

Combined Assurance Status Report 2023/24



**Boston Borough Council
March 2024**

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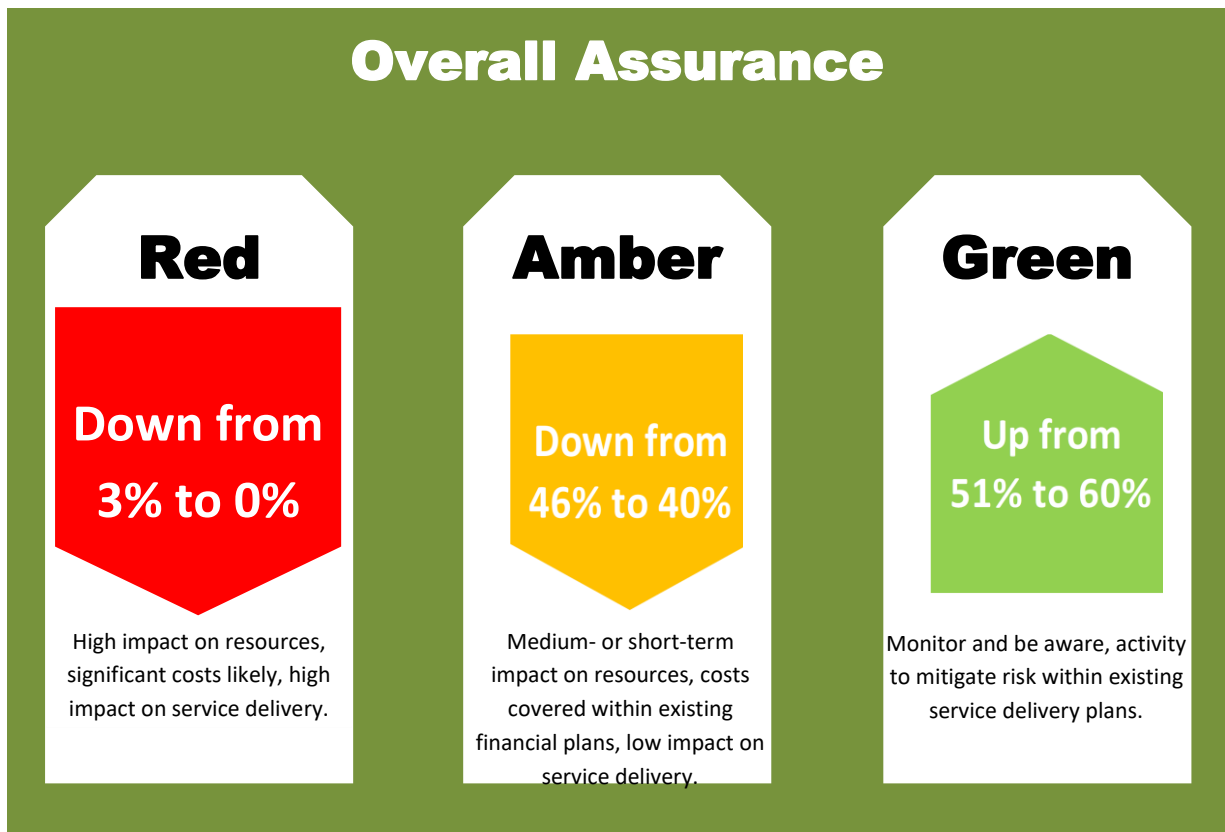
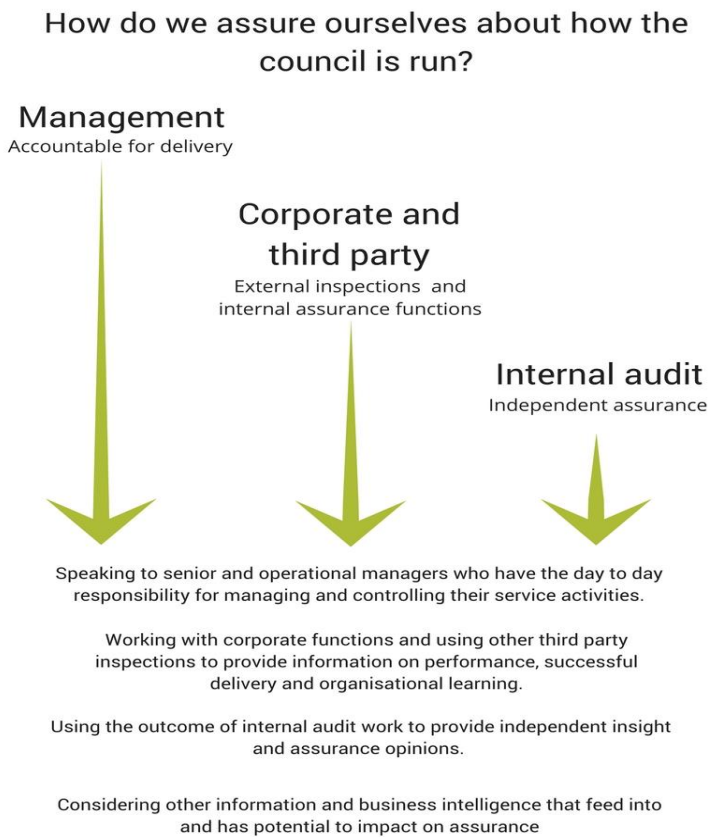
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Overview of Assurance

Combined assurance is a structured means of identifying and mapping the main sources and types of assurance in the council and coordinating them to best effect.

It enhances risk management by providing an effective and efficient framework of sufficient, regular and reliable evidence of assurance on organisational stewardship and management of major risks to the Council's success.

We do this using the 3 lines of defence model.



Chief Executive's Summary

The annual assurance process is of great value to me as Chief Executive.

The ability to triangulate the views of management with external peer accreditation provides both confidence in the way our services are managed, along with the clear visibility of areas where we believe there is room for improvement.

The latter helping us with resource and transformation planning.

The level of recorded assurance is a strength for the Council.

Key Messages

Strategic Risks

Good risk management is part of the way we work. It is about taking the right risks when making decisions or where we need to encourage innovation in times of major change – balancing risk, quality, cost and affordability.

This put us in a stronger position to deliver our goals and provide excellent services.

Our Strategic Risk Register is regularly reviewed, and our risks are being effectively managed.

Risk	Mitigating actions	Risk rating
Economic hardship	Taking action to improve housing standards, Working with local landlords; Support to local people on budgeting, training, and jobs; Political pressure on the government to address fuel bills nationally. Homes for Ukraine Host Property Inspections to ensure decent standard and properties not overcrowded.	High
Health	The opportunity to work with health partners to address long term health issues and deprivation, to raise awareness and promote good health, to support the sustainability of local health services Close working with LCC Public Health to ensure appropriate treatment measures are carried out.	Medium
Local economy	Town Deal and Levelling Up projects EP Team represented on County Wide LRF Group looking at issues of winter pressures / cost of living and industrial action.	Medium
Budget	Medium Term Financial Strategy; Budgetary process; Sound level of reserves Continued close monitoring	High
Civil contingency risks	Community Risk Register monitored by the Lincolnshire Resilience Forum (LRF); Work with partners to assess, monitor and plan for these risks together. Exercising of plans and training of staff.	Medium
Infrastructure risks	Sub-regional focus and briefings; Support with the evolution of ideas and solutions; Scrutiny Committee looking at the theme of highways/public transport.	Medium
Capital Programme	Robust programme and project management Regular and structured reporting mechanisms Robust and effective governance (financial and project) Effective working with partners and 3rd Party delivery Risk transference and mitigation	Medium
General Fund Assets	The restructure has taken place, so we now have the SOPM (Strategic & Operational Property Manager) for budget management, meetings job criteria and Strategic Property acquisitions and sales.	Low
Cyber Incident	Defence in depth in the form of firewalls, Mimecast and antivirus is deployed both at the perimeter and the internal Local Area Network. The ICT team play an active part in the East Midlands WARP (Warning, Advice and Reporting Point) which allow us to have early sight of issues being experienced across neighbouring Authorities and Agencies.	High

Key Messages

Risk	Mitigating actions	Risk rating
Technology infrastructure failure	The Council has a series of resilience arrangements in place through its service provider, PSPS. Work is continuous to ensure these are fit for purpose across a range of areas.	High
Implementation of the Environment Act 2021	The Lincolnshire authorities comprising the Lincolnshire Waste Partnership are working together to identify the impact of the Environment Act across the county.	High
Introduction of Extended Producer Responsibility	Officers closely follows all policy and practice changes being implemented by the Government and has responded to relevant consultations.	Medium
Identification and Suitability of future Depot Accommodation	Report in development for mitigating options	High
Waste Collection Round Pressures	Implementation of a round review to ensure staff are able to finish their working day on time and that all waste presented is collected. This will result in some collection day changes for some properties. Hire in Vehicles to enable waste collection	Medium
Capacity	Annual Delivery Plan in place to help manage the work programme. Services when bringing forward new initiatives to consider the capacity required and the need to bid for capacity if it can't be accommodated within existing resources.	High
Third Party Service Delivery	Assessment of business plans for key partnerships. Regular performance reports and monitoring meetings with third parties. Some key partnerships based on open book approach to financial monitoring. Regular contract meetings in place to manage risk.	Medium
External Communication	External communications are quality checked by the Communications Team to ensure that the messaging is effective and relevant to its audience.	Medium
Retention of staff	The workforce strategy is aligned across the 3 Councils. A development programme is in place to assist with both personal and professional development and to further develop the talents of individual employees.	Medium
Service Delivery	Staff resources maximised under the Partnership. Working with external partners to deliver shared priorities. HR support on recruitment and retention.	Medium
Internal Communications	Internal communications approach has been reviewed. There isn't a one size fits all approach for the Council/Partnership given the breadth of services provided and this is reflected in the internal communications model.	High

Key	Risk
Very High /High	High impact on resources, significant costs likely, high impact on service delivery
High/Medium	Medium or short-term impact on resources, cost covered within existing financial plans, low impact on service delivery
Medium/Low	Monitor and be aware, activity to mitigate the risk within existing service delivery plans / management arrangements

Key Messages

Deputy Chief Executive - Communities

Refuse and Recycling, Health and Safety, Play Areas, Grounds Maintenance, Tree Risk Assessment, Public Conveniences – External, Public Conveniences – Internal, Commercial Services, Street Scene, Green Waste, Depot, Fleet management and Maintenance, Safeguarding, PSPS Customer Service liaison, Wellbeing, Affordable Homes and supported Housing Growth, Homelessness, Housing Standards, Rough Sleeping, Housing Advice Triage, Housing Register, Temporary Accommodation, Housing Strategy, Housing Assistance (DFG and other grants), Community Safety, CCTV, ASB, Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Community and Voluntary Sector, Community Lottery, Cost of Living, Licensing, Emergency Planning, Land Charges, Environmental Health - Food Safety, Home Energy Advice and Retrofit Team, Building Control, Carbon Reduction, Climate Change, Parkwood Leisure, Culture, Recruitment and Retention.

Critical Activities

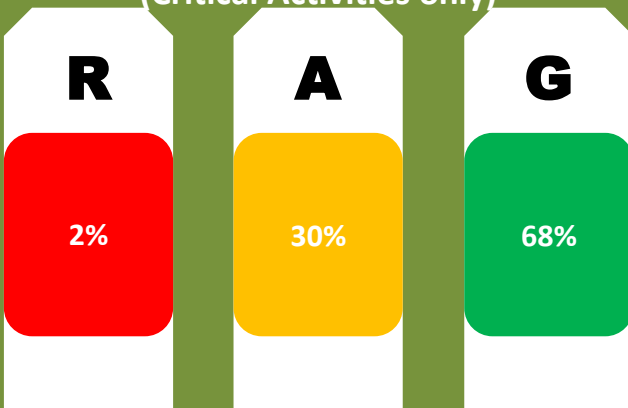
Public Conveniences - External
Homelessness
Housing Advice Triage
Housing Strategy
Building Control
Home Energy Advice and Retrofit Team
Carbon Reduction
Climate Change
Recruitment and Retention

During 2023/24 the Communities Directorate has been able to mobilise its resources effectively to meet the aims and objectives of Boston Borough Council to achieve better outcomes for local people. As part of the infrastructure associated with the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership the Directorate has been able to deliver with greater resilience initiatives such as the Government’s Household Support Fund and work to make the Borough a safer place through investment for example in CCTV infrastructure, whilst taking forward important Borough initiatives such as the successful tendering of a new leisure provider (Parkwood) at Geoff Moulder Leisure Centre and the development and adoption of the Boston Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan that covers the four thematic areas of 1) Clean and Safe 2) Open for Business 3) Culture and Events and 4) Transformation.

During the last year, our work with the voluntary sector has also been further enhanced as a consequence of the South and East Lincolnshire Community Lottery and the South and East Lincolnshire Crowd (crowd fund) with considerations well underway to develop a Trusted Volunteer Scheme. The Communities Directorate has also developed a business development/action plan for the Guildhall in order to further focus resources on achieving Best Value at this key venue.

Overall Assurance

(Critical Activities only)



Critical Activities

Red	Amber
Depot	Refuse and Recycling
	Tree Risk Assessment

Key Messages

Deputy Chief Executive – Corporate Development

Transformation, Savings and Service Reviews

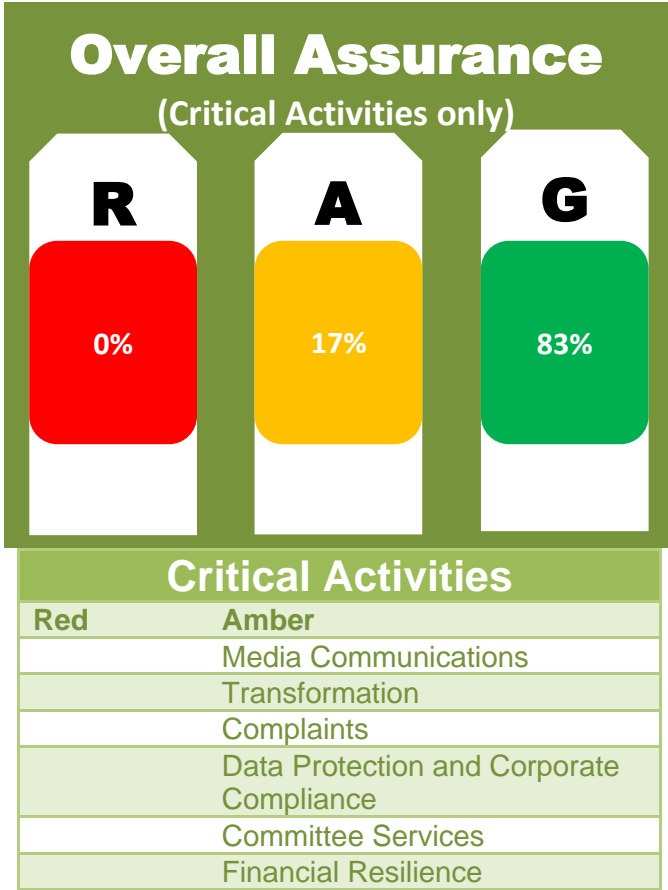
Training Plans and Budgets, Workforce Strategy & Culture, Media Communications, General Communications, Transformation, Risk Management, Consultation, Corporate Plan, Performance, Legal Services, Information Management, Complaints, Members Complaints, Data Compliance and Corporate Compliance, Expenses & Community Grants, FOIs, Member Training, Police & Crime Panel, Electoral Registration, Elections, Scrutiny Function, Committee Services, Procurement and Contract Management, Finance Skills and Knowledge, Corporate Governance, Financial Resilience, Transformation, Savings and Service Reviews, Constitution Alignment, Income Management, Rent Control, Tenancy and Estate Management, Cost of Living Crisis, Supported Accommodation Tenants, Right to Buy Schemes, Business Support, Maintenance of NEC System (Northgate), Decent Homes Capitol Investment Programme, Landlord Compliance, In - House Repairs Team, Aids and Adaptations.

This year has seen a continued programme of activity embedding governance arrangements across the three organisations supporting the partnership way of working that is now becoming more established. The Partnership Peer Review action plan is being regularly reviewed and reported upon with the imminent Boston Peer review now being actively prepared for. The redemption of debt in 2023/24 mitigated a significant risk in terms of the proposed changes to MRP impacting on the Councils historic debt.

The Transformation agenda has also seen significant activity with the establishment of an Innovations, Transformation and Efficiency board to support services in implementing service changes through the Workforce Development Strategy and service review proforma. An efficiency plan has also been developed to support the savings requirement in the 2024/25 budget alongside the continued efforts and lobbying around the challenges of IDB funding.

The key areas of Risk Management and Procurement have seen renewed focus and enhanced resources with a complete review of all Risks and the embedding of the team within PSPS to provide procurement advice a considerable step change from previous resource levels and the benefits of this approach are now being seen. Internal audit progress has improved throughout the year with us in a good position moving into 2024/25.

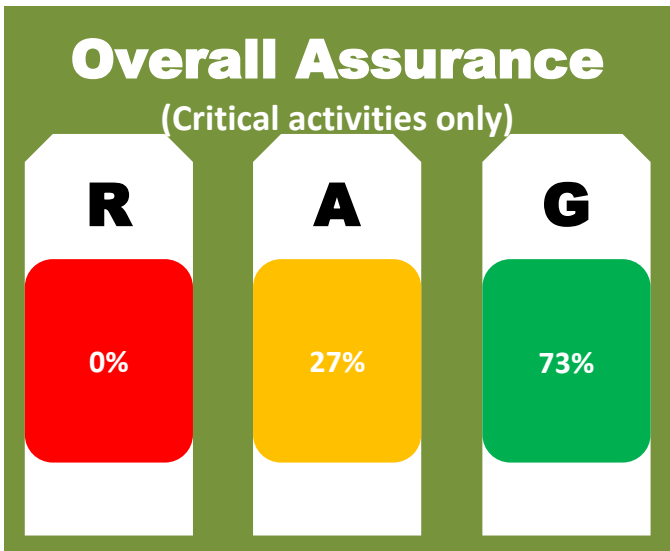
Finance continues to be an area of substantial focus with three budgets being set in challenging and unprecedented circumstances with impacts from international events and high inflation continuing to impact. In addition, the resourcing in this area continues to be incredibly challenging and we are working with PSPS closely in order to seek to address this and support the development of home-grown talent. Data protection and cyber security continue to be significant areas of focus for the Council.



Key Messages

Deputy Chief Executive – Programme Delivery & SIRO

Towns Fund Delivery, New Homes Capital Programme, Long Term Towns Fund, Levelling Up Funds PE21, SIRO, Crematorium and Cemeteries, BBC Car parks, Cleaning Caretakers, Public Conveniences, Riverside Industrial, Redstone Caravan Park, Strategic Asset Management, Land and Property, Princess Royal Sports Centre.



It is pleasing to note that there are no red rated activities.

The delivery of Towns Funds projects and the ownership of the PE21 / Rosegarth Square Levelling Up projects represents the biggest risk within the directorate as they are part of a £180m S&ELCP partnership wide delivery programme. However, there numerous tiers of governance within these schemes, including sponsorship meetings, monthly Major Projects Board oversight and regular presentations to members.

Other risks are part of normal day to day activities and are managed through our risk management processes.

From a SIRO perspective, no major issues have arisen during the year.

Critical Activities	
Red	Amber
None	Towns Fund Delivery
	Redstone Caravan Park
	Land and Property

Key Messages

Deputy Chief Executive - Growth

PE21

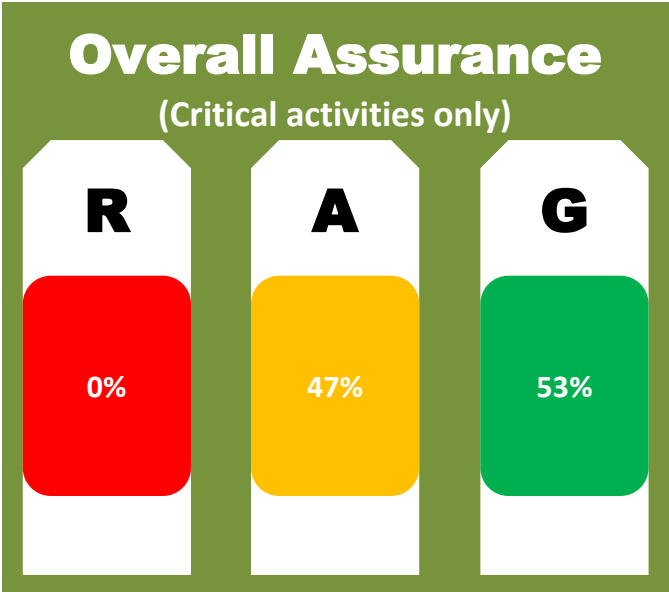
External Governance with Central Government Strategic contracts, Towns Fund Internal Governance, Towns Fund LA as Accountable Body, Towns Fund Inception to stage 4 delivery, Levelling Up, Investment & Growth, NPO Funding, External Funding - Heritage Lottery Fund, S106, Planning Policy (Local Plan), Heritage, Planning Enforcement, PE21, Development Management Control (processing planning applications, pre applications and appeals), South East Lincolnshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee.

The annual assurance maps for the Growth Directorate remains positive.

During the year, our reputation with Government, Partners and Local Businesses has been seen as exemplary.

We carry many challenges within the work programme due to the ambitious nature of activity.

Our performance in attracting investment, adhering to conditions of funding and delivery has been to a high standard.



Critical Activities	
Red	Amber
None	Towns Fund Internal Governance
	Towns Fund LA as Accountable Body
	Levelling Up
	Investment & Growth
	NPO Funding
	External Funding - Heritage Lottery Fund

Key Messages

Strategic Partnership Working

Health & Safety, General Procurement, Spend Analysis, Procurement Strategy, Contracts Register, Contract Management, HR strategy, Officers and Members Expenses, Recruitment, Payroll, Equality & Diversity, Employee Relations, Systems & Reporting, Pension Scheme, Customer Services, Telephony Enhancement Project, Complaints Legislation, Digital Transformation Projects, CRM, Income, Accounts Receivable, Accounts Payable, General Ledger, VAT, Procurement Cards, Treasury Management, Insurance, Budget Preparation & Management, Financial Staff Resilience, Working with External Audit, Control Account Reconciliations, New Income Management System, ICT and Digital Services, Council Tax, Recovery, Housing Benefits, Council Tax Support, CTS Fraud, Business Rates, ICT Governance, ICT Organisational, ICT Physical, ICT Technological, ICT People, ICT Applications, ICT Projects, ICT Compliance

Critical Activities
Financial Staff Resilience
Procurement Cards
Close Down of Accounts
Working with External Audit
New Income Management System
Recovery
Housing Benefits
Council Tax Support
ICT Physical
ICT Technological
ICT Projects
ICT Compliance
ICT Applications

A significant amount of effort has been put into the Partnership working with PSPS to address some key areas of focus around recruitment, retention and support for growing local talent in this area.

The new finance systems and processes still need further organisational embedding, and this work is underway and continues into 2023/24.

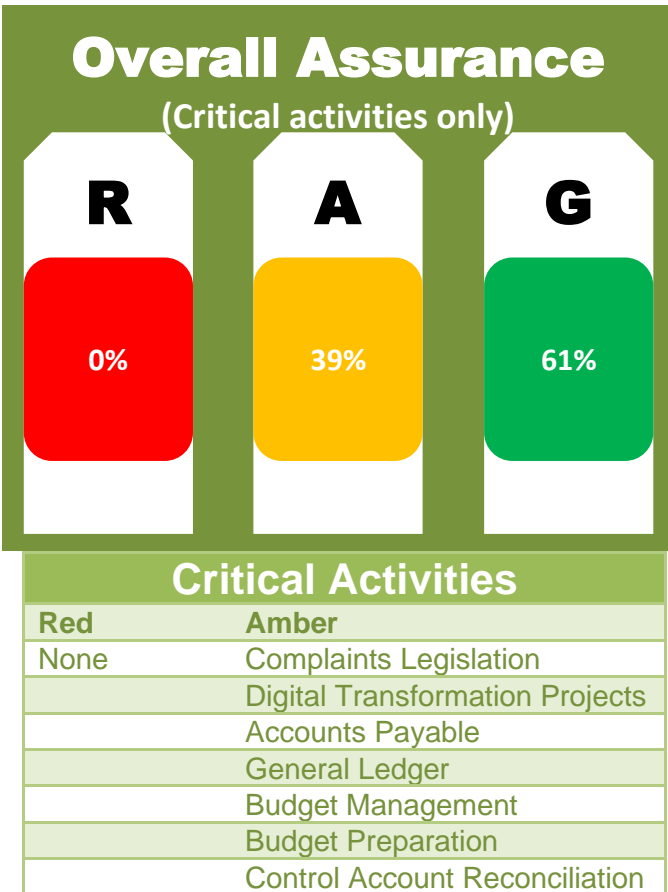
Significant focus has been needed to ensure the attainment of key deadlines for budgeting/year end and this work continues with the Statement for 2022/23 now signed off.

The specialist areas of the service continue to be under high demand particularly in respect of Capital, Treasury and VAT due to the complex nature of the Towns Fund/LUF projects and changes to the prudential and treasury framework.

Revenues, Business Rates and Benefits have supported further distributions of reliefs and resources following the award of financial support although the service is now moving toward a more pre-covid level is it still very challenging due to the economic circumstances currently being experienced.

ICT continues to be critical to our new way of working and further investments continue to be planned particularly to ensure that our data stays secure and within a modern and robust operating framework.

From a HR perspective the service continues to see high levels of activity across all services.



Key Messages

Key Projects

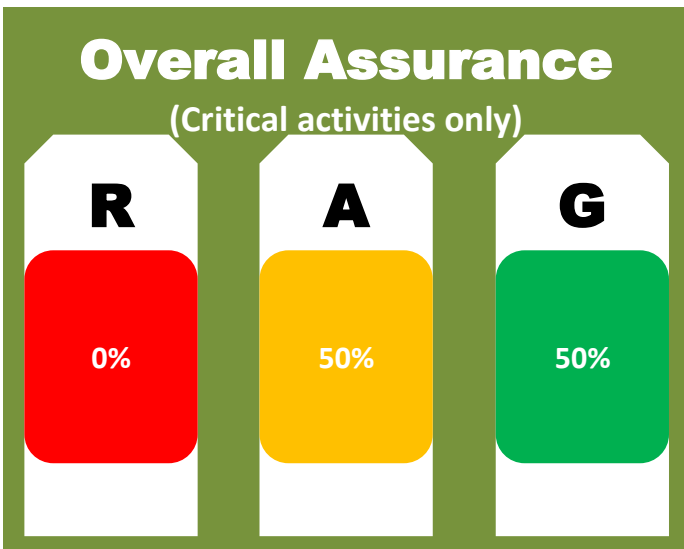
Commissioning of Volunteers, Number of specific applications/development projects – e.g. Towns Fund projects, Implementation of Uniform 2023, Nationally Significant Infrastructure projects, Sheltered Housing, Transformation Team.

During 2023/24 the Communities Directorate delivered a number of key projects within the borough of Boston. These included developing a Boston Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan that is taking forward 73 actions to improve the town centre covering the four themes of 1) Clean and Safe 2) Open for Business 3) Culture, Heritage and Events and 4) Transformation. The Directorate also led on the Borough’s first ever four day Christmas Festival that was held from 23rd November to 26th November 2023.

During this year projects linked to the voluntary and community sector (VCS) have continued to develop such as the South and East Lincolnshire Community Lottery and the South and East Lincolnshire Crowd (crowd fund) and schemes to help our most vulnerable citizens during the “cost of living crisis” such as the Household Support Fund have been delivered. Effective project management arrangements have ensured these schemes have been provided as required.

Work with the VCS is set to continue in 2024/25 with the anticipated development of a Trusted Volunteer Scheme.

We have embedded many positive workforce initiatives (and been shortlisted for LGC Workforce Award for our Future Leaders’ Programme) and we continue to drive delivery of our Digital Strategy that will support the savings agenda and continue to join up ICT.



Critical Activities	
Red	Amber
None	Commissioning of Volunteers
	Implementation of Uniform 2023
	Nationally Significant Infrastructure projects

Key Messages

Key Partnerships

The Council recognises that effective partnership working is key to the achievement of many of its goals and desired outcomes. In that regard it is essential that any partnerships entered into, or are currently in operation, deliver and their on-going relevance and effectiveness are continually evaluated.

Historic England, Arts Council England, Destination Lincs, LCC - South Lincolnshire Food Enterprise Zone, Town Boards, Environmental Agency, Housing Association Board, Housing Investment, Local Authority Housing Fund, Housing, Health & Care Delivery Group, Resettlement Scheme for Displaced Families, LCC.

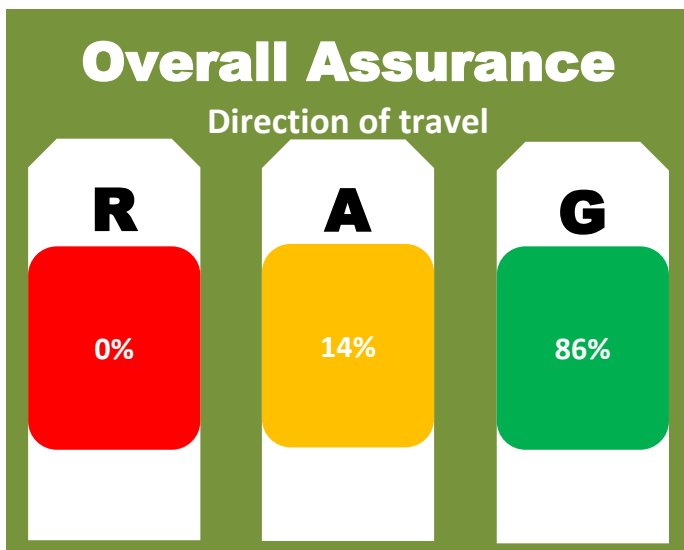
The Communities Directorate supports a number of key partnerships including the South and East Lincolnshire Community Safety Partnership, the Healthy Living Board and the South and East Lincolnshire Climate Action Network (SELCAN).

The Community Safety Partnership is delivering key actions/initiatives against the following thematic areas of 1) Safer Streets & Night-Time Economy 2) Anti-Social Behaviour 3) Hate Crime 4) The Safety of Women and Girls and 5) Vulnerability and Safeguarding.

The Healthy Living Board meets quarterly and supports work activity 'themed' around 5 'lever' areas: 1) Housing and Homelessness 2) Activity & Wellbeing 3) Environment and climate 4) Economic inclusion and 5) Working with Communities.

The South and East Lincolnshire Climate Action Network (SELCAN) has celebrated its first year of existence and consists of eight sub-groups who meet regularly throughout the year. They have each now agreed priority proposals for the coming twelve months. It has been a busy first year for this Partnership with a number of projects already being worked on, including: -

- A proposal to reduce emissions arising from courier deliveries, by promoting the use of collection points at commonly visited locations.
- Webinars to assist businesses across the sub-region, featuring topics including carbon foot printing advice, promoting the benefits of a circular economy, transitioning to renewable energy, resource auditing and monitoring, and communicating low carbon credentials.
- A proposal to assist agricultural businesses to understand and quantify their carbon footprints and



Partnership Assurance	
Red	Amber
None	Arts Council England
	Town Boards
	Environmental Agency

Key Messages

learn how to undertake energy audits, supported by infographics.

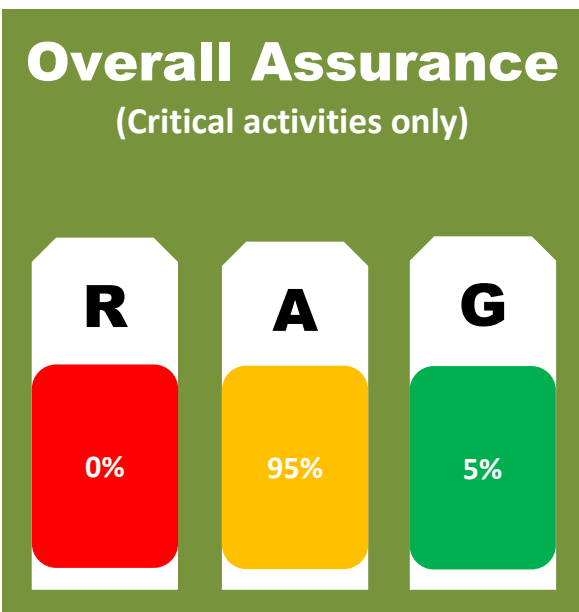
- A project which promotes the concept of 'right tree in the right place' and explores opportunities to protect and enhance our wildlife via more inclusive and interconnected landscape-scale habitat restoration, by utilising tools such as the emerging ELMS, Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies.
- A proposal which will support residents and businesses to access available funding to improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty.
- A proposal to promote technologies and behaviours that reduce water consumption across all domestic and commercial sectors and to support initiatives to improve the management of waterways and coastal areas thereby reducing flood risk and benefitting the natural environment by keeping water higher in the catchment for longer.
- A proposal around mapping of energy flows in and out of the sub-region with a focus on Anaerobic Digestion.
- Developing the first principles for an electric vehicle strategy for the sub-region
- As well as these projects, SELCAN has developed a logo, website, social media channels and a communications plan.

Key Messages

Emerging Risks

It is impingent on all managers to undertake effective risk management and attempt to minimise the impact of any risks should they materialise. Looking ahead and horizon scanning to identify any emerging risks is a pre-requisite and it is encouraging that this activity is being completed.

Transformation, Staffing, Impact on ICT services as a result of Transformation in SELCP, Implementation of Uniform at BBC, Rising costs of construction works, Environmental Act, Leisure Procurement, Repairs and Maintenance, Crematorium and Cemeteries, Guild Hall, H&S Events, Alignment, Payroll, Alignment Constitutions, Pension Scheme, UK Shared Prosperity Funding, Towns Funds Staff Capacity/Resources, Bidding for & Awarding Funds, PSPS Financial Reporting, End user operator for Towns Fund projects, Planning Software Systems alignment, National Infrastructure Projects, Reduction in planning fees income, Staffing Resources across the whole of Planning, Apprenticeships/Training, PSPS, Procurement, New guidance impact on service delivery and depot provision, Fleet - Environmental Issues, Leisure and Culture, Complaint Handling Code, Alignment, Greater strain on Corporate Governance Framework, Decent Homes 2, Damp & Moulds Standards, Carbon Reduction.



Critical Activities	
Red	Amber
	Transformation
	Staffing
	Impact on ICT services as a result of Transformation in SELCP
	Implementation of Uniform at BBC
	Environmental Act
	Rising costs of construction works
	Leisure Procurement
	Repairs and Maintenance
	Crematorium and Cemeteries
	Guild Hall
	PSPS
	H&S Events
	Alignment
	Payroll
	Alignment Constitutions
	Pension Scheme
	Towns Funds Staff Capacity/Resources
	PSPS Financial Reporting
	End user operator for Towns Fund projects
	Planning Software Systems alignment
	National Infrastructure Projects
	Reduction in planning fees income
	Staffing Resources across the whole of Planning
	Apprenticeships/Training
	Procurement
	New guidance impact on service delivery and depot provision
	Fleet - Environmental Issues
	Leisure and Culture
	Complaint Handling Code
	Alignment
	Greater strain on Corporate Governance Framework
	Decent Homes 2
	Damp & Moulds Standards
	Carbon Reduction

Key Messages

Some key pressures and risks continue to require attention to ensure appropriate mitigation such as matters impacting the public directly, for example the cost of living crisis and homelessness. The Well-Being and Community Leadership Division was created to be able to better apply resources against these and other risks and this is supported through key strategic documents such as the Lincolnshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy that the Council has signed up to. The Division through the Accessible Homes, Housing Enabling and Housing Strategy service is looking to commission work that will focus on the condition of the housing stock in the Borough and across the South and East Lincolnshire Councils Partnership area, in order to better target resources as we seek to drive up housing standards, supported by work towards a Private Sector Housing Strategy for the Council/Partnership.

Transformation work that is under consideration at this time is the provision of leisure and certain cultural facilities (the South Holland Centre in South Holland and the Embassy theatre in East Lindsey) and across South and East Lincolnshire as the Partnership explores any longer term opportunity to improve service delivery with enhanced efficiencies through a single contract for the sub-region. To help mitigate risks within this area of work, a Head of Special Projects (Leisure) has been recruited to in order to provide dedicated support/resources in this regard. This is helping the Leisure and Cultural Services Division focus on managing the important relationship with the current leisure provider (Parkwood) whose contract runs for three years (from the end of last year), whilst acknowledging they and others in the marketplace may well be interested in a future opportunity to deliver such services across the South and East Lincolnshire sub-region. The Leisure and Cultural Services Division also manages Council events and works with the Council's Safety Advisory Group and PSPS Health and Safety colleagues in order to seek to mitigate health and safety risks and that events are run safely.

A key risk last year was the need to recruit to key posts in Building Control. It is pleasing to note that during the year the Group Manager post for Building Control was successfully recruited to. The new Group Manager is reviewing service delivery during the forthcoming financial year to help improve the service and better mitigate against risks.

Work towards transforming Neighbourhood Services continues to provide a focus as the team look at current routing demands on waste collection rounds and ways to ensure collections are carried out as efficiently and effectively as possible, whilst considering within this where additional resources may be required. As this work goes on the team also plans for the introduction of food waste collections in 2026 (a requirement of the Environment Act 2021), with risks to manage including ensuring sufficient depot space and access to a suitable vehicle wash. Both of which are an ongoing challenge. A project team is being led by the Assistant Director for Neighbourhood Services to provide focus on transformation and risk management activity within the Division.

Further to the above in Neighbourhood Services the team are looking at how risks associated with tree management can be better mitigated against, recognising the systems/resources in place at East Lindsey District Council and taking good practice from there into consideration to improve the service should that be appropriate in Boston.

Ensuring communities across the borough of Boston feel safe as they go about their daily lives remains a priority, and following investment in CCTV infrastructure the service is looking at further ways to support delivery such as the use of volunteers. When considering matters within the Public Protection service it is reassuring to note that from a statutory provision perspective there are currently no key concerns as the service goes into a review in the new financial year.

Key Messages

Success in acquiring grants is evident within the Directorate and an area that continues to develop is the Council's Climate Change and Environment Team as they work hard to deliver green home grants (home energy advice and retrofit service) across the Borough and South and East Lincolnshire Partnership area whilst also championing work against the agreed Climate Change Strategy and plans for carbon reduction. In order to help mitigate risks associated with budget spend and demand it is important that where opportunities to support capacity within this service exist, that they are utilised wherever possible.