Corporate Solutions Performance Report 23/24
Annual Summary

The number of library events has increased by 7% from last year with 6,135 library events held this year resulting in a total of 81,006 attendees, an 11% increase from those attending events last year. This covers regular events and activities for both adults and children as well as standalone events.

The Summer Reading Challenge, based around the power of play, sport and games, saw over 1,000 children sign up this year (a 15% increase on last year) with 55% of those completing the challenge (a 4% increase on the numbers finishing last year). Nearly 130 events were attended by over 4,000 children and their families and over 21,000 items of junior stock were issued over July and August. As a result, libraries saw 668 new child memberships which reflects the positive engagement of the Summer Reading Challenge.

Book Week Scotland took place in November and 66 events were held across our libraries including Bookbug sessions, author visits, workshops, crafting, school visits and Bookbug bag gifting sessions. Almost 2,300 people attended which was a great turn out for what was a very wet Book Week Scotland. A bookmark design competition was run in partnership with Midlothian primary schools with almost 300 entries having been submitted.

Lend and Mend Hub
This year saw the launch of Gorebridge Library's Lend and Mend Hub. The Hub provides free access to sewing machines and other equipment to allow communities to repair, re-use and upcycle their own items. Gorebridge was one of nine library partners across Scotland in a project funded by the John Lewis Partnership's Circular Future Fund and managed through SLIC (the Scottish Library and Information Council).

Taking a co-design approach, the hubs were developed with insight and expertise from local teams and library members to ensure services were tailored to community needs. Funding granted from the John Lewis Partnership's £1m Circular Future Fund was used for the equipment, training and space upgrades needed to deliver the projects. Following their launch, each library hub introduced an education programme to support new skills development, helping to reduce inequality through equitable access to resources. The first focus was on 'mending', and several workshops and sessions were held with groups such as the SHRUB Cooperative, to teach people the first steps of repairing and re-making.

This is an example of how the library service is transforming and thriving, responding to community needs and giving people access to resources that they may not otherwise have. In line with the Council's commitment to Net Zero by 2030 and the Climate Change Strategy, the promotion of circular economy activities can change the way we use and consume to make the way we live greener, as well as upskill residents and foster new social connections. It is anticipated that this pilot will help develop a long-term model for libraries to be a hub of circular economy activities and external funding has been secured for two more Lend and Mend Hubs due to launch in Summer 2024 in Danderhall and Loanhead Libraries.

Relaunch of our Warm and Well hubs

As part of Challenge Poverty Week in October we relaunched our 4 warm and well hubs. Working in partnership with other services including Communities, Lifelong Learning and Employability, Citizens Advice Bureau, Social Security Scotland and Into Work, a number of workshops and drop-in sessions were held in our Warm and Well Hubs providing advice on benefits, employability support, household budgeting and Cost of Living support and advice. In order to continue to support our communities through the Cost of Living Crisis, Dalkeith Library launched a free coat swap where coats could be donated or taken by those who were in need. A wide range of jackets, hats and gloves were on offer with 127 coats being taken since January.

Library Service Excellence Award

This year, Library Services were awarded the SLIC Library Service Excellence Award for activities that put our communities at the heart of the service. The service has risen to the challenges of a rapidly changing community, creating a series of events and services that respond to the needs to the community, particularly in response to the Cost of Living Crisis. The judges commended the service for these activities and joined up thinking they represent. They also saw a great range of cultural events which have been rewarded by significant increases in library visits and materials issues compared to that of the previous year.

Our website performance

In SiteImprove, the marketing performance platform, our council website's Digital Certainty Index score has been consistently around 10% better than the Government benchmark. We currently have a score of just over 90%. This is a gauge of how the website compares to other sites from the same sector across the UK, in terms of accessibility, usability, credibility, trustworthiness and how well-poised it is to respond to Search Engine optimisation challenges. This is a significant achievement particularly with a minimal website team, in comparison to websites managed by much larger government agencies. This year we received 1,142,941 visits to our website, although this number is based on customers accepting analytic cookies, therefore, we expect figures to be much higher.
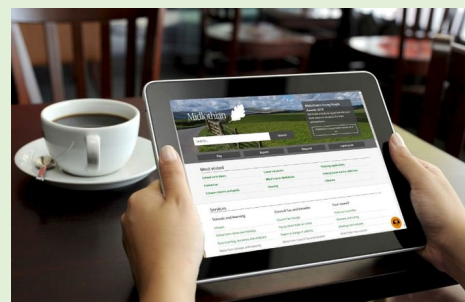
Communications and promotion
Our communication and marketing team continue to support services across the Council by promoting key initiatives on our social media platforms, news releases, website and community radio channel. Key successes this year include:

Promotion to encourage participation of the Midlothian Outdoor Festival through a dedicated communications campaign. This includes a new Council website page signposting customers to online booking, media releases, brochure and posters and promotion across our social media platforms. The best performing Facebook post reaching 7,604 news feeds and 406 engagements. The best performing Twitter post reaching 2,123 impressions and 85 engagements.

Communication to encourage the uptake of Bonfire Night Waste Amnesty contributed to a 21% increase in total uplifts from last year. 510 items were uplifted in total, removing potentially flammable waste from our communities most affected by nuisance fire-raising in the run up to Bonfire Night. A series of social media posts publicised the initiative and provided updates on slot availability. The best performing Facebook post reached 16,847 with an engagement rate of 7.75%, both considered higher than might be considered typical. Best performing Twitter post reached 1,986 impressions.

Activity to promote the uptake of the Health & Social Care Partnership (HSCP) social care strategy survey, canvassing views of residents about future strategic priorities for Midlothian social care provision. A series of social media graphics were created in collaboration with HSCP, each formatted for use on different social media platforms. Combined Facebook posts reached 13,396 impressions and combined Twitter

Encouraging eligible families to apply for free school meals and clothing grants through a dedicated communications campaign. Short videos were created with school children and the Council's food nutritionist and posted across all social media platforms. Facebook and Twitter posts featured key messages pointing people back to the Free School Meals/Clothing Grant webpages to apply. As a result, in terms of the webforms being received, the majority of those were applications for these supports. The best performing Facebook post reached 8,077 views and 5,635 views via Twitter.

Communications to support the recruitment of more Shared Lives carers, focusing on short break services. Social media posts were created across all Council platforms publishing the work of the service and soliciting expressions of interest. The combined Facebook posts reaching 14,468 with an engagement rate of 4.66%. Interview footage was shot for inclusion in a new video providing information about the service, which will be released in Spring this year as well as work to update webpages for the service.

Promotion of customer consultations and surveys including:
- Fostering campaign (led externally and supported by the Council's communications service)
- Auchendinny to Rosewell stretch of Core Path (best performing social media post reached 80,468 news feeds with 7,824 engagements)
- Newtongrange former pool site (a series of scheduled Facebook posts publicising an in-person consultation event and signposting to an online questionnaire had a total reach of 112,814)
- Midlothian Local Development Plan engagement actions (Facebook posts for the development plan, with a total reach of 22,066, engagement rate 2825 (12%) and Facebook posts for open space strategy, with a total reach of 16,722, total engagement was 759 (4.5%)).

Policy and strategy

- Consultation with the Trade Unions to prioritise the policy review with requests to focus on disciplinary, resolution, maximising attendance at work, performance improvement.
- Job Evaluation was brought back in-house this year with work undertaken to streamline the internal processes and increase efficiencies.
- A new Hybrid Working Policy was launched following engagement with Trade Unions.
- The Recruitment Strategy was drafted this year and is being finalised for approval, prior to communication and implementation.
- The new Wellbeing Strategy was approved by the Corporate Management Team. The strategy continues to focus on the financial, physical, and psychological wellbeing of our workforce and ensure employees have access to advice, guidance and initiatives which support their health and wellbeing.

Investing in our workforce

- A new programme for welcome, induction, long service recognition and leavers was developed this year. This includes a refreshed face to face induction programme for all new staff and existing staff; and will be supported by a range of online resources provided at onboarding. The introduction of long service recognition and a revised approach to learning from employees exiting the organisation will enable us to learn from employee experiences, understand the reasons for leaving and promote Midlothian as an employer of choice.
- The introduction of shared cost additional voluntary contributions has been approved and work is now underway with procurement and Employment and Reward for implementation. When finalised, a communications plan will support the roll out to all staff to encourage take up to the scheme.
- A new coaching programme has been rolled out across the organisation and the Leadership Team. The Leadership Forum programme for 2024 is agreed and the new Management Forum focusing on practical line management launches in Summer 2024.

Workforce measures

We track our employee turnover rates on a half yearly basis by expressing it as a percentage of employees overall when taking account of all leavers. Consideration of the levels of turnover across services, locations and particular groups of employees helps to inform workforce planning and resourcing. Compared to last year, staff turnover rates have decreased from 10.3% last year to 9.2% this year.

The gender pay gap measures the average female pay (£19.81) versus average male pay (£20.36) within the organisation. The figures show that the Council has more male staff at higher rates of pay by 2.7% in 23/24. This figure has reduced from 2.86% in 22/23.

The percentage of female employees in the top 5% of earnings continues to gradually increase this year to 122 from 120 in 22/23, 115 in 21/22 and 98 in 20/21.

Sickness absence rates for all employees has remained fairly consistent to rates of last year with average sickness days at 11.71 for this year compared to 11.04 in 22/23. For Corporate Solutions, the average number of working days lost due to sickness absence has slightly increased compared to this time last year. Of the FTE days lost, 15% was due to long term sickness, 68% self-certified, 17% short term absence. There are no identifiable trends causing increases in figures, either in short term or long term absences and work continues with each service area to review attendance levels and support those absent to return to work.

Wellness@Midlothian
This year Midlothian Council maintained the Healthy Working Lives Gold Award for over 9 years, through involvement by a committee of dedicated employees volunteering their time and expertise to create and support wellbeing initiatives.

The rolling programme of **Wellness@Midlothian** initiatives continued this year to ensure we are supporting the positive health and wellbeing of our staff. This year 75 wellbeing events were held internally and externally covering cost of living supports, wellbeing and mental health awareness and health checks. A total of 595 staff attended various events organised in house. Events included:

- promotion of free learning opportunities, and a programme around Carer's Week with training from Vocal and Alzheimer's Scotland, raising awareness of the carers policy and supports available. Other promotions included men's health guidance, McMillan cancer support and promotion of volunteer week
- health checks were held across Midlothian Libraries, Schools, Cherry Road and Council depots including Stobhill, Fushiebridge and Bonnyrigg garage. In addition, staff engagement exercises were held in Stobhill Depot and Bonnyrigg Garage to share employee wellbeing information and details of where to seek support on a large range of topics.
- onsite visits were provided by Capital Credit Union to meet staff and provide advice on budgeting and saving. Webinars were delivered from Money Advice Scotland and drop-in sessions from Citizen Advice in Midlothian. In addition, 3 Affinity Connect courses held on financial topics this year. 2 home energy workshops were also delivered to staff.
- in terms of mental health, Trauma Level 1 & 2 courses were delivered, a SQA Coping Strategies Course, a Mindfulness course delivered by Health and Social Care Partnership, and the first series of the Edinburgh College Coaching Course.
- 6 Health walks were held for staff from the Active Travel Team supported by the Sport and Leisure team and special offers for gym membership over the festive period were promoted to staff.

Roll out of Microsoft 365 across the whole corporate estate was completed this year, enabling widescale collaboration and co-production. This has included:

- Phase 2 started in December, focusing on user adoption, service-level workflow re-design, Sharepoint deployment, software rationalisation and data reporting and visualisation. Progressing with the roll out of SharePoint and OneDrive for corporate users by engaging with Infotechtion (a leading M365 delivery organisation), who are providing advice and guidance for key parts of the project.
- Providing Council wide training to corporate staff and elected members, bringing the total to 3,568 attendees across 29 training sessions of 8 different courses.
- Technical deployment of core Office 365 applications across the estate.
- Improved collaboration and efficiencies now being realized in many ways across various areas of Council working.
- Linkage (federation) of Microsoft accounts with NHS and other local authorities enabling chat, video-calling, and efficient calendar appointment scheduling (free/busy status visibility).
- Increasing the security of the M365 environment by implementing tighter Bring Your Own Device controls.

Education and Equipped for Learning
As part of the equipped for learning project, 500 new Smart Screens installed this year across the school estate. As well as providing a superior teaching and learning experience, the new panels reduce power consumption by 50%.

36 physical primary school servers were consolidated down to just 3 this year. This significantly reduces power requirements and CO_2 emissions. This also allowed us to reduce the number of servers, thus reducing complexity and maintenance time of these systems.

Significant progress was made towards simplified meeting scheduling, enabling calendar visibility across Google and Microsoft accounts which went live in January 2024.

Digital Systems and Infrastructure

A range of improvements have been completed this year to facilitate a more efficient organisation and improve how we work:

- Completion of a major upgrade to the Citrix platform, significantly enhancing security and efficiency. Citrix is used by approximately ¼ of corporate staff.
- Cloud First strategy continues with successful migration of several major business systems to the Cloud increasing resilience, simplifying maintenance reducing power consumption and CO2 emissions, and providing increased functionality -
  - ➤ Contact Centre's Netcall Liberty telephony management system
  - ➤ Capita One Housing system
  - ➤ Spydus, the new Library Management System

- Replacement, upgrade or removal of all Microsoft Windows 2012 Servers and upgrade to Commvault Backup System. This ensures that we do not have any old unsupported (and unsecure) server operating systems and hardware. Eight servers and four storage arrays replaced by four new servers. Again, reducing power, CO2, as well as increasing performance and reducing complexity.
- Performance and security of remote-access to Council network improved through roll-out of new Global Protect solution.
- Education access and utilisation of the internet is now more secure via LightSpeed roll-out which blocks inappropriate websites, and alerts staff to any potentially concerning internet searches / usage from pupils, improving the safety for pupils.
- ForcePoint Cloud was successfully rolled out across the corporate network to enhance our internet security, significantly reducing the likelihood and impact of cyber threats.
- Deployment of Corporate WiFi at the Stobhill depot.
- Migration from a poor point to point WiFi system at Pathhead to a reliable 4G solution.

Cyber Security
This year we were successful in managing and mitigating a major cyber incident. All systems and data were fully secured due to rapid response and multi-team effort during out-of-hours. A testament to the groundwork previously done to block, minimize and mitigate cyber attempts, as well as the dedication and professionalism of the workforce.

In addition, various cyber security initiatives and events have taken place this year:

➢ **Phishing Exercises:** Designed and executed realistic phishing exercises to evaluate the resilience of the organisation against social engineering attacks.
➢ **Elected Member Cyber Security Presentation**: Communicated key cyber security threats and mitigation to elected members, enhancing overall awareness.
➢ **Staff Security Presentation:** Delivery of security presentations to staff, ensuring a widespread understanding of cyber security risk and protective measures.
➢ **Setup PDNS (Protective DNS) for the Schools Network:** To strengthen the overall resilience of the schools' network against malicious attacks.
➢ **Implementation of Key Technical and Business Processes:** Collaborated with teams to integrate security and compliance measures into new technologies and workflows, minimising potential risks e.g. Projects such as M365 and Google Workspace etc.

Business Applications
A range of Business application upgrades were completed this year including TotalMobile, CivicaPay, Citizen Space, Mosaic, Open Revenues, Legend, Capita ONE. ITrent was migrated to a hosted server and an annual data cleanse of casual employee data was complete. A complete revision of all data and creation of a new agency was carried out as part of a Homecare and CM2000 project.

Other achievements this year included:

• Successful roll out of a Print and Post service across the Housing Services team ensuring that customer correspondence in relation to Housing Services is sent out timeously, whilst reducing internal resource, postage and stationary costs required to do so. In addition, the Operational Support team worked closely with Housing Services to review and enhance the information published on our website with the aim of improving customer access to information and reducing the volume of enquiry type calls received.
• The replacement of 82 multi-functional devices and printers across our school estate.
• The completion of the replacement programme for vehicle trackers across our fleet.
• A review and cleanse of unused mobile phone connections was carried out this year with 387 disconnections made in total.
• A new contract for Vehicle Telematics awarded resulting in reduced costs for the support and maintenance of the application. The new contract also includes free replacement of hardware and potential for the introduction of mobile apps for driver safety and compliance.

Invoicing

Work continues for the rollout of invoice approval processes. Fushiebridge Depot, a high-volume invoice service, was fully onboarded to invoice approval this year. Work to onboard Fleet Services and expand invoice approval in Property Maintenance was fully implemented. Invoice approval was also implemented in Catering Services for non-food purchases. Moving away from paper-based invoicing to invoice approval system management allows for a greater level of audit, performance management and data, leading to more up to date financial monitoring and real time reporting. The percentage of invoices processed via a green slip (paper-based invoicing) has reduced from 15.3% in 22/23 to 12.1% this year.

The rate of invoices paid on time across the Council is 92.6% (target is 95%), an increase from 90% paid on time in 22/23. A total of 109,847 transactions were processed in 2023/24, of which 90,076 were included in the Statutory Performance Indicator (SPI) invoice calculation with an average of 12 days to pay an invoice. The team made 16,411 direct payments to bank accounts to cover Free school meals during the holiday periods, Energy bill support scheme, Ukrainian Host payments and Business Covid recovery grants. 3,360 internally generated payments were processed including grants, corporate appointees, salary deductions and treasury activities.

Supporting the Cost-of-Living Crisis

Requests for crisis funding continue to remain consistently high, with 100% of the revised Scottish Welfare Fund (SWF) budget up to and including Q4 allocated. (114% of the original budget). 6,766 applications have been received for Crisis Grants this year (1,789 during Q4). 1,349 received for Community Care Grants (320 during Q4). This demonstrates the significant challenge faced by our communities. The successful recruitment of the Scottish Welfare Fund Assessors will not only allow the team to respond and address the current backlog of processing activities but also analyse the reasons for the high number of applications and refusals to identify preventative activity to mitigate people reaching this crisis point. This is identified as a key action in the Child Poverty Action Plan. In addition, 11,721 customers received help and support via housing benefits this year.

As part of the UK government's support to consumers with their energy costs this winter via the Energy Bills Support Scheme (EBSS) and Alternative Fuel Payments (AFP), Business Services successfully administered these schemes this year through verification of applications against the criteria set by the UK government, approval/rejection of applications and payments made to successful applicants.

Payroll

The Employment and Reward and Business Applications Team successfully implemented the Local Government Pay award and associated back dated payments at the start of this year. Work was carried out to improve our processes and controls in relation to salary overpayments which has reduced monies owed to the Council. Further work was carried out in Employment and Reward to review various employee processes resulting in the introduction of e-forms and workflows to manage special leave/extended unpaid leave/career breaks/sabbatical requests, flexible retirement, new post and recruitment authorisation and onboarding processes.

Legal and Compliance

This year our Legal Services team concluded various Section 75 agreements to enable housing developments across Midlothian including:

- Newbyres, Gorebridge for 96 homes
- small scale housing development at Robertson Bank, Gorebridge
- Lingerwood Farm, Newtongrange for 1000 homes
- land to east of Glenarch Lodge, Dalkeith for 6 units
- land south west of Newlandburn house, Gorebridge for 10 units

The team negotiated the purchase of 19 properties on the open market to support the Council's social housing programme, and purchased 11 buy backs, 53 affordable housing units at Roslin and land for 11 units at Pathhead to increase the Council's housing portfolio.

Other in-house legal work this year included:
- Provision of servitudes across Council land to enable development of adjacent housing sites. In particular, receipt of £519,532 in March as consideration for granting two servitudes at Oak Place, Mayfield which were required for a housing development adjacent to Council land.
- Land sales for garden ground, tree preservation and charging orders at various locations.
- Purchase of Millerhill Hub community facility from Shawfair LLP pursuant to Shawfair S75 Agreement. This involved agreeing additional transfer provisions for special district heating obligations, mutual car parking arrangements and special arrangements to take effect when the new (adjacent) retail unit is being constructed. An in- house legal fee will be received for this work.
- Completion of legal documentation, conclusion of missives at various sites, securing of Scottish Government funding.
- Conclusion of film location agreement at Vogrie House.

The Continuous Improvement Team transferred from the Chief Executive's Office to Corporate Solutions part way through 2023/24. The team supports the required step-change to ensure that as an organisation we learn from feedback and complaints received and improve service delivery as a result of driving forward a culture of continuous improvement.

A key success this year has been the introduction of the 'Contact Us' customer feedback and complaints module, with a central resource to support and deliver an improved process and experience for the customer.