

**South Lakeland District Council**  
**Council**  
**23 March 2021**  
**Housing and Innovation Portfolio**

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**Portfolio:** Cllr Jonathan Brook

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The development and implementation of the Council Plan.

The Council Plan objectives in relation to improved customer engagement and communication implementing of the Local Plan housing objectives.

Working in partnership to improve the standard, availability and affordability of housing in the District to meet local needs, championing these issues at national, regional and sub-regional level.

Looking at innovative ways of working.

To support the Leader of the Council and to deputise in his/her absence.

Policies, Plans and Strategies

- Council Plan
- Local Plan (including Development Management Policies)
- Housing Strategy and Policy (including Choice Based Lettings Allocation Policy)
- IT/Information/E Government Strategy

Key Areas

- Council Planning
- Customer Connect Programme (Strategy)
- Development Management and Building Control
- Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention
- IT Services
- Strategic Housing and delivery (including Housing Enabling and Housing Grants)

## **Council Planning**

During 2020 a virtual review of the 2021 Council Plan was undertaken which provided steer on the priorities and impact measures to be emphasized within the Council Plan whilst aligning the medium term financial plan against the priorities.

The Council Plan 2021 was approved at Council in February 2021 alongside the budget. The plan sets out the Council's long term vision and direction. It provides a consistent basis for the council's plans, strategies, projects and decisions such as how the transformational Customer Connect Programme is implemented.

The plan enables council activity to be focused on strategic objectives and provide a consistent basis for the Prioritisation of resources, commissioning and performance management frameworks and the roll-out of the new ways of working under Customer Connect.

One big change in the 2021 Plan is closer working with Barrow Borough and Lancaster City councils to build on the positive work on the Bay unitary proposal. This means co-operating on economic development, infrastructure, housing and employment growth as well as skills and knowledge. All of this is vital as communities emerge from the impact of the pandemic. The three councils are also looking to collaborate on inequality and deprivation, population health and carbon reduction.

## **Customer Connect Programme (Strategy)**

The delivery of the Customer Connect Programme has been ongoing since September 2016. The programme is divided into three main elements; Digital, People and Place. The people element is led by the Customer, Commercial Services and People Portfolio Holder and the Places element is being led by the Finance and Assets Portfolio Holder.

In 2020 the Customer Connect Steering Group agreed new governance arrangements following the implementation of the new operating model and the realisation of the salary savings outlined in the Customer Connect business case. Outstanding programme activity, was paused due to the COVID-19 pandemic however, transition and innovation activities have now recommenced. The move to the new governance arrangements has ensured that continuous improvement is the focus for the organisation.

The Customer Connect board continues to have oversight of the remaining programme and innovation activity. The weekly programme includes officers responsible for the delivery of the the programme work streams, which include change and transition, communications and digital. Following the paused in the programme the organisation is re-engaging with staff to deliver the remaining change and transition activity. The board is also responsible for driving forward digital developments that will support innovation and continuous improvement across the organisation. The weekly programme board remains responsible for providing assurance to work stream leads and a forum for resolving risks and overseeing the spend on the remaining Customer Connect Programme budget. The programme will remain subject to Cabinet member oversight, with the Customer Connect Steering Group continuing to update Cabinet members.

In relation to digital development the organisation is utilizing the digital platform to build online forms that allow customer to self-serve online and provide the organisation with greater efficiencies in the back office. There are now 24 online forms covering a number of services, including Street Scene, Locality and Case Management. These forms allow the customer to access services online 24/7. The scrums have also developed 12 COVID application forms to support the various business grant schemes and test and trace

application, as well as a number of internal forms which allow for work requests to flow through the organisation more efficiently. Since the enablement of the new forms and My Account in May 2020 there has been an increase in the number of online transactions. In 2020 (May to December) there were over 8,000 transactions and during January and February 2021 there has been 2,500 transactions recorded.

The account functionality has been integrated with the Capita Revenues and Benefit product early next year which will allow customers to access a number of revenue and benefits services and sign up for e-billing. The ability to make online payments is also being introduced, with updated payment forms for services including Council Tax. Processes such as bulky waste and parking permits will also be redesigned and integrated to take customer payments. The digital development of forms is continuing to progress at pace as we redesign processes that require the customer to report an issue or apply for a service.

## **IT Services**

The IT service has focused on the delivery of Customer Connect through the preparation of the Enterprise Digital Platform to support single customer records and online accounts.

The Council is continuing to move forward in preparing the systems to support online accounts and configure the platform to support new processes for both Eden and South Lakeland as part of the shared ICT service.

Outside of the Customer Connect programme, the Shared ICT Service has maintained a full Business as Usual operation, some examples of this work includes:

- Upgrade of the SLDC Cash receipting/Payment system
- Continuing to replacing the technology in the Data Centers of both Eden and SLDC, this will improve performance by replacing aging equipment. This is part of the rolling IT replacement programme.

Due to Covid-19 the Council had to quickly introduce new innovative ways to support those working from home and the ability to host virtual formal and informal meetings. The IT Team have worked quickly and highly effectively to install the Microsoft Teams Platform for all employees and Councillors across SLDC to allow the organisation to continue conducting business as usual and keep in regular contact whilst adhering to Government Guidelines. The IT team have also been involved in supporting virtual meetings to rectify any technical issues experienced.

## **Development Management and Building Control**

Significant progress had been made moving through our enforcement enquiries, demonstrating increased efficiency for dealing with enforcement issues that arise. Throughout Covid-19 in accordance with government guidelines, enforcement officers were not permitted to enter any premises. Therefore the Council was able to utilize mapping platforms which provide sufficient evidence through dated satellite imagery allowing Officers to look back on how developments have progressed. During the challenges arising from the pandemic Officers have had to review enforcement cases based on a priority level determined by the impact upon communities in order to protect Officers and Communities.

During the Covid-19 the Council was also able to continue to determine planning applications through the virtual planning committee process.

## **Housing Options and Homelessness Prevention**

The Council introduced a target measure of the number of homelessness households living in temporary accommodation will be no more than 20 at a time. The highest number of households in Temporary Accommodation at any one time was 39 which was in Quarter 1 in 2020/21 the figure had reduced to 24 in Quarter 3 2020/21.

In order to support the reduction of the homelessness households living in temporary accommodation, the Council introduced the Homelessness Strategy 2019/2024 which identifies four key priorities:

- Homeless prevention
- Increasing the supply of settled accommodation
- Ensuring appropriate support is available
- Tackling complex needs

The Council was successful in securing a grant of £388,987 from MHCLG which is supporting our work with the homeless during Covid-19. Cumbria County Council were also awarded an additional £30k for this work which will be split between the six districts. SLDC's Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme will create an additional 12 move-on bed spaces, including four complex needs spaces. These will be hosted by Home Group, utilizing their housing stock around the district.

The council has been continuing to work towards achieving the strategy's actions:

- Working with private rented sector to secure accommodation for people in housing need/at risk of homelessness;
- Bringing empty homes back into use by implementing the Empty Homes Strategy and Action Plan;
- Working with public sector bodies and churches to identify any potential sites that could be used for affordable or supported housing;
- Using housing renovation grants to enable potential new schemes suitable for tenants with specific needs;
- Working with providers to enable a shared housing scheme in South Lakeland for young people;
- Working with housing associations to develop new affordable homes with the help of low-cost loans.

The Council has been continuing to enable the reduction of empty homes by 20% by 2025 through targeted interventions. In order to support this target the Council is still on track to bring a minimum of 70 empty home back into use each year. Since 2015 to Q3 2021 the Council has brought 435 empty homes back into use throughout the district.

Throughout the Covid-19 the Council supported an increased number of households presenting as homeless. In addition to the 18 rooms at Town View Hostel the Council successfully secured additional accommodation across the District including Bed and Breakfasts, Holiday Lets and Housing Association properties.

The Homelessness team have are continuing to create better working partnerships to ensure appropriate health support is available for those in temporary accommodation and to develop a more effective hospital discharge pathway.

## **Strategic Housing and delivery (including Housing Enabling and Housing Grants)**

At Q3 2020/21 the Council had supported 529 affordable homes to rent since 2014. These figures show that the Council is on target to deliver 1000 affordable homes to rent by 2025.

The Council has supported the delivery of extra care housing and a new 104 unit scheme is underway at a site in Oxenholme by Housing 21. This includes provision of 29 affordable rented units and 43 shared ownership units.

We have been continuing to work closely with partners such as Highways England, Cumbria LEP and Housing Developers to ensure the development of the Cross-a-moor roundabout.

Barrow Borough Council is the lead on the Private Sector Stock Condition survey being carried out using a new methodology by the Building Research Establishment. The survey was jointly commissioned by Eden District Council, Cumbria County Council and SLDC.

The £2.36 million Community Housing Fund was designed to help tackle the problem of high levels of second home ownership. The funding was broken down into two available grants.

- CLH Capacity Building Grant
- CLH Scheme Grant

The fund is being used to enable the delivery of new community-led housing schemes through new build, re-use of existing buildings and bringing empty homes back into use. In December 2020 the Council approved a grant scheme of £350,000 and an infrastructure grant of £368,244 to the Levens Community Project (LCP).

The Arnside and Silverdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Local Plan received the Royal Town Planning Institute Award for Planning Excellence, ahead of the Manchester Northern Gateway, Windermere Jetty, Preston Bus Station and the Knutsford Neighborhood Plan.

The Local plan will now cover the period up to 2040 and will be adopted in 2023. Consultant events were postponed due to Coronavirus however these would be rescheduled when safe to do so allowing for residents to provide input in the major plan which will shape South Lakeland for the next 10 years and beyond. The future plan will consider employment and housing needs for the district and how its historic character and landscapes can be protected. The draft plan is to be published in 2021.

The governance arrangements for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) are now well advanced. Significant elements of strategic infrastructure essential for the delivery of planned growth in the South Lakeland Local Plan have been funded and delivered (or are committed) from a variety of sources. Earlier schemes implemented include: £3.4m for highways and transport improvements in Kendal, including road junction improvements and improved cycle routes, funded by Cumbria Local Enterprise partnership (LEP).

Cumbria County Council (CCC) completed the Kendal major infrastructure study. The Kendal Northern Relief Road was identified as a potential improvement in the Transport for the North – Strategic Transport Plan. Cumbria County Council are continuing to seek funding opportunities and preparing an outline business case.