

Runnymede Borough Council

Service Area Plan 25/26

Customer, Digital and Collection Services

FINAL COMMITTEE APPROVED

Approvals

Approved by CLT: 11/12/2024

Approved by Corporate Management Cttee: 20/03/2025



Service Area Plan for Financial Year 2025/26

Service Area: Customer, Digital and Collection Services

Corporate Head of Service: Linda Norman

Supported by: Stephen Bowen, Adam Hecquet, Gaynor McKenna, Fran Butler and Ed Bowen

Version: FINAL

The priority and focus for service areas for 2025/26 must be demonstration of ongoing continuous improvement, delivery of savings or income generation opportunities and realisation of benefits to align with the MTFs and address the Council's budget gap. This is alongside delivery of core activity.

Initiatives that are agreed to come forward from the Savings and Efficiency programme and the rolling programme of Service Reviews will be prioritised in relevant service area plans and progress monitored during the year.

Mission statement

During 2024, Members approved both the Customer First and Digital Transformation Strategies which provide a clear roadmap of improvement for the next three years. We understand the importance of a skilled and empowered workforce. By investing in our staff and keeping pace with the latest technology, we are well-positioned to deliver the right services to residents until 2027 and beyond.

From April 2024, Customer Services still had vacancies across the service area which had a major impact in service delivery. Customer Services is an area with a high turnover of staff particularly on the statutory team which requires in depth legislative knowledge of both Council Tax and Housing. Housing repair work has transferred to MCP but unfortunately due to poor contract performance, Customer Services have continued to deal with a large number of housing repair calls which continues to impact on resources.

Work has continued with the website and customer relationship management system to enable customers to self-serve and reduce the need to contact the Council via more traditional methods such as telephone, letter, face to face and email. Call volumes have continued to reduce and two new roles (Digital Engagement Officer) have been created to continue improving the on-line experience to enable more customers to self-serve.

Staff retention has been an issue across all areas within the division with vacancies carried across Parking, Benefits, Infrastructure & Operations as well as the Transformation Team and GIS. As vacancies arise, each area is reviewed to ensure efficiencies and savings are delivered.

Revenues and Benefits continue to face legislative challenges with the cost-of-living crisis and continue to administer various grants from the Government in a relatively short period of time. The Revenues Team are working with the Government on a pilot to undertake further scrutiny of Covid business grants to identify fraud and error.

The new Enforcement Agent contract started in April 24 and members have approved a new Corporate Debt and Financial Inclusion policy from June 24. A Corporate Debt and Financial Inclusion pilot has commenced and is proving to be a resounding success, demonstrating the potential for data-driven decision-making and improved service delivery. By dedicating a staffing resource and investing in software licenses, the Council can enhance its ability to accurately assess and address resident needs. A key outcome of this pilot has been the implementation of an innovative benefit calculator, which empowers vulnerable residents to access the financial support they require to meet their obligations to the Council. This not only improves the well-being of residents but also ensures that the Council receives the necessary funds to maintain essential services.

A consultation on a new CTS scheme for 25/26 has been undertaken with support to move to a banded income scheme from 1 April 2025. A report will be taken to full Council in December 2024 to approve the new scheme. In addition, the Benefits Team continues to administer the various tranches of the Household Support Fund ensuring much needed support is targeted to those most in need.

The Homes for Ukrainian Team are responsible for the administration of the Government Homes for Ukraine initiative. The Team comprises of one resettlement co-ordinator and one translator. The team are responsible for supporting both host and refugees families, working with government agencies, voluntary sector and Surrey CC to ensure refugees are supported and assist them with integration into the community. Welfare checks are carried out every three months to minimise breakdowns in relationships and the need to re-match with other hosts. The scheme has been extended until March 26 to reduce the risk of homelessness albeit with a reduced budget per refugee which will bring challenges around how much support the team can offer with regards to housing costs.

The case management and parking portal system for council owned car parks has resulted in an increase in parking payments with an average collection rate of 69% and a reduction in the number of appeals and challenges. New pay and display machines have been installed in eight car parks including contactless and chip and pin payments. Automated Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) will be installed during Q4 at the remaining four car parks.

Both teams within Digital Services have been carrying vacancies whilst delivering 'The Getting Fit for the Future' Transformation Programme. GIS are delivering GIS and LLPG services for Reigate and Banstead for a fixed costs of £37k pa with an initial £20k invested back into the service for training and software development.

Several back-office systems will need replacing over the next four years and cyber security is becoming a high priority across the organisation with a need to protect personal data and ensure systems are safe and secure. The team have successfully delivered the IT member device refresh and other hardware replacement projects during 24/25 year to ensure the Council's various operating systems remain secure.

Service Information

Service Area: Customer, Digital and Collection Services

Service Area 1:	Customer Services
Service Area 2:	Digital Services
Service Area 3:	Post and Document Management Services
Service Area 4:	Housing Benefits
Service Area 5:	Revenues
Service Area 6:	Parking Services
Service Area 7:	Homes 4 Ukraine

Description of Service (1) Customer Services

Main Purpose: The aim of the service is to provide our customers with the information they require at first point of contact as much as possible, in a way that meets their needs and desires yet still being affordable to the Council. The Customer Services team is trained in a multi-disciplinary way to answer simple queries on a wide range of services whether the customer visits in person, contacts us by telephone or e-mail. This will deliver a cost-effective modern service which meets customer and corporate needs through the development and use of appropriate technologies whilst maintaining customer care and statutory responsibilities.

This service is split into two distinct areas:

Statutory Team which works on Council Tax and Housing related matters:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| • Moves | • Housing Maintenance |
| • Discounts | • Work schedules, orders, administration |
| • Exemptions | • Garage rentals |
| • DD | • Rent payments; arrears; statements |
| • Refunds | |
| • Payment arrangements | |
| • Housing tenancy management | |

Community Team which works on Environmental and Leisure-related matters:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| • Environmental protection (fly tipping, abandoned vehicles, stray dogs, graffiti, noise, anti-social behaviour) | • Parking permits |
| • Registration of public health licenses (dog breeding, tattoos, piercing, acupuncture, food safety) | • Green waste |
| • Parking – processing PCN's, DVLA access, appeals | • Food waste |
| | • Street cleansing |
| | • Rubbish & Recycling |
| | • Halls & Day centres |
| | • Leisure and sports bookings |
| | • Events in parks |

The team deal with general high-volume enquiries including:

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| • Telephony | • Reception |
|-------------|-------------|

- Payments
- Council Tax
- Housing maintenance
- Tenancy management
- Green waste

Key Functions and relevant Statistics from Previous Year/ projections for next FY:

- Amount of correspondence received in relation to Customer Services in 23/24 – 66,641
- Number of telephone calls taken in Customer Services in 23/24 – 109,331

Description of Service (2) Digital Services

Main Purpose: The Digital Services team are responsible for all aspects of the ICT service i.e. network, infrastructure, security, applications, hardware, software and support. No aspect of the ICT service is outsourced to a third-party provider.

The core objectives for the team are:

- To keep the network, all applications and systems operational at all times to support the delivery of services.
- To maintain the network, applications, systems, security, hardware and software to the highest level.
- To lead and advise the organisation in the choice, procurement and implementation of new applications, systems, software and hardware.
- To provide the staff and councillors with the necessary training and advice to use the equipment and systems.
- To keep up to date with the latest technologies and inform the Council how innovation can improve service delivery.
- To maintain a working relationship with all other Surrey Districts, Boroughs, the County, third sector, suppliers and business partners.
- To provide a means of ensuring that problems and issues are resolved as quickly as possible.
- To secure the network, data and information against external threats.
- To ensure that applications and systems are fit for purpose and are operating both efficiently and effectively.
- To manage the Council website.

The team have responsibility for:

- Cyber security audit.
- Penetration test and PSN compliance.
- Microsoft home office for staff.
- Member device and support.
- Regular software upgrades of back-office systems.
- Obtain and maintain PCI DSS compliance.
- Obtain and maintain PSN certificate and compliance.
- Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity testing.
- Maintain Digital services contract register & system asset database.
- Update Business Continuity Plan.

Key Functions and relevant Statistics from Previous Year:

- Service Desk stats April 2023 to March 2024 is fairly static at 4769

Description of Service (3) Post and Document Management Services

Main Purpose: This team has been moved back into Digital Services and is managed by the Digital Delivery Manager. This section deals with all incoming post to the Council and sorts the correspondence at a basic level for other services areas. It provides scanning and indexing facility as required by departments with a large part of their work back-scanning documents into Information@Work (I@W) once services have processed the paper copy. For some areas, the work is scanned directly into the I@W once the correspondence has been categorised and referenced. Staff have a working knowledge of the Verification Framework Code of Practice for handling Housing Benefit documents.

Key Functions and relevant Statistics from Previous Year:

- Outgoing mail for 23/24 is 185,468 compared to 224,628 for 22/23
- Incoming mail for 23/24 is 23,760 compared to 15,477 for 22/23

Increase in 23/24 mail is due to General Election and increase in postal votes.

Description of Service (4) Housing Benefits

Main Purpose: The Housing Benefits team deal with all aspects of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support administration:

- Appeals
 - Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS)
- Hardship and Welfare advice
 - Verification of Earnings and Pensions (VEPS)
- Household Support Fund
- Discretionary Housing Payments
- Overpayment
- Verification of documents
- Government partnership working
 - Real Time Indicators (RTI)
 - Automated Transfer Local Authority System (ATLAS)
 - Customer Information System (CIS)
 - HBAA (full case reviews)
 - Self-employed reviews
- Assessment of
 - Housing Benefit
 - Council Tax Support
- Local Housing Allowance
 - Registered Social Landlords
 - Council Tenants
 - Short term temporary accommodation
 - Private tenures

Key Functions and relevant Statistics from Previous Year:

- Amount of correspondence received in relation to Housing Benefits in 23/24 42,996
- Number of telephone calls taken in Housing Benefits in 23/24 6,248
- Number of visitors to reception in relation to Housing Benefits in 23/24 1,088

Description of Service (5) Revenues

Main Purpose: The Revenues section deal with the more complicated aspects of Council Tax administration:

- Business Rates
- Valuation office schedules
- Completion Notices
- Building works
- Appeals
- Exemptions
- Complaints
- Freedom of Information requests
- Sole or main residence appeals
- Court attendance

- Enforcement agents
- Attachment to Earnings/Benefits/allowances
- Charging orders
- Insolvency
- Tracing absconders

Key Functions and relevant Statistics from Previous Year (23/24):

- Council Tax collection rates – 98.0%
- Business Rates collection rates – 99.10%
- Recovery notices for Council Tax – 20,999
- Recovery notices for Business Rates – 2,114
- Number of DD payers for Council Tax – 27,352
- Number of DD payers for Business Rates - 801
- Amount of correspondence received in relation to Council Tax
 - – 10,755 (Back Office)
 - – 10,971 (Customer Services)
- Amount of correspondence received in relation to Business Rates – 4,445
- Number of telephone calls taken in Council Tax – 1,372

Description of Service (6) Parking Services

Main Purpose: The Parking Team deal with the administration, collection and enforcement of Penalty Charge Notices (PCN) for both On-street and Off-Street Parking. The Team is responsible for ensuring road safety and free flow of traffic across the Borough and for ensuring customers who use Council owned car parks pay for the service provided. In August, the team also took over the management of Runnymede Pleasure Ground car park and the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system installed at that location.

In 2023/24, the team issued 1,919 PCNs and answered 1,473 calls. The Team deal with all aspects from informal challenge to Tribunal Hearings. The Civil Enforcement Officers patrol 37 hours a week across 7 days from 7.00 in the morning to 7.00pm at night on a rota to ensure service delivery.

Description of Service (7) Homes 4 Ukraine

Main Purpose: The Homes for Ukrainian Team are responsible for the administration of the Government Homes for Ukraine initiative. The total budget across three years is approximately £1.3m which will go towards administering the scheme including thank you payments to hosts and support with Housing costs as required. The Team comprises of one resettlement co-ordinators and one translator. The team are responsible for:

- supporting 106 refugees and 70 host families.
- updating the Home Office portal.
- working with North West Surrey Volunteers and other stakeholders to ensure the refugees are supported and assist them with integration into the community.
- carrying out mandatory checks required by the government to ensure that sponsors are suitably vetted.
- undertake welfare and safeguarding visits at 3,6-,9- and 12-month intervals.
- Preventing and minimising fraud in relation to visa and thank you payments

Planned Activities



Customer, Digital & Collection

Total number of planned activities

17

Types of Activities

Project	Review	One-off	New Core Activity
5	6	1	5

Project						
Type of Activity	Title	Corporate Theme(s)	Plan start date	Actual start date	Plan due Date	Progress
Project	Cycle Racks in 3 Car Parks	Climate Change	01 September 2025		31 March 2026	Not started
Project	Procure and implement a new Environmental Services system	Organisational Development	01 April 2025		31 March 2026	Not started
Project	Telephony Upgrade	Organisational Development	01 April 2025		01 January 2026	Not started
Project	Web Streaming	Empowering Communities	01 April 2025		01 June 2025	Not started
Project	Windows 11 Upgrade	Organisational Development	01 April 2025		31 March 2026	Not started

Review						
Type of Activity	Title	Corporate Theme(s)	Plan start date	Actual start date	Plan due Date	Progress
Review	Access Channels Service Review	Organisational Development				In progress
Review	AI Policy & Development		01 April 2025		31 March 2026	Not started
Review	Digital Services training requirements / skills audit.	Organisational Development	01 April 2023	01 April 2023	31 March 2026	In progress
Review	EV Charging Point Implementation	Climate Change	01 April 2025		31 March 2026	Not started
Review	Off-Street Parking Orders		01 April 2025		31 March 2026	Not started
Review	Parking Permits		01 April 2025		31 March 2026	Not started

One-off						
Type of Activity	Title	Corporate Theme(s)	Plan start date	Actual start date	Plan due Date	Progress
One Off	Customer Services Excellence Accreditation	Organisational Development	01 April 2025		31 March 2027	Not started

New Core Activity						
Type of Activity	Title	Corporate Theme(s)	Plan start date	Actual start date	Plan due Date	Progress
New Core Activity	Cyber Security Training	Organisational Development	01 April 2023	01 April 2023	31 March 2026	In progress
New Core Activity	Member Case Management System	Empowering Communities	01 April 2025		01 July 2025	Not started
New Core Activity	Online content annual rolling review and improvement programme 25/26	Organisational Development	01 April 2025		31 March 2026	Not started
New Core Activity	Technology continuous improvement 25/26	Organisational Development	01 April 2025		31 March 2026	Not started
New Core Activity	UC migration	Organisational Development	01 April 2025		31 July 2026	Not started

For all information contained within this document contact:

Runnymede Borough Council
The Civic Centre
Station Road
Addlestone
Surrey KT15 2AH

Tel 01932 838383

email: customerserviceteam@runnymede.gov.uk

www.runnymede.gov.uk

Further copies of this publication,
or copies in large print other
formats or languages
can be obtained via the
above contact details.



Search: Runnymede Borough Council