

6.6.1. 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.

6.7. Rural Communities

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

6.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

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

6.9. Public Health

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

6.10. Climate Change

6.10.1. An update on delivery of the Carbon Neutral Action Plan will be provided in a separate report to the Committee in January 2022.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Paul Bayley, Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services paul.bayley@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	None