

## ***SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE Agenda***

Date Tuesday 28 July 2020

Time 4.00 pm

Venue Virtual Meeting

[https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/200608/meetings/1940/live\\_council\\_meetings\\_online](https://www.oldham.gov.uk/info/200608/meetings/1940/live_council_meetings_online)

- Notes
1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST- If a Member requires any advice on any item involving a possible declaration of interest which could affect his/her ability to speak and/or vote he/she is advised to contact Paul Entwistle or Sian Walter-Browne in advance of the meeting
  2. CONTACT OFFICER for this Agenda is Sian Walter-Browne email [sian.walter-browne@oldham.gov.uk](mailto:sian.walter-browne@oldham.gov.uk)
  3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS – Any member of the public wishing to ask a question at the above meeting can do so only if a written copy of the question is submitted to the Contact officer by 12 Noon on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2020.
  4. FILMING – This meeting will be recorded for live and/or subsequent broadcast on the Council's website. The whole of the meeting will be recorded, except where there are confidential or exempt items and the footage will be on our website. This activity promotes democratic engagement in accordance with section 100A(9) of the Local Government Act 1972. The cameras will focus on the proceedings of the meeting.

Members of the public and the press may also record / film / photograph or broadcast this meeting when the public and the press are not lawfully excluded. Please note that anyone using recording equipment both audio and visual will not be permitted to leave the equipment in the room where a private meeting is held. Recording and reporting the Council's meetings is subject to the law including the law of defamation, the Human Rights Act, the Data Protection Act and the law on public order offences.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE SHAREHOLDER COMMITTEE IS AS FOLLOWS:  
Councillors Chadderton, Fielding, Jabbar and Shah

Item No

1 Election of Chair

The Panel is asked to elect a Chair for the duration of the Municipal Year 2020-2021.

- 2 Apologies For Absence
- 3 Urgent Business  
Urgent business, if any, introduced by the Chair
- 4 Declarations of Interest  
To Receive Declarations of Interest in any Contract or matter to be discussed at the meeting.
- 5 Public Question Time  
To receive Questions from the Public, in accordance with the Council's Constitution.
- 6 Minutes of Previous Meeting (Pages 1 - 2)  
The Minutes of the Shareholder Committee held on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 are attached for approval.
- 7 Proposed Change of Auditors for 2019-20 (Pages 3 - 4)
- 8 Unity Partnership Limited Annual Report 2019/20 (Pages 5 - 36)

**Present:** Councillor Fielding (Chair)  
Councillors Jabbar, Shah and Ur-Rehman

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence received.

2 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of urgent business received.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received.

4 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

There were no public questions received.

5 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

RESOLVED- That the minutes of the Shareholder Committee meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2019 be approved as a correct record.

6 **UNITY IT RESTRUCTURE**

The Committee gave consideration to a report of the Deputy Chief Executive which sought agreement to the first phase of a restructure of Unity IT. The Committee noted that the proposed restructure had been agreed by the Unity Partnership Board of Directors on 10<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

The Articles of Association provided that any proposed programme of redundancies or rationalisation of a group of employees was a reserved matter and it was therefore appropriate that the Committee consider and determine the recommendations of the report.

Members were informed that a review had been undertaken within Unity ICT, the key finding of which was to recommend a restructure to develop the digital skills necessary for a modern IT Support function, with an emphasis on remote support and cloud-based computing. The restructure would increase the number of staff in certain teams, in order to boost the capability in the developing areas, but reduce numbers required in some existing traditional roles and capabilities.

The expected overall impact would result in the number of operations staff reducing by 4 posts, with the current 45 posts reducing to 41 by the end of the financial year 2020/21.

The reduction would be achieved by the removal of 7 existing posts and the creation of 3 new posts. Wherever possible the reduction in posts would be achieved through voluntary redundancy and the Unions have been fully engaged throughout.

Following a voluntary redundancy exercise, it was recommended that six ICT staff should be allowed to leave the organisation. The seventh post to be removed would be achieved by redeployment and retraining.

The Committee noted that budgetary provision had been made for the restructure but agreed that no compulsory redundancies would take place.

Options/Alternatives considered

Option 1 - Do nothing

Option 2 - Approve the Unity IT restructure

RESOLVED- That:

1. The approval of the Board of Directors to the restructuring of the ICT service be noted.
2. That their decision be endorsed and the 'rationalisation of a group of employees' that would involve the use of voluntary redundancy be agreed.
3. No compulsory redundancies would take place.

The meeting started at 5.00pm and finished at 5.13pm

## Unity Partnership Limited – Proposed Change of Auditors for 2019-20

### 28 July 2020

**Produced for:** Unity Partnership Ltd Shareholder Committee

**Report of:** Dominic Whelan (Chief Operating Officer)

**Prepared by:** Chris Kelsall (Financial Controller)

#### 1. Background

Unity's 2018-19 audit was conducted by PwC and this was commissioned by Unity's previous majority shareholder in the Joint Venture, Kier Business Services, who were responsible for ensuring the Company was audited prior to the acquisition by the Council.

For the forthcoming year, it is proposed to change the auditors and to appoint the Council's auditor, Mazars to conduct Unity's audit for 2019-20.

This proposal has been approved by the Board of Directors, however under the Articles of Association this is matter reserved for Shareholders to agree.

#### 2. Recommendations

To **note** that any change of auditor for Unity Partnership Ltd requires Shareholder Committee agreement;

To **approve** the appointment of Mazars as auditor for Unity Partnership.

#### 3. Appointment of Auditor

It is usual practice that organisations within a group are audited by the same auditor. This can provide for economies of scale and means that certain information common to all organisations within the group needs only be provided once. In Unity's case, some 90% of its turnover is derived from the Council.

It is therefore proposed to appoint the Council's auditor, Mazars as the auditor for Unity Partnership Limited.

#### **4. Financial Implications**

The quoted fee for the audit for 2019-20 is £24,500. This is some £10,000 less than the current auditor, PwC, quoted for 2018-19.

PwC has requested an additional £18,000 be paid in respect of additional work that was undertaken during the course of the 2018-19 audit, that PwC claims was not included within the original quoted fee. The claim continues to be disputed by Unity. This outstanding claim has no bearing on the decision to change auditor.

#### **5. Legal Implications**

Under the Company's Articles of Association, this is a reserved matter requiring approval by the Shareholder Committee.

## Unity Partnership Limited Annual Report 2019/20

### 28 July 2020

**Produced for:** Unity Partnership Ltd Shareholder Committee

**Report of:** Chairman – Cllr Fida Hussain

**Author:** Dominic Whelan (Chief Operating Officer)

### Introduction

Unity Partnership Limited (the Company) provides regular updates on Service Delivery, Financial reporting and Performance to Directors at the routine Board meetings. Periodically the Shareholder Committee also considers matters and decisions that are reserved to Shareholders.

There is also a requirement to deliver a summary of Company key activity and performance to Shareholders following the end of year. This is separate to the formal Annual Return and Full Company Accounts for a Limited Company which is required to be sent to Companies House, as directed under Companies Act 2006.

A consolidated End of Year report has now been produced for the full 2019/20 period which has been considered and approved by the Board of Directors and is now passed to the Shareholder Committee for information.

Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) also asked for a report on Unity annual performance to be considered by their committee, an ongoing action from last year. It is proposed that this report may provide a suitable document for consideration by O&S, as the Shareholder Committee is a sub committee of cabinet.

### Recommendations

The Committee is invited to:

- **note** the information within this report covers the 2019/20 year, the first full year of 100% Council ownership;
- **note** that the report provides a general summary and also an overview of operational delivery across each of the Unity service areas plus a financial summary and key performance outcomes;
- **agree** that the report be presented to Overview & Scrutiny (O&S) for their information and overview.

# Unity Partnership Limited

## Annual Report 2019/2020





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## 1 CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

I am very pleased to be able to provide this opening statement for this 2019/20 end of year report for Unity Partnership Limited. This has been a period of significant contrasts and challenges, with the year starting in relatively stable form following on from the successful acquisition in 2018 and ending with the disruption and turbulence caused by Covid-19.

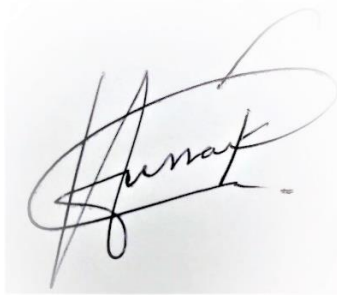
It has been a successful year with much to be proud of; most pleasing to me has been to see the way our staff have embraced the challenges of the year. The enormous dedication, positive and professional approach taken by everyone from senior managers right down to the 'front-line' operations teams has been exceptional.

The relationship between the Company and the Council continues to strengthen from the days under the joint venture arrangements. I commend the way in which the Council Deputy Chief Executive / Unity Managing Director (Helen Lockwood) and our Chief Operating Officer (Dominic Whelan) have been steering the progress on this on behalf of the Shareholders and our Board of Directors. We have set firm foundations which we will continue to focus on and strengthen further over the next year as there is still more to do.

The effect of Covid-19 has been keenly felt, impacting upon our ways of working, that in turn affects our staff in different ways or adds pressure to our service delivery, particularly in areas such as customer support, revenues and benefits, ICT and project delivery. But it has also provided a platform of opportunity that enabled us to move swiftly to a new digitally enabled way of working. It has resulted in greater collaboration across existing and new partners and groups, aligned to supporting our communities, residents and businesses across Oldham.

Our primary focus remains the delivery of services in line with our core purpose: *to provide services to the residents, communities, businesses across Oldham, on behalf of the Council and to provide various business support services to the Council.* However, it has been extremely pleasing to see we have delivered this successfully but also maintained and grown some important external work, that makes a positive contribution to our finances.

As I look ahead, there are also some interesting and innovative new initiatives in the pipeline for the next year. However, we recognise that the uncertainty relating to Covid-19 remains, that may impact further upon our operational delivery and our plans may require adjustment accordingly. Also, foremost in our mind is ensuring that we can continue to support Oldham Council to deliver upon its strategic objectives whilst playing our part in helping to deliver ways to meet the challenging financial constraints.



Cllr Fida Hussain  
Chairman  
Board of Directors  
Unity Partnership Limited

## 2 CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER'S – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

This has been the first full year of operation under the new full Council ownership and it has been a very successful year. Across all Unity Services, from management, team leaders through to the lowest paid member of staff, everyone has pulled together in a superbly positive manner to help the kick start a new era for the Company.

The new Chief Operating Officer (COO) arrived in April 2019 and after a period of 'acclimatisation' has worked with the Deputy Chief Executive / Unity Managing Director to re-orientate and rebuild the relationship between the Council and the Company following the challenging years under Kier majority ownership. Whilst there is still more work to do, to strengthen the relationship further over the coming year(s), based upon verbal feedback<sup>1</sup> from Members and Officers, this has overall been a very successful achievement and has set a strong foundation for the new governance and operating arrangements to thrive.

The COO's 'intent' was to create the conditions so that, to colleagues across the Council, Unity Partnership had the 'look and feel' of another Directorate rather than an arms-length company with an appropriate level of responsiveness and a positive and proactive approach. However, the challenge has been to deliver upon this intent whilst also maintaining the agility, commercial nous and flexibility that a separate 'arms-length' Company can operate with. This has been a fine balancing act at times but it is felt that overall the outcome has been extremely successful with a reputation being steadily rebuilt across all areas of the Council, albeit with more work to do, whilst also continuing to deliver positive outcomes as a Limited Company via external income, capital to revenue generation for the Council, new third-party activity and commercial agility when required.

### Financial Headlines (full details in Section 6)

The 2019/20 financial year has had a successful outcome, *achieving a small operating profit that has enabled the Company to pay a £0.25m Dividend* to the Council as Shareholder. This has been achieved in a continuing pressurised financial environment that has seen us seek to deliver further savings to the Council via reductions in the core fee whilst continuing to pay the Council £1.1m of charges for provision of support and services.

The overall total income into the Company reduced from £21,670m in 2018/19 to £20,946m this year; of this £0.26m was a reduction in core fees which delivered savings to the Council and the balance was from reduced income in our variable project activity.

External income increased in the year and at £0.98m was ahead of budget predictions from the start position in Apr 2019. Similarly, income from Schools and Academies at £0.95m was also an increase against predicted budget.

The balance sheet has remained healthy with approximately £2.6m of net assets held.

### Operational Service Delivery (full details in section 3)

All Service areas have had a very busy and successful year; there have been challenges in areas but overall the outcomes and overall performance has been extremely good (see Appendices 2 and 3). Covid 19 had an impact at the end of the year, affecting Revenues collection in particular and also impacting some project delivery timelines. The latter included the delivery of the new HR & Payroll system (MyHR), some Highways and Property capital schemes and various ICT projects. The latter was particularly impacted as key technical resources and expertise were diverted to priority Covid-19 activity.

<sup>1</sup> The COO intends to commission a survey in the next period to gather views on the new wholly owned company arrangements, relationship and approach to delivery in order to feed into next year's report.

## Highways Engineering

Highways Service has been engaged in the largest capital programme to date, supporting a significant level of Highways planned preventative improvements; helping in the successful bid development that has been successful in gaining funding for Growth Deal 3 (urban highways and town centre improvements) and the Mayors Cycling and Walking Fund. The team have also been engaged in delivering improvement to a range of Council assets including drainage and flood mitigation works; bridgeworks and retaining walls.

The team have been working under considerable pressure this year, not least due to some exceptional demand in work requests, many as a result of flooding; increases in capital scheme activity (a positive thing) and general upward trend in traffic management activity. This resulted in a backlog of service requests at certain periods during the year that led to the overall average performance for '*percentage of service requests responded to within 7 days*' attaining 87.9% which is below the annual target.

External support continues to be provided to Rochdale Council and our Inspectors continue to be engaged in monitoring and checking of Utility contractors works on the highway (providing external fee income).

Lead Local Flood Authority. There were some significant flooding events across the borough this year which saw an increase in demand for advice and assistance. This complex area has seen a high level of queries and concerns from residents who need advice to clarify the differing responsibilities between Environment Agency, Land owners, Utility Companies and the Council. A number of flood alleviation schemes have been completed; the largest, a £650k scheme in Delph that will help protect over 100 homes.

Property Technical Support and Estates. The Unity property teams have continued to support their usual range of work in support of Council Corporate assets, Schools & Academies and Estates. In addition to this core activity and the provision of work and services to a range of external third-party contracts, a major focus this year has been to assist with the thought leadership and development of the new Property Strategy. This included a fresh look at governance and working arrangements of Council and Unity property service areas to create better alignment and cohesion, resulting in a co-location of Unity Property staff alongside their Council colleagues in the main Civic Centre.

## Customer Services, Revenues & Benefits and Exchequer Services.

Across Customer Services the teams have continued to seek ways to improve engagement with customers and developed effective working arrangements with the Housing front of house teams who moved into Access Oldham. Volumes of contact via email (27k emails) and phone (390k calls) remain high but have dropped slightly since last year which is positive, although the impact of Covid will change this picture for Q1 and Q2 of 2020.

Within Revenues & Benefits there has been a continued focus on improvement work to increase collection levels in Council Tax and Business rates. This remains a very challenging area for all Local Authorities, across the country and within GM, most Authorities are seeing a drop in their collection levels. The Unity revenues team were already finding it very challenging to maintain collection levels throughout the year and Covid 19 further impacted as proactive collection and enforcement was stopped. We were 0.55% below target in Council Tax and 0.76% below in Business Rates and this will remain a key focus for the year ahead as we seek to find ways to improve collection.

## HR Operations & Payroll

HR & Payroll have had to deal with a high level of business ‘turbulence’ this year. This included the need to manage a busy routine of work whilst also supporting the project to implement the new HR & Payroll MyHR system and latterly helping to manage relevant staffing and HR matters relating to Covid-19.

Alongside this, there has been an ongoing review of the HR operating model across the Council and Unity to determine the most suitable structure for the future. The new HR Operations Manager, who was appointed in year, arrived in time to help support the existing interim head of service from the Council who has been leading the Service. Between them, with strong support from all the staff, they have helped navigate through this busy period successfully.

Despite the ongoing challenges associated with the legacy Agresso A1 and Selima Payroll systems, the levels of payroll service performance continue to improve. This year, the Service has maintained a far more stable environment than previous years offering higher levels of payroll accuracy. However, once the new MyHR system is fully implemented we remain confident that the whole service will be more effective and efficient which should see a step change in customer experience both within the Council and across the education sector that we support.

## ICT

The ICT Service often remain quietly busy in the background delivering technical support and ‘keeping the technology lights on’. However, this year has provided a platform for the ICT staff to come to the fore in many areas and really demonstrate their important capability. This has been particularly noticeable in the latter weeks of the year as Covid hit and the Service has been instrumental in helping re-orientate the workforce to remote working. The previous Council Technology Strategy has proved its worth, as this set out the road map for most people to be moved onto a laptop first policy with cloud hosted Office 365 software. This approach enabled the Council to swiftly react to Covid as staff moved out of the offices. The detail outlined in Section 3.5 provides a glimpse of the service and work that they have successfully delivered.

The Service commenced an important review of its own operating model, with the aim of ensuring it moves forward and adapts to the changing technology environment. This resulted in a structural change in the ICT operations area and an adjustment to capabilities and skills to align more with the digital and agile approach to future technology support.

## Digital

The COO assumed the role of Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) for Oldham Digital, to establish a new approach to Digital across the Team Oldham organisation, workforce and leadership and also across the Place. Following a series of workshops with key officers and engagement with Members, Partners and the Oldham Community, a new Strategy is being developed that will provide the overarching framework for a Digital Programme. Unity will play an active role in this programme.

Sitting within this Digital programme, under the Digital Place theme is the rollout of the Oldham Local Full Fibre Network (LFFN), which is part of a GM wide increase in high speed fibre that has been funded by a combination of Government funding and Council capital funding. As this LFFN programme is moving into delivery, the COO has also taken on the SRO lead officer role for this important borough wide initiative.

### Community Support, Employment & Apprenticeships

The year has seen even more apprentices employed within Unity, we successfully recruited or upskilled 19 new Apprenticeships and also provided 17 work experience places across the Company. We maintained close engagement with groups such as Get Oldham Working, Positive Steps and the Accelerate / Elevate mentoring programme with Oldham College. This work has been recognised with the Careers and Enterprise Company listing Unity as a Cornerstone Employer as well as shortlisting us for an award for increasing social mobility within Oldham.

The success Unity have had with apprenticeship recruitment & work experience numbers led to an award at the 2019 Oldham Business Awards in the category of 'supporting young people'.

### **Summary**

This year has seen a successful re-purposing of the Company from a Joint Venture vehicle to a wholly owned Company, with reputation enhanced and relationships improved. Whilst more remains to be done, it has set a really strong foundation that we will seek to strengthen further over the next year. Unity has achieved its financial aims for the year, building some new income streams, delivering savings to the core fee, achieving a small operating profit which enabled a Dividend payment to be made. Performance has been extremely good across the board with most KPIs achieved, with the exceptions in revenues collection and highways service request responsiveness. The response in the latter part of the year to the Covid situation has been exceptional and all our managers, teams and individual staff have been a real credit to the Company.



**Dominic Whelan**  
**Chief Operating Officer**

### 3 SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS

#### 3.1 Highways Engineering

Highways has had a busy and successful year; the capital programme for 2019/20 has been significantly the largest in recent years. There has been a total of £10m in 19/20 assigned and delivered for improvement works across areas including:

- **Growth Deal 3** to carry out high quality urban highway / town centre redevelopment;
- **GM Mayor's Cycling & Walking Fund** which is investing significantly in GM to bring its cycling and walking facilities to the best in UK over a 10-year period;
- **Planned Highways Asset Management Programme** aims to deliver very targeted resurfacing schemes that will move Oldham Council's asset management of the main carriageways towards a position of advantageous preventative planned maintenance.

Of this progress was made against all these areas.

**Growth Deal 3 / Accessible Oldham** – this is a programme of public realm enhancing highways infrastructure packages designed to open up areas of Oldham to help promote its economic development. Some 12 proposed highways infrastructure schemes have been designed to a very complete detail totalling some £9m of works. This has been a significant and unprecedented piece of initial work just to get to this stage.

**Mayor's Cycling and Walking Fund** – we have been actively engaged with Oldham colleagues to produce the bids for this programme that aims to encourage / facilitate cycling and walking. Oldham gained 'programme entry' for all 7 of our bid entries, two of them being considered the two best in GM in this bidding round. This in effect could result in the Council gaining £15.7m of funding across projects totalling £19m with Council match funding, to be completed by end of March 2022. Oldham is expecting to receive the vast majority of its £15.7m bid, probably around £12.1m.

**Planned Highways Asset Management Programme** – this continuation of the planned preventative highways programme funded by direct Council investment achieved all the anticipated programmed £4m schemes for this year (a total of £12m over three years). Significant savings brought about by a re-procurement exercise of the frameworks and economies of scale across schemes resulted in significant savings which resulted in 12 additional schemes planned for future years being completed.

In addition to these major grant funded schemes Highways & Engineering have been commissioned by the Council's Corporate Landlord client to also deliver some £1.5m of capital maintenance and improvements to Council "Corporate assets". This includes drainage and flood mitigation works; bridgeworks and retaining walls and is the largest programme of this type Unity Highways & Engineering have agreed.

We have also increased our management level of inspecting the utilities contractors works on the highways network – this will further ensure that the Council's highways asset is maintained appropriately and reduce deterioration. We completed the second full Annual Engineering Inspection (AEI) that may replace the way the network condition is reported to DfT and certainly is much more useful in providing information to produce forward programmes of work. All footways have been included this year as well as carriageways.

The Construction, Highways Services and Works Framework (CHSWF) procurement process was completed by OMBC Procurement supported by Unity Property and Highways teams. This resulted in the establishment of new supplier frameworks that are now in use.

Oldham continues to make significant progress towards the **National Strategic Framework Targets** of a 40% Reduction in Road Safety KSI's between 2010 and 2020. In recent years, the application of our evidence based, data-led Casualty Reduction strategy, integrated with the Council's highway capital programme, has resulted in road safety injury collision rates being at the lowest levels ever recorded in the Borough. Our success in achieving these reductions is also evident when compared to the rest of GM where we often out-perform many other Districts.

- The overall downward trend in road traffic injury collisions continues with reductions in the proportion of accidents in the dark and or wet conditions.
- In 2019, the number of Injury Accidents of all manner involving Children reached an all-time low of 57, representing 18% of all accidents in Oldham. This all-time low follows a year on year fall in child casualties that was 166 (23%) in 2006.
- Encouragingly, in 2019 Child Pedestrian Injury Accidents remained at the same level as 2018 and still being equal to our all-time low of 31. This figure is almost two thirds less than that of 2006 (pre-Unity) when the annual figure was 88.
- The increase in cycle activity in recent years has not resulted in a pro-rata increase in injury collisions involving cyclists.

### **Department for Transport & Other future work**

There is a large forward workload on the horizon with 3 bids put together with Council colleagues for new funding. These include:

Challenge Fund Tranche 2b submissions. Very recently despite government delays the Council was awarded additional funding under this process, totalling £4.174m against projects totally £5.283m including the structural maintenance of two major bridges carrying Oldham Way. This can be carried out over the 2020 and 2021 financial years.

The Council also received an additional £1.8m award within the 2019 – 20 financial year for additional capital highways works as the government made the decision to simply divide out the overall funding pot among authorities who submitted an Expression of Interest as above. We have received a commission (circa £200k) from Oldham Regeneration team to design the existing and new highways enabling works to support the new Saddleworth (secondary) School in Diggle. These works including new curtilage works to the new school amount to around £2.5m of works involving highways, drainage, traffic and retaining wall works.

Unity are involved in a commission to act as a consultant for an external developer (Galliford Try) to design highways works for the new Oasis Academy. The possible additional external fee revenue will be £30 - £40k and involves design and site /contract supervision of the delivery of a new signalised junction and School Safety Zone

### **Flood Authority**

Unity Partnership provide the Lead Local Flood Authority for Oldham Council. This year, our overall service delivery was impacted by the major "flooding event" in August 2019 where some 174 reported property flooding events occurred. Each of these were investigated to determine if they were actual property flooding events according to the EA definitions and therefore maybe valid for possible EA funding contribution. This was the second highest overall number in a recent high rainfall event over the last 4 years, so it was significant.



There was another major flood event in late September which, together with other more minor but sustained instances in November, meant the autumn period followed on the very wet periods within the summer months and really stretched the service and associated other services across Team Oldham. In the early part of 2020, February proved to be the wettest on record – if not the intensity on any individual day, but the cumulative effect of ever more water-logged land with no respite has meant the service demand has been relentless and unprecedented. Whilst the recent warm and dry weather has helped, the impact of Covid on our resource levels has meant that we are slowly working through all the requests, correspondence and complaints both from the public and in many cases further stated by elected members and MPs.

Overall our ability to maintain our target of 95% query resolution within 7 days has been affected this year. Additional staff have been used from across the service and closer interaction with Highways Operations to deal with matters in a prioritised way as is possible.

A number of major flood alleviation schemes have been delivered or are in progress, this has included the delivery of a £650k scheme near Delph to help protect more than 100 homes and a £500k scheme at Broomes Park in Chadderton. A further detailed business case has been developed for Environment Agency / Defra funding (circa £0.5m) to support a future flood alleviation scheme at Grasmere.

## **3.2 Property Technical & Estates**

### **Property Services Review**

The development of a new Oldham Medium Term Property Strategy has been a major and ongoing project for 2019/20 and Unity Property staff have been actively involved with Council colleagues to help with this work that has developed into the 'Creating a Better Place' strategy.

Included within this work was a review of the operating model for Property Services that has involved some realignment of teams and working arrangements to align with the revised Council property priorities for the 20/21 year. In 2020/21 there will be less emphasis on property disposals and Community Asset Transfers and more on Asset Management Plans to help shape a work programme for the coming years.

### **Property Team collaboration – relocation to Civic Centre (Room 310)**

In support of the new Property Strategy it was deemed necessary and appropriate that all property teams with Unity and Oldham Council improve collaboration. Unity teams attended workshops to review structures and practices resulting in a co-location of all property staff within room 310 in the Civic Centre.

### **Core Activity**

There has been a wide range of activity in support of the Council for provision of facilities management, mechanical and electrical engineering, estate management activity and capital projects. In addition to the work in support of Council infrastructure, the Unity Technical Delivery team have continued to provide services to schools/academies by direct appointment under Service Level Agreements.

Unity Estates, in partnership with the Council, has driven through the Council's acquisition of the freehold reversionary interest in Forge Industrial Estate, for £2.1 million. The Council already held a leasehold interest in the property and this acquisition will reduce the Council's rent liability by at least £103,000 per annum for the next 60 years and will enable us to manage the individual units on the site in a more commercial manner to drive up income and increase tenant satisfaction.

The Estates team also successfully completed the Councils Valuations programme ahead of the scheduled deadline for end of November 2019. This was despite a key member of staff being away due to long term illness, this was mitigated by appointing temporary surveyors to backfill and through seeking additional support from within the existing team.

### **External Work and Major Projects**

A 2019/20 target of £150K additional 'external' revenue was set for Property and this was successfully achieved.

The Estates team continued to provide leasehold enfranchisement, shop management and ad hoc valuations for First Choice Homes Oldham (FCHO). Our strong performance helped secure a new contract to deliver Right to Buy/Acquire valuation work for FCHO for the next 2 years that commenced in May 2019.

We secured a variety of small commissions for asset and insurance valuations for schools and colleges across the region. A Service Level Agreement was also agreed with EACT Academy for their Royton and Crompton site along with some high value project opportunities with Hollinwood Academy and Kingfisher Special School.

Members of the Property teams were heavily engaged in the creation of the new Construction, Highways Services and Works Framework (CHSWF) in 2019. The procurement process was completed by OMBC Procurement supported by Unity Property and Highways teams. 23 Lots with 82 suppliers were fully evaluated and the new framework was successfully mobilised in November 2019. Unity are providing the role and responsibility of Contract Administrators for the Council.

The projects team have been involved in a wide range of school capital projects, some of which have been extremely challenging due to issues with contractors and more latterly Covid 19. These include:

- Crompton House 4FE Expansion;
- SHALD (Holly Bank Apartments);
- Greenfield Primary School – new 2FE Primary School;
- Oldham Academy North – 2FE Secondary School expansion;
- Kingfisher School – New Hydrotherapy pool, extension and internal alterations – commission direct with Trust;
- Blessed St John Henry Newman RC College – technical advisory and monitoring support to the Council on this PFI scheme that has a number of issues;
- Civic Centre - Lift Replacement scheme;
- Yew Tree Community School – new build.

A large number of other projects are at different stages of development from design through to Tender.

### 3.3 Customer Services, Revenues & Benefits and Finance Exchequer

#### Contact Centre

The Contact Centre has performed well against target for 2019/20, handling circa 390,000 telephone calls and 27,000 emails. The overall level of contact has reduced slightly from last year where the equivalent volumes were 402,000 calls and 33,000 emails. The four largest services driving the telephone contact remain the same as last year with circa 10,000 calls routing to the switchboard, 8400 calls for Council Tax, 3500 calls for Payments and 3500 calls for Waste & Recycling. The next four services that were all around the 1300-2000 call volume were Benefits, School Admissions and Environmental Health.

The team have been involved with a range of activities over the year including:

- **Training** – the team received refresher training in effective customer engagement, how to get the best out of each interaction with a customer to improve outcomes and reduce repeat calling. The training was also provided across the Council to other customer facing teams.
- **Blue Badge calls** – the service provision of Blue Badges transferred across to Unity along with some new staff, from MioCare (who previously provided the service for Oldham) in Dec 2018. So, this past year has been the first full year of the service being provided by Unity during which time we have been able to provide an extended hours of service for customer enquiries, greater resilience and ability to flex resources to meet demand and improves options for payments.
- **Modernisation of software** – during the latter half of year, the Service commenced work to assess and recommend improvements to the current call management software which will enhance the offer of the service, for example, improved customer satisfaction surveys and quality management with call recording. This is anticipated to be implemented in 2020.

#### Access Oldham (Customer Support, Benefits, Council Tax, Blue Badge & Housing)

The Access Oldham team primary focus remains on provision of advice for Benefits, Council Tax and Blue Badges. The specific team who provide the latter service have settled in well following their transfer into Unity.

There has been an increase in footfall of citizens coming into Access Oldham, with over 73,000 visitors logging in for support or advice this year against 66,700 in 2018/19. This is primarily due to the influx of new customers visiting Housing Options, who moved into Access Oldham from First Choice Homes. The volume of contact for people logging in via Access Oldham reception for Housing queries was 9,321 and there will be an additional amount of visitors who bypassed reception and went straight through to Housing Options who would therefore not be included in these statistics. If the visitors for Housing Options (not included in the previous 2018/19 stats) are excluded from the visitor numbers and Blue Badges also removed, then it *shows the general trend for customer face to face contact has dropped from 66,750 in 2018/19 to circa 61,000 this year.*

The Unity team have worked closely with Housing Options to ensure a safe and efficient service for all our visitors and now also share the 'Do It Online' team resource. This latter team provide a digital assistance provision to enable customers to self-serve queries using our online terminals. It is pleasing to note that the volumes of digital assist self-serve have increased from 6,400 in 2018/19 to over 10,700 this year.

The team also adapted well to the new national policy changes that saw “invisible” disabilities criteria such as Dementia and Alzheimer’s being included in the criteria for Blue Badge entitlement in August. The team geared up for increased demand and assisted the Council to manage and mitigate any impacts across teams, including effective communications and updated website information.

### **Revenues & Benefits and Finance Transactional Services**

In 2019/20, collection of both council tax (CT) and business rates (NDR) remained an area that required concentrated effort to improve performance but was ultimately below expectations and is one of the few areas where we have not achieved our performance target. Although the cash collected £104.8m was higher than 2018/19 (£98.7m), the performance outturn of 94.05% CT and 96.18% NDR collected was slightly below the 2018/19 attainment (CT 94.46% and NDR 97.22%). Covid-19 hit prior to year-end which impacted the collection levels in the last month as staff were disrupted by a move out of office and also pursuit of debts paused.

A number of digital improvements and process reviews were implemented during the year, however, others were postponed due to Covid-19 pressures. There is work still to be done during 2020/21 on this, particularly to identify and deliver further automation and initiatives to support speed and accuracy.

Benefits processing was in a strong position for most of the year and thus provided a good service for claimants and ensured that billing for Council Tax was accurate and up to date, maximising the chance of compliance with payment. Covid-19 impacted at the end of year as officers had to cope with new demands to support Covid related activity.

The team have worked closely with Council client team throughout 2019/20, providing data and subject matter expertise in relation to some complex supported housing claims, in order to safeguard vulnerable tenants’ housing and the financial status of the Council’s subsidy claim.

## **3.4 HR Operations, Payroll & Advisory**

### **Payroll**

Despite the ongoing challenges associated with the legacy Agresso A1 and Selima Payroll systems, the levels of payroll service performance continue to improve. This year, the Service has maintained a far more stable environment than previous years offering higher levels of payroll accuracy. This is largely due to the quality assurance measures and manual processes that remain in place whilst system configuration is frozen pending the implementation of the new HR and Payroll System towards the end of 2020.

There is a lot of work still to be done to implement the new system, structures and processes and we expect that the significant cost pressure incurred due to the extra resources being used for manual processing and assurance of payroll, will reduce significantly following implementation.

A project was initiated in 2019 to review various salary over-payments; this has made good progress in addressing ageing debt and, working with Council colleagues, tightening up processes to improve compliance. This is the last outstanding item from the legacy programme inherited from the Kier ownership.

## **Pensions**

The three yearly pension re-enrolment exercise for the Council was successfully completed in May 2019, which included resolving historical issues for impacted customers.

The ongoing legacy issues associated with auto-enrolment had been resolved, with the exception of some teachers' pensions, who have not engaged with the process, so therefore remains open. The Council successfully agreed a settlement with Kier in 2019 that will help offset any risk associated with any future costs relating to this work.

## **HR Operations**

The service completed a restructure which has created distinct teams for Payroll, Pensions, HR Transactional and HRP Systems, each of which are headed by a team manager. Additionally, an Operations Manager post has been created to provide direct leadership and management to these operational teams and offer subject matter expertise where required. Alison Collins was appointed to this role in August 2019 and now heads up the service.

A review of Unity HR Operations & Payroll was undertaken during the year. This was a joint piece of work between the Chief Operating Officer and the Director of Workforce & Organisational Design and was a holistic redesign of HR / Organisational Development Services across the Council and Unity. This piece of work has resulted in HR Advisory transferring from Unity to the Council and two posts transferring to Unity from the Council. Work also commenced on the development of future operating model for the service post the new MyHR system implementation.

The Board of Directors approved a Recognition Agreement with the Trades Unions in early 2020 that has been in place from 01 April 2020.

The team are currently working from home and despite numerous challenges have adapted to this new working style with ease and productivity, team working and collaboration has improved.

## **HRP Systems**

The HRP Systems team have been seconded over to Unity BCS to support the work on implementing the new HRP solution, iTrent. This has been their primary focus for the last year, whilst continuing to provide support to the wider team for business as usual queries, software upgrades and year end support.

A significant amount of work has been undertaken to collaboratively design the new system processes and functionality to ensure best practice and automation is adopted across the service and the wider customer user base.

However, we expect that the significant cost pressure incurred due to the extra resource being used for manual processing and assurance of payroll, will reduce significantly following implementation.

### 3.5 ICT

ICT have had a very busy start to the year implementing the early phases of the IT Strategy. This has created the enablers for increased remote working for Council, MioCare and Unity staff. The initial investment of circa £2.5m included:

- Deployment of over 2500 personal computers and the implementation of Office365 functionality, including MS Teams, OneDrive and SharePoint;
- Deployment of 650 mobile telephones with secure access to emails and business files provided by Microsoft In-Tune software;
- Completion of the Wide Area Network (WAN) transformation which delivered an annual saving of £150k to the Council.

These initiatives were all enablers to support the digital workforce agenda and the associated accommodation strategy which initially intended to reduce desk ratios from 10 desks to 7 desks for every 10 employees c30% remote working. However, the Covid-19 crisis saw an accelerated implementation of remote working with approximately 80% of staff working remotely. This brought additional challenges, with IT having to fundamentally having to re-architect areas of the technology estate to cope with this increased demand, such initiatives include:

- Increasing the size of the network connections to the datacentre;
- Adding more servers and storage to the Council's Citrix estate;
- Working with third parties to find a solution for the remote delivery of anti-virus software and deployment of Microsoft patches;
- Re-architecting the Councils Direct Access estate, increasing its size and enabling split tunnelling for Office 365.

The introduction of this modern IT environment also meant Unity had the wrong mix of skills within IT to support the new remote working environment, with too many 'traditional' technicians and not enough software engineers. Therefore, following a skills and workforce analysis and consultation, the ICT operations team were restructured with:

- The creation of the Unity Digital Academy, to recruit and train up graduates to become IT professionals of the future;
- A reduction of the traditional support resources, with six colleagues leaving the team by voluntary redundancy;
- Recruitment of specific software skilled resources on fix term contracts to maintain the momentum of the migration to the new environment.

This increased workload for IT shows no sign of abating, as migration to the new cloud-based systems continues. To realise the full benefits of the Office365 environment, the legacy shared areas which are currently on-premise need migrating into SharePoint. Therefore, a proof of concept is due to be trialled within Unity in 2020, working closely with the Council's OD team to design the workstyles of the future to consider the needs of the workforce i.e. MS Licence types, desk phones or softphones, etc.

The Council's IT strategic investment plan of £8.9m has been re-profiled over the next 5 years and a new Strategic Investment Board has been established to govern all Investment in Technology. One such initiative on the strategic roadmap is a provision to invest in Digital Enablement and the potential development of a digital platform. This is seen as a key enabler for further digitalisation of the customer engagement process, which could lead to further business efficiency improvements via Robotic Process Automation (RPA).

An early manifestation of this was the creation of the community Covid response hubs, using Microsoft Dynamics software to register and record the distribution of food and medicine to the sheltered residents of Oldham. This was designed, deployed and operational within 3 weeks, which is a phenomenal achievement and demonstrates what can be achieved when Services and IT work together in an agile way.

### 3.6 Business Change Service

The Business Change Services team provide an internal consultancy and change capability at both a strategic and tactical level. The business unit serves 3 main purposes:

- **To help deliver Unity's own change** priorities and transformation needs;
- **To work across the Team Oldham estate** helping our partners ranging from Council (primary customer) through to CCG, Oldham Hospital, Action Together and MioCare;
- **To generate additional revenue through opportunities across GM** or where we can deliver support or services to team Oldham partners and add value.

The team have had another successful year delivering on a range of important programmes for both Unity Partnership, Oldham Council and working with partners across the Team Oldham estate including Oldham's Clinical Commissioning Group. This year, we successfully won a new piece of work to support Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership (GMHSCP) to develop a new operating model.

#### Key Programmes and Projects to note

**Digital by Design Programme and Office 365** - Conclusion of phase 3 of the programme which implemented mobile working in environmental services, improved the customer experience for residents in relation to the waste collection service and designed a new operating model for the Revenues and Benefits service. A Council wide digital behaviour channel shift programme and website content ownership was also launched and a digital visioning session held with senior leaders to inform the future digital programme. This has evolved into the new Office 365 functionality to collaborate across team Oldham, improve access to information and help us all become more productive as we learn to work flexibly in new hybrid environments.

**Thriving Communities** - The Thriving Communities programme is viewed as a ground-breaking programme which integrates voluntary and community capacity into our health and care system. Through a data driven approach it has linked up primary care with the Voluntary and Community Sector to improve people's health. Changing commissioning priorities to redefect the importance of our community partners in providing good health and wellbeing, the programme aims to help 1000+ residents improve their lives each year.

The programme is currently nominated for the following awards; Local Government Chronicle Award; Government Opportunities Award; Innovation in Politics Awards and was also commended at both the iNetwork and Local Area Research and Insight awards. The team went onto to support the set-up customer Bronze, foodbanks and place-based working, etc.

**People Programme** – The team have been leading the implementation of a new market leading HR and Payroll software (iTrent). The new application which will be known as MyHR will be implemented for all Oldham Council staff, MioCare and all Schools and Academy customers who purchase HR transactional SLAs from the Unity Partnership. The HRP and ICT team in Unity and colleagues across Oldham Council have been integral to the implementation which will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the service, thereby delivering both financial and non-financial benefits. Importantly it will help the HRP team position itself more competitively in the marketplace as this will enable us to provide a leading self-serve HR & pay solution to our partners.

**Greater Manchester Heath and Social Care Partnership (GMHSCP)** – a successfully won external contract to support the GMHSCP in developing a cross functional model which would help the team move manage a budget cut handed down nationally from Public Health England but would also help the team reorganises to better work in the Programme and Project way as well as better cross fertilisation of skills and knowledge across their team in advance of Covid-19.

**Start Well Children’s Programme** – Setting up a project to deflect inappropriate hospital admissions for children from A&E which could be treated locally in primary care.

**Early Intervention and Prevention Redesign and Recommission** - leading the first aspect of transforming how Early Intervention and Prevention services are delivered across Oldham’s Health and Social Care platform. Implementing the first phase of this programme by re-visiting the Early Help aspect of service delivery, through service re-design, market engagement and a full procurement process.

**GDPR** – implementing controls and overall management of Subject Access, Disclosure Requests and related processes like Information Security Breaches, utilising where possible the new digital capabilities across Oldham Council to automate workflows and integrate with current or new applications.

The team have invested time this year in being ready for new business development opportunities by registering on the appropriate procurement portals and documenting case studies. Subject to the needs of Oldham Council we expect to further build on the success this year by bidding for external contract opportunities which align to Unity’s core competences and business plan.

### 3.7 Apprenticeships & Community Engagement

The year ended having successfully recruiting or upskilling 19 new Apprenticeships enabling us to support the young people in Oldham borough. In addition to this, Unity provided 17 work experience places across the Company and maintained close engagement with groups such as Get Oldham Working, Positive Steps and the Accelerate / Elevate mentoring programme with Oldham College. This work has been recognised with the Careers and Enterprise Company listing Unity as a Cornerstone Employer as well as shortlisting us for an award for increasing social mobility within Oldham. The success Unity have had with apprenticeship recruitment & work experience numbers led to an award at the 2019 Oldham Business Awards in the category of ‘supporting young people’.

#### **Apprenticeship Advisory Service**

Having developed a significant level of experience in the recruitment, management and development of Apprentices, Unity launched the Apprenticeship Advisory Service to help other employers recruit apprentices and to generate an additional revenue stream. Unity secured the first contract to provide apprenticeship consultancy services to a Company in Manchester. The client has provided positive feedback and discussions are now taking place to carry out further work for this client.

#### **Community Support**

Unity colleagues have completed 513 hours of volunteer work to support the local community taking part in key activities this such as:

- Mock interviews at the North Chadderton School, Radcliffe School & Oldham college;
- Oldham College Elevate and alleviate mentoring programme;
- Reach out mentoring programme



- Oldham Events (e.g.: Christmas Lights, Fireworks, Remembrance, Band contest);
- Speed networking sessions with young people of the Oldham borough alongside Q&A sessions, including in local primary schools;
- EDT (Engineering Development Trust) mentoring program;
- Community activity to support young people on national apprenticeship week; national careers week and GM Digital awareness day;
- Oldham Waterhead park, veg in the park initiative;
- Primary Engineer mentoring to encourage the take up of STEM careers.

We were pleased to provide Reuben's Retreat with £3,498.10 as a result of our 2018 fund raising within the Company via various events, cake sales, etc. This year the staff have chosen Maggie's Oldham as the charity of choice to support.

### **Supporting Local Employment**

In addition to our apprenticeships and supporting young people with work experience placements in various sectors of the business, the Company has:

- supported an additional 6 residents on the get Oldham working register with work experience placements with 2 individuals securing an apprenticeship;
- committed to supporting the Get Oldham Working programme by taking on traineeship placements within the Access Oldham team;
- been pleased to see 4 Unity apprentices (Oldham residents) progress into fulltime positions after the successful completion of their apprenticeship.

## **4 COVID-19**

Like most organisations, the Company has been impacted by Covid 19 but primarily this has been in relation to the way people work rather than any major reduction in output. The first few weeks did impact productivity as personnel were sent home to work and in some service areas it took time to re-set the technical arrangements to enable staff to function remotely. Also, we were impacted by the external environment which meant that the construction and property sectors were initially struggling to work as normal as they sought clarification on working guidelines. After a few weeks and following some government clarification, most third-party contractors re-started their works and our Highways and Property projects and inspection regimes recommenced.

By mid-April, the Company was providing most services successfully with only a few areas temporarily suspended. The latter included revenues collection that was postponed as part of a national initiative to stop the pursuit of debts from residents and businesses and cessation of enforcement action. Also, Access Oldham was closed down, with all customers routed instead via the contact centre, new help line or online.

### **Staffing**

At the outset of lockdown, we identified 83 colleagues in the 'amber' category who were the first to be sent home, the majority of whom were able to work from home on laptops and Office 365. In addition, over the period, the Company has had 40 staff who have declared absence as a result of Covid-19, of which some have informed us this is due to being tested positive or suffering from symptoms and others self-isolating due to having family members who have experienced symptoms.

## **Finance**

Covid-19 is having an impact on Unity's Financial position as a number of the planned / expected projects due to commence in 2020/21 are currently on hold as a result of the current lockdown arrangements.

All Unity suppliers were placed on 7-day payment terms (the closest we could practically get to immediate payment terms) to help ensure maximum cash flow for our supplier base. In turn this placed additional cash pressure on the Company but due to a healthy bank balance and the Council also switching to monthly payments for our core fees, the Company maintained a positive cashflow throughout.

The Company has been providing significant and important support to the Council, communities and businesses as part of the community support provision to assist vulnerable, shielding and elderly citizens and also to enable businesses to access assistance (see below). All Covid related activity that has incurred new cost to the Company has been coded to a specific Covid cost code in order to capture all related costs. This information is provided to Council Finance each month to feed into the Council returns to MCHLG.

## **Supporting Vulnerable People**

Unity has played a key role in supporting the most vulnerable people in Oldham as part of the Team Oldham response to coronavirus. We have been actively engaged with the Community Bronze team to develop and deliver a range of key provision including:

### **Coronavirus Helpline**

The new community helpline was launched on 26 March and took 3½ days to set up from a standing start. The Helpline is delivered by staff who normally work in Access Oldham using our Contact Centre infrastructure supported by our IT service. These staff were made available as Access Oldham was closed as part of the initial response to the pandemic. The service receives incoming calls from residents requiring support and makes outbound calls to residents who have been identified as particularly vulnerable. A triage process helps establish needs with a focus on ensuring the most vulnerable (who have no friends or family to help them) that lead to referrals to the virtual place-based hubs to ensure they get the essential food, supplies and prescription medication they need.

### **Enabling a more co-ordinated response / Databases and CRM**

A key strand of supporting work to help enable a more co-ordinated and informed response has involved the development and delivery of a new database that draws in information from various sources. This is accessed via a new technology response system that has been rapidly developed with input from Unity ICT, BCS and council colleagues in a real collaborative 'agile' manner. This will enable the Helpline and Hub Teams to work effectively and efficiently by managing repeat contact and feeding in important sources of data. The initial operating capability based upon a minimal viable product was produced in less than 3 weeks from project brief to go live.

A similar piece of work to develop a database to support the processing of Business Grants has been developed with colleagues from ICT, Finance, Revenues & Bens and Economy.

## **Digital and Remote Working**

Unity ICT have been incredibly busy during the pandemic, which necessitated a massive acceleration of the Council's remote working capability and the enablement of technology to support the new digital way of working as a result of the crisis. This has enabled a step change in the way of working and has been a key enabler to ensuring that the operations and ways of working associated with maintaining priority services has been achieved.

This included the issuing of more laptops and mobile phones and the rollout, with supporting knowledge transfer, of MS Teams. It has involved a rapid scaling of the Technology Platform implemented as part of the Council's ICT Strategy and supporting Investment Plan. In total, over 400 additional devices have been added to our Technology infrastructure and issued to staff since the lockdown started. The Council infrastructure which was designed to support a remote workforce has been scaled up to accommodate a remote capability of 80% plus of Team Oldham staff.

Unity ICT have:

- Deployed Office365 technology (including MS Teams and SharePoint) to support remote working;
- Created MS Teams & SharePoint sites to support the Gold, Silver & Bronze Teams;
- Worked with Constitutional Services to enable virtual Council meetings to ensure the democratic process can continue remotely;
- Implemented new remote contact centre technology to enable customer service teams to work from home;
- Assisted the set up the PPE hub in the QE Hall with technology to support the distribution of PPE;
- Made significant changes to the way we manage end user devices to reflect that devices are remote permanently;
- Supported Community Response activity in delivering new Help Line, MS Dynamics response platform and helped manage many remote working challenges.

## **Supporting Business and Residents**

The Revenues Team has been working seven days a week in order to help the Council issue the new business rates grants provided by the Government, handling the enquiries from worried business owners at this time and processing applications. The team receive the queries via either an online webform or via phone and then business owners provide a claim via a webform.

We have also re-profiled Council Tax payments over the year for residents who are struggling due to the current situation and are dealing with these requests within 24 hours.

The Benefits Team have seen a large increase in claims for help with Council Tax and they have been working hard to deal with these claims as swiftly as possible to reduce the worry and financial burden for residents during this difficult time.

Our Accounts Payable Team have also worked hard to get up to date with immediate payments for suppliers to ensure that businesses are supported effectively with cash flow.

## 5 Financial Summary

Unity generated a surplus (before tax and Council recharges) of £257,000 compared to a forecast of £247,000, meaning a favourable variance of £10,000. This is after paying the Council some £1.1m in respect of accommodation and charges for support services.

Following approval at the last Board meeting, a dividend of £250,000 was paid to the Council on 26 March. This is considered a very satisfactory financial outcome in what has been a challenging year.

Results for the year to 31 March are summarised in the table below and a summary of results by service is shown in the table at Appendix 3.

<b>Unity Partnership Ltd Contribution before Overhead and Council Recharges to 31st March 2020 – overall view</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>Full Year Budget</b>	<b>Variance</b>
	£000	£000	£000
Core Fee	12,138	12,129	9
OMBC Variable Income	6,876	7,053	(176)
Schools & Academies	950	885	65
External	982	861	120
<b>Total income</b>	<b>20,946</b>	<b>20,928</b>	<b>18</b>
Pay	(12,079)	(12,244)	165
Agency	(3,002)	(3,092)	91
Other direct cost of sales	(3,905)	(3,570)	(334)
<b>Gross Profit</b>	<b>1,960</b>	<b>2,021</b>	<b>(60)</b>
Council Charges	(1,103)	(1,103)	0
Other Expenditure	(600)	(671)	71
<b>Net Profit for the Year before Taxation and dividends</b>	<b>257</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>10</b>
Taxation	0	0	0
Dividends	(250)	(250)	0
<b>Net Surplus for the Year</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>(3)</b>	<b>10</b>

Specific financial challenges have included the following:

The Payroll service has faced considerable challenges in respect of dealing with the existing systems whilst implementation of the new system continues. Costs associated with the resource strain have either been covered through the HRP programme (e.g. backfill of posts) or absorbed by Unity where possible. The new system will now be implemented in the autumn which is later than initially planned due to Covid 19 impact. Therefore, the additional challenges, relating to increased staffing to cope with the myriad of manual processes required to support the existing systems continue longer than initially planned.

The Business Consultancy service has changed significantly during the year with a much-reduced income stream resulting in the establishment reducing from eleven staff to six. However, there is now a developing pipeline of work and the team is in a strong position to take advantage of new opportunities in 2021-22.

Covid-19 impacted during the latter part of March leading to reduced income in the Highways and ICT services. This will have a significant impact upon Unity's financial results in 2020-21 but fortunately had less of an impact in the current year.

### **Balance Sheet**

The balance sheet as at 31 March 2020 is summarised below and shows that net assets have remained at £2.6m since the start of the financial year.

	31-Mar-20	01-Apr-19
	£000	£000
Fixed assets	273.8	36.2
Work in Progress	399.6	260.0
Debtors	3422.2	2,727.0
Cash	599.6	476.5
Creditors	(2,113.6)	(925.9)
<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>2,581.6</b>	<b>2,573.8</b>

#### Notes:

Fixed assets have increased during the year as a result of an ICT refresh programme, upgrading all employees up to Office 365.

Work in Progress (WIP) represents project work for the previous month not yet invoiced.

Debtors has increased by £0.7m which is due to the increased invoicing at the end of March in order to comply with the council's final accounts timetable. Within debtors, £165,000 (previous period: £305,000) is now over 6 months old and a provision of £25,000 for doubtful debts is included within the accounts.

Creditors has increased by £1.2m because until 1<sup>st</sup> April 2019 Unity operated an interim finance system whereby suppliers were on 7-day payment terms.

## Financial Outlook for 2020/21

The Covid-19 outbreak impacted on the latter part of Quarter 4 in 2019-20 and continues to impact in 2020-21. Significant factors include:

- A reduction in certain variable income due to delays to capital projects;
- An increase in the costs of the new payroll system which has been delayed, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, from July to October;
- Increased expenditure on specific Covid-19 related activities particularly in relation to ICT support. The Company is providing returns to the Council Finance to feed into their own returns to MCHLG and has been provided some funding from the national funding allocation, but this will not cover all expenditure.

The above financial challenge is partly mitigated by cost saving measures the Company undertook last year. Alongside the additional income from the Council in respect of Covid-19 related activities means that, based upon the start position set out in April, the financial outlook did remain reasonably positive for 2020-21.

The level of capital programme activity that is ongoing or in the pipeline, particularly in relation to Highways Infrastructure and ICT technology change suggests a productive year ahead for these teams.

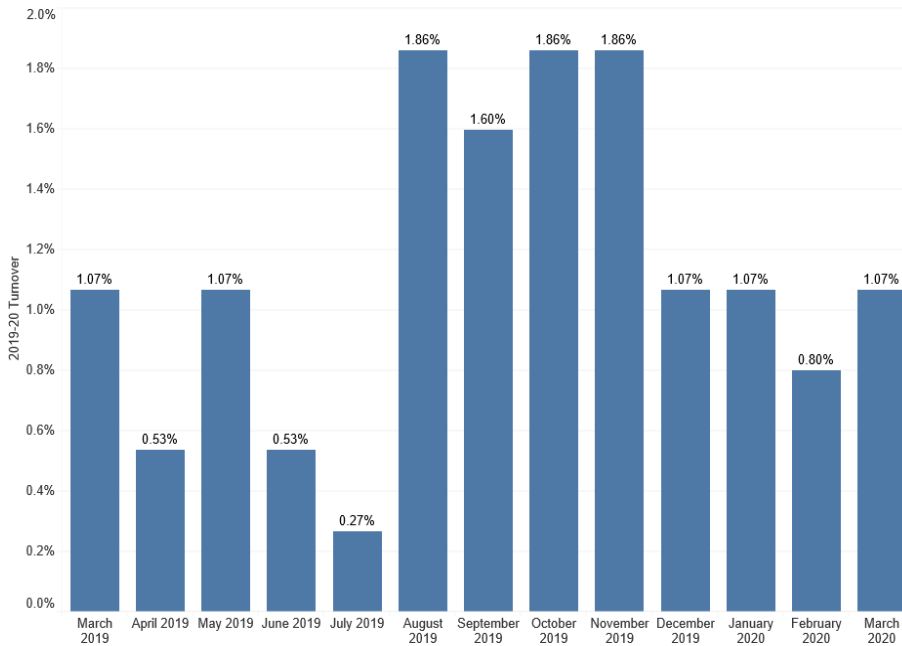
However, the uncertainty over Covid and potential impacts of any further lockdowns or second wave of the virus continues to be a key risk to the 2020/21 financial and commercial delivery. In addition, as our Shareholder Council is navigating the challenging financial environment, we expect there will be a requirement to develop further initiatives and efficiencies in order to mitigate the impact that Covid has had on Council finances. So, it is expected that 2020/21 will be a challenging year.

## Appendices

1. Workforce Metrics – Key data
2. Performance data – Customer focus
3. FY2019/20 KPI results; with year on year comparison

**WORKFORCE METRICS – KEY DATA**

**Staff Turnover**



As at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 Unity employed 371 permanent staff, equating to 341 FTE.

NB: In addition to the FTE, the operating model means that the Company utilises a large amount of agency staff to support variable projects that are not core funded, circa 35-40 typically at any one time depending upon volume of work

**There were 44 leavers throughout FY20 meaning a c13% turnover rate.**

Among the most common reasons for leaving Unity were seeking better opportunities, improved salaries, retirement.

For information, average salary in Unity is £26,500 and average length of service is 12.8 years.

**Sickness Absence**

There was a total of 4,511 recorded sick days during 19/20 that results in a **sickness absence rate of 5.8%**

**Reasons across departments**

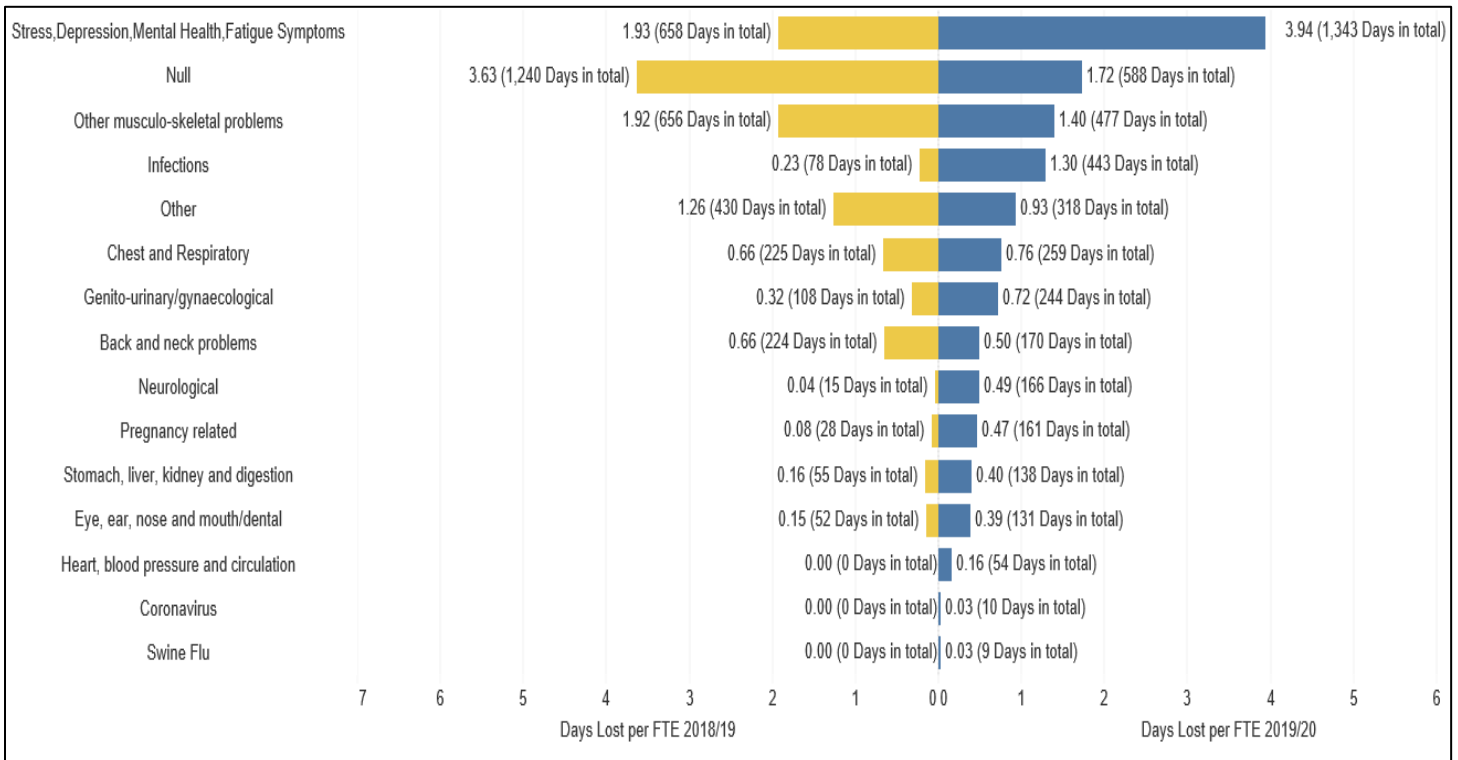
	Revenue & Benefits	Property	ICT	HR & Payroll	Highways
Stress, Depression, Mental Health, Fatigue Symptoms	1.95	1.05	0.13	0.40	0.40
Null	0.59	0.33	0.27	0.09	0.45
Other musculo-skeletal problems	0.08	0.18	0.97	0.18	0.00
Infections	0.83	0.22	0.06	0.17	
Other	0.14	0.13	0.50	0.17	

The adjacent heat map shows the average sick day reasons per employee across each department, e.g. stress, depression, etc was responsible for a total 1,343 days across Unity, equating to an average of 1.95 days per employee in Revenues and Benefits.

Sickness recording improved YoY, however 'no reason' still covered 588 sickness days compared to 1,240 days in FY19.



**Sickness Absence – 18/19 v 19/20 comparison**  
(Days Lost per FTE)

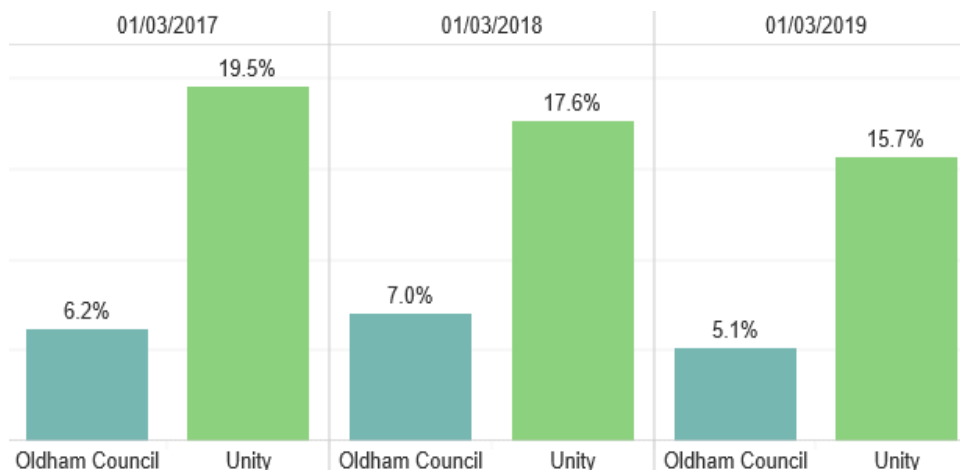


**Gender Pay Gap**

As an employer of more than 250 people Unity Partnership must publish its gender pay gap annually by 30<sup>th</sup> March.

This measures the difference in average gender earnings across an organisation or labour market without taking account of the relative value of the work being delivered.

The pay gap within Unity is reducing year on year but remains high and an assessment is underway to ascertain what positive measures can be used to continue the gap reduction.



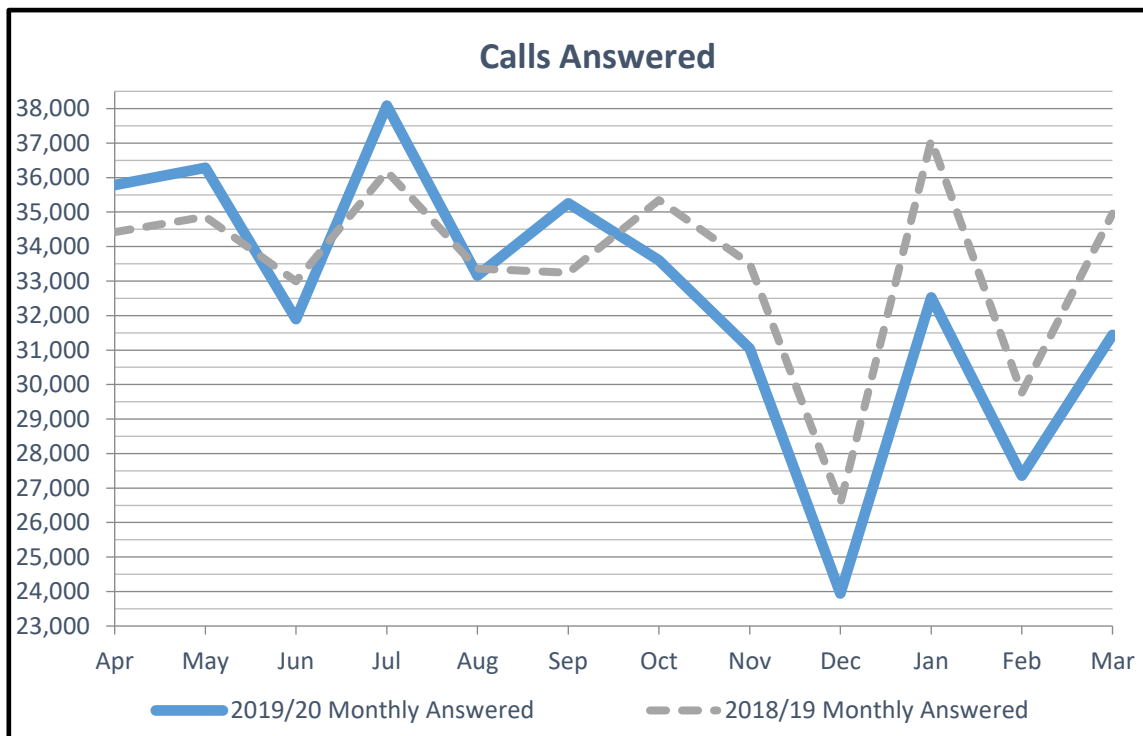
**Performance – Customer Focus**

The following tables provide information on some key areas of customer performance, this includes external and internal customers. The first table provides a high-level overview of overall combined contact in both Access Oldham and the Contact Centre:

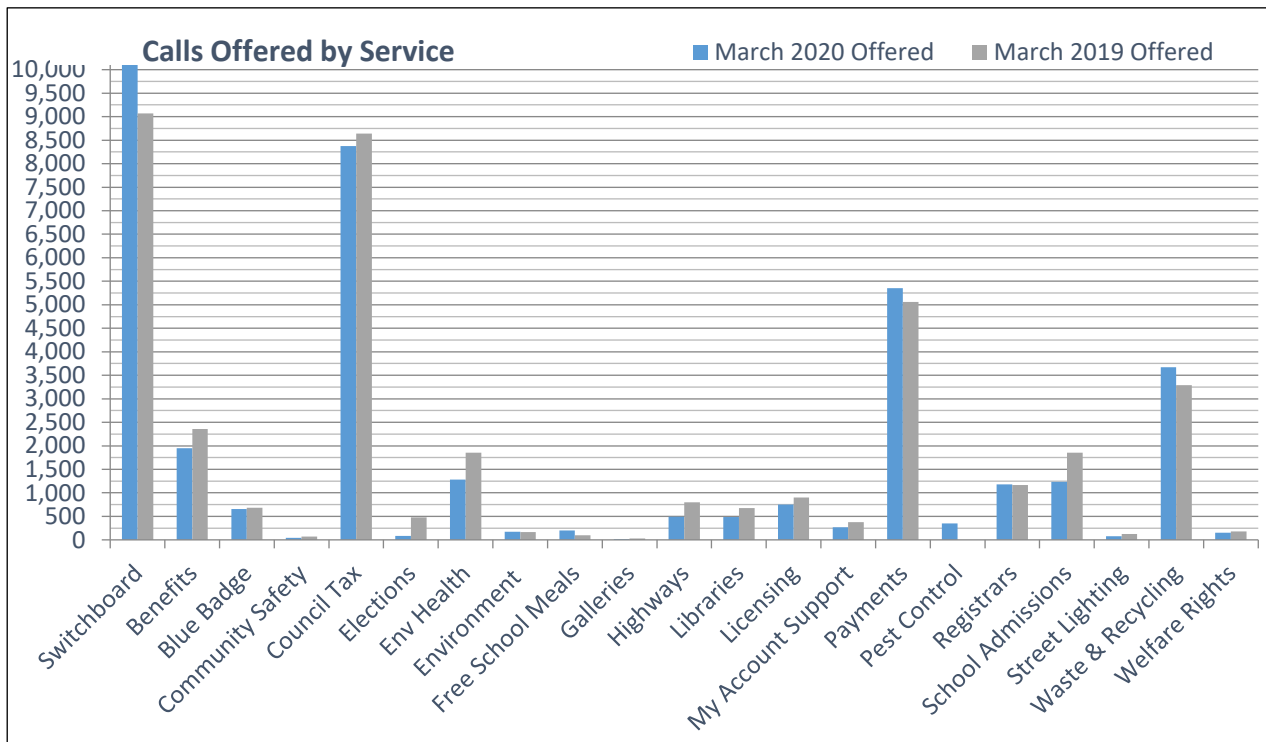
Access Oldham (AO) and Contact Centre (CC)	Vol	Perf
<i>(AO) Face to face interviews</i>	34,800	n/a
<i>(AO) Face to face interviews held within 30 mins</i>	34,000	97.9%
<i>(CC) Phone calls answered from total offered</i>	390,000	89.9%
<i>(CC) Emails answered in one working day</i>	25,000	100%

Contact Centre Performance

This following table indicates the overall number of calls that have been answered in the contact centre, overall it shows a slight decline on the volumes for the previous year with similar trend patterns for month / season variation.

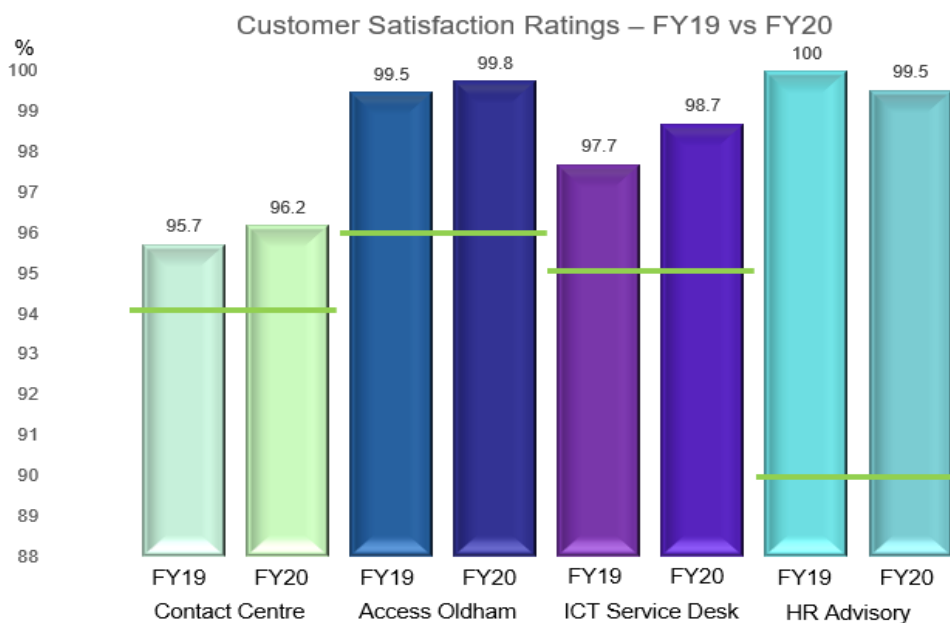


The following table provides a breakdown of calls by Service area. The high-volume Service area contact remains similar to last year with the Switchboard and Council Tax handling the most, followed by Payments and Waste / Recycling.



**Customer Satisfaction**

Overall customer satisfaction, based on a survey conducted by Service areas (a total of 7,550 surveys were responded to), continues to demonstrate extremely high levels of achievement. However, the Company recognises that there can be small levels of discontent that may have a disproportionate impact on corporate reputation and on customer quality and outcomes at individual case level. We continue to seek improvements and take each case of dissatisfaction seriously, once reported to us.



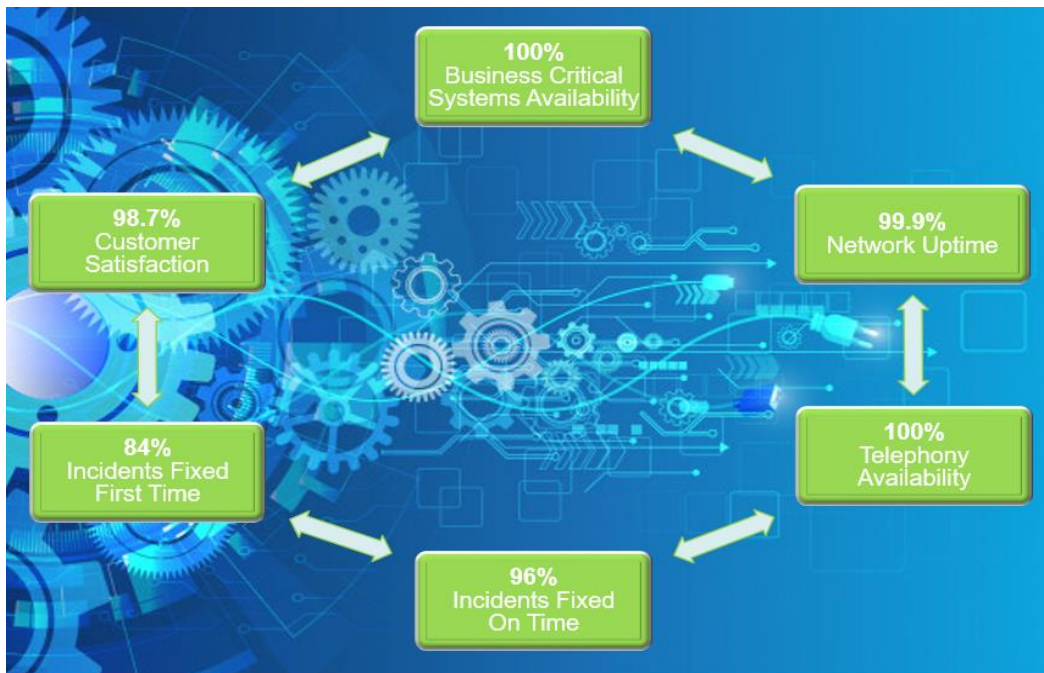
Revenues & Benefits – Key Performance Information

Collection activity was impacted by Covid 19 at the end of the year, as an embargo was enforced on enforcement activity and proactive engagement with debtors was ceased. The collection rates were already under pressure during the year, although we remained hopeful of attaining a similar level of collection to 18/19 until Covid 19 impacted.

Collections	Val	Perf
<i>Council Tax – FY19/20</i>	<i>£105m</i>	<i>94.1%</i>
<i>Business Rates – FY19/20</i>	<i>£56.3m</i>	<i>96.2%</i>
<i>External debtors</i>	<i>£61.0m</i>	<i>99.5%</i>
<i>Council Tax arrears (prior to April 2019)</i>	<i>£3.2m</i>	<i>9.7%</i>
<i>Business Rates arrears (prior to April 2019)</i>	<i>£1.7m</i>	<i>23.1%</i>

ICT Service Desk and Business Critical System Availability:

All ICT performance targets were achieved; some of the key areas are shown in the table below:



**FY20 KPI results; with year on year comparison**
**Unity Performance Indicators as at March 2020 - Council Service Provision**

KPIs rated green if meeting contractual target; amber if contractual target not met; red if target is not met by a significant margin or is of significant importance.

Service	Ref.	Short Description	Unit	Monitoring Period	Reporting Period	Target (Contractual)	Commentary	Freq	FY20	FY19
Social Value	SV1	The Partner shall recruit at least 11 apprentices per annum. (Cumulative KPI)	No.	Monthly	Annual	11	Recruited 19 apprentices during FY20, including 11 post half year.	Annual	173%	110%
								Annual	19	22
Social Value	SV2	The Partner shall provide 500 hours of volunteering activities within Oldham Borough at no charge to the Council in each financial year. (Cumulative KPI)	No.	Monthly	Annual	500	Majority of volunteering hours were at 3 locations. Chadderton FC re leadership and awareness training with secondary school pupils, the Food Bank and OMBC bonfire.	Annual	100%	102%
								Annual	502	510
Consultancy	BC1	The Partner shall provide 600 business transformation hours to the Council, at no charge, i.e. approx 50 per month. (Cumulative KPI)	No.	Monthly	Annual	600	Approx 100 transformation days remaining in FY20; agreed for balance to be utilised in FY21 for HR Payroll programme.	Annual	504	600
ICT	IT1	Availability of Business Critical and Platinum Services	%	Monthly	Monthly	97.00%	All business critical and platinum services were available 100% of the time during FY20.	Month	100%	100%
ICT	IT2	Network availability (uptime)	%	Monthly	Monthly	97.00%		Month	99.89%	99.89%
ICT	IT3	Telephony availability	%	Monthly	Monthly	97.00%		Month	100%	100%
ICT	IT4	Service Desk - All incidents fixed (within agreed timescales)	%	Monthly	Monthly	93.00%	The team performed well to end March only 0.03% away from achieving the monthly target. However, the average for the year is significantly above expected level.	Month	96.07%	95.79%
ICT	IT5	Service Desk - Incidents First Time Fix (within agreed timescales)	%	Monthly	Monthly	55.00%	First time fix results during February and March has dipped the average for FY20 to just below 84%. The vast majority of customers are satisfied with the service they receive from ICT Helpdesk. Note - surveys are sent to all customers.	Month	83.97%	84.13%
ICT	IT6	Service Desk - Customer satisfaction	%	Monthly	Monthly	80.00%		Month	98.69%	97.70%
Contact Centre	CC1	Customer satisfaction	%	Monthly	Quarterly	89.00%		Month	96.18%	95.72%
Contact Centre	CC2	Emails responded to within one business day	%	Monthly	Quarterly	95.00%	100% performance maintained. Average monthly email volume for FY20 was 2,260. Majority of email contacts were about Waste & Recycling and Highways. Monthly performance report shared with OMBC details email categories.	Month	100%	100%
Contact Centre	CC3	Calls answered on the combined queues and the switchboard	%	Monthly	Quarterly	89.00%	32,500 calls was the average amount of calls offered each month. Target for answering met with an understandable dip in performance during March.	Month	89.59%	93.46%
Access Oldham	AQ1	Customer satisfaction	%	Monthly	Quarterly	94.00%	100% customer satisfaction maintained month on month since June. No results recorded for March-20 due to Covid-19.	Month	99.75%	99.48%
Access Oldham	AQ2	Face-to-face customers who commence a private interview within 30-minutes of arrival	%	Monthly	Quarterly	90.00%	Up to end of Feb - approx 38,000 face to face interviews conducted over the year with c98% commencing within 30 minutes. Average of 134 interviews held per day. No results recorded for March-20 due to Covid-19.	Month	97.81%	93.30%
Benefits	B1	Right Time Indicator (NI181): Time taken to process housing/Council Tax benefit (new claims & change events)	Days	Monthly	Annual	13	Average of 9.5 days through FY20 to process new benefit claims and amendments.	Annual	9.5	10.5
Benefits	B2	Accuracy of processing claims (includes financial errors only)	%	Monthly	Quarterly	94.00%		Month	95.52%	95.60%
Benefits	B3	Information required to complete the year-end subsidy claim form and year-end accounts to be submitted within agreed timescales	Date	Annual	Annual	25-Apr-19	Note - FY20 submission was also on time during April 20.	Annual	On time submission	On time submission

Benefits	B3	Information required to complete the year-end subsidy claim form and year-end accounts to be submitted within agreed timescales	Date	Annual	Annual	25-Apr-19	Note - FY20 submission was also on time during April 20.	Annual	On time submission	On time submission
Council Tax	CT1	Achievement of in-year Council Tax collection (Cumulative KPI)	%	Monthly	Annual	94.60%	The collection figure of 94.05% is lower than anticipated due to the Covid 19 pandemic that affected March 20 collection rate.	Annual	94.05%	94.46%
Revenues	ET1a	Achievement of in-year Council Tax collection (Cumulative KPI)	£m	Monthly	Annual	-	In 19/20 the cash collection compared to FY19 increased by £6.1m	-	£104.8m	£98.7m
Revenues	CT2	Achievement in former year Council Tax (Cumulative KPI)	£m	Monthly	Annual	-	Cash collection in FY20 is £307k lower than FY19	-	£3.2m	£3.5m
Business Rates	BR1	Achievement of in-year Business Rates collection (Cumulative KPI)	%	Monthly	Annual	96.94%	The collection figure of 96.18% is lower than anticipated due to the Covid 19 pandemic that affected March 20 collection rate.	Annual	96.18%	97.22%
Revenues	ET1a	Achievement of in-year Business Rates collection (Cumulative KPI)	£m	Monthly	Annual	-	Cash collection in FY20 is £1.7m lower than FY19 however the net debit in 19/20 was £1.2m lower than in 18/19, i.e. £58.5m FY20 and £59.7m FY19.	-	£56.3m	£58.0m
Revenues	BR2	Collection of former years' Business Rates (Cumulative KPI)	£m	Monthly	Annual	-	Cash collection in FY20 increased by £252k compared to FY19	-	£1.65m	£1.30m
Accounts Payable	AP1	Invoices keyed to Agresso and paid to terms of 30 days	%	Monthly	Annual	99.00%	All KPIs achieved on annual basis, however did not achieve in March 2020 due to COVID-19 lockdown and time taken set up home working.	Month	99.64%	100%
Accounts Payable	AP3a	Invoices paid by BACS	%	Monthly	Monthly	99.00%		Month	99.61%	99.68%
Accounts Payable	AP3b	Invoices paid by cheque	%	Monthly	Monthly	1.00%		Month	0.39%	0.32%
Accounts Receivable	AR1	Debt created in previous financial year collected by 31 March of the contract year. (Cumulative KPI)	%	Monthly	Annual	98.00%	All KPIs achieved on an annual basis. All invoices on hold are removed at the end of March.	Annual	99.46%	99.50%
Accounts Receivable	AR2	Debts collected in < 45 days (start of financial year) (Cumulative KPI)	%	Monthly	Annual	65.00%	All KPIs achieved on an annual basis. All invoices on hold are removed at the end of March.	Annual	88.38%	81.78%
Accounts Receivable	AR3	Debts collected in < 75 days (start of financial year) (Cumulative KPI)	%	Monthly	Annual	86.00%	All KPIs achieved on an annual basis. All invoices on hold are removed at the end of March.	Annual	95.03%	91.45%
Highways	HT7	RFS Workstream: % of service requests responded to in 7 working days	%	Monthly	Monthly	95.00%	Highways service requests are categorised as follows for FY20; Highways Maintenance 60%, Traffic 23%, Drainage 12%. Highways maintenance resolved 98% of queries within 7 days, whereas Traffic resolved 75% to target against a backdrop of a number of team member changes. Drainage resolved 67% of queries within 7 days. However, the team received 53% of annual queries in the 4 month period between Aug-Nov due to flooding incidents. Additional flooding in Feb also had an adverse impact on performance.	Month	87.91%	91.40%
HR Advisory	HA1	Customer Satisfaction	%	Monthly	Annual	85.00%		Quarterly	99.52%	100%
HR Advisory	HA2	Instances of long term sickness with a case management in place.	%	Quarterly	Annual	TBC		Month	98.98%	76.00%
HR Payroll	HP1	Accuracy of issued documents	%	Monthly	Annual	TBC		Month	92.71%	86.33%
HR Payroll	HP2	Documents issued on time	%	Monthly	Annual	TBC		Month	66.57%	58.24%
HR Payroll	HP5	Payroll Accuracy	%	Monthly	Annual	99.20%	The current payroll process is a manual one with multiple checks. However, the accuracy rate is high with an average of 7 errors per month, from a range of 3,800 - 4,200 council employees during FY20.	Month	99.83%	98.35%
HR Payroll	HP6	Internal Audit Rating	Rating	Monthly	Annual	Adequate	Improved year on year from weak to adequate - new Payroll system expected to rectify inadequacies.	Annual	Inadequate	Weak
HR Payroll	HP7	Statutory Return Completion	%	Monthly	Annual	10 May 2019	Unity statutory report was submitted two days later than expected in May 2019. However, reporting has moved to monthly electronic submissions via Bury Payroll. This annual KPI is no longer required for FY21.	Annual	Late submission	On time submission