

## **Introduction**

Improving the way services are managed, enhancing access to services online and prioritising services has meant we can, as a Council, can deliver services better and saves money. Even with substantial savings, we continue to face challenges from long-term budget pressures, reduced or constrained funding, rising costs and rising demand for services.

Budget engagement is an important part of the budget process, providing residents with an opportunity to shape and inform the budget process. Over the last few years, much of the focus for budget engagement has been through online activity, with detailed programmes put in place to encourage residents to understand the challenges facing the council and the decisions that need to be made to deliver services within the budget available.

As a direct result of this feedback, councillors have made changes to the budget, and have introduced a new Council Plan. The Plan has within it 11 priorities, which will be the focus of our attention between now and 2022.

In this narrative, we have set out our 11 priorities, and illustrated what we have done with what you told us about each of them.

Whilst we have tried to paint a picture of the range of work we have done, there is more happening every day, at a local level, as a result of engagement with communities.

### **Support a strong, sustainable, diverse and successful economy**

In 2016 when asked about investing in our communities and specifically about spending on capital projects, the majority of respondents felt that the council was spending enough on capital projects. However, the highlighted key areas that individuals felt should be prioritised include schools, roads and care homes.

The current Capital Plan is being reviewed to more closely represent the Council Priorities, in terms of affordability, deliverability and timing of the projects. The results of this review will be reported to Council in February 2019.

During engagement on the Council Priorities in 2017, respondents ranked a strong and successful economy as being the most important priority for successful and sustainable communities. Reacting to concerns raised of an over-dependency in Aberdeenshire on the oil and gas industry, we have recently refreshed the Regional Economic Strategy which covers Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire. There are actions within this strategy which will work towards addressing some of the feedback that has been received. The plan has a focus on investment in infrastructure, inclusive economic growth and innovation.

Aberdeenshire Council promotes and supports local and small companies with a focus on tourism, food and drink, fisheries and agriculture.

The Council is also working to support the national Developing the Young Workforce programme. This emphasises opportunities in our local industries and links employers up with schools.

These developments and investments are leading to opportunities for learning new skills, for retaining professionals within the area and reducing our dependency on one specific sector.

### **Having the best possible transport and digital links across our communities**

During conversations to identify Council Priorities, several residents and community groups stressed the importance of improved transport links (a regular, affordable service) and generally better infrastructure.

The majority of bus services in Aberdeenshire are operated commercially by private bus operators. Aberdeenshire Council may contract some services as required that are not provided by private bus operators. However regular customer engagement is carried out through Area Bus Forums that are held in each of the six administration areas twice a year. Furthermore, we have developed five Integrated Travel Town (Huntly, Ellon, Inverurie, Fraserburgh and Portlethen) Masterplan documents for Aberdeenshire's largest towns, with actions over 5 years set out by us and community partners.

The Council has financially supported the rollout of superfast broadband as part of the Rest of Scotland Programme. Since 2014, 1700 Kms of new fibre has been built in Aberdeenshire. As part of the City Region Deal the Council is continuing to work with public sector partners to improve digital.

In 2015 residents were asked about investing in online services – making doing business with the council more accessible, convenient and quicker. This could result in fewer council offices open to the public in the future. Nearly 7 in 10 respondents indicated support for the council using online services to make access to council services available. As a result, in the last three years Aberdeenshire Council has improved online services by creating the myAberdeenshire portal and app for mobile phones giving easier and quicker access to our services and information online. We have redesigned our website and improved the content to make it easier for customers to find the information they are looking for. We have introduced online services for school meal payments and car parking for example. Improvements are ongoing as we continue develop our online presence.

## **Provide the best life chances for all our children and young people by raising levels of attainment and achievement**

During the engagement around the Council Priorities, raising levels of attainment, ensuring equality and excellence was consistently seen as the number one priority amongst respondents. A strong overall majority of respondents believe that future budgets should be focused key priorities which will help develop aspirational people. As a result we have extended other work to regularly review attainment in academies and extended that out to the primary schools which feed into it, so we can get a better picture of how our pupils are doing from a younger age. At these reviews the attainment of all schools, primary and secondary, is discussed with a particular focus on literacy and numeracy.

A key priority which was highlighted through engagement was that we build a sustainable workforce through an innovative teacher recruitment strategy. Recently there has been an increased focus on attracting people into the teaching profession with innovative programmes. The council has been working in partnership with Aberdeen, Dundee and UHI universities to attract new teachers particularly in the key Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics focused subjects.

Working towards achieving positive destinations for all our young people has resulted in us placing an increased focus through Guidance Teams and Skills Development Scotland to increase awareness of the options open to our school leavers.

## **Work with parents and carers to support children through every stage of their development**

In 2015 residents were asked if they supported the council's ambition to build more schools, even though it means older schools may be affected. The majority of people responding agreed with this, in principle. Our Learning Estates Team is currently undertaking a review of our schools. They are looking at the schools on an area-wide basis to decide on the best way forward. This work is still at an early stage.

We are working in partnership to support children, doing that by making sure our schools get the views and input from parents, carers and the community when it comes to shaping the design of the curriculum. By working together, we can be sure we are reflecting the locally important issues, while supporting important principles within STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths subjects) and Developing the Young Workforce as well as Curriculum for Excellence.

## **Encourage active lifestyles and promote well-being with a focus on obesity and mental health**

A community engagement exercise, “The Big Listen” took place to get the views of the public, key stakeholders and staff on the high-level themes and priorities to help shape the Culture, Sport and Physical Activity Strategies for 2018-2028.

In that, it was clear you wanted us to help encourage people to read, write and learn, to work with local communities to offer exhibitions and community events, to encourage access and learning through artistic and creative experiences as well as to encourage and enable people to become more active.

To do this we have opened facilities Fraserburgh, Laurencekirk, Ellon, Alford, Banff and Macduff and we are working on a new facility in Banchory. We have earmarked Alford ski slope for an upgrade and have done work on library spaces at Ballater station and Huntly swimming pool. Meanwhile, Inverurie Community Campus will provide a flexible community space for a range of literacy and sporting services.

To help us meet the ambition of supporting mental health challenges through active lifestyles, we have piloted an anti-loneliness programme in Peterhead, supported the Macmillan MOVE MORE programme and we run several active lifestyle services for everyone from early years stage through to the over 50s. Our libraries offer dementia friendly support and there are areas within libraries designed to support those with Autism, mental health and anxiety. We use our facilities to help residents improve their CVs, to deliver early years resources and to provide library direct services.

## **Have the right mix of housing across all of Aberdeenshire**

In 2017 as part of the budget engagement residents were asked which type of housing should be a priority over the next few years. Three quarters of respondents agreed that council housing and affordable housing should be a priority.

The Aberdeenshire Reputation Tracker reinforces these findings as when respondents note dissatisfaction with the provision of local housing, council and

Through our Strategic Housing Investment Plan (SHIP) 2019 – 2024, we are working towards ambitions including:

- People being able to access more quality affordable housing.
- Delivering new affordable houses including bringing empty houses being brought back into use.
- Ensuring adequate supply of new homes are suitable for households with a particular need including wheelchair accessible houses.

In summary, within the plan there is:

- An ambition to build 2,354 homes for social rent, mid-market rent or low cost shared equity.
- To have 751 of these underway before 2020.

- A total investment over £150million.

## **Support the delivery of the Health and Social Care Strategic plan**

During engagement on the council priorities in 2017, respondents ranked “Continued support for the health and social care strategic plan” as the most important priority under the ‘Caring for the Communities’ theme.

Work is already underway to develop the next Strategic Plan (2019-2022) and to align with the Plan, we are undertaking a Minor Injury Unit review to make sure that the service across Aberdeenshire is cost effective, safe, sustainable and delivered in the right place at the right times.

We are developing a Learning Disability Strategy for adults which will keep people at the heart of their communities with the right support. We have nearly completed the creation of a Mental Health Strategy and are working with the team of school nurses around Aberdeenshire to support towards a greater focus on Mental Wellbeing and Health.

We also have a focus on working with the children’s social work team to make sure there is a better understanding of what is required during the transition from Children’s to Adult’s Services.

## **Work to reduce poverty and inequalities within our communities**

In 2015 as part of the budget engagement exercise the council asked if it should review the criteria for accessing services to ensure that they are received by those who are most in need. From the 1,087 people responded to this question, the majority agreed with the statement.

In 2018 members of the citizen’s panel were asked about views regarding child poverty. One of the key findings was that 1 in 5 respondents have had personal experience of living in poverty, including 7% as an adult and 15% who have previously experienced poverty as a child, and respondents see a range of factors as contributing to child poverty in Aberdeenshire. Alcohol/drug misuse, parent’s access to employment, financial management, and family breakup are identified as the most significant factors

Our *Reducing Child Poverty* action plan includes delivering services in partnership to make them more accessible, such as placing an Employability Workshop within a GP surgery to service rural communities. We recognise, in the plan, the importance of the Hot School Meal programmes, and more job clubs. We are also working on a strategy for older citizens seeking employment as we now see a higher proportion of job-seeking clients in an older bracket. Our ‘in-work poverty strategy’ (when done in partnership) seeks to increase the number of local business who are Living Wage employers.

Meanwhile, through our Procurement team, guidance has been developed to encourage organisations bidding for work with Aberdeenshire Council to recognise the benefits of the Living Wage, increasing employability opportunities, reducing food poverty as well as fuel poverty.

### **Deliver responsible, long-term financial planning**

Since 2015 residents have been asked several times about income generation and generating more revenue.

When asked, people were against increasing council tax in 2015, however in 2017, when asked a similar question, the majority of respondents were in favour of a 3% increase. Those who disagreed indicated that before raising Council Tax the Council should become more efficient. In February 2018 Councillors in Aberdeenshire agreed at 2.5% increase in council tax. Consideration is now being given to what Council Tax rates will be required in 2019/20 to fund services.

Residents have previously told us they would be prepared to pay more for a service if it would prevent that service being reduced/discontinued. Over the last three years we have reviewed our fees and charges. We have compared our charges with other local authorities, private sector (where required) and the Scottish average. We have increased some of costs for services provided and we will continue to review this to ensure we can continue to provide essential services.

Residents have told us that the council should seek to deliver savings by securing the best price for goods and services by buying through national contracts, or joint-buying with other public sector organisations but also should seek to develop local relationships even if it costs us slightly more. Our Joint Procurement Strategy for 2017-2022 vision is to deliver innovative, cost effective and high quality strategic procurement services that maximise best value from all commercial relationships, exploiting new opportunities, while ensuring a robust and effective governance framework in support of the wider strategic, financial and operational needs of the individual Councils and their partners.

### **Have the right people, in the right place, doing the right thing, at the right time**

During a budget engagement exercise in 2015, 95% of respondents indicated that they believe that we should make the best of our buildings and furthermore 85% of respondents believe that we should dispose of surplus buildings.

The council is taking forward its Office Space Strategy as part of its commitment to ensuring we have the right people, in the right place, doing the right thing at the right time. By reviewing our office estate, we are considering how we can make sure that the people serving our communities are doing so in the best way and the best place possible.

One of the strands of the Strategy is to find ways in which communities and some of our partners can share spaces. The ambition is that this will mean more flexible

space and better working relationships, which would be of benefit to the community they service.

During budget engagement in 2015 when asked about the community taking more responsibility for services the council can no longer deliver, the majority of respondents agreed with this approach. This was highlighted again in 2017 during the council engagement on the council priorities, where residents and councillors stressed the importance of community involvement and influence in decision-making. This was echoed by our citizens' panel in 2018 who indicated that a large majority of respondents would like more say in how local services are provided, most feel they are not part of decisions affecting their community and that decisions affecting local public services are taken too far from where they live.

Through our governance approach we keep decision making as close to communities as practicable to increase accountability and transparency. Communities have a range of ways to participate in decision making across Aberdeenshire and can do so in a way that fits with their interest, capacity and capability. Read all about your options [here](#).

### **Protect our special environment, including tackling climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions**

During a recent engagement exercise 83% of respondents were supportive of the council generating income through renewable energy,

Aberdeenshire Council is working with Aberdeen City and Moray Councils to for the procurement of a joint facility for recovering energy (heat and power) from non-recyclable waste. Excess electricity would be sold to the grid whilst heat would be used for a district heating scheme.

Gas from an old landfill at Crow's Nest in Banchory is being used to generate electricity at the waste and recycling site. Future plans include using the plant for providing heating for a new welfare building being built for waste operatives.

As part of the Waste engagement and consultation exercises this year focus groups and a survey were carried out in February 2018 to test residents' views on some of the service changes being considered to increase recycling. The feedback obtained helped to shape a draft waste strategy. Consultation followed and the results will be considered by committee in January 2019.

In 2017 when the citizens' panel was asked to consider the extent to which respondents agreed or disagreed with a number of statements concerning climate change and Aberdeenshire Council, the highest level of agreement occurred with the statement that the council should develop and implement integrated sustainable transport.

As a result, we have an Electric Vehicle Delivery Plan to support EV charge point installations for public and internal use, are rolling out EV charge points across the Area

We are engaging with schools, businesses and communities to promote and support sustainable and active travel and markets behaviour change via online, digital, cinema and on street advertising utilising the GetAbout brand. We have supported a Sustrans I-Bike officer to work directly with a number of Academies and catchment schools and developed a Staff Training Module to promote fuel efficient driving.

### **Next steps/going forward**

Looking to the future, several recurring themes have been already been identified, including:

- Efficiencies should be prioritised before any cuts to services are made
- The Council should focus its budget on key strategic priorities.
- Residents expected the following as part of what we do every day
  - Effective communication
  - Community involvement
  - Real partnership working
  - Maintenance/improvement of infrastructure, facilities, services
  - Good governance and scrutiny

### **Keep in touch**

You can continue to stay informed and involved in what we do through our website ([www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk](http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk)), Twitter (@Aberdeenshire) and Facebook (@AberdeenshireCouncil)