

Councillor Andrew Portfolio Briefing

Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Area	Key achievement
People	
Walsall Works	<p>Launched in 2012, as a Council funded initiative designed to support local people of working age to improve their employability, help to find jobs, apprenticeships and access training. We work closely with local employers to understand the demands of the local labour market and match live vacancies to locally unemployed people. We continue to offer employment advice and skills support to residents of all ages, through funded employability programmes targeting key groups i.e. Restart, Kickstart, Impact and are now mobilising delivery on the Community Renewal Fund programmes, Works+ and the 50 Plus Partnership.</p> <p>Walsall Works uses a range of virtual methods to communicate support and opportunities, as well as using face-to-face delivery where necessary. Despite restrictions, we have maintained safe delivery in partner and community organisations, alongside a full calendar of virtual and face-to-face events, which aim to match employer vacancies with local people especially in the demand sectors of health and social care, construction, business admin and logistics. The team have used varied virtual communication methods and extensively used social media, our live website and digital weekly bulletins to promote events, jobs, apprenticeships, training, and partner support services.</p> <p>We continue to achieve good successes in supporting residents into employment and training. Since the inception of the programme, we have supported 4,766 with their employability skills resulting in over 1,050 young people accessing apprenticeships, and 246 into paid work placements or work experience, 2,062 individuals into work with a further 1,483 into training.</p>
Black Country Impact	<p>Black Country Impact continues to utilise the £34million of EU and Government funding to support young people aged 16-29 into positive outcomes. Walsall Council, one of the programmes key partners has up to £8million available to support and a majority of the delivery is within the Economy Environment and Community directorate.</p> <p>Through collaborative working with internal services and partners, the key aim is to maximise the chances of success for vulnerable young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). The programme offers personalised 1-1 support to remove significant barriers to help them get back into training or work. Barriers will include access to housing, low skills, debt management, poor health so the offer includes specialist provision through contracted funded providers and via mainstream services.</p> <p>The programmes target groups include long term unemployed or NEETs, care leavers, those with special education needs, those with health issues including disability and mental health, children from travelling communities, young offenders in particular those affiliated to gangs or involved in knife crime.</p>

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Kickstart	The Council is a registered gateway organisation for the DWP Kickstart scheme, and aims to bring forward 150 paid work placements for 16- 24 year olds universal benefit claimants. Employers are offered grant funding for a minimum of 25-hours per week for a six-month period, and to date over 100 work placements have been created within the private sector. The Council has also pledged 12 work placements in Leisure Services, Programme Management and Regeneration Services.
Restart	The Restart scheme is a DWP welfare to work programme, which has been contracted to Serco in the Central West region. The Council is a delivery partner to Serco for the Walsall area along with Steps to Work and Pathways Group who in total will support over 10,000 unemployed claimants over a four-year period. The Council contract aims to deliver employability support to 1,500 working age residents who have been unemployed and claiming a universal benefit for 12-18 months. The scheme will support individuals to tackle barriers that they may have and to help them prepare and access sustainable employment. To date, we have received 206 referrals, of which 155 participants have started their journey, and 13 have commenced employment.
Works+	Works+ has secured £500k grant via Community Renewal Fund, to be delivered in collaboration with Walsall Housing Group (WHG), who in partnership, will support unemployed and economically inactive residents to access training and job search support to prepare them to access to the labour market. The programme will target residents from our top seven deprived wards, those who are social housing tenants, and those at risk of redundancy, or who have been made redundant. The niche element of the project is the creation of fully paid work placement for adults over 25+ who are unemployed and seeking employment, especially those aged 50+ who have been impacted by the pandemic.
50+	This Community Renewal Fund programme led by Sandwell Council and Walsall Council has been awarded £200k as a main delivery partner for our area. The programme will appoint four 'navigators' based in community who will support the 50+ age cohort to access training and education that improves their health and economic wellbeing. The programme also offers £50k of grants to the voluntary sector for innovative projects to test new approaches and delivery, i.e. activities for this age cohort to address issues such as social isolation, anxiety, poor skills, so improving personal wellbeing, community engagement and promoting cohesion.
Careers Information Advice and Guidance (CIAG)	Offered to schools and NEETs prevention work with vulnerable young people, CIAG is funded by the Careers Enterprise Company. CIAG is offered into local schools to help young people of schools age become more empowered, employable and entrepreneurial. We aim to broker real business engagement and promote local economic development by informing students on local labour market changes, local provision and progression pathways to employment such as apprenticeships, T-levels, traineeships. We actively encourage the business community to engage with young people and participate in schools. There are funded traded service contracts with all four Special Schools and Joseph Leckie Academy.

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	<p>Careers Enterprise Company have awarded grant to pilot a project to support vulnerable young aged 15 who are at risk of becoming NEET, the focus is to re-enter into education those in elected home school environments, children in need, child protection orders and those referred from schools or early help teams. The target is to support 100 young people in this academic year.</p>
Place	
Town Centre Masterplan	<p>The Vision driving the Town Centre Masterplan states, that “Walsall will attract visitors based on its leisure and culture offers; including its internationally significant art gallery. The town centre environment will be easily navigable with healthy streets, which encourage walking and cycling and maximise the value of significant public spaces through regular events and activities”. The below activity, supported by the Future High Streets Fund, Towns Fund, Walsall Council and the West Midlands Combined Authority, is taking forward schemes which will make this happen.</p> <p>Connected Gateway</p> <p>Walsall Council was successfully awarded £11.4million from central government for the Future High Street Fund (FHSF) programme in July 2021. This together with match funding from the Council, means the Connected Gateway project has full funding. Creating a landmark arrival experience into the centre of Walsall, the Connected Gateway will enable the delivery of two of the ten catalytic Town Centre Masterplan interventions; Transforming the Rail Station and Connected Hubs. A project team was set up during summer 2021 to provide full project management and based on the current delivery programme, the project is anticipated to achieve full completion by 2025/26.</p> <p>Town Deal</p> <p>Walsall and Bloxwich town areas stand to benefit from £21.3million each of Town Deal funding through the government’s Towns Fund programme. The Council and other scheme promoters such as Walsall College and Urban Hax are producing full business cases for a variety of projects that will deliver urban regeneration, green transport and economic growth outcomes. The schemes range from a new performance facility in the centre of town to incubation hubs, digital and construction skills programmes, and active public spaces/active travel schemes. Together these will create a transformative package, which will contribute to evolving, dynamic environments in two key Walsall locations. The Town Deal Accelerated Fund package also enabled the delivery of public realms works to Gallery Square. The works were intended to uplift to a key public square in Walsall Town Centre. The scheme was completed in Spring 2021 with the aim of stimulating footfall, dwell time and interaction.</p> <p>A Public Realm Investment Plan (PRIP)</p> <p>Has been completed for Walsall Town Centre as part of the Accelerated Fund package. This document is an important next step to further the transformation of the public spaces and key routes. The document provides a further layer of design information on key interventions developed in the Town Centre Masterplan.</p>

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	<p>Challenge Building</p> <p>The sale of the Challenge Building was completed in October 2021, with demolition underway to transform the site into a modern, purpose-built medical centre that will deliver GP services to more than 20,000 patients. The £12.6million scheme, including grant funding from NHS England, is a strategic development opportunity in the town centre and complements the development plans for the wider area and the vision for the town centre through the masterplan.</p> <p>Station Quarter</p> <p>Work has also progressed on Station Quarter, with detailed due diligence taking place to inform the future delivery approach. The project is focused on the opportunity to introduce new residential development in the town centre to compliment the investment-taking place through the Connected Gateway project. The town centre site of the former Walsall Police Station has also secured planning permission for a 130-unit apartment scheme.</p>
<p>Borough Regeneration and Strategic Sites</p>	<p>Delivery of the Black Country Enterprise Zone sites has continued; including the new Darlaston Builders Merchant super depot at Box Pool following funding support from the Black Country LEP and the £3.7million Fortel HQ at Tempus 10, both of which are completed and operational. Grant funding has also been secured from the Black Country LEP for the delivery of 113,00sqft of employment floor space at Parallel 113 with construction due to start in 2022.</p> <p>In addition, significant progress has been made towards delivery of the borough's most significant employment site, Phoenix 10. Contracts were exchanged with Henry Boot Developments in November 2020, and a planning application for the remediation of the site has now been approved with work due to commence in early 2022.</p> <p>Construction progress continues a number of strategic housing sites following funding support from the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Black Country LEP to redevelop derelict brownfield sites. These include the former Caparo site by Anthem Lovell LLP; former Goscote Cerro site by Taylor Wimpey; former Goscote Lodge Crescent by Keepmoat; and former Harvestime Bakery by Vistry. In total, these sites will deliver 1,010 new homes.</p>
<p>Willenhall Masterplan</p>	<p>Delivery of Willenhall Masterplan programme is a key part of our attempt to tackle former derelict buildings and land in Willenhall and bring them back into economic use for housing or business. The preparation of the Willenhall framework masterplan is well advanced and will outline the long-term vision and delivery approach to grow the area into a vibrant, connected and welcoming town through the provision of high quality, energy efficient homes with the benefit of the new Willenhall train station, work on site had started and as this was the catalyst for the Wilenhall Masterplan. There are a number of opportunity areas identified in the masterplan, which are categorised for delivery over the short, medium and long term. In total the aim is to provide up to 500 new homes with associated environmental and connectivity benefits, including 133 units in Phase 1.</p>

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Planning and Development	<p>The Planning Policy Team are significantly involved in the review of the Black Country Plan, which looks to identify and allocate development land to meet the housing and employment needs across the sub-region up to 2039. It is currently projected, that a Black Country Plan will be adopted during 2024, subject to consultation. The public consultation on the Draft Plan (Regulation 18) version of the Plan was carried out during August-October 2021 and approximately 19,000 responses from individuals and organisations were received. Black Country Authorities are currently processing and analysing these responses to determine implications for the next version of the Plan and whether further evidence is needed. We continue to pursue our brownfield first policy in order to protect the green belt.</p> <p>The Development Management service continues to support new proposals for sustainable development, which help to enhance the environment, secure social improvements and deliver increased economic growth to Walsall.</p>
High Streets	<p>The Council is working with the West Midland Mayor's Town Centre Taskforce and the central government High Streets Task Force to consider the current challenges and how these are addressed. There has also been effective partnership working with West Midlands Combined Authority and West Midlands Growth Company to actively promote development and investment opportunities across the borough. In addition, there continues to be regular dialogue with landowners, developers and investors to help bring forward new development and secure job creation and economic growth.</p> <p>There has also been focus on softer interventions to support the town centre and is continuing to work with Shopappy Ltd. who provide an online resource for local independent shops and businesses.</p>
Events	<p>Women's Tour</p> <p>In October 2021, Walsall hosted Stage 2 of the Women's Tour international cycling race. This prestigious event is the UK's first international stage race for women and brought the world's top elite riders to compete in Walsall, including European and World Champions. As well as show casing Walsall on an international stage and generating visitor trips and football in the town, the event successfully engaged a range of partners and suppliers, including local community groups, schools and Walsall College, who delivered various activities in the Arboretum and town centre to celebrate Walsall and promote health and wellbeing. The success of the Women's Tour will open opportunities for delivering other sporting and community events in Walsall to drive the ambition of creating the healthiest town centre.</p>
Business	<p>Walsall Council's Business Growth Team have logged 172 business engagements year to date, through 1-1 business support, events (both internally and externally) and stakeholder referrals. This includes start-up businesses, strategic companies and foreign owned firms. Unsurprisingly, manufacturing businesses account for 45% of those engagements, with transport & logistics accounting for 10% and Arts & Culture organisations at 7%. The main reasons for businesses contacting Walsall Council is General Business Support at 61%, Access to Finance at 31% and Sites and Premises inquiries at 4%.</p>

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	<p>AIM for Gold The team continue to deliver the AIM for Gold programme, with 26 businesses enrolled on the programme. Throughout the pandemic, we adapted the programme to suit the need for business sustainability and resilience. We are now engaging with businesses who wish to grow, invest and take on more staff. 2021 saw £95,268 in ERDF grant given out to Walsall businesses, with a further local SME investment of £181,719.</p> <p>Foreign Owned Businesses Walsall Council continue to work hard in their account management of foreign owned businesses, managed in collaboration with the West Midlands Growth Company and Department for International Trade. This includes Walsall Council account managing ASSA ABLOY, Poundland, Lichtgitter, JE Sedgwick, Delkin, Bernstein and Signode. We will be meeting with DIT and Growth Company colleagues in the New Year to discuss progress made by all partners and how we can build on these early successes. We are also working towards meetings in the New Year with Midland Chilled Foods and Alanto.</p> <p>Black Country Business Festival 2021 In October, Walsall Council played its part in a successful 2021 Black Country Business Festival, hosting the 'Why Walsall: Regeneration and Collaboration in the Borough' event; alongside speakers from the Black Country and LEP and Black Country Chamber of Commerce, as well as attending other events in the borough, including as a stand holder at the Black Country Manufacturing Roadshow at Walsall Football Club.</p>
Transport	<p>In January 2021, WMCA Board approved the full business case for two new rail stations at Willenhall and Darlaston. These stations will be fully accessible and will be served by two trains an hour in each direction – one between Walsall and Wolverhampton, and one between Birmingham New Street and Crewe. Work is now underway at Willenhall and will follow thereafter at Darlaston with a view to having the first of the two stations delivered in summer 2023. Work continues to develop a business case to build Aldridge Railway Station in order to secure funding, the site for the station has already been purchased by the Combined Authority.</p> <p>Work is ongoing in Walsall to deliver Phase 1 of the A34 Sprint scheme. The scheme will improve connectivity between Walsall, Birmingham and Solihull, providing improved quality, quicker and more reliable bus journeys, supporting regeneration and improved accessibility to economic opportunities for the residents and businesses of Walsall.</p> <p>Improvement works at M6 J10 have continued at pace throughout 2021 with the alterations to the slip roads and installation of two new bridges over the M6. Scheduled for completion in summer 2022, the scheme will deliver a freer flowing network and improved conditions for all road users and support economic growth.</p> <p>In June 2021, Cabinet approved over £10million of investment in LED street lighting upgrades. The improvement programme will deliver a modern, energy efficient street lighting solution that provides the ability to finely control light output, whilst significantly</p>

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	<p>reducing energy consumption and contributing to the Council becoming carbon neutral by 2050.</p> <p>Over the past 12 months, the Council has adopted over 1,100 metres of highway with improvements and new assets to the value of £1.6million. In total, fifteen miles of roads and footway have been renewed or treated to improve their condition and prolong their life. Our team of highway inspectors have walked a total of 3,750 miles inspecting the roads and delivering nearly 8,000 highway repairs.</p>
Programme Management	<p>Supporting Walsall People</p> <p>On behalf of the Black Country, Walsall Council competed for and secured EU funding of £1.5million to deliver the Black Country Community Grants Programme. Through this programme, 34 grants were offered to Walsall voluntary sector groups, providing them with £433,590 of support that directly benefited 546 local residents who undertook activities that moved them closer to achieving their economic goals.</p> <p>External Funding, Programme Development and Accountability Body Services</p> <p>Walsall Council has developed specialist skills and has a successful record of accomplishment in the administration and development of major projects and programmes. We currently act as the LEP's Single Accountable Body, and so far have successfully contracted almost £300million across the Black Country. For Walsall, this includes investments benefitting housing, employment and transport, totalling over £100million for projects including Goscote Lane, Phoenix 10 and Junction 10 of the M6, through the Growth Deal and land and Property Investment Funds.</p> <p>The External Funding team acts as a central point of contact for directorates looking for external funding that may be available. Working together with colleagues across the Council, this has resulted in many successful applications, leveraging in significant amounts of external funding, with £12million secured during 2020/21.</p> <p>So far during this 2021/22 financial year, bids totalling over £8million have been submitted, with just over £3.1million approved so far.</p> <p>The team also leads on strategic partnerships with a number of funders, including the National Lottery Heritage Fund, National Lottery Community Fund and Arts Council England. This has led to the development and drafting of the Walsall Heritage Strategy, now approved by Cabinet, providing a firm foundation for the submission of bids, which we hope will bring many derelict heritage buildings back into economic use.</p> <p>A number of Catalyst Projects are underway including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reimagining of Walsall's canals with the External Funding Team working with the Canal & River Trust secured £1.7million from the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund. • National Archives support grant, the "Walsall in Pictures' Archives digitisation programme, with a £250k next stage bid now being submitted to Heritage Lottery. • Working alongside Walsall Housing Group and One Walsall to develop a local "Heritage Champion programme".

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working with Manor Hospital to support a bid focussed on the development of a Sister Dora heritage trail and exhibition within the planned new build site. <p>The team is also developing alternative ways of supporting community groups to access and distribute funding; the now established CrowdFund Walsall saw its first round successfully fundraise for 6 local projects, varying from festivals to youth buses, beekeeping to allotment refurbishments. Collectively, these projects fundraised a total of £28,760 from 177 backers, including local businesses.</p> <p>Crowdfund Walsall Round 2 is under development with 8 projects seeking a further £58,669 of contributions to deliver community based projects, including, the creation of community gardens and improvements to allotments, mental health & wellbeing initiatives, active clubs for primary school children, equipment for youth buses and many more. So far, by 16 December, these projects are well on their way to meeting their targets, with over £56,000 of pledges received, more details and the ability to pledge is available through the Walsall Crowdfunding website, through the link below, Crowdfund Walsall Round 3 will be launched early 2022.</p> <p>Discover Projects in the Crowdfund Walsall (spacehive.com)</p>
Asset Management	<p>As part of the transformation of the management of the Council's property portfolio to a Corporate Landlord model, the Corporate Landlord team has prepared the Strategic Asset Plan 2022-27, which was approved by Cabinet in December 2021. The Strategic Asset Plan is a key document to the Corporate Landlord model as it sets out the objectives and strategies for the Council's property portfolio.</p> <p>The Asset Management team has been working hard on the disposal of surplus assets and has transacted approximately £3.7million of property sales in the current financial year, which helps to support the Council's capital programme.</p> <p>In addition to disposal work, the team has been actively supporting the Regeneration team with a number of key projects, including Connected Gateways and other Town Centre projects.</p>
Preventing Homelessness	<p>Corporate Outcome: <i>Housing meeting all people's needs – is affordable, safe and warm</i></p> <p>Throughout the pandemic, the service continued to provide support to the homeless and help prevent others becoming homeless. The Rough Sleeper Initiative team have been able to temporary house 16 individuals through the Government's funded 'Everyone in Project' and then provide the relevant support to move them into long-term housing solutions. Although the potential high infection risk meant the Authority could not provide the usual night shelter provision during last winter, the Council was able secure accommodation with a local hotel. From November 2020 to March 2021, 30 individuals used the provision, of which the service was able secure a long-term secure accommodation for 23 of them. The statistics from the rough sleeper count continues to show a downward trend for Walsall with the recent average of 3 being found bedded down. The funding received from government to assist with their pledge to eradicate rough sleeping have allowed the service</p>

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	<p>to reduce the rough sleeping count from 26 in 2016 to that current level of 3. In that time, the service has worked with its partners to house 101 former rough sleepers. These are amongst the most complex and vulnerable individuals who would normally be excluded from housing options.</p> <p>As mentioned earlier the service also works hard on preventing homelessness and Walsall's performance against the national prevention rate indicator is consistently above the national average.</p> <p>To assist this work, just shy of £1million was awarded in Discretionary Housing Payments in 20/21 to assist over 1,200 vulnerable households alleviate the threat of eviction. It is estimated that the same level of assistance will be provided in 21/22</p>
Assisting Vulnerable Households	<p>Corporate Outcome: <i>People live a good quality of life and feel that they belong</i></p> <p>The effect of the pandemic saw a 16% increase in the number of working age Council Tax reduction claimants. With the numbers rising from the pre pandemic total of 17,587 to a height of 20,407 at the start of August 2020. Although the numbers have decreased from that high and continue to be on a regular downward trend the current number is still around 19,300.</p> <p>At the end of 2020/21, Walsall Council awarded an extra £1.5million in Council Tax reduction to working age claimants from the anticipation level pre pandemic. This extra award was in addition to the £3.5million awarded in hardship payments to over 23,000 households.</p> <p>Since September 2020 the service have been administering the Test and Trace Support Payment scheme and have to date assisted 2,531 households with the £500 award. This comes to a total of £1,265,500 to help low-income households during the time they otherwise would lose income due to having to self-isolate.</p> <p>To support the households in the greatest needs with the cost of food, utilities and water the government introduced the Covid-19 Winter Fund and then the Covid Local Support Grant. Through these two schemes, a total of £2.6million was paid directly to the most vulnerable households in the borough.</p> <p>Further assistance to the most vulnerable households will continue through the winter of 21/22 with the administration of the household support fund. Walsall have been allocated £2.8million by central government to support those most in need this winter. This fund will be used to provide direct financial support to vulnerable families during school holidays plus further to those households who have lost out in the recent changes to central welfare schemes and those in most need.</p> <p>In addition, the service has also secured £13.3million of external grant funding to help residents in fuel poverty with insulation and home heating.</p> <p>Prior to Christmas, all households and families in temporary accommodation received age related presents for their children as well as food boxes for the festive season.</p>

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Ensuring Good Quality Housing Standards	<p>Corporate Outcome: <i>Housing meeting all people's needs – is affordable, safe and warm</i></p> <p>The service strives to ensure a good quality private sector housing stock in the borough. To this end, the Council has served 34 statutory notices against rogue landlords and added both a landlord and letting agent to the National Database of Rogue Landlords and Agents. In addition, the Council have issued £42,487 in civil penalties for housing law breaches and charged rogue landlords £7,227 for the Council having to issue statutory notices for not carrying out repairs.</p> <p>After listening to local concerns, the first Additional Licensing scheme for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) was introduced for the wards of St Matthews, Pleck, Palfrey and Paddock. In addition, consultation will start in 2022 concerning the possibility of extending the scheme to another 5 wards. This scheme provides the same statutory protection to tenants of all HMOs not just those with 5 or more occupiers.</p> <p>To provide further protection for private sector tenants the Council has secured funds to tackle and educate private landlords who have failed to update their Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) and ensure they are not F and G rated ones. In 2021, this has led to 133 new valid EPCs being secured by landlords.</p> <p>In addition, £1.5million of grants have been awarded to 364 households to ensure disabled residents can stay safe in their homes. A further 545 grants, totalling £2.6million, have been approved via the Handyperson scheme.</p> <p>To assist residents the service has broadened its support by increasing the financial level before a means test is required and improved access for those with visual impairment through a new referral system with Walsall Society for the Blind.</p>
Providing Assistance to Businesses	<p>Corporate Outcome: <i>Creating an environment where businesses invest and everyone who wants a job can access one</i></p> <p>The Council have administered the various business grants scheme introduced by central government to assist affected businesses. This mammoth task involved getting the grant money out to qualifying businesses as quickly and easily as possible whilst still ensuring the necessary security measures were in place to identify fraudulent applications. In total, the service paid out 14,322 grants worth circa £80.6million to help struggling businesses within the Walsall area.</p> <p>In addition to the grants, the service has awarded around £36.6million in additional rate relief for 2020/21 and 2021/22. This relief was awarded to businesses within the retail, hospitality and leisure industry where the premises was wholly or mainly used by visiting members of the public.</p>

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Awards	<p>In the 2020/21 Staff Recognition Awards both the rough sleeper team and business rates team were highly commended in the 'Proud to Serve' category. Also, highly commended was the manager of the tenancy support services in the 'Outstanding Leader' category.</p> <p>As regards National awards, Walsall Council had an excellent night at the 2021 Institute of Revenues Rating and Valuation Performance Awards ceremony. The Council were announced winners of both the 'Revenues Team of the Year' award and 'Excellence in Innovation (Operational)' award. In addition, the Council received a Highly Commended award in 'Excellence in Partnership Working'. The latter two related to the Council's work around the administration of the business grant schemes.</p>
Delivering a Modern and Resilient Council	<p>Corporate Transformation Programme and our 3 Proud Promises</p> <p>Improving Outcomes and Customer Experience; Improving Employee Satisfaction and Engagement; Improving Efficiency and Performance.</p> <p>The Council has created a clear 'vision' for the future of Customer Engagement through a dedicated Customer Experience Strategy, which sets out our ambition for improving services, and a new Customer Promise that we will deliver GREAT services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get things done quickly • Respect our customers and the communities we serve • Excellent customer service, first time, every time • Align the way we work with customers, partners and internal services • Tell people about our services and be clear about what we don't do. <p>The Council has already seen an improvement in overall customer satisfaction rates from 67% in 2019 to 73% in 2021. Part of this improvement was achieved through establishing a new Corporate Customer Engagement team and our investment in a new Customer Platform, which has not only improved our telephony offer, but also helped increase the number of services accessible to customers 24 hours a day via new digital self-serve processes. In 2021, we also launched a new Digital Design for our website, which makes information more accessible to disabled residents and easier for all customers to find. We have also commenced the development of a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to help facilitate a 'whole council' approach to customer engagement, which will mean that in the future we can deliver more personalised services for our customers. Our consultation with customers and staff identified that key priorities for improvement were the development of new digital self-service processes for Corporate Complaints, Comments and Compliments and Clean and Green, and this has been progressed, with the new digital pathways currently being trialled, and the official launch to residents planned for early 2022.</p>