

# Runnymede Borough Council

## Service Area Plan 26/27

### Customer, Digital and Collection Services

#### **COMMITTEE APPROVED**

##### Approvals

Approved by CLT: 3 December 2025

Approved by Corporate Management Cttee: 11 December 2025



# Service Area Plan for Financial Year 2026/27

**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 in 2026/27 is to actively support the Council's transition to the new unitary authority as a result of Local Government Reorganisation (which will take effect on 1 April 2027) alongside the delivery of core activity. Plans reflect the dual responsibility of delivering for Runnymede now, while preparing for a successful handover to the future unitary council. This includes ensuring financial sustainability, clarity of purpose, and alignment with the Corporate Business Plan for 2026/27. Initiatives from the Savings and Efficiency Programme and the rolling programme of Service Reviews will be prioritised and monitored throughout the year, contributing both to current performance and to the legacy we leave behind.

## 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 2025, 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 the two Digital Engagement Officers 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 successfully completed work on a Government pilot to identify fraud and error with Covid Business Grants and achieved £17500 one off grant.

The Corporate Debt and Financial Inclusion pilot was made permanent in April 2025, 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 new Council Tax Support (CTS) banded income scheme was implemented from 1 April 2025 which has released resources to enable the Benefits Team 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 1.5 FTE who 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 27 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. Camera Assisted Enforcement (CAE) 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.

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 Council Chamber refresh and other hardware replacement projects during 25/26 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
- Discounts
- Exemptions
- DD
- Refunds
- Payment arrangements
- Housing tenancy management
- Housing Maintenance
- Work schedules, orders, administration
- Garage rentals
- Rent payments; arrears; statements

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

- Environmental protection (fly tipping, abandoned vehicles, stray dogs, graffiti, noise, anti-social behaviour)
- Registration of public health licenses (dog breeding, tattoos, piercing, acupuncture, food safety)
- Parking – processing PCN's, DVLA access, appeals
- Parking permits
- Green waste
- 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:

- Amount of correspondence received in relation to Customer Services
  - 24/25 – 66,641
- Number of telephone calls taken in Customer Services in
  - 24/25 – 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 2024 to March 2025 has fairly static at 4,769

## **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 24/25 178,267 compared to 185,468 for 23/24
- Incoming mail for 24/25 15,451 compared to 23,760 for 23/24

#### **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
- Hardship and Welfare advice
- 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
- Housing Benefit Matching Service (HBMS)
- Verification of Earnings and Pensions (VEPS)
- 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 24/25 46,242
- Number of telephone calls taken in Housing Benefits in 24/25 2,989
- Number of visitors to reception in relation to Housing Benefits in 24/25 901

#### **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 (24/25):

- Council Tax collection rates – 97.6%
- Business Rates collection rates – 98.9%
- Recovery notices for Council Tax – 24,058
- Recovery notices for Business Rates – 1,639
- Number of DD payers for Council Tax – 27,517

- Number of DD payers for Business Rates - 872
- Amount of correspondence received in relation to Council Tax
  - – 10,236 (Back Office)
  - – 9,627 (Customer Services)
- Amount of correspondence received in relation to Business Rates – 3,926
- Number of telephone calls taken in Council Tax – 1,177

### **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 2024/25, the team issued 4,027 PCNs and answered 761 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



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 November 2025	01 November 2025	31 March 2026	In progress
Project	Depot refurbishment and LAN decommission	OD - Internal	01 April 2026		31 March 2027	Not started
Project	EV Charging Implementation in off street car parks	Fair & Sustainable Economy	01 January 2026		31 March 2027	Not started
Project	Remove Meraki switches and go WiFi only	OD - Internal	01 April 2026		31 March 2027	Not started
Project	Replacing ANPR for Camera-Assisted Enforcement (CAE)	Economic Development	01 November 2025	01 November 2025	31 March 2027	In progress
Project	Text reminders for Revenues and Benefits	Supporting Communities through Change	01 April 2026		31 March 2027	Not started

Review						
Type of Activity	Title	Corporate Theme(s)	Plan start date	Actual start date	Plan due Date	Progress
Review	AI Policy & Development	Organisational Development	01 April 2025	01 April 2025	31 March 2026	In progress
Review	LGR Council Tax discount alignment	OD - Internal	01 April 2026		31 March 2027	Not started
Review	LGR Council Tax support scheme	OD - Internal	01 December 2025		31 March 2027	Not started
Review	LGR Digital Alignment	OD - Internal	01 April 2026		31 March 2027	Not started
Review	LGR Parking Alignment	OD - Internal	01 April 2026		31 March 2027	Not started
Review	Parking Permits	Organisational Development	01 September 2025	01 September 2025	31 March 2027	In progress

One-off						
Type of Activity	Title	Corporate Theme(s)	Plan start date	Actual start date	Plan due Date	Progress

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 25/26	Organisational Development	01 April 2023	01 April 2023	31 March 2026	In progress
New Core Activity	Cyber Security Training 26/27	Organisational Development	01 April 2026		31 March 2027	Not started
New Core Activity	Member Case Management System	Empowering Communities	01 January 2026		30 September 2026	Not started
New Core Activity	Online content annual rolling review and improvement programme 25/26	Organisational Development	01 April 2025	01 April 2025	31 March 2026	In progress
New Core Activity	Online content annual rolling review and improvement programme 26/27	OD - Internal	01 April 2026		31 March 2027	Not started
New Core Activity	Technology continuous improvement 25/26	Organisational Development	01 April 2025	01 April 2025	31 March 2026	In progress
New Core Activity	Technology continuous improvement 26/27	OD - Internal	01 April 2026		31 March 2027	Not started
New Core Activity	UC migration	Organisational Development	01 July 2025	01 July 2025	30 September 2026	In progress

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