

Public Document Pack



EXECUTIVE

Date: Wednesday, 20 October 2021

Time: 1.00pm

Location: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Contact: Ian Gourlay (01438) 242703

committees@stevenage.gov.uk

Members: Councillors: S Taylor OBE CC (Chair), Mrs J Lloyd (Vice-Chair),
L Briscoe, R Broom, J Gardner, R Henry, J Hollywell and J Thomas.

AGENDA

PART I

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2. MINUTES - 15 SEPTEMBER 2021

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 15 September 2021 for signature by the Chair.

Pages 3 – 12

3. MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES

To note the following Minutes of meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and Select Committees –

Environment & Economy Select Committee – 13 September 2021

Community Select Committee – 21 September 2021

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 22 September 2021

Environment & Economy Select Committee – 4 October 2021

Pages 13 – 30

4. COVID-19 UPDATE

To consider an update on the Covid-19 pandemic.

5. CLIMATE CHANGE - ANNUAL UPDATE 2020/21

To consider the Climate Change Annual Update 2020/21.

Pages 31 – 48

6. REVIEW OF THE CO-OPERATIVE PROCUREMENT STRATEGY 2021-2024

To consider a review of the Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2021–2024.

Pages 49 – 108

7. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2022/23

To consider the SBC Council Tax Support Scheme for 2022/23.
Pages 109 – 126

8. 1ST AND 2ND QUARTER CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING REPORT 2021/22

To consider the 1st and 2nd Quarter Capital Programme Monitoring report 2021/22.

[REPORT TO FOLLOW]

9. URGENT PART I BUSINESS

To consider any Part I business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

10. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

To consider the following motions –

1. That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That Members consider the reasons for the following reports being in Part II and determine whether or not maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

11. URGENT PART II BUSINESS

To consider any Part II business accepted by the Chair as urgent.

NOTE: Links to Part I Background Documents are shown on the last page of the individual report, where this is not the case they may be viewed by using the following link to agendas for Executive meetings and then opening the agenda for Wednesday, 20 October 2021 – <http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/have-your-say/council-meetings/161153/>

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 15 September 2021

Time: 1.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Sharon Taylor OBE CC (Chair), Mrs Joan Lloyd (Vice-Chair), Lloyd Briscoe, Rob Broom, Richard Henry, Jackie Hollywell and Jeannette Thomas.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 1.00pm
End Time: 3.51pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Gardner, Phil Bibby CC (observer) and Robin Parker (observer).

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 11 AUGUST 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 11 August 2021 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

The Chief Executive confirmed that a draft Executive Action Tracker had been prepared for consideration by Members ahead of the next Executive meeting.

3 MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND SELECT COMMITTEES

The Strategic Director (CF) confirmed that it was intended that the further report on the Council's Transformation Programme would be presented by the end of the current financial year. In the meantime, Members would receive informal updates periodically.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held on 17 August 2021 be noted.

4 COVID-19 UPDATE

The Executive considered an overarching verbal progress report from the Strategic Director (RP), together with a short presentation from the Corporate Policy & Research Officer providing an update on the latest epidemiology statistics relating to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The following matters were raised during the verbal progress report/presentation:

- Officers undertook to seek statistics regarding Covid hospitalisations, with particular emphasis of the numbers of those un-vaccinated, single-vaccinated and double-vaccinated;
- The Leader confirmed that she had circulated to Members the useful guidance produced by the Hertfordshire Public Health Officer regarding vaccination consent for 12-15 year olds;
- The Leader reported that 3 additional one year fixed term posts had been approved to help Independent Living Schemes re-open communal lounges and re-introduce social activities for residents; and
- It was acknowledged that some sectors were experiencing staff shortages (eg. HGV drivers and hospitality staff). It was pleasing to note that Stevenage Direct Services had not had to suspend any services during the pandemic, but Stevenage Leisure Limited were experiencing staffing issues, particularly with recruitment of hospitality employees.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Covid-19 update be noted.

5 TRANSFORMING OUR TOWN CENTRE PROGRAMME UPDATE AND TOWNS FUND DECISION MAKING

The Executive considered a report in respect of progress with regard to town centre regeneration, together with proposals for decision-making with regard to the Town Investment Plan projects benefitting from the Towns Fund.

The Leader commented that the report showed how exciting and busy the work on Town Centre Transformation was. The Mayor, herself and a number of other Members and officers had recently attended the opening of Co-Space, located in the Town Square North Block. Co-Space was a flexible working provision and was a fine addition to the Town Centre.

The Leader advised that good progress had been made in delivering the Town Centre Regeneration Programme and many of the aims and objectives that were set out within the Stevenage Central Framework six years ago.

The Leader stated that the report also provided an overview of the Towns Fund process so far, including the development and submission of the Town Investment Plan, and the £37.5M funding offer received from the Government, which was one of the highest in the country. The report then outlined the responsibilities of the Council as the Accountable Body and the role of the Stevenage Development Board, including the approval pathways for the Towns Fund business cases and setting out the associated timeframe. The Council had an ambitious programme and must continue to work robustly at pace to meet Government deadlines to ensure maximisation of this once in a generation opportunity.

The Assistant Director (Regeneration) added that there were 9 projects that comprised the Town Investment Plan (TIP), to be partly funded by the Towns Fund. He reminded Members that the TIP consisted of a set of projects designed to supercharge the local economy and businesses based in the town; continue the next

phase of the transformation of the town centre as a place to live, work and enjoy; and most importantly to maximise opportunities for local people.

The Assistant Director (Regeneration) advised that the Council had a crucial role to play in the delivery of the TIP, with specific responsibilities as the Accountable Body. In order to access the £37.5M funding, the Council was required to sign-off business cases and submit them to the Government by 24 March 2022. The development of business cases would draw on the expertise of a range of Council officers and external professionals.

The Assistant Director (Regeneration) explained that the report sought to confirm the internal process for the approval of business cases over the months ahead. It was proposed that a follow-on report would be presented to Full Council in October 2021 to seek delegated approval of the business cases to the Executive, including those that may require match funding above the Executive threshold in the Council's Constitution. This would enable SBC to fulfil its Accountable Body obligations by the 24 March 2022 deadline.

The Assistant Director (Regeneration) stated that for projects above the Executive approval threshold, such as the Leisure Centre scheme, a further report would be submitted to Council in due course to outline the proposed funding model and, if necessary, updated business cases once some of the feasibility and design work had been carried out. This would be after the 24 March 2022 deadline.

The Executive supported the replacement wording of Recommendation 2.4 of the report proposed by the Assistant Director (Regeneration), as follows:

“To note that all Business Cases will be prepared for submission to the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) by 24 March 2022. A report will be prepared for a meeting of Full Council confirming the approval of Business Cases for submission to the MHCLG with delegated authority to the Executive.”

In order to meet the challenging timescales relating to the submission of Business Cases, the Leader requested officers to identify some dates for additional Executive (and possibly one Council) meetings to consider the Business Cases.

In response to Members' questions, the Assistant Director (Regeneration) replied;

- The Regeneration Team had taken on additional resources to help progress the Business Cases, and external professional support had also been engaged. Other Council Teams (particularly Planning and Finance colleagues) would also be assisting in the process. Every effort was being made to ensure that the Council had the necessary capacity to deliver the Business Case submissions;
- Correspondence from the MHCLG indicated that successful Town Fund bidders should receive an upfront payment of 5% of the total Towns Fund award. For Stevenage this was estimated to be £1.875M, to assist with the development of Business Cases and the implementation of projects. This sum had yet to be received;
- In approving the £37.5m Town Deal for Stevenage, the MHCLG had not as yet provided any supporting information regarding its rationale for approving the bid;

- The Stevenage Development Board would be required to endorse Business Cases before they were considered by the Executive. A Chair's Panel, comprising of officers, external experts (including the Development Board Theme Lead for each project) and Members, would be established to vet the draft Business Cases before submission to the Development Board/Executive; and
- The timing of any further planning approvals for projects would vary dependent on the size and complexity of each scheme. Some projects (such as the Marshgate Science Innovation Centre) already benefitted from having planning permission in place.

The Leader requested the Portfolio Holder for Resources and her Street naming Sub-Group to compile a list of potential names for the new streets arising from the Town Centre Regeneration Programme.

The Leader asked the Chief Executive to invite the Chairman of the Stevenage Development Board to future Executive meetings where Town Deal Business Cases were being considered.

The Leader requested that consideration be given to the introduction of some form of interactive Town Centre Regeneration question and answer forum be developed for inclusion on the Council and Stevenage Even Better websites.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the progress of the regeneration programme, including the Queensway North regeneration scheme, Town Square co-working & heritage project, and the construction of the new bus interchange, be noted.
2. That the progress of Town's Fund programme to date, including the obligations of the Council as the Accountable Body for the Town's Fund, be noted.
3. That the creation of an Officer Panel (as set out in Paragraph 4.12 of the report) be approved, to support the discharge the Council's obligations as Accountable Body and to review and approve business cases for full approval.
4. That it be noted that all Business Cases will be prepared for submission to the Ministry of Housing Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) by 24 March 2022. A report will be prepared for a meeting of Full Council confirming the approval of Business Cases for submission to the MHCLG with delegated authority to the Executive.
5. That it be noted that there will be future decision points for a number of Council-sponsored projects, in accordance with the Council's Constitution, following approval of the Towns Fund Business Cases and release of funding by MHCLG.
6. That the inclusion of the £37.5 million within the Council's Capital Strategy be noted, and that it be further noted that this is aligned with the Heads of Terms agreement with MHCLG for the Towns Fund, and the funding profile attached to the Towns Fund grant confirmation letter. Authorisation for Council match

funding will be reserved until the relevant Business Case is approved.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

6 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE QUARTER ONE 2021/22

The Executive received a presentation from the Chief Executive concerning the Quarter One Corporate Performance report 2021/22.

Prior to the presentation, the Leader stated that the effects of the Covid pandemic had required the Council to adapt service delivery to provide support for residents and manage the Covid-related impacts, for example to scale up the Stevenage Helps and the Local Outbreak teams, supporting vaccination efforts and maintaining critical front line service delivery. Council teams had also re-prioritised workloads to address particular challenges (eg. delivering of a range of Covid-related grants).

The Leader explained that the pandemic had significantly impacted on residents and businesses in the town, which was reflected in areas of increasing demand and pressures in some service areas, such as homelessness support and advice, Council Tax and Housing Benefits, income and rents, and the capacity of the Environmental Health Team who had played a leading role in Local Outbreak Management. Whilst managing the impact and planning/supporting the recovery from Covid, the Council had worked hard to remain focussed on the delivery of agreed Future Town Future Council (FTFC) priorities.

The Chief Executive presented some slides which outlined a number of the Council's highlights during Quarter 1, and that, of the 53 Corporate Performance Indicators, 43 were at Green status; 5 were at Amber; 8 were at Red; and 1 was not available.

The Chief Executive drew attention to the 8 Red Indicators and 5 Amber Indicators. The Red Indicators related to Void Loss; Voids – sheltered; Voids – sheltered Major Works; Anti-social behaviour; Jobs created through Business Technology Centre; Complaints responded to within deadline; website satisfaction; and calls abandoned in the Customer Service Centre. The Amber Indicators were in respect of Homelessness preventions; Domestic abuse; Garage Voids; Time taken to recruit; and Non-Domestic Rates collected. He explained the reasons for these Indicators performing below target, and outlined where appropriate the measures proposed for improvement.

Discussion points raised included:

- Whilst recognising the 45% reported increase in calls to the Customer Service Centre (CSC) post the last lockdown, Members were concerned about CSC response times. An informal Executive meeting on 30 September would consider this matter further, including any further opportunities to improve the performance of the CSC;
- Notwithstanding the appointment system operated by the CSC during the pandemic, it was confirmed that customers with high priority needs continue to be seen in-person, with or without an appointment;

- It was important that back-office services worked in collaboration with the CSC with regard to efficient responding to customers;
- The response times on re-letting void properties were often skewed by the limited demand for sheltered housing units. The Leader highlighted that the Council had converted a number of bedsit units into one-bedroom homes and was continuing to do so
- In relation to the Co-operative Neighbourhood FTFC priority, the Leader asked that the issues identified during Ward walkabouts be entitled “Actions List” rather than “Community Plan”; officers were requested to ensure that there was an element of consistency with regards to action taken by the 6 Co-operative Neighbourhood Teams in respect of matters such as following up / resolving issues identified during walkabouts, guidance on the method of payment for issue resolution (ie. central budgets or Member Local Community budgets) and the promotion of Co-op Neighbourhood meetings; officers were also asked to ensure that County Councillors were invited to participate in future walkabouts;
- The Leader asked the Assistant Director (Stevenage Direct Services) to provide Members with an assessment of the success of the establishment of the new meadowland areas in the town;
- It was confirmed that the first Climate Change Citizens’ Panel group had met and that a fresh Panel would be set up for 2021/22. An annual report regarding progress on the Council’s Climate Change Strategy was scheduled to be submitted to the October Executive meeting.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the delivery of priorities which form the Future Town, Future Council Programme and performance of the Council across the key themes for quarter one 2021/22, together with the latest achievements, be noted.
2. That the continued impacts of COVID-19 on the homelessness preventions service and actions to recover be noted (as set out in Paragraphs 3.60 to 3.74 of the report).
3. That the issues with sheltered voids and void loss be noted and plans to improve performance be endorsed (as set out in Paragraphs 3.75 to 3.86 of the report).
4. That issues with asbestos and the letting of Council garages and the planned measures to improve performance be noted (as set out in Paragraphs 3.91 to 3.98 of the report).
5. That work with the Business Technology Centre (BTC) to recover from the impacts of COVID-19 be monitored (as set out in Paragraphs 3.89 to 3.90 of the report).
6. That work to investigate issues with late complaint closures continues and actions be implemented to ensure complaints are dealt with in a timely manner (as set out in Paragraphs 3.99 to 3.106 of the report).
7. That issues with satisfaction of the Council website be monitored and issues be addressed utilising the new customer feedback panel (as set out in Paragraphs

3.123 to 3.125 of the report).

8. That challenges within the Customer Service Centre be noted and improvement plans endorsed (as set out Paragraphs 3.107 to 3.122 of the report).

Reason for Decision: As contained in the report.

Other Options considered: As contained in the report.

7 GENERAL FUND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE (2020/22 - 2025/26)

The Executive considered a report providing a General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) update for the period 2020/22 to 2025/26.

The Strategic Director (CF) advised that the report included General Fund projections up to 2025/26, as well as the latest COVID-related costs and 1st Quarter 2021/22 monitoring projections.

The Strategic Director (CF) stated that the projected COVID costs for parking had increased by a further £245,000 for 2021/22 and based on this, further losses for 2022/23 had also been added to the MTFS. Due to the increased income losses (with parking being the largest), the estimated income guarantee scheme income had increased by a further £164,000, which offsets some of the losses. Inflation pressures were estimated to be £746,000 for 2022/23 and this included an assumption of a 2% pay rise in the year.

The Strategic Director (CF) commented that the report showed a 1st Quarter monitoring underspend of £378,000 in year. This was mainly due to lower salary costs (in Stevenage Direct Services) and an improvement in recycling income prices.

Members noted that a Council Tax rise was estimated at 1.99% for 2022/23.

The Strategic Director (CF) advised that The Making Your Money Count target for 2022/23 was £656,000, however this was before the Government's 1.25% increase in National Insurance, which would increase costs by £140,000 before any increase in recharges to the Housing Revenue Account. It was likely that the target would need to be increased if the Government did not fund it. The MTFS included an assumption that the General Fund would contribute £300,000 to take forward the planned Transformation activities in 2022/23.

The Strategic Director (CF) undertook to provide the Leader with a breakdown of the "Other COVID spend (funded from grant)" figure of £500,210 set out in the Table at Paragraph 4.1.2 of the report.

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That change to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) principles, as outlined in Paragraph 4.1.6 of the report and amended in Paragraph 4.10.9, be

approved.

2. That, for modelling purposes, Council tax increases be set at the threshold of 1.99%, subject to any change in Government rules to achieve a balanced budget, as set out in Paragraph 4.6.9 of the report.
3. That the updated inflation assumptions used in the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as set out in Section 4 of the report, be approved.
4. That the approach to Making Your Money Count (MYMC) budget options, as set out in Section 4.8 of the report, be approved.
5. That an amount of £300,000 for 2022/23 be approved for inclusion in the budget setting process to support the Transformation Fund, to help deliver the MYMC Target, as set out in Paragraph 4.8.4 of the report.
6. That a Making Your Money Count Target of £2.14million (of which £1.91Million is not identified), be approved for the period 2022/23- 2024/25, as set out in Section 4.9 of the report.
7. That the potential expansion of the Revenues and Benefits Service be approved, subject to a full business case, as set out in Paragraph 4.8.11 of the report.
8. That the 1st quarter changes to the General Fund, as outlined in Section 4.3 and also in Appendix B of the report, of £377,840 net underspend, be approved.
9. That the changes to business rates and section 31 grants, as set out in Paragraph 4.5.5 of the report, be noted.
10. That the financial impact of COVID in 2021/22 and future years, as set out in Section 4.1 of the report, be approved.
11. That the use of £265,930 of COVID finance settlement funding for homeless pressures, as set out in Paragraph 4.3.10 of the report, be approved.
12. That General Fund growth be only approved for the Council's FTFC priorities and the growth allowance in the 2022/23 budget is £75,000. Growth above that level will need to be funded by further savings in addition to the £2.14Million target identified.
13. That a minimum level of balances for the General Fund of £3.46million be approved for 2021/22, as set out in Paragraph 4.10.8 of the report.
14. That the MTFs be regularly updated for any material financial pressures so forecasts are updated and then be re-presented to the Executive for approval.
15. That the Trade Unions and staff be consulted on the key messages contained within the Medium Term Financial Strategies and more specifically when

drawing up any proposals where there is a risk of redundancy.

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

8 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY REVIEW OF 2020/21 INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL CODE

The Executive considered a report in respect of the annual review of the 2020/21 Treasury Management Strategy.

The Strategic Director (CF) advised that there were no breaches to the Treasury Management Policy in 2020/21 and no Treasury Limits were breached during the year. The Council also had no liquidity difficulties.

The Strategic Director (CF) reported that investment balances had increased year-on-year by £15.6 Million, primarily due to COVID grants to businesses and Section 31 Reliefs in advance. However, £8.5 Million was due to be repaid to the Collection Fund relating to Section 31 reliefs in 2021/22 and the remaining balances included restricted use funds that could only be used to finance capital spend, money set aside as provisions, and monies held on behalf of others, including council tax and business rates provisions. During the year the average investment balance was £63.007 Million, earning interest of £406,682, and achieving an average interest rate of 0.65%

The Strategic Director (CF) explained that, in 2020/21, the Council spent £44.361 Million on capital projects (General Fund and Housing Revenue Account). The capital programme was funded from a combination of existing capital resources and an increase in borrowing (General Fund £0.791 Million, HRA £20.858 Million). As at 31 March 2021 the Council had total external borrowing of £218.966 Million.

The Strategic Director (CF) commented that cash balances (£69.700 Million as at 31 March 2021) enabled the Council to use internal borrowing in line with its Capital Strategy and Treasury Management Strategy. This position was kept under review taking into account future cash balances and forecast borrowing rates.

The Council has to demonstrate that borrowing is required and affordable through MRP (Minimum Revenue Repayment) for the General Fund. This did not apply to the HRA (the HRA affordability was determined in the HRA Business Plan). The calculation of MRP was based upon prior years' borrowing requirement (regardless of whether that borrowing was internal or external) and the life of the asset for which the borrowing was required. The MRP charge to the General Fund in 2020/21 was £275,775.

It was **RESOLVED:**

1. That the 2020/21 Annual Treasury Management Review be recommended to Council for approval.
2. That Council be recommended to approve that the wording in Appendix C,

Table 1 of the report (Specified Investments Criteria) be amended as set out in Paragraph 4.2.6.5 of the report, in order to allow the use of Enhanced Cash Funds included in Table 3 (Treasury Limits).

Reason for Decision: As contained in report.

Other Options considered: As contained in report.

9 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

10 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraphs 1 – 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act as amended by Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.
2. That the reasons for the following report being in Part II were accepted, and that the exemption from disclosure of the information contained therein outweighs the public interest in disclosure.

11 PART II MINUTES - EXECUTIVE - 11 AUGUST 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 11 August 2021 be approved as a correct record for signature by the Chair.

12 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None.

CHAIR

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 13 September 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren, Doug Bainbridge, Stephen Booth, Adrian Brown, Wendy Kerby, Maureen McKay, Sarah Mead and Claire Parris

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00 pm
End Time: 7.04 pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Simon Speller.

2 **MINUTES - 22 JUNE 2021 AND 5 JULY 2021**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Committee meetings held on Tuesday 22 June 2021 and on Monday 5 July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 **UPDATE ON THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CV-19 PANDEMIC ON THE LOCAL ECONOMY**

As part of its review of the economic impact of Covid19 on Stevenage, the Committee invited three organisations (Fin Divers Ltd, Westend Wi-Fi Ltd and Relton Associates Ltd) to offer their view on how Covid19 impacted their business and their path to recovery following the lockdowns.

The guest speakers from each organisation provided the following key updates to committee:

- The pandemic was described as catastrophic for small businesses.
- The Government Recovery Roadmap helped businesses survive the pandemic through the Bounce Back Business Loans, grants and the Furlough Scheme. Businesses survived and some emerged even stronger.
- It was also an opportunity for some businesses to look in to their systems and improve them during the pandemic.
- Banks were usually strict with providing loans to businesses, however, the Bounce Back Business loans enabled smaller businesses to access finance

more quickly during the pandemic.

- The Council provided support to businesses by processing the Government grants quickly and efficiently and also by providing clear and timely information about what help from the Council and what government loans were available
- Grants made a huge difference for businesses, and this support also had positive impact on their personal lives.
- Businesses took the opportunity to furlough staff during the pandemic.
- The Kickstart Programme mitigated the risks of the uncertainties in the business environment.
- The Government's introduction of a new reduced rate of VAT for businesses helped them survive during the pandemic.

Members asked a number of questions and received the following comments:

- Bounce Back Business Loans were introduced quickly and efficiently, and the application process was easy and straight forward.
- Businesses were reliant on the Government funding and it provided them with some business confidence.
- The Council adapted quickly to support businesses in Stevenage to process grants.
- For businesses based at the BTC operated by Wenta on behalf of the Council, these businesses received very quick support and information but it was harder for businesses located elsewhere, who did not always receive the information or the same level of advice that was available via Wenta so struggling to make the right choices about accessing grants and loans etc so getting the message out to them would be the most important change if this was ever to be repeated in the future.

The Chair outlined for Members the next steps in the review, which would be for a draft report and recommendations to be brought back to the Committee for consideration in October 2021.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Committee noted the update.

4 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

5 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

6 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

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**COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Tuesday, 21 September 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete

Present: Councillors: Sarah Mead (Chair), Margaret Notley (Vice-Chair), Myla Arceno, Matt Creasey, John Duncan, Alex Farquharson and Simon Speller

Start / End Start Time: 6:00 pm

Time: End Time: 7:14 pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies were received from Councillors Claire Parris, Stephen Booth and Liz Harrington.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING - THURSDAY 15 JULY 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of Community Select Committee meeting held on Thursday 15 July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PRESENTATION - BACKGROUND TO NEW TOWNS HERITAGE CENTRE BID

The Committee received an update on the New Towns Heritage Centre bid. The presentation included the Regeneration Programme, Stevenage Town investment Plan, Immediate Objectives and Aspiration and Next Steps for the programme.

The Regeneration Programme Manager provided the following key updates to Members:

- Highlighted the regenerations programmes that were currently in progress, such as SG1, Bus Station, North Block, Town Square, Park Place and Queensway North, and how these projects were aligned to New Towns Heritage Centre.
- The Government awarded the Council £37million for Town's Fund in March 2021.
- As part of the criteria set up by the government, the Council had 12 months to submit business cases with associated working groups.

- £2millions were allocated towards a New Towns Heritage Centre.
- The programme would place people, communities and innovation at the heart of the Town Centre.
- It would also help to build on the existing museum collection.
- Officers would need to create a solid vision for what the new Heritage Centre would contain and how it would function. The business case would need to be produced by January 2022.
- The New Towns Heritage Centre project would be at heart of the regeneration programme.
- It would also provide well-meaning visitor experience for families and other audiences, a digitisation programme that would make collections more accessible to wider audience and its central location in the Town Centre would provide easy access.

Members of the Committee noted the update and discussed this area of work in detail. During the discussion the following suggestions were noted by the Panel:

- It was suggested that all communities across Stevenage could take part in a Stevenage Day festival to promote the town.
- Site visits would be really helpful and would provide opportunity insight into the project.
- Stevenage could be used as a stop point location for national exhibitions in other major cities.
- Stevenage needed high quality spaces to attract visitors.
- The desire for the space to be accessible to different groups, and that one demographic group did not dominate.
- Have potential to have usable spaces for workshop and conference/meetings.
- The space harness the modern technology available to bring exhibition to life.
- To cement the existing work of the museum and develop the ambitions of it.

The Chair advised Members to be proactive in researching and garnering views from community groups, and requested site visits be organised for Members to experience modern development in exhibition and heritage story telling.

It was **RESOLVED** that the New Towns Heritage Centre bid be noted.

4 **DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENT - NEW TOWNS HERITAGE CENTRE**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Draft Template Scoping Document be noted.

5 **WORK PROGRAMME PLANNING DOCUMENT 2021/22**

The Committee received a suggested Work Programme Planning Document 2021/22. The Work Programme was a flexible working document that was subject to change as new issues arose. Members were encouraged to suggest items to be included in the Work Programme at any time.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Work Programme Planning Document 2021/22 be noted.

6 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

7 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

8 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 22 September 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber, Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage

Present: Councillors: Lin Martin-Haugh (Chair), Philip Bibby CC (Vice-Chair), Myla Arceno, Adrian Brown, Michael Downing, Alex Farquharson, Chris Howells, Wendy Kerby, Andy McGuinness, Sarah Mead, Robin Parker CC, Claire Parris, Loraine Rossati and Simon Speller.

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 8.15pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no apologies for absence and no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 17 AUGUST 2021

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Committee meeting held on Tuesday 17 August 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 PART I DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

2. Minutes of the Executive – 11 August 2021

Noted.

3. Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Select Committees

Noted.

4. Covid-19 Update

The following comments/questions were raised:

- A Member sought to clarify the provision of data by Government. Officers confirmed that the Middle Layer Super Output Areas (MSOA's) were used by the National Office of Statistics and were closely aligned to the Council Wards although do not cover exactly the same geographic areas;
- It was confirmed that there was a rounding up error in relation to the vaccination rate set out in the report which would be rectified;
- Officers confirmed that when further information was made available on topics such as vaccination rates or demographic data, it would be

shared with Members as and when it became available.

5. Transforming Our Town Centre Programme Update and Towns Fund Decision Making

The following responses were given by Officers to a number of comments/questions raised by Members:

- In respect of the geographic focus of the Town Investment Plan (TIP) Officers confirmed that the TIP had a particular focus on achieving transformation in the central part of Town. However, not all projects benefitting from the Towns Fund were within the Town Centre boundary;
- A Member sought further information on the composition of the Stevenage Development Board and the Council elected representatives on the Board. Officers confirmed that Councillors Sharon Taylor and John Gardner were Members of the Stevenage Development Board. Officers also confirmed that the Board had been established in compliance with Government requirements and a prior report to the Executive had set out the requirements and how the Council would meet these requirements. Officers also highlighted other areas where Members have played an active role in developing projects, and noted that Councillor Richard Henry was also involved with a themed Sub-Group of the Board relating to Leisure and Culture;
- Members noted that themes for the Regeneration of the Town would mean changes such as new streets and squares. Themes for street naming had not yet been approved but it was confirmed that the Planning and Development Committee would be involved in the process;
- Officers confirmed that they would be happy to engage with Members about any ideas they had in relation to Towns Fund projects and also 'Meanwhile Use' ideas;
- Officers confirmed that every Business Case would be thoroughly scrutinised and considered by the Executive and by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and if necessary also by Full Council. Some of the larger projects would be before Members at more than one meeting. In addition, it was noted that the Community Select Committee was looking closely at the New Town Heritage Centre;
- An All Member Briefing had been scheduled for 30 September. The session was intended to be recorded for those Members unable to attend;
- Members were keen to ensure there was public engagement with projects such as the Garden Square. Officers confirmed that each project would have its own communication plan which would include public engagement;
- Members sought further clarification of how much impact could be secured through the allocated cycling and walking project. Officers indicated that final decisions would be taken in due course regarding details of where the funding for the cycling and walking infrastructure plan would be allocated informed by the Council's agreed plan. The

challenge was to come up with a package of works within the funding available which would make a visible impact and demonstrable results;

- In relation to redevelopment of other areas such as the Oval and Marymead shops, this would be coming forward for development in the future but without timescales at this stage;
- Members asked that consideration be given to inviting the Chair of the Stevenage Development Board to a future meeting where this matter was being discussed.

6. Corporate Performance Quarter One 2021/22

The following responses were given by officers to a number of comments/questions raised by Members:

- Concern was expressed regarding response times within the CSC, Officers were aware of the issue and advised that a combination of the lockdown, previous efficiency savings plus an increase in the complexity of cases for household and individuals had caused the issue. Work was now underway to address this and proposals would be forthcoming to Members in the next calendar year regarding a remodelling of the Service which would include a strengthened on-line offer;
- In relation to the recent IT issues, Officers advised that although there had been a level of disruption this week following the implementation of a major project to replace the IT network, Officers had worked to ensure that the network upgrade had been completed and would enable the Council to continue with planned IT improvements. In response to a question, Officers advised that it was not possible to quantify the cost of the IT disruption as many staff members were working remotely or able to pick up non IT based work;
- Members sought clarification on the Major Repairs Contract (MRC). The MRC contract was continuing alongside engagement with Leaseholders regarding the repayment of the charges required of them as it was recognised that there would be pressures on Leaseholders to make the repayments. The Strategic Director (CF) agreed to send a summary of the payment options available to Leaseholders to all Members of the Committee;
- A Member requested that officers make changes to the layout of the Performance Report tables. Officers indicated that they would seek to make changes to clarify the headings and to ensure the measurement of the website satisfaction was provided in the report. A Member requested that the Officer responsible for each Indicator was listed for ease of reference for Members;
- In respect of the Transformation Programme, Members highlighted that their knowledge of complex customer matters and complaints could provide useful information on areas for improvement. Officers agreed that it would be beneficial to engage Members where possible in the end to end process review including through discovery workshops;
- In relation to the Garage Programme, it was noted that further work was underway and a report had been requested on a number of issues

to ensure the Council could demonstrate safety as well as value for money;

- Following a discussion on the homelessness challenges being faced in Stevenage and other places, Officers confirmed that Statistics would be provided for Members in relation to homelessness figures, in particular the numbers with and without a local connection to the Town. Work was ongoing through the Council's Housing First approach and further work was being taken forward in conjunction with the Herts Accommodation Cell. Concern was expressed by Members that the targets had been adjusted for Homelessness Indicators. Officers advised that the measure had been amended to reflect the significant level of demand due to Covid-19 and other factors such as the private rented sector possession hearings being suspended;
- The Committee agreed that the Chair should talk to officers about the possibility of a stand-alone scrutiny into the re-letting of void properties which were currently below target due to a complexity of reasons.

7. General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy Update (2020/22 – 2025/26)

Noted.

8. Annual Treasury Management Strategy Review of 2020/21 Including Prudential Code

Officers advised that advice was taken from the Council's Treasury Management Advisers regarding the investment companies used by the Council.

4 URGENT PART I DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

None.

5 URGENT PART I BUSINESS

None.

6 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED**:

1. That, under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that they involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in paragraphs 1 to 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act, as amended by SI 2006 No. 88.

2. That having considered the reasons for the following item being in Part II, it be determined that maintaining the exemption from disclosure of the information

contained therein outweighed the public interest in disclosure.

7 **PART II MINUTES - OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 17 AUGUST 2021**

Officers advised that there was no date as yet for a report back to Committee on the Future of Fairlands Valley Farmhouse.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Part II Minutes of the Committee meeting held on Tuesday 17 August 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

8 **PART II DECISIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE**

Noted.

9 **URGENT PART II DECISIONS AUTHORISED BY THE CHAIR OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

None.

10 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

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STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Monday, 4 October 2021

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Michael Downing (Chair), Adam Mitchell CC (Vice-Chair), Julie Ashley-Wren, Doug Bainbridge, Stephen Booth, Adrian Brown, Wendy Kerby, Maureen McKay, Sarah Mead and Simon Speller.

Start / End Start Time: 6.00pm

Time: End Time: 7.19pm

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Claire Parris.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 **MINUTES -13 SEPTEMBER 2021**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Committee meeting held on 13 September 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

The Chair advised that the report back on the Economic Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on the local economy would be considered at the next meeting of this Committee on 21 October.

3 **CLIMATE EMERGENCY - OFFICER PRESENTATION**

The Assistant Director Planning and Regulation gave a presentation to the Committee on the Council's response to the Climate Emergency. He reminded Members that Stevenage had declared a Climate Change emergency and had targeted net zero carbon by 2030 with aspirations to reduce Council carbon emissions, support residents and businesses to reduce emissions and to consult and collaborate effectively.

Members were advised that the Council was working with Herts County Council and the Hertfordshire Sustainability and Climate Change Partnership (HSCCP) to maximise efforts across the County.

The Assistant Director reported on the 8 themes and high level actions adopted by the Council including People, Biodiversity, Transport, Energy and Water, Business, Homes, Construction and Regeneration, Waste and Recycling.

Members were pleased to note the progress achieved towards this target in the last year including:

- An action plan now in place for making improvements to grasslands, woodlands and pond clear ups resulting in a positive visual impact for the Town;
- 2 for 1 tree policy and the new St Nicholas Community Orchard; and
- The new bus interchange, bids for cycling networks and also electric bus bids working with Herts County Council as the Transport Authority.

In response to a number of questions the Assistant Director Planning and Regulation and the Assistant Director Stevenage Direct Services advised:

- The Annual Climate Change Report which would show the progress in terms of Borough wide emissions would be considered by the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee later this month.
- Following consultations with the Citizens Panel and Stakeholder groups such as Friends of the Earth, 1600 people had been approached through digital engagement platforms. Members were keen to ensure that young people were included as they could play a major role in this engagement. Members were advised that the membership of the Citizens Panel was currently being reviewed. Members agreed that it was essential that when people volunteered to be a part of the Panel that regular feedback was given to them on an individual basis as well as a generic approach to giving the feedback.
- The Assistant Director accepted that refurbishment of existing buildings was a recommended way forward but that Stevenage did not have many derelict buildings that could be refurbished. Many current developments were on surface car parks and dilapidated buildings which could not be regenerated.
- It was noted that the County Council was responsible to assist HCC schools to meet their target to become carbon neutral.
- In response to a question about the Lister Hospital, there were a number of current planning applications submitted for works to the Hospital. The Council would also engage with the Hospital through Stevenage Together to ascertain the climate change commitments.
- In relation to recycling, it was agreed that more could always be done. An Educational Support Officer was now in post working with schools to target younger people. Further Government plans were expected in early 2022 regarding what was expected of local authorities in relation to future recycling targets.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Assistant Director Planning and Regulation be thanked for his presentation.

4 **DRAFT SCOPING DOCUMENT - CLIMATE EMERGENCY SCRUTINY REVIEW**

The Scrutiny Officer presented a Draft Scoping Document on the Climate Emergency Scrutiny Review for consideration by Members.

In relation to the Review, the following suggestions were made:

- External witnesses to be invited could include a representative from the Health Service, local residents with knowledge of the issues and a local expert;
- Possible benchmarking with other Local Authorities;
- It was agreed that an invitation to attend a future meeting should be sent to Hertfordshire for Enabling and Adapting for Resilience Together) HEART – a Hertfordshire based environmental community group;
- An invitation should also be sent to Councillor Phil Bibby, the Herts County Council Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Transport to attend a meeting.

In relation to the allocation of Lead Members on specific issues, the Chair asked for volunteers to undertake their own desktop and fact finding research. Councillors volunteered as follows:

- Cllr Kerby – the link between sustainability and small local businesses;
- Cllr Mead – communications put out by other Local Authorities;
- Cllr Ashley-Wren – the work being undertaken by schools;
- Cllr Speller – consultation and collaboration, looking at the visuals on climate change.

Other suggestions included contacting graduates at Herts University undertaking study in this area.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Scrutiny Officer amend the Draft Scoping Document with the suggestions listed above.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

None.

CHAIR

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Meeting Executive
Portfolio Area Environment and Regeneration
Date 20th October 2021



CLIMATE CHANGE – ANNUAL UPDATE (2020-2021)

KEY DECISION

Author Zayd Al-Jawad | 2257
Lead Officer Zayd Al-Jawad | 2257
Contact Officer Zayd Al-Jawad | 2257

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide Members with an overview of the action taken to tackle Climate Change by Stevenage Borough Council and with partners, through our joint working on the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP).
- 1.2 The report highlights the need for substantial external funding and support, in particular from Government, and seeks Executive's endorsement of the top 'asks' of central Government in support of our local actions to tackle climate change.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the content of the Climate Change Annual Update (2020- 2021) be noted.
- 2.2 That the Executive agree the following additional measures to support our climate change journey;
- (i) To develop the business case to migrate our corporate and waste fleet to low or zero carbon from 2028, in the interim commit to switching fuel supplies to low or zero carbon alternatives, subject to a detailed business case.
 - (ii) Following the Executive's commitment to accelerate the SG1 Phase 2 programme, including a move to the low carbon Public Sector Hub by 2026, the Council will also develop proposals and a business case to reduce energy use, reduce our physical and carbon foot print of our other Council buildings.
 - (iii) Embed the low carbon ways of working we have embraced during the pandemic in to our current and future ways of working, to continue that carbon saving.
 - (iv) Support residents and business to reduce their carbon footprint by illustrating a comprehensive range of measures they can take, including education and publicity campaign, through a Communication and Collaboration Plan.
 - (v) Provide a total of £8,000 to offer grants to local Stevenage businesses to help transition their business to lower carbon and to supplement bids for low carbon investments. The amount is subject to budgeting for 2022/2023.
- 2.3 That Officers prepare a submission on behalf of the Council's Executive to the Minister of State (Minister for Energy, Clean Growth and Climate Change), making the urgent case for Government to:
- Develop a comprehensive funding plan for the retro-fitting social housing with energy saving measures, including electric heating, insulation, local energy generation and carbon reduction measures.
 - Support Stevenage Borough Council's multi-pound bid to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.
 - Develop a carbon emissions pricing scheme that protects and supports our local business, discouraging the displacement of carbon creation to more vulnerable places while incentivising business to invest in low carbon technologies.
 - Developing and funding a plan for a comprehensive, integrated and funded public transport system to offer people a genuine alternative to car ownership and driving, and a fully funded EV strategy and network. In Stevenage we are building a new bus interchange and bidding for funds to electrify our existing bus services, but the services need to be significantly expanded, reliable and affordable to people.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Climate Change Act 2008 introduced the UK's first legally binding target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% compared to 1990 levels by 2050. Strong progress has been made. Between 1990 and 2017, the UK reduced its emissions by 42% while growing the economy by more than two thirds.
- 3.2 On 27 June 2019 the UK government amended the Climate Change Act and set a legally binding target to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions from across the UK economy by 2050.
- 3.3 Acknowledging that the 2050 net zero target is not sufficient, Stevenage Borough Council in June 2019 declared a climate emergency, and agreed a motion for the Council to achieve zero carbon for town and Council by 2030. This has been reflected into a Strategy (approved September 2020) and a live Action Plan has been developed to implement the Strategy. To achieve this strategy in full, the Council will require substantial external support and funding from Government to implement the scale of change required in the town.
- 3.4 Our efforts in Stevenage are also supported by the work of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) which, declared a climate change emergency in 2019, and committed to be net zero for their own operations by 2030 and aim for net zero for Hertfordshire as a whole by 2050.
- 3.5 As a local Council we are estimated to be responsible for about 1% of the direct emissions in the geographical area of Stevenage. This rises to 10% when including the 8,000 Council homes that are managed by Stevenage Borough Council. Through regulations and powers we already have, we can influence change over another 10%-20% of the emissions of the town. This leaves the remaining 70%+ that will individuals and organisations direct action to address. As such we and other local Councils will need to make the case to Government for increased powers and funding to help us reach out shared ambitions to achieve net zero. The funding required is so large most individual businesses or residents cannot fund it themselves.
- 3.6 To achieve our collective ambition for a zero carbon Stevenage by 2030 the Council, central government and our local residents and businesses over time, will have to commit more funding and pay more to achieve it.
- 3.7 All levels of government and stakeholders acknowledge that we can only realise these ambitions for climate change with the support and action of our local residents and businesses. We all must make changes to how we consume and travel to protect our environment. It is an emergency and the time for action for us all is now.
- 3.8 We have identified our fleet emissions and how we work as the way SBC can directly make the most impact alongside regulations and policies. Our 'asks' from government support the areas our residents and businesses are most affected by and for which they can make the most change towards.

Recommendation 2.1: That the content of the Climate Change Annual Update (2020-2021) be noted.

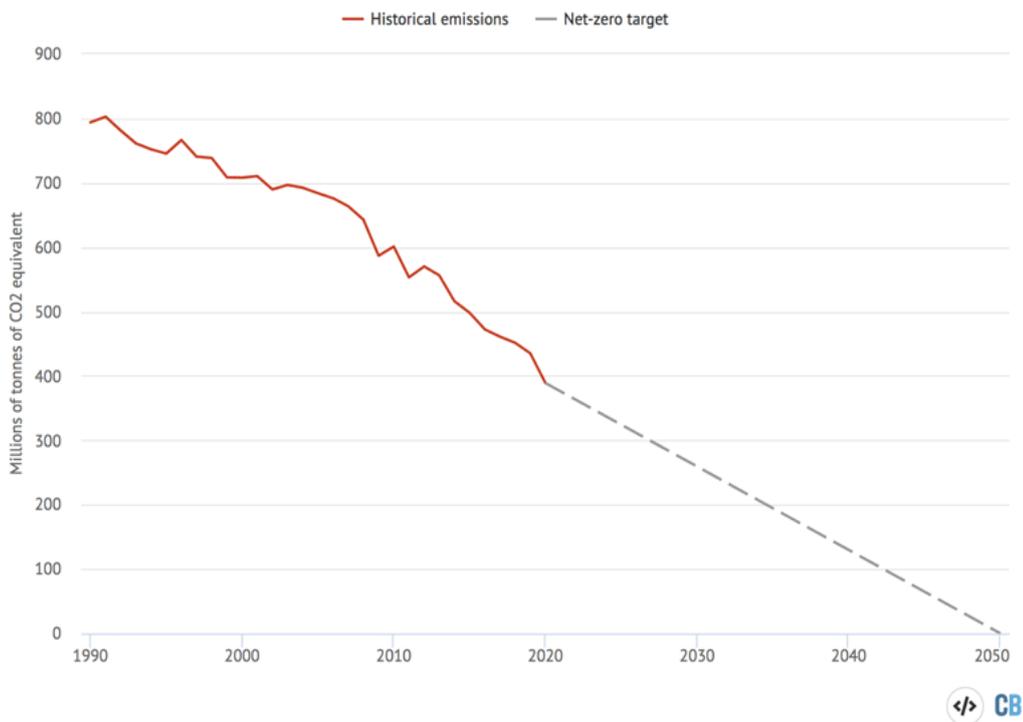
4 CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE FOR 2020 / 2021

4.1 The global pandemic and associated 'lockdowns' have had a significant impact on climate change during 2020 – 2021. This included an estimated 85% drop in long haul air travel and reductions in all type of commuting, and meant that emissions declined at the fastest rate on record in 2020, an estimated 13% drop. The drop in 2020 marks a record eighth consecutive year of reductions in the UK and much will depend on the recovery in 2021 and beyond to see how much of these carbon savings can be maintained and further improved.

Below details (from the Business Energy and Industrial Strategy Government department) the decline in carbon emissions by sector, showing the drop in carbon from power as the country has switched to increased use of renewable energy, but buildings ,and surface transport remain heavy polluters.

The UK is now halfway to net-zero greenhouse gas emissions

Emissions in 2020 were 51% below 1990 levels



Emissions in Stevenage

- 4.2 The carbon emissions in the Stevenage Borough Council geography dropped by 3.1% in 2019, over 2018 to 340.8 ktCO₂ (Kilo-tonnes of carbon). 350 ktCO₂ is broadly equivalent to 350,000 return flights from London to New York, or 1.2 billion miles driven in a diesel car, and it would need 17.5 million new trees to offset its carbon. The 2018 figure (351.8 ktCO₂) is our baseline as it is the level of emissions when SBC announced its climate change emergency. These are figures produced by central government taking into account a complex array of energy use data and are about a year behind
- 4.3 One of the main achievements for the Council in the last year has been the consultation on and adoption of the Climate Change Strategy and the Citizens Panel. The Strategy is based around 8 themes, reflecting the breath of services offered by the Council. The 8 themes are shown below and our 2020-2021 delivery against those themes is set out below. The traffic light colouring (red, yellow, and green) depicts the progress made against each one.
- 4.4 Some key successes include:
- Drop of over 3% emissions in 2019 over 2018. With an expected 10%+ drop in 2020/2021
 - SBC saved almost 1 million kg of CO₂ in 2020/2021, including switching our main electricity to 100% renewable energy, and printing 400,000 less pages (saving 32 trees and 8,000 kWh/1.7 tonnes of CO₂ alone)
 - Switched our residents survey to digital only, saving almost 20,000 pages of paper being printed
 - Successfully bid for almost £1m investment in reducing carbon in our housing stock
 - Implemented several planning policies to support sustainability, and climate change including first Biodiversity SPD in the region
 - Secured funding, with partners, for sustainable transport projects including developing a plan to become a Sustainable Travel Town
 - Securing £3.75m for cycling, walking and a heritage trail
 - Developing a new bus interchange to promote use of public transport
 - Participation in the set up and development of HSCCP
 - Founding launch authority partner for the UK100 programme and Race to Zero, to lobby central government on climate change
 - New website <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/about-the-council/climate-change>

People

SBC will produce a Climate Change Comms Plan to help education and inform our residents.

Continue to work with youth groups, Youth Council and local schools to help both understand their Climate Change concerns and also empower them to make changes.

Biodiversity

Tree protection and Planting Strategy

Biodiversity Plan and Actions

Plant over 2,000 trees by 2030

Construct at least 3 new lakes or ponds by 2030

Transport

Electric Taxis and support to drivers to transition their fleet.

Electric Buses, with expanded routes and frequencies.

With HCC, introduce work-place parking charges

Living Streets trials

Decarbonising the SBC fleet before 2030.

Bike and E-bike hire

Energy & Water

Promote cross county purchase of renewable energy supply

Identify opportunities for local renewable energy generation.

Test a Combined Heat & Power Station as part of new swimming pool development.

With Affinity Water & HCC, support their move to zero carbon

Businesses

Lobby government to support our businesses and a Green Recovery

Using our network's shared knowledge to support SME to adapt to climate change opportunities

Share knowledge and improved ways or working across our business community to reduce carbon.

Homes

Energy efficient housing and subsidies for public and private homes

Planning Policy for zero carbon homes on all large scale developments

Zero carbon development at the Station Gateway

Fully electric / zero carbon heat and power on SBC lead developments

Construction & Regeneration

Design a Carbon Neutral new Civic Hub

Work with Regeneration Partners that are committed to zero carbon operations

Fully electric SG1 residential development

Zero carbon state schools

Waste & Recycling

Develop a new Waste Strategy promoting reduction, reuse and recycling

Zero waste to landfill or incineration

With HCC produce biogas

SBC ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2020-2021

- 4.5 We have focused our work within SBC on decarbonising our fleet; recycling; planning; changing our ways of working and our energy use. Outside of SBC we have focus on educating and supporting our residents; empowering behaviour change and sharing best practice. These target the largest sources of emissions and the biggest areas for change.
- 4.6 Stevenage Borough Council was successful in being given outline approval to be the first Sustainable Travel Town in Hertfordshire, with partnership support from Hertfordshire County Council in support for many of our Transport related climate change ambitions.
- 4.7 The Climate Strategy is based on 8 broad themes, set out below:
- People
- 4.8 The only way we can achieve the goal of carbon zero by 2030 is if everyone plays their part. Through educating, engaging, supporting, listening to and communicating with our residents from all background, positions, ages and interests can we collectively make the required changes to our behaviour we need.
- Biodiversity
- 4.9 Ensuring our biodiversity is improved as part of the carbon reduction measures will ensure we have a holistic approach to the wider sustainability impacts we as humans are having on our local ecology. Using nature's natural way of addressing the human impact of climate change is the most effective method of taking action. Ensuring that one area of improvements does not undermine the other is vital.
- Transport
- 4.10 Making up nearly a third of our emissions Transport is a key area for us to address, and one that behaviourally we as residents, employers, employees or visitors make every day. Big changes and support from the Transport Authority can have huge transformational impacts not only on our carbon outputs, but also health and employment opportunities.
- Energy & Water
- 4.11 The source and use of energy has the opportunities to make significant changes in our carbon emissions relatively quickly, particularly while we are still trying to change behaviours. It is expected that the general electrical grid will be fully re-carbonised by 2050 which is too late for our targets, so encouraging all energy users to not only consider where they source their energy from but how much is used, is one of the first major actions. As our temperatures increases, our water usage increases and availability decreases. Hertfordshire is already one of the driest regions in the UK while also using twice as much water as people in places like Manchester. Actions to address leakage and chalk stream sourcing also need to be considered.

Businesses & Homes

- 4.12 Industrial and residential users make up nearly two-thirds of carbon emissions, investment in de-carbonising industrial processes, and home heating / energy use are key areas to support and educated our businesses and residential to make the changes. Government financial support will be required too.

Construction & Regeneration

- 4.13 As a leader in building new homes and regenerating the town centre the Council will have significant powers and opportunities to build better buildings and places, which are designed in sustainable ways, in sustainable locations.

Waste & Recycling

- 4.14 Reducing reusing then recycling need to be at the heart of what we do as a Council collecting and processing waste but also in educating our residents and businesses.
- 4.15 Held against the 8 Strategic Themes, in 2020/2021 we achieved the following results set out on the tables overleaf.

People

- Engagement via broad consultation and tested with a smaller panel
- Focus now shifts to campaign to align with overarching 'clean and green' themes

Biodiversity

- Biodiversity Action Plan in place
- 3 community orchards
- Council adopted Biodiversity SPD to ensure new development enhances biodiversity
- New trees policy implemented for Stevenage to replace on a 2 for 1 basis
- £50k funding for biodiversity projects secured
- Leading partner through HSCCP for Biodiversity, including a Countywide baseline analysis

Transport

- FTFT programme in place
- New EV charging facilities on Swinggate in the town centre
- Local Cycling Walking Investment Programme (LCWIP) in place
- Sustainable Travel Town bid approved
- North Road cycle project at £1.8m from Graveley Road to Old Town
- 8 new public EV charging points across the Borough in car parks.
- New bus interchange, close to the train station, improved facilities connections to support modal shift. Enabled with the hard infrastructure to be EV ready
- Interlink bus partnership
- New eye-catching cycle ranks and storage facilities in the Old and New Town centres
- Consulted and adopted on adopted Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD)
- Jointly leading through HSCCP on county wide travel emissions reductions and modal shift strategy.
- In stopping the community transport offer, we have removed the old buses and saved saving 7,800 miles of driving.

Energy & Water

- SBC main energy contract changed to zero carbon saving carbon
- Work to rationalise assets in town centre into enhanced facilities via regeneration programme (Hub)
- Working with Affinity Water to support their 2030 net zero target

Business

- Engagement planned through the Collaboration and Communication Plan.
- Mapped all large businesses carbon commitments
- Establishing a Stevenage Together and Smartgo Stevenage sub group on Climate Change.

Homes

- Awarded £1m for retrofit projects in Stevenage Borough Council homes
- Resolution to grant SG1 planning application with over 1,800 units, with zero gas
- Resolution to grant North of Stevenage planning application with a 38 ha country park, SUDS, and 2250+ new trees
- Committed to electric boilers in our new housing schemes from 2023 onwards

Construction and Regeneration

- SG1 application, baseline for electric only heating with higher standard for schemes
- £3.75m funding secure for walking, cycling and heritage trail
- Securign £37.5m Towns Funding
- Housing Development, triple glazing, solar power and other low carbon housing
- Regeneration refurbishments in the town centre, at North Queensway

Waste and Recycling

- Work on waste policy to help improve collection methods and clarity for customers
- National waste strategy under consultation and SBC Strategy to be completed in 2021
- Commitment to Food Waste collections for residential properties in Stevenage from 2025

Working with partners: Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership

- 4.16 A crucial element of our approach is to work with other local government partners to help secure investment, business cases and to find ways to collectively reduce our carbon footprint and improve sustainability.
- 4.17 The Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) consists of all 10 districts and the county council, plus the Local Enterprise Partnership. HCCSP is a strategic group which acts as the lead partnership organisation for partners to collaborate and identify joint work programmes on environmental, climate change and wider sustainability issues
- 4.18 SBC are proactive participants in the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP), with the Chief Executive the lead Officer sponsor for the HCCSP work plan and we are supporting on two of the four main themes for which detailed action plans are being developed:
- Biodiversity
 - Carbon reduction
 - Transport
 - Water.
 - New : Behavioural Change
 - New: Climate Change Adaption
- 4.19 Much of the strategic work is being focused through HCCSP to harness the power of a county of over 1.2 million people. The themes fed into our own 8 themes and it is through this work with HCCSP we are delivering on our own objectives at a greater scale. Large amounts of work have been done already, including producing and agreeing 3 of the 4 Action Plans. A summary of HCCSP's outputs are in the background papers.

5 HOW WE ARE WORKING

Engagement

- 5.1 To inform the strategy and action plan, extensive consultation has taken place. An open consultation in 2019/2020 achieved wide and broad engagement across the town, with 1,600 responses helping shape the strategy. Key priorities identified by residents included making a change to their method of travel and eating habits.
- 5.2 A representative Citizen's Panel met in October 2020, an Executive Summary is in the background documents. Their aspirations are being incorporated into our various action plans and work, and the key areas they would like us to focus on are:

Improve communications and recycling awareness incentives to public and commerce

Zero Food Waste Town

Implement climate emergency education and create awareness for Stevenage residents, businesses, and visitors

Establish a collaborative framework to achieve sustainable infrastructure to reduce pollution

5.3 We are continuing our engagement and feedback with Friends of the Earth local group, w has also fed into this update.

5.4 The climate change strategy commits to an annual Citizen's Panel, with a new group to be recruited for late 2021 to review the work so far and feed into the Collaboration and Communication Plan.

Governance

5.5 A Member working group is in place, Chaired by the portfolio holder for Environment and Regeneration. The group includes the portfolio holders for Transport & Economy; Housing, Older People and Health; Environment and Regeneration; the Chair of the Environment and Economy Select Committee.

5.6 The climate working group sub group on Youth engagement and a Planning Committee sub group will be led by Cllr Speller.

5.7 The Environment and Economy Select Committee have committed to reviewing the delivery of the climate strategy and action plan over a two year period, with an expectation that the climate actions planned and required in each portfolio area will be subject to review.

5.8 There is a cross-party member led group within the HCCSP, which Cllr Gardener (as portfolio holder for Environment & Regeneration) attends and contributes towards.

5.9 Over the last two years, a significant amount of preparation work has been undertaken to engage residents and businesses, work with partners and focus on deliverable actions that can achieve the goals of the Stevenage Borough Council Climate Strategy. We are working closely with partners through Stevenage Together, to share our experiences on climate change, speak with a single voice to government and support our residents, and customers to reduce their emissions.



6 2021/2022 ACTION PLAN

- 6.1 This report provides a review of the progress made in the last year, and a forward look to anticipated priorities for future years. The Council has made positive progress over the last twelve months, with limited additional resources available to tackle climate change and substantial focus on addressing the severe impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. As the report sets out, a number of bids for funding have been successful, several smaller scale local projects have been undertaken and significant work agreed to change our longer-term policies that shape and influence the town and its community.
- 6.2 It is recognised that the scale of the challenge presented by the pandemic is very sharp and all public bodies, Government, businesses, communities and individuals will need to take further steps to achieve our shared aim. This will require substantial additional investment from the Government, and to be able to address some of the most impactful measures that the Council can take, will require substantial investment and reprioritisation of resources by the Council – and in the town, by businesses and investors.
- 6.3 **Priorities for 2021 / 2022 include:**

We have set a range of proposed priorities for the next 12 months. This includes:

- Establishing our carbon savings for 2020/2 and look to report to CDP Cities carbon disclosure insight programme in 2021/2022
- Spending £100k+ on biodiversity improvements
- Doubling EV charging capacity in the town
- Demonstrating local changes, such as Council Wardens to use bike / E car clubs or walk on their site visits.
- Delivering c. £1m investment in reducing carbon in our housing stock
- Continuing the roll out of new lower carbon SBC homes
- Local Councillors committing to paperless committees as a carbon reduction exemplar
- Developing a new Waste & Recycling Strategy to increase recycling and improve sustainability
- Develop a leading zero carbon Planning Policy for the Station Gateway development
- Complete the business case for a bike / E-bike hire scheme
- Anticipated implementation of the Sustainable Travel Towns plan for Stevenage, an exemplar in Hertfordshire
- New bus interchange
- Support over 250+ staff to stop commuting by car at least twice a week
- Implement the Collaboration and Communication Plan.

6.4 There are still major challenges ahead to achieve net zero, including work to engage the public and businesses along with lobbying government for funding.

As such this report is seeking further commitments from the Council's Executive for additional support to help meet our 2030 target in the form of:

Recommendation 2.2: That the Executive agree to the additional following measures to support our climate change journey

- 6.5 That the Executive agree the following additional measures to support our climate change journey;
- (vi) To develop the business case to migrate our corporate and waste fleet to low or zero carbon from 2028, in the interim commit to switching fuel supplies to low or zero carbon alternatives, subject to a detailed business case.
 - (vii) Following the Executive's commitment to accelerate the SG1 Phase 2 programme, including a move to the low carbon Public Sector Hub by

2026, the Council will develop proposals and a business case to reduce energy use, reduce our physical and carbon foot print of our other Council buildings.

- (viii) Embed the low carbon ways of working we have embraced during the pandemic in to our current and future ways of working, to continue that carbon saving.
- (ix) Support residents and business to reduce their carbon footprint by illustrating a comprehensive range of measures they can take, including education and publicity campaign, through a Communication and Collaboration Plan.

7 COP26

- 7.1 In October 2021, the COP26 summit will bring parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the Paris Agreement and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- 7.2 The UK is committed to working with all countries and joining forces with civil society, companies and people on the frontline of climate change to inspire climate action ahead of COP26.
- 7.3 We will be working with HCCSP for a Herts wide promotion and activity and offer a local series of engagement to simulate behavioural change, including a live Sustainable Hertfordshire Eco-Fair event at County Hall on the 6th of November 2021.
- 7.4 Stevenage will be hosting a 'Stevenage Together' Climate summit for local public sector and voluntary partners, to compare our plans, key areas of action and our asks of government.
- 7.5 The press interest and coverage that will come with COP26 will support our local campaign work. We also expect central government to set up their funding for carbon reduction measures too. We are therefore going to write to the Minister of State to ask for specific measures we believe will best address climate change.
- 7.6 It is clear that the Council will require support from Government to achieve the scale of reduction necessary to secure a Net Zero position. It is recommended that the Council works with partners to engage Government, to make the case for substantial investments to decarbonise key local assets. This would be based on investment into social housing stock, to reduce emissions, improve the local supply chain of skilled practitioners who could then support private landlords. It also would require a concerted focus on measures to decarbonise the transport system, including a clear EV charging strategy and funding plan that can be rolled out nationally, with local support, along with further investments into walking, cycling and bus infrastructure.

Recommendation 2.3: That the proposed 'asks' of government (in para 7.4) be part of a formal letter send on behalf of the Council's Executive to the Minister of State

7.7 Our 'ask' of government as part of their COP26 commitment

- Develop a comprehensive funding plan for the retro-fitting social housing with energy saving measures, including electric heating, insulation, local energy generation and carbon reduction measures.
- Support Stevenage Borough Council's multi-pound bid to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.
- Work with local communities and businesses to explore a carbon emissions pricing scheme that protects and supports our local business, discouraging the displacement of carbon creation to more vulnerable places while incentivising business to invest in low carbon technologies.
- Developing and funding a plan for a comprehensive, integrated and funded public transport system to offer people a genuine alternative to car ownership and driving, and a fully funded EV strategy and network. In Stevenage we are building a new bus interchange and bidding for funds to electrify our existing bus services, but the services need to be significantly expanded, reliable and affordable to people.

8 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 8.1 The costs associated with producing and consulting on the climate change strategy have been met from the agreed departmental budget. A number of projects referenced within this report have secured third party funding from government and other sources, such as s106 agreements, to be able to pilot initiatives, or to improve sustainable travel assets.
- 8.2 The change in energy provider to a low carbon alternative has been approved and met from the agreed departmental budget.
- 8.3 As the report identifies, for councils to meet net zero, by 2023, significant funding will be required from central government and/or third parties to fund the cost of large scale projects such as implementation of Electric Vehicle charging networks, retrofit of council housing stock and commercial and operational buildings.
- 8.4 As the Council works on options and future projects to achieve the ambition of being a net zero carbon Council and town by 2030, Officers will need to bring forward a number of business cases. If the government does not step in to support the local government sector and the Council is required to provide the investment then a significant reprioritisation of other projects and activities would be required to progress highly complex projects to absorb increased revenue and capital costs.

Legal Implications

- 8.5 There are no direct legal implications associated with adopting the Climate Change Strategy, however it is likely the Government will begin introducing stricter targets with legal implications for those Councils that are not meeting carbon reductions.

Risk Implications

- 8.6 The greatest risks associated with this work are failing to secure sufficient support from residents, businesses and government to protect us all from the effect of climate change.

Policy Implications

- 8.7 The Annual Update on Climate Change supports our own Climate Change Strategy and wider corporate ambitions for a low carbon future.

Climate Change Implications

- 8.8 This report highlights the risks, challenges and opportunities we have to address not only carbon emissions but our wider climate change aspirations.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 8.9 Climate change affects those in most need both in the UK and around the world. Those in deprivation, hunger or unwell are both most affected by climate change and least able to address it. Therefore we are duty bound as those of us in the world that are more able to act, to act now.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

BD1 - HSCCP update

BD2 - SBC Climate Change Strategy

BD3 - Citizen Panel Executive Summary

BD4 - Draft Communication and Collaboration Plans

BD5 - Climate Change info-graphic

Meeting Executive
Portfolio Area Resources
Date 20th October 2021



REVIEW OF THE CO-OPERATIVE PROCUREMENT STRATEGY 2021-2024

KEY DECISION

Author - Lisa Baldock x 2083
Lead Officer – Clare Fletcher x 2933
Contact Officer – Lisa Baldock x 2083

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To consider the Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2021-2024.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Members approve the updated Co-operative Procurement Strategy for 2021-2024.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 The Council first approved a Corporate Procurement Strategy in 2001; it has been reviewed on five occasions during this period, the last revision was in 2016/17. The latest revision to the strategy has been made to align with the Council's Future Town, Future Council ambitions and outcomes and the Strategy has been rebranded the 'Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2021-2024'.

3.2 The procurement function plays an important role in achieving value for money, helping to support the economy, driving sustainability, social value

and community wealth building and mitigating the risk of legal challenge and fraud.

- 3.3 The Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2021-2024 forms part of the Council's policy framework

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 The Council could just adopt the National Procurement Strategy 2018; it would offer procurement direction but not direct alignment with the Council's Corporate Plan, Future Town, Future Council and focus specifically on the themes that are important to Stevenage Borough Council. For this reason, it is therefore recommended that the Council adopts its own Co-operative Procurement Strategy to support the strategic direction of the Council.

- 4.2 The Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2021-2024 has been written around the principle of five 'Foundations'. Each 'Foundation' is a building block of the considerations that need to underpin the procurement process and will be embedded into the way the Council procures goods, works and service contracts to support the Council's ambitions.

- Community Wealth Building – This focuses on keeping money reinvested in Stevenage to promote opportunities for SME's, Employee Owned Businesses, Social Enterprises and other Community based or Owned Businesses within the Borough which will support the aim of locally recirculating wealth in the area.
- Sustainability – Tackling climate change and improving sustainability must be a key foundation for all procurement activity. By harnessing purchasing power the Council will help combat climate change and reduce carbon emissions; reduce waste; save resources; improve air quality; and enhance green space and promote biodiversity.
- Social Value and Ethical Procurement – Social Value involves looking beyond prices of each individual contract and looking at what the collective benefit to a community is, when a public body chooses to award a contract. Social Value asks the question 'If £1 is spent on the delivery of services, can that same £1 be used to also produce a wider benefit to the community?'
- Commercial and Insourcing – The Council will continue with its commitment to use in-house services to deliver council operations, and insourcing will be the council's default position, other than when there is sufficient evidence that this is not an option. All services provided to, or on behalf of the council by external suppliers or third parties will be reviewed to establish if an opportunity exists to enhance service delivery or achieve better value by delivering services directly.

- Pro-active Procurement – The Council’s Corporate Procurement team provide support that delivers better procurements to develop knowledge and intelligence, supporting the delivery of the Council’s ambitions. The procurement process spans from the pre-market engagement, preparation, the tender and award and through to the final stage of contract management. The Council expects to form a pro-active approach at all stages in the procurement cycle taking stock and considering options to best meet the needs of the town.
- 4.3 The Council spent approximately £60 million on the procurement of goods, works and services in 2020/21; this is an increase of £10 million compared to 2019/20. That growth is a result of the construction projects being undertaken in the town as part of regeneration schemes. A major part of the procurement spend relates to major refurbishment contracts on the Council’s housing stock. Although these construction works contracts are national rather than local in nature they do have local clauses such as:
- employing and training local apprentices
 - working with local schools to provide career advice and experience.
 - supporting and using local suppliers within their supply chain.
- 4.4 The implementation of the Social Value portal as part of this strategy will enable the Council to capture the social value embedded in new contracts over the value of £75,000 going forward.

Consultation

- 4.5 The strategy was sent out to consultation to local businesses in Stevenage including Biz4Biz, Herts Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses in addition to Council Members and procuring Council Officers. The consultation was issued over a five week period in August and early September. A total of 19 responses were received, a summary consultation report acknowledging the feedback received is detailed under Appendix C. Where comments made as part of the consultation have required an action these have been carried out by Corporate Procurement; minor changes have been made to the strategy as a result of some of the feedback received and some respondents have received emails to offer them advice, for example on how they can register for opportunities through the Supply Hertfordshire webpages.
- 4.6 The strategy was taken to the Portfolio Holder Advisory Group on 16th September where the following points were raised.

	Question Raised	Response	Actions
1.	How are the Council able to guard against poor quality performance in a contract?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is the responsibility of the Council to keep on top of a contract through good contract management. 	Procuring Officers to receive a training refresher on contract management.

	Question Raised	Response	Actions
2.	Are payments made for contracts where there has been poor performance in advance or arrears?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contract Standing Orders state pre-payments must not be made before goods, works or services are received unless approval is sought. Poor performance can be managed by ensuring good contract management. 	Procuring Officers to receive a training refresher on contract management.
3.	How is the Council able to apply the principle foundations of the Strategy back to any in-house services being provided by the Council, such as social value?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Officers will explore how this could potentially be measured Social Value is measured through scoring the tender so this is not as easy for in-house services. If any procurement is undertaken in an in-house contract then the Contract Standing Orders would be followed for say materials and equipment 	The point will be taken away to consider ways to benchmark in-sourced contracts against the principle foundations of this Strategy.
4.	Is the Council able to take up references for contractors? When there has been a poor contract experience, does the Council notify other authorities or do they notify Stevenage of poor practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> References are requested as part of procurement process. Poor contract performance can happen for a number of reasons but could be also due to poor contact management within a specific authority. Procurements should be considered individually and other authority's poor experience should not form part of a new procurement exercise. 	No action required.
5.	What inflation measures does the Council have in contracts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CPI is used to measure inflation in the majority of contracts. There are some exceptions where fixed pricing is requested. If a contractor sees risk then it will be built into the contract so fixed pricing is not normally the best approach. 	No action required.
6.	If there was a Stevenage based supplier and a non-Stevenage based supplier selling the same product but the supplier in Stevenage was more expensive how can the Council be sure to follow the principles of the Strategy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of procurements are based on the most economically advantageous offer so quality plays a part as well as price. The Strategy gives local suppliers the opportunity to bid; if their offer is not competitive then it would not be fair to award them the contract. We will always act on the principles of fairness and transparency as set out in the Public Contract Regulations 2015. 	<p>The Council will encourage local suppliers to register on Supply Hertfordshire to give them the opportunity to bid for the Council's business.</p> <p>Webinars will be held to assist suppliers with understanding the procurement process.</p>
7.	Was the timing of the consultation a reason for the lack of response to the survey?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The consultation was issued over August/September which may have limited some survey responses, however it was open for five weeks to maximise the opportunity to respond. 	The Council will review the timing of any survey consultation in the future.

- 4.7 There are delivery outcomes with dates for each of the five foundations set within the Strategy advising of commencement and completion. The strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis by the Contracts and Procurement Group to update on the progress of the delivery targets and to ensure that it continues to reflect the Council's ambitions.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 It is anticipated that following best practice through the revised Procurement Strategy will improve the Council's financial standing by adopting value for money procurement, efficiency gains and the mitigation of risk. The Commercial and Insourcing Principle Foundation of the Strategy encourages commercialism including maximising value for money from contractual relationships, including the consideration of insourcing services.

Legal Implications

- 5.2 The Strategy has due regard to the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and other relevant legislation to be applied within the procurement process. The Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2021-2024 will be reviewed in light of changes that may arise as a result of updated procurement legislation passed during the term of this Strategy.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.3 Tackling climate change and improving sustainability is a key foundation for all procurement activity and is embedded in the Sustainability foundation of the Strategy, which will help combat climate change, reduce carbon emissions, reduce waste, save resources, improve air quality, enhance green space and promote biodiversity in the supply chain.

Human Resources Implications

- 5.4 It is anticipated that the outcomes and deliverables of this Strategy will be absorbed in the current workload of both the Corporate Procurement team and Procuring Officers across the Council. As procurement occasionally involves outsourcing of services, workforce matters involving the transfer of staff in line with the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 is an area that procuring officers may need to consider.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.5 The Council has committed itself to providing high quality services that are relevant to the needs and responsive to the views of all sections of the local community, irrespective of their race, gender, disability, culture, religion, age, sexual orientation or marital status. The General Equality Duty (Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) requires the Council to have due regard to the need

to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations in the exercise of its functions. These considerations are the duty of decision makers. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out as part of this strategy review to aid decision makers in their consideration of the Equality Duty (see Appendix B).

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- BD1 Corporate Procurement Strategy 2016-2020
- BD2 Corporate Plan: Future Town, Future Council

APPENDICES

- A Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2021-2024 – Building Wealth in Our Community.
- B Equality Impact Assessment of Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2021-2024.
- C Briefing Paper on the Corporate Procurement Strategy 2021-2024 Consultation Results.

Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2021 – 2024

“Building Wealth in our Community”



Foreword

We have revised our Procurement Strategy for 2021 to 2024 outlining our priorities and how procurement will contribute to our Future Town, Future Council ambitions and outcomes.

Stevenage Borough Council spent around £60 million on goods, works and services in 2020/2021. We have a duty to provide value for money for our residents and customers through effective and efficient procurement policies and practices.

In November 2020, the Council launched its Co-operative Inclusive Economy Charter encouraging communities, organisations and businesses to work together to help shape the economy and share the benefits of growth. Procurement plays its part in encouraging our local suppliers to bid for our contracts and help to grow and connect our town's residents and organisations and to support wealth building within Stevenage.

We will look to insource procurement opportunities as our default position; we will review our contracts to establish if we are able to enhance service delivery or better value by delivering services directly.

The Council declared a Climate Emergency in June 2019; we want and need to do more to achieve net zero emissions in Stevenage by 2030. We consider the supply chain an important part of helping us to achieve this goal. Social value benefits in procurement will bring together positive sustainable and economic solutions driving down our carbon usage.

One of the Council's challenges will be to help the Borough to recover from the effects of Covid 19; procurement will play its part in supporting our existing suppliers through good contract management and encouraging new suppliers to tender for up and coming opportunities. Community wealth building will work through the supply chain to help our town grow with opportunities that procurement gives.

Public Procurement Laws are being reformed by the government simplifying processes as a result of Brexit. Stevenage Borough Council will unleash the potential of public procurement so that departments can tailor their procedures to meet the needs of the market.

We signed the Co-operative Party Modern Slavery Charter in September 2018 as a frontline stand against modern slavery. We have trained our corporate procurement team to support challenging any low cost tenders and report any contractors that they feel may be of concern. We actively check our supply chains to ensure that exploitation has no place across our Council.

Successful implementation of this strategy ensures that every pound spent is at the heart of achieving value for money and supporting the residents, communities and businesses of Stevenage.



Councillor Joan Lloyd (Mrs)
Portfolio Holder for Resources

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Progress since our last strategy.....

Our strategy is published on the Council website along with our 'Selling to the Council' Guide.	We have made further updates to our Contract Standing Orders for Band 2 to say that Council Officers must invite a Stevenage based supplier if one such exists and is appropriate for the requirement.
We have encouraged procuring officers to carry out pre-market engagement for procurement exercises to understand what suppliers are able to offer prior to starting the procurement.	We have delivered an online webinar to help small businesses understand how to do business with the Council.
The Council publishes a quarterly pipeline of procurement opportunities and the contracts register on the website.	We have encouraged procuring officers to get local suppliers wanting to do business with the Council to sign up on the Supply Hertfordshire website – http://www.supplyhertfordshire.uk/ so they can receive automatic email alerts.
We have revised our bidding documents to make them simpler to understand.	Procurements over £75,000 are openly advertised through Supply Hertfordshire and Contracts Finder.

Future Town, Future Council

The delivery of the Council's ambitions will be central to every procurement exercise. It is also important for the Council to ensure that the organisations and individuals it does business with have culture and values that align with the Council's.

Procurement is a function which works alongside many other areas of the Council. There is a requirement for awareness and adherence to UK Law and other Council policies and strategies. For example, Health and Safety Acts and regulations, Safeguarding, Equality and Diversity, Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006, Confidentiality and Publicity, Data Protection, Freedom of Information, the Modern Slavery Act, Anti-terrorism, Anti-Fraud and Corruption, Commercial and Co-operative Insourcing Strategy, Co-operative and Inclusive Economy Charter and Climate Change Strategy.

Stevenage will promote effective procurement across the Borough with a long term focus on its ambitions.

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The Council will contribute to facilitating economic growth, including the transformation of the town and high-quality housing. Procuring officers are committed to encouraging and working with a diverse and competitive supply chain including working with small firms, social enterprises, ethnic minority businesses, voluntary and community sector suppliers and encouraging apprenticeship schemes.

Five Principle Foundations of the Stevenage Procurement Strategy

The Procurement Strategy for 2021-2024 is made up of five principle foundations.

Each foundation is a building block of the considerations that need to underpin the procurement process and will be embedded in the way we procure our goods, works and services contracts to support the Council's ambitions.

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1. Community Wealth Building

Community Wealth Building focuses on how much money is held and reinvested into an area for the benefit of local communities. Stevenage Borough Council is well positioned to promote opportunities for SMEs, Employee Owned Businesses, Social Enterprises and other Community Based or Owned Businesses within the Borough which will support the aim of locally re-circulating wealth in the area.

This Procurement Strategy will encourage the development of Community Wealth Building as part of our foundations. We will embed Community Wealth Building into our procurement process, into the supply chain and the community. We will engage with other anchor institutions to include relevant departments from Hertfordshire County Council, the NHS, North Herts College and the University of Hertfordshire. The success that comes from Stevenage Borough Council will be used as a means to explore and incorporate this agenda within other anchor institutions thus creating economies of scale to lever our collective spend. By adapting their procurement processes and decision making, anchor institutions can create dense local supply chains and ecosystems of local enterprises, SMEs, Employee Owned Businesses, Social Enterprises, Cooperatives and other forms of Community Ownership. This is important because these types of businesses are more likely to support local employment and have a greater tendency to recirculate wealth and surplus locally.

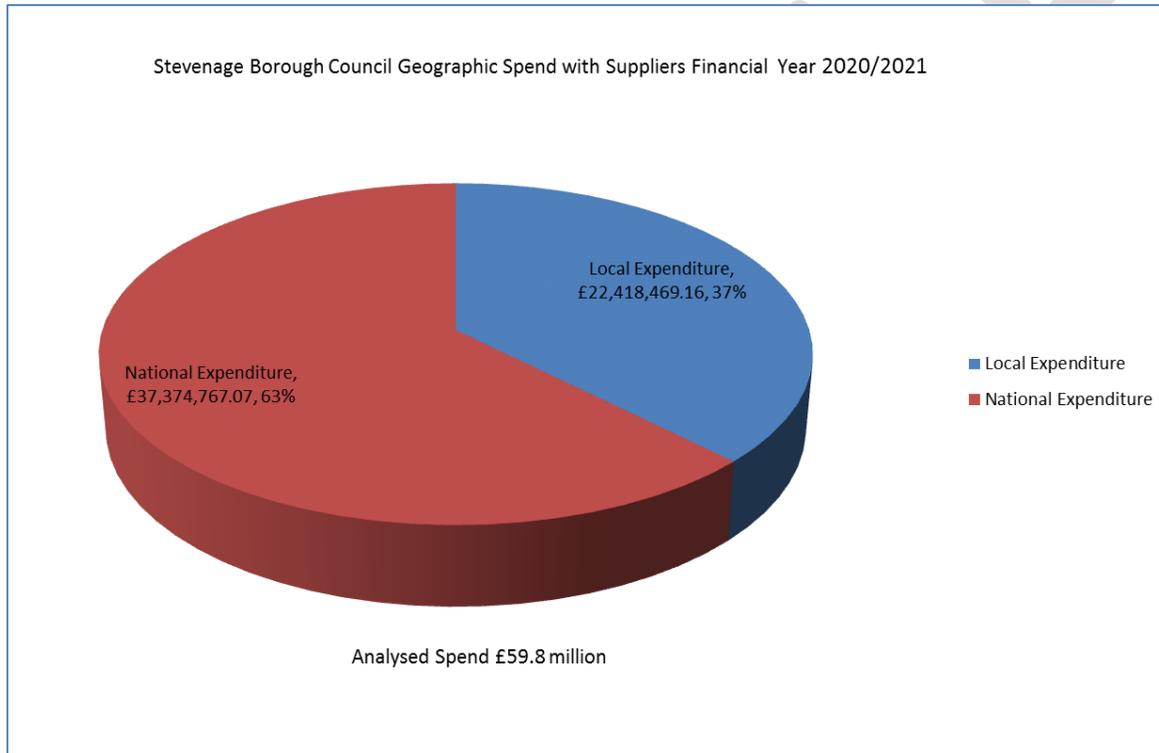
Community Wealth Building works with the other four principle foundations forming this strategy by helping to address the various inequalities experienced by our residents by focussing on generating economic growth and supporting financial resilience within our local community.

Stevenage Borough Council is a member of the Cooperative Council's Innovation Network which recognises the need to define a new model for local government built on civic leadership, with councils working in equal partnership with local people to shape and strengthen communities. This means a new role for local authorities that replaces traditional models of top down governance and service delivery with local leadership, genuine co-operation, and a new approach built on the founding traditions of the co-operative movement: collective action, co-operation, empowerment and enterprise.

As part of the recovery efforts from Covid-19, the Council established a charter for the town to drive pledges from public, private and voluntary sector partners to rebuild the local economy putting residents and local enterprises at the heart of recovery planning.

The Cooperative and Inclusive Economy Charter aims to prevent money leaving the area. Ways of doing this include making contracts more accessible to small and medium sized local companies, and connecting local people to good jobs. The council identified two main benefits when developing the charter – bringing about a fairer society, as people become more connected to their economy, and a more resilient economy as people and businesses cooperate to create sustainable growth.

In 2020/2021 Stevenage Borough Council (“The Council”) spent approximately £60 million on the procurement of goods, works and services; this was an increase of £10 million from the previous year. The increase is a result of the major construction projects being undertaken in the town as part of the regeneration scheme. The chart below maps the geographical area our expenditure has been made in. We can see from the geographical spend that 37% goes to suppliers locally. We have defined local as all suppliers that are based in Hertfordshire, Luton and Central Bedfordshire.



2. Sustainability

Stevenage Borough Council declared a climate emergency in June 2019 and reconfirmed its commitment to battling climate change by setting a target to ensure Stevenage has net-zero emissions by 2030. Tackling climate change and improving sustainability must be a key foundation for all procurement activity. By harnessing our purchasing power we will: help combat climate change and reduce carbon emissions; reduce waste; save resources; improve air quality; and enhance green space and promote biodiversity. The Council, following Hertfordshire County Council, is approaching the climate emergency through three specific themes: Enable, Lead, and Inspire. While Stevenage Borough Council is fully committed to being net zero carbon itself by 2030, it is also committed to achieving that for all within Stevenage. The Council can only do this in partnership and with the support of the town. Through identifying these 3 approaches and effective engagement it is possible to empower everyone to reduce their carbon emissions, including the supply chain.

We will drive sustainability into our procurement process in the following ways:

- As a minimum comply with all relevant environmental, social and procurement legislation.
- Support our goal of net-zero emissions by 2030 and reduce carbon dioxide emissions from contracted services.
- Wherever possible, the Council will specify products which are made from recycled products, can be recycled or re-used, can be operated in an energy efficient manner and cause minimal damage to the environment in their production, distribution, use and disposal; so long as the requirements for value for money and quality are met.
- Lessen environmental impacts across design, construction and operation, as well as services and goods provision.
- Ensure that waste is reduced, reused, and recycled wherever possible.
- Reduce all plastic waste.
- Integrate environmental considerations throughout the procurement process, from options appraisal to contract completion, applying appropriate significance.
- Reduce energy consumption and maximise the use of green energy sources.
- Reduce the energy consumption and subsequent contribution to the Council's carbon footprint from ICT equipment and electrical appliances.
- Support services that help generate improved air pollution within the town.

- Reduce transport impacts through smarter delivery options and encourage greener vehicles to be used both within the Council's fleet and for contracted services.
- Avoid the unnecessary use of chemicals, and prevent the use of hazardous chemicals wherever possible on our estate and within our contracted services.
- Support options that encourage green infrastructure and biodiversity.



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3. Social Value and Ethical Procurement

'Social Value' is a way of thinking about how scarce resources are allocated and used. It involves looking beyond the price of each individual contract and looking at what the collective benefit to a community is, when a public body chooses to award a contract. Social value asks the question 'If £1 is spent on the delivery of services, can that same £1 be used to also produce a wider benefit to the community?' The Public Services (Social Value) Act came into force on 31 January 2013. It requires people who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic and environmental benefits. Before they start the procurement process, commissioners should think about whether the services they are going to buy, or the way they are going to buy them, could secure these benefits for their area or stakeholders.

Stevenage Borough Council has chosen to use the Social Value Portal to manage social value within its tendered contracts – <https://socialvalueportal.com/> evaluating social value comprises of themes, opportunities and measures. The themes which are being used in procurement at Stevenage are:

- Promote Local Skills and Employment
- Supporting Growth of Responsible Regional Business
- Healthier, Safer and more Resilient Communities
- Decarbonising and safeguarding our world
- Promoting Social Innovation

As a member of the Co-operative Councils Innovation Network, Stevenage Borough Council is a local authority committed to reforming the way it works through building an equal partnership with local people, based on the values and principles of the International Co-operative Alliance. We will support the development of a framework and criteria for social value, giving substance to the concept and to ensure better local social and economic outcomes.

Social Value can help support Community Wealth Building aims to revive local economies, renew trust in local services and deliver a renaissance of local government; by giving businesses and communities a bigger stake in the local economy.

The council is committed to ensuring a high standard of ethical trade practices, across its commissioning and procurement activities. The council expects its suppliers, service providers and contractors to act with integrity and transparency in their dealings and practices, adhering to the laws of the countries where they operate. These are not normally included explicitly in the subject matter of the contracts as most are governed by legal requirements which if breached would be grounds for excluding the supplier from further contracts for non-compliance.

Stevenage Borough Council has signed up to the Co-operative Party Charter against Modern Slavery which aims to establish ethical labour sourcing practices in our supply chain and establish robust recruitment processes. We require all of our contractors to comply fully with the Modern Slavery Act 2015, wherever it applies, with contract termination as a potential sanction for non-compliance.

Procurement can be the target of anti-competitive, fraudulent and corrupt activities. The Council will take steps to minimise the opportunity for these and use clear policy statements and codes of conduct which are easily accessible by members, staff and the public.

4. Commercial & Insourcing

Stevenage Borough Council recognises that it is operating in a rapidly changing environment, with increasing financial challenges which are expected to become more demanding in future years. In the last decade, against the backdrop of austerity, £10m of ongoing savings have been made. In addition, the council have made investments via the Future Town, Future Council programme in regeneration, building new homes, improving council homes, supporting neighbourhoods and improving services for customers.

There is a need for the Council to adapt its culture, thinking and ways of working. In August 2020 the Council launched its Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy which harnesses greater innovation, financial flexibility, commercial awareness, prudent risk management and the effective use of new technologies. Commercialisation will be embraced and delivered throughout the organisation, with opportunities identified and realised universally wherever possible. As a Co-operative Council, the focus will be on cooperative solutions and where possible work will be undertaken through the Co-operative Council Innovation Network. The Council defines commercialism as the ability to manage services well and efficiently and be innovative in generating vital funds to be able to protect vital services and deliver the best value for our communities and customers. This includes maximising value for money from contractual relationships, including the consideration of insourcing services.

The council will continue with its commitment to use in-house and shared services to deliver council operations, and insourcing will be the council's default position, other than when there is sufficient evidence that this is not an option. All services provided to, or on behalf of the council by external suppliers or third parties will be reviewed to establish if an opportunity exists to enhance service delivery or achieve better value by delivering services directly. Officers are being provided with guidance on considerations around insourcing and where possible, business units will be developed to deliver work that is currently contracted out to others. Attention will be given to whether opportunities exist to join up work streams across the council and break down silo approaches when procuring services and managing contracts. Insourcing roadmaps will be used to list known contracts and potential insourcing opportunities and will detail timescales for their consideration.

5. Pro-active Procurement

High quality, professional procurement support is essential to deliver better procurements and also for developing a knowledge and intelligence base to support the delivery of the Council's ambitions. The procurement process spans from the pre-market engagement, preparation, the tender and award and through to the final stage of contract management. We expect to form a pro-active approach at all stages in the procurement cycle taking stock and considering our options to best meet the needs of our town.

Pro-active Communication

- Generating opportunities to engage with our stakeholders, developing a knowledge base of up and coming procurements and understanding how they translate into the Council's ambitions. This will include the quarterly contracts and procurement group.
- Reaching out to establish opportunities to engage with the community, local businesses, the voluntary sector through meet the buyer events and by utilising technology to offer webinars on how to do business with the Council.
- Through this process, building a repository of intelligence and using it to enable us to be best placed to provide appropriate guidance, developing a consultative pro-active approach across the Council to all our procurements.

Pro-active Learning

- From the procurements we have undertaken, wherever possible we will follow up with a lessons learnt plan to ensure that we are making the most effective use of public money and looking for opportunities to develop our local supply base.
- The Corporate Procurement team will ensure that they are appropriately trained and guided, with suitable tools and data to pro-actively move the procurement strategy forward.
- Providing opportunities to develop skills and knowledge, as well as creating career pathways that will enable the Council to attract and retain the best talent.

- The Council will continually review how its procurement teams are resourced to pro-actively support and deliver the challenges of the Procurement Strategy.
- The Corporate Procurement team will deliver training to procuring staff across the Council to promote the five principle foundations of the Procurement Strategy.

Pro-active Analysis

- Data integrity and intelligence is beneficial to good pro-active procurement. We will use the Council's financial data to assist with our decision making.
- Have the ability to generate reports that provide a complete understanding of our contractual spend and supplier make up, including local versus non local spend.

Pro-active Contract Management

- Meeting the requirements of the Local Government Transparency Code 2015 by capturing all contracts over £5,000 on a central contracts register to support effective contract management.
- Procuring Officers will confirm procurements for major and operational contracts have appropriate KPI's and outcome measures included.
- Learning from suppliers and stakeholders to understand how performance and outcomes have been delivered and can be improved, along with lessons learnt to build into future procurements.
- Undertaking benchmarking exercises of pre-agreed services and continually reviewing the contracts to ensure maximum value is being achieved. Where appropriate review any possible insourcing opportunities.
- Delivering training on a regular basis to support officers that are pro-actively managing contracts.

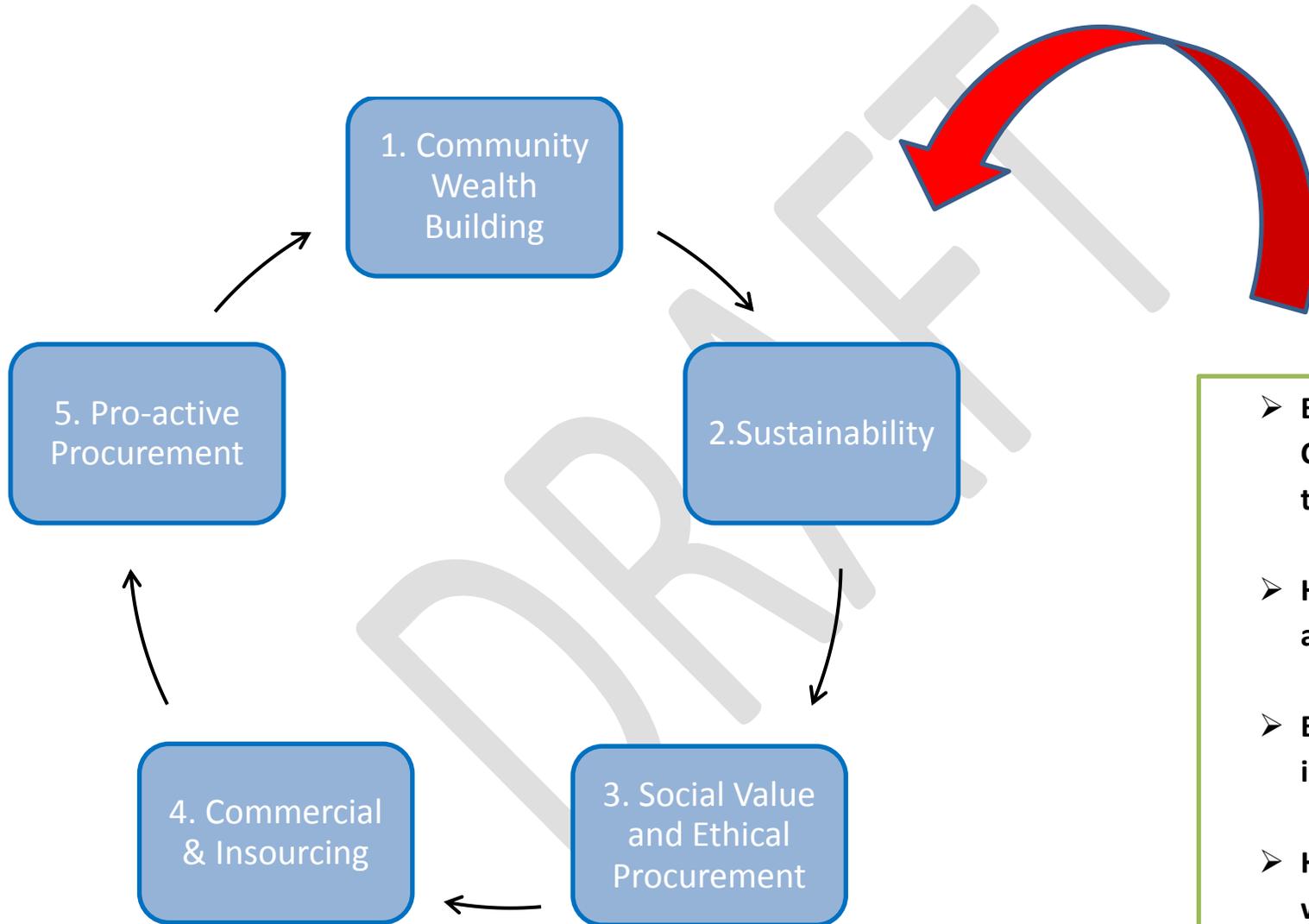
Pro-actively Moving Forward

- Reviewing progress across the five principle foundations of the Procurement Strategy.
- Taking on board feedback from all stakeholders (internal and external) and constantly striving through our procurements to deliver maximum social, environmental and economic benefits for our local communities.
- Providing guidance through spend and contract information on where our focus should be in supporting the Council's Future Town Future Council ambitions while balancing the need to make efficiencies.

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Moving Forward – The Five Principle Foundations

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- **Be a financially resilient Council with enough resource to deliver our priorities**
- **Have the right people, skills and knowledge**
- **Become a smart Council with improved performance**
- **Have stronger partnerships with key agencies to deliver our priorities**

Community Wealth Building

The Council is a key anchor institution in Stevenage and can lead by example to encourage and support Community Wealth Building. To create community wealth from a procurement perspective we need to understand the local supplier base.

Outcome Delivery – Increase the number of local suppliers we use within Stevenage year on year from our current baseline

Indicators

- Number of contracts awarded to local suppliers
- Amount spent with the local supply chain

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1. Understand the local supplier base Target: by Dec 2021

- Conduct research, identify supplier engagement activities, and work with key local supplier representatives to understand more of what our local supplier base comprises of.
- Conduct a gap analysis to show what we are looking to procure across our programmes of work versus the types of local suppliers.

2. Understand opportunities for local suppliers Target: by Mar 2022

- Through supplier events and by improving our online offer specific to local suppliers, enabling them to learn more about the support available, future opportunities and how to register on the procurement portal – www.supplyhertfordshire.uk.

3.	Targeting procurements for the local supply base	Target: to commence April 2022
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- Identify the number of social enterprises, for example, Mutual, Co-operatives, Community Interest Companies etc. in the local community.
- Understand what services they can provide and look to conduct preferred contract procurements targeted to social enterprises in line with current legislation.
- Through our procurements, create links for larger suppliers to use our local supply chain in delivery of the required project, capturing the number of suppliers and amount spent within the local economy.
- Work with key departments to encourage the creation of more social enterprises that will support community wealth building.

4.	Broadening our scope to bring in other Anchor organisations	Target: to commence Jun 2022
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- To engage with other anchor institutions in Stevenage and Hertfordshire such as the NHS, Hertfordshire County Council, North Herts College and The University of Hertfordshire to work collaboratively on procurements embedding wealth building.
- Specifically looking to identify opportunities where leveraging spend will enable all involved to provide more opportunities for the local economy.
- Using an evidence based approach to demonstrate the journey, intelligence around the local supply base and social enterprises, as well as successes with regard to increases in the amount we have been able to spend within the community.

Sustainability

The Council’s commitment to achieving net zero emissions by 2030 and leading work to establish Stevenage as a leader in sustainable transport and the enhancement of Stevenage’s biodiversity will be supported through the procurement process.

Outcome Delivery – Reduce waste through smarter procurement

Indicators

- How many of our suppliers have strategies in place to reduce carbon in the supply chain. This will be tested through the evaluation of the procurement process and contract management.

1. Create a Procurement Sustainability check list for use on all future procurements **Target: March 2022**

- Incorporating the ‘Communication and Collaboration Plan’ from the Climate Change Strategy to create a sustainability check list suitable to use in the procurement process.
- Working with departments to ensure that the check list captures all aspects to the procurements that will be undertaken.

2. Implementing the Procurement Sustainability checklist **Target: to commence April 2022**

- Working with the contracts and procurement group and delivering training across the Council to end users to roll out the use of the checklist.
- Once agreed to use the check list as part of the contract management process.
- Link into the social value portal theme of Decarbonising and Safeguarding our world.

Social Value and Ethical Procurement

Stevenage Borough Council is firmly committed to social value and will be embedding the Social Value Portal into all tendered procurements.

Outcome Delivery – Measure the delivery of social value

Indicators

- The individual TOM's (Themes, Opportunities and Measures) will be reported on from the Social Value Portal.

1.	To work with the Social Value Portal to select the TOM's for Stevenage Borough Council	Target: March 2021
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- Organise a workshop with officers from different areas of the Council to define what TOM's are suitable for Stevenage Borough Council to use.

2.	To include Social Value Evaluation in all tenders over £75,000	Target: to commence September 2021
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- Develop guidance and update the standard procurement tendering templates.
- Offer training to officers on the Social Value portal where required.

3.	To report on the TOM's for Stevenage	Target: to commence April 2022
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- Use the available data to report on the Social Value being created by the supply chain in Stevenage.

4.	Modern Slavery Statement	Target: to commence April 2021
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- To review and update the Council's Modern Slavery Statement on an annual basis.

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Commercial & Insourcing

The Council will identify commercial options and insourcing opportunities which will support the Council's financial position.

Outcome Delivery – to increase the number of insourced contracts or where there is commercial opportunity

Indicators

- Number of contracts insourced
- Number of contracts insourced and then scaled up for services to be sold externally
- Savings realised through the insourcing of contracts
- Number of contracts with income generation

1.	Embed a review process 18-24 months prior to end of contract to consider insourcing/commercial options	Target: to commence January 2022
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- As part of the contract management process at around 24 months prior to the end of a contract a process is to be implemented to review whether the contract is suitable to bring in house and what the financial and resource implications would be.

2.	Case Studies	Target: September 2022
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- Where successful insourcing has taken place, encourage the departments responsible to produce a case study to showcase the positives and any problems with the process as a learning tool.
- Case studies are also to be encouraged for procurement projects where successful commercial opportunities have been implemented and executed.

Pro-active Procurement

Corporate Procurement will support the delivery of savings by identifying further budget options through the transformation programme, through better communication and contract management.

Outcome Delivery – Provide commercial intelligence to ensure we are achieving value for money

Indicators

- Maintain the contracts register and identify opportunities to collaborate on internal contracts
- Work with the contracts and procurement group to understand opportunities and risks of up and coming projects and contract management
- Developing supplier relationships
- Savings/cost avoidance

1.	Pro-active Communication	Target: Continue to build April 2021
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- Continue to pro-actively manage up and coming opportunities and publish the procurement pipeline on the Council’s website.
- Support local and small businesses by offering webinars, participating at meet the buyer events and updating the Selling to the Council guide on the internet.
- Update and build a repository of new guidance and web links relevant to procuring officers as and when required on the internal intranet, to include for example information on the National Procurement Policy Statement.

2.	Pro-active Learning	Target: Continue to build April 2021
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- Set up a process to enable a debrief and lessons learned plan after all tendered procurements.
- Continually review how the Council's procurement function is resourced in order to ensure it is equipped to support and deliver the challenges of the Corporate Procurement Strategy.
- To deliver training to procuring staff across the Council to promote the five principle foundations of the Corporate Procurement Strategy.

3.	Pro-active Analysis	Target: Continue to build April 2021
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- Working with departments to ensure there is a full awareness of data requirements and how this feeds into supporting the Council's ambitions.
- Generate reports to provide a complete understanding of our contractual spend and supplier make up including local versus non local spend.

4.	Pro-active Contract Management	Target: Continue to build April 2021
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- All contracts over £5,000 are to be recorded on the central contacts register and published online.
- Procuring Officers to ensure all contracts have appropriate KPI's and outcome measures included.
- Work with departments and offer guidance and training to ensure contract management and performance is achieving contractual commitments.

- Undertake benchmarking exercises of pre-agreed services and continually review the contracts to ensure maximum value is being achieved. Where appropriate review any possible insourcing opportunities.

5.	Pro-actively Moving Forward	Target: Continue to build April 2021
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- Building in the milestones set out across all of the five principle foundations in the Corporate Procurement Strategy and reviewing regularly to make sure we are on track.

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First things first: does this activity need an EqIA?

Subject of the assessment:	Review of the Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2021-2024	
Please answer Yes or No to the following questions:		
Does it affect staff, service users or the wider community?		Yes
Has it been identified as being important to particular groups of people?		Yes
Does it or could it potentially affect different groups of people differently (unequal)?		Yes
Does it relate to an area where there are known inequalities or exclusion issues?		No
Will it have an impact on how other organisations operate?		Yes
Is there potential for it to cause controversy or affect the council's reputation as a public service provider?		Yes

Where a positive impact is likely, will this help to:	Please tick all that apply (✓)
Remove discrimination and harassment?	Yes
Promote equal opportunities?	Yes
Encourage good relations?	Yes

If you ticked or answered Yes to one or more of these questions you should carry out an EqIA. There are two levels of analysis (Brief and Full) and in deciding which to go for, you should think about not just the number of people affected but the significance of the effect on them – both positive and negative.

If you answered No to all of the questions and decide that your activity doesn't need an EqIA you must explain below why it has no relevance to equality and diversity. You should reference the information you used to support your decision and seek approval from your Head of Service or Strategic Director before sending this to equalities@stevenage.gov.uk.



Full Equality Impact Assessment

For a policy, project, service or other decision that is new, changing or under review

What is being assessed?		Review of Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2021-2024			
Lead Assessor	Lisa Baldock			Assessment team	Contracts and Procurement Group
Start date	December 2020	End date	October 2021		
When will the EqIA be reviewed?	October 2022				

Who may be affected by it?	Staff procuring across the Council, local stakeholders and contractors.
What are the key aims of it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Strategy has been written around five principle foundations of Community Wealth Building, Sustainability, Social Value & Ethical Procurement, Commercial and Insourcing and Pro-active Procurement. It has been revised and rewritten to align with the Council’s Future Town, Future Council ambitions and outcomes. The Strategy manages the Council’s duty to provide value for money for our residents and customers through effective procurement policies and practices.

What positive measures are in place (if any) to help fulfil our legislative duties to:					
Remove discrimination & harassment	Procurement is conducted fairly and transparently opening opportunities for all types of organisation to do business with the Council. Procurements undertaken will ensure suppliers are committed to following the Equalities Act 2010 through signed terms and	Promote equal opportunities	Procurement is conducted fairly and transparently opening opportunities for all types of organisation to do business with the Council. Procurements undertaken will ensure suppliers are committed to following the Equalities Act 2010 through signed terms and	Encourage good relations	Procurement is conducted fairly and transparently opening opportunities for all types of organisation to do business with the Council. Procurements undertaken will ensure suppliers are committed to following the Equalities Act 2010 through

	conditions and good contract management.		conditions and good contract management.		signed terms and conditions and good contract management.
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What sources of data / information are you using to inform your assessment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Public Contract Regulations 2015 • The Councils Contract Standing Orders • Other Council Policies and Strategies that link into procurement i.e. Data Protection, the Modern Slavery Act, Climate Change Strategy, Commercial and Insourcing Strategy & Safeguarding. • Data used in the Strategy to show how much is spent locally and nationally - £22,418,469.16 (local) & £37,374,767.07(national)
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In assessing the potential impact on people, are there any overall comments that you would like to make?	<p>Under the foundation of Community Wealth Building the Council will be identifying the number of social enterprises, for example Mutual, Co-operatives, Community Interest Companies etc. in the local community. We will understand what services they can provide and look to conduct preferred contract procurement targeted to social enterprises.</p> <p>The consideration of completing an EQIA is given in the guidance on the intranet for officers undertaking a procurement process to ensure that individual needs are met for differing procurement projects.</p>
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Evidence and impact assessment

Explain the potential impact and opportunities it could have for people in terms of the following characteristics, where applicable:

Age					
Positive impact	The Procurement Strategy refers to the Equality Act 2010.	Negative impact	The mitigation of any negative impact will be achieved through training and advising Officers on equalities in procurement.	Unequal impact	

Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	The Contract Standing Order 8.7 states that the Council must have due regard to the requirements of the public sector equalities duty under the Equalities Act 2010, which must be taken into account when procuring goods, work or services from external providers.		
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	The Council encourages all suppliers to register on the Supply Hertfordshire portal. All contracts over £75,000 are advertised through Supply Hertfordshire and Contracts Finder to ensure maximum accessibility and ability to participate.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	The consideration of an Equalities Impact Assessment for all procurement exercises to ensure that individual needs are met for differing projects.

Disability e.g. physical impairment, mental ill health, learning difficulties, long-standing illness					
Positive impact	The Procurement Strategy refers to the Equality Act 2010.	Negative impact	The mitigation of any negative impact will be achieved through training and advising Officers on equalities in procurement.	Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment	The Contract Standing Order 8.7 states that the Council must have due regard to the requirements of the public sector equalities duty under the Equalities Act 2010, which must be taken into account when procuring goods, work or services from external providers.				
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	The Council encourages all suppliers to register on the Supply Hertfordshire portal. All contracts over £75,000 are advertised through Supply Hertfordshire and Contracts Finder to ensure maximum accessibility and ability to participate.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	The consideration of an Equalities Impact Assessment for all procurement exercises to ensure that individual needs are met for differing projects.		

Gender reassignment					
Positive	The Procurement	Negative	The mitigation of any	Unequal	

impact	Strategy refers to the Equality Act 2010.	impact	negative impact will be achieved through training and advising Officers on equalities in procurement.	impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		The Contract Standing Order 8.7 states that the Council must have due regard to the requirements of the public sector equalities duty under the Equalities Act 2010, which must be taken into account when procuring goods, work or services from external providers.			
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	The Council encourages all suppliers to register on the Supply Hertfordshire portal. All contracts over £75,000 are advertised through Supply Hertfordshire and Contracts Finder to ensure maximum accessibility and ability to participate.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	The consideration of an Equalities Impact Assessment for all procurement exercises to ensure that individual needs are met for differing projects.		

Marriage or civil partnership

Positive impact	The Procurement Strategy refers to the Equality Act 2010.	Negative impact	The mitigation of any negative impact will be achieved through training and advising Officers on equalities in procurement.	Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		The Contract Standing Order 8.7 states that the Council must have due regard to the requirements of the public sector equalities duty under the Equalities Act 2010, which must be taken into account when procuring goods, work or services from external providers.			
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	The Council encourages all suppliers to register on the Supply Hertfordshire portal. All contracts over £75,000 are advertised through Supply Hertfordshire and Contracts Finder to ensure maximum accessibility and ability to participate.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	The consideration of an Equalities Impact Assessment for all procurement exercises to ensure that individual needs are met for differing projects.		

Pregnancy & maternity					
Positive impact	The Procurement Strategy refers to the Equality Act 2010.	Negative impact	The mitigation of any negative impact will be achieved through training and advising Officers on equalities in procurement.	Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		The Contract Standing Order 8.7 states that the Council must have due regard to the requirements of the public sector equalities duty under the Equalities Act 2010, which must be taken into account when procuring goods, work or services from external providers.			
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	The Council encourages all suppliers to register on the Supply Hertfordshire portal. All contracts over £75,000 are advertised through Supply Hertfordshire and Contracts Finder to ensure maximum accessibility and ability to participate.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	The consideration of an Equalities Impact Assessment for all procurement exercises to ensure that individual needs are met for differing projects.		

Race					
Positive impact	The Procurement Strategy refers to the Equality Act 2010.	Negative impact	The mitigation of any negative impact will be achieved through training and advising Officers on equalities in procurement.	Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		The Contract Standing Order 8.7 states that the Council must have due regard to the requirements of the public sector equalities duty under the Equalities Act 2010, which must be taken into account when procuring goods, work or services from external providers.			
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	The Council encourages all suppliers to register on the Supply Hertfordshire portal. All contracts over £75,000 are advertised through Supply Hertfordshire and Contracts Finder to ensure maximum accessibility and ability to	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	The consideration of an Equalities Impact Assessment for all procurement exercises to ensure that individual needs are met for differing projects.		

	participate.		
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Religion or belief					
Positive impact	The Procurement Strategy refers to the Equality Act 2010.	Negative impact	The mitigation of any negative impact will be achieved through training and advising Officers on equalities in procurement.	Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		The Contract Standing Order 8.7 states that the Council must have due regard to the requirements of the public sector equalities duty under the Equalities Act 2010, which must be taken into account when procuring goods, work or services from external providers.			
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	The Council encourages all suppliers to register on the Supply Hertfordshire portal. All contracts over £75,000 are advertised through Supply Hertfordshire and Contracts Finder to ensure maximum accessibility and ability to participate.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	The consideration of an Equalities Impact Assessment for all procurement exercises to ensure that individual needs are met for differing projects.		

Sex					
Positive impact	The Procurement Strategy refers to the Equality Act 2010.	Negative impact	The mitigation of any negative impact will be achieved through training and advising Officers on equalities in procurement.	Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		The Contract Standing Order 8.7 states that the Council must have due regard to the requirements of the public sector equalities duty under the Equalities Act 2010, which must be taken into account when procuring goods, work or services from external providers.			
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	The Council encourages all suppliers to register on the Supply Hertfordshire portal. All contracts over £75,000 are	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	The consideration of an Equalities Impact Assessment for all procurement exercises to ensure that individual		

	advertised through Supply Hertfordshire and Contracts Finder to ensure maximum accessibility and ability to participate.		needs are met for differing projects.
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Sexual orientation					
e.g. straight, lesbian / gay, bisexual					
Positive impact	The Procurement Strategy refers to the Equality Act 2010.	Negative impact	The mitigation of any negative impact will be achieved through training and advising Officers on equalities in procurement.	Unequal impact	
Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment		The Contract Standing Order 8.7 states that the Council must have due regard to the requirements of the public sector equalities duty under the Equalities Act 2010, which must be taken into account when procuring goods, work or services from external providers.			
What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?	The Council encourages all suppliers to register on the Supply Hertfordshire portal. All contracts over £75,000 are advertised through Supply Hertfordshire and Contracts Finder to ensure maximum accessibility and ability to participate.	What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)	The consideration of an Equalities Impact Assessment for all procurement exercises to ensure that individual needs are met for differing projects.		

Socio-economic¹					
e.g. low income, unemployed, homelessness, caring responsibilities, access to internet, public transport users, social value in procurement					
Positive impact	Holding webinars and meet the buyer events to support all organisations that want to do	Negative impact	Some complex EU procurements may deter local and small suppliers from bidding, however	Unequal impact	Where some suppliers/individuals have difficulty using technology they may find it hard to

¹Although non-statutory, the council has chosen to implement the Socio-Economic Duty and so decision-makers should use their discretion to consider the impact on people with a socio-economic disadvantage.

	<p>business with the Council and updating the Selling to the Council guide. Using the Social Value portal to embed social value in all procurements over £75,000. Promoting the Supply Hertfordshire website for all organisations to see opportunities that exist and to ensure they are registered to be selected for under threshold procurements.</p>		<p>the procurement strategy encourages links for larger suppliers to use our local supply chain for the delivery of required projects.</p>		<p>read the strategy or find it hard to access opportunities to supply the Council.</p>
<p>Please evidence the data and information you used to support this assessment</p>	<p>The Contract Standing Order 6.5.12 states that the Social Value Act requires commissioners to consider securing economic, social or environmental benefits when buying services above the OJEU threshold. The Council has extended this further with the launch of the Social Value Portal under the Social Value & Ethical Procurement foundation of the Strategy which will be used for all procurements over £75,000.</p>				
<p>What opportunities are there to promote equality and inclusion?</p>	<p>We advertise our procurement opportunities over £75,000 electronically through Supply Hertfordshire to ensure maximum accessibility and ability to participate. We encourage all suppliers to register on the Supply Hertfordshire portal. Encouraging Procuring Officers to carry out pre-market engagement prior to procuring goods/works/services. Procuring Officers should consider carefully the procurement thresholds for each opportunity so as not to exclude smaller suppliers</p>	<p>What do you still need to find out? Include in actions (last page)</p>	<p>The consideration of an Equalities Impact Assessment for all procurement exercises to ensure that individual needs are met for differing projects.</p>		

	unnecessarily. Procuring Officers are reminded to embed policy requirements only when strictly needed and to try not to overcomplicate the procurement process.		
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What are the findings of any consultation with:

Staff?	<p>The findings of the consultation include making a strong bid to show diversity and inclusivity by attracting all suppliers. This will be managed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-market engagement Webinars to help encourage and simplify the process Promoting the Supply Hertfordshire website Only embedding policy requirements where needed There will also be training and guidance offered to procuring staff to remind Officers of the five principle foundations of the revised strategy. 	Residents?	Residents did not respond as part of the consultation.
Voluntary & community sector?	<p>The actions have already been inserted into the opportunities to promote equality and inclusion and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-market engagement Webinars to help encourage and simplify the process Promoting the Supply Hertfordshire website Only embedding policy requirements where needed 	Partners?	<p>The actions have already been inserted into the opportunities to promote equality and inclusion and include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-market engagement Webinars to help encourage and simplify the process Promoting the Supply Hertfordshire website Only embedding policy requirements where needed

Other stakeholders?	<p>The actions have already been inserted into the opportunities to promote equality and inclusion and include:</p> <p>Pre-market engagement</p> <p>Webinars to help encourage and simplify the process</p> <p>Promoting the Supply Hertfordshire website</p> <p>Only embedding policy requirements where needed</p>	
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Overall conclusion & future activity

Explain the overall findings of the assessment and reasons for outcome (please choose one):		
1. No inequality, inclusion issues or opportunities to further improve have been identified		
Negative / unequal impact, barriers to inclusion or improvement opportunities identified	2a. Adjustments made	Adjustments have been identified and will be used to promote equality and inclusion.
	2b. Continue as planned	
	2c. Stop and remove	

Detail the actions that are needed as a result of this assessment and how they will help to remove discrimination & harassment, promote equal opportunities and / or encourage good relations :				
Action	Will this help to remove, promote and / or encourage?	Responsible officer	Deadline	How will this be embedded as business as usual?
Incorporate equalities training as part of corporate procurement training suite.	This will help to promote equal opportunities and raise the awareness in the procurement process.	Corporate Procurement Manager	Ongoing	By asking Procuring Officers to check that appropriate Equalities clauses are included in the procurement process and that they are being fair and transparent with their

				process.
Ensure that all contracts comply with the Equalities Act 2010	<p>Corporate Procurement is to train and advise as appropriate on the Equalities Act 2010</p> <p>Departments are to check that the Equalities Act 2010 is covered in any procurement documents issued (latest versions on the intranet will contain up to date clauses)</p> <p>Legal Services to ensure that Equalities clauses are inserted into contract terms and conditions.</p>	<p>Corporate Procurement Manager</p> <p>Procuring Officers</p> <p>Shared Legal Services</p>	Ongoing	<p>By reminding the Procuring Officers about contracts and Equalities and ensuring that they embedding the appropriate clauses in contracts</p> <p>Through good contract management to ensure that the continuation of compliance with the Act continues throughout the contract duration.</p>
By encouraging local and diverse suppliers to participate in the Council's contract opportunities	<p>Through internal training supporting the requirement for pre-market engagement</p> <p>By working with the Council's Business Relationship Manager to support smaller, unusual or less culturally embedded suppliers to register on Supply Hertfordshire</p> <p>By updating Selling to the Council Guide to help small and local businesses understand the procurement process</p> <p>By delivering webinars to help encourage and simplify the process</p> <p>By advertising contracts through the Council's Twitter account</p>	<p>Corporate Procurement Manager</p> <p>Procuring Officers</p>	Ongoing	<p>By reminding the Contracts and Procurement Group and Procuring Officers about encouraging and enabling local and diverse suppliers to participate in contract opportunities.</p>



Approved by Assistant Director / Strategic Director: Clare Fletcher

Date: September 2021

Please send this EqIA to equalities@stevenage.gov.uk

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Briefing Paper on the Corporate Procurement Strategy 2021 – 2024 Consultation Results

Background

The Corporate Procurement Strategy 2021 – 2024 was put out to consultation through a survey in August 2021 following input from Councillor Joan Lloyd.

The consultation email was sent to 650 possible respondents (39 members, 61 staff and 550 businesses) including Biz4Biz, Herts Chamber of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses. The strategy consultation was targeted by individual email although there was an opportunity for additional businesses to participate via a link advertised through the Councils social media and for Council Officers through the intranet.

There were 19 completed survey responses received and a further 4 written responses. All of the responses have been included in this report.

There were 8 completed responses from businesses and 11 from Council Officers, there were no responses received from Members.

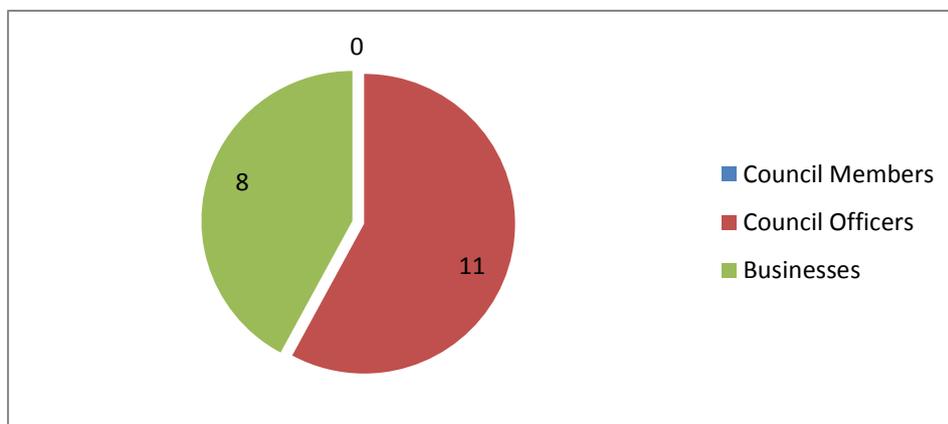
The businesses were asked to tell us about the main products and services that their business provided so some businesses fit into more than one category. The other areas included consultancy, information and communication technology, art and leisure services, horticulture, health, clothing, human resources, electric components and assemblies, commercial property advisory services, education, playground equipment, stationery and indoor and outdoor screens.

The survey response and sample size was small at 19 from a possible 650 (2.92%) but the results were positive to the Strategy with the exception of some of the written responses to the 'No' questions which have been included in the survey results.

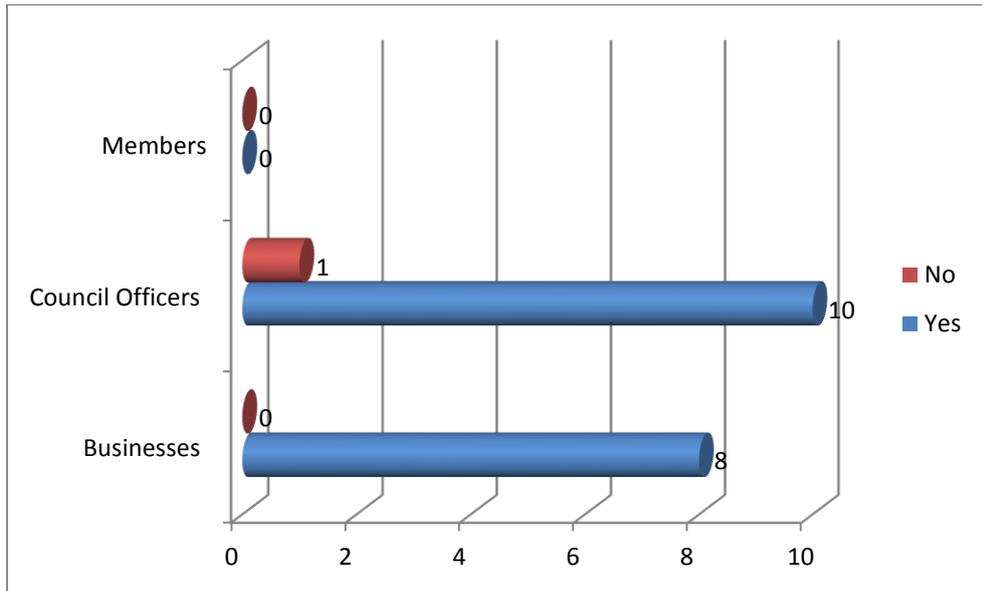
The 550 businesses invited to comment on the survey were local businesses in receipt of the Council's Economic Bulletin.

Survey Results

Question 1: Are you a Council Member, a Business or a Council Officer?



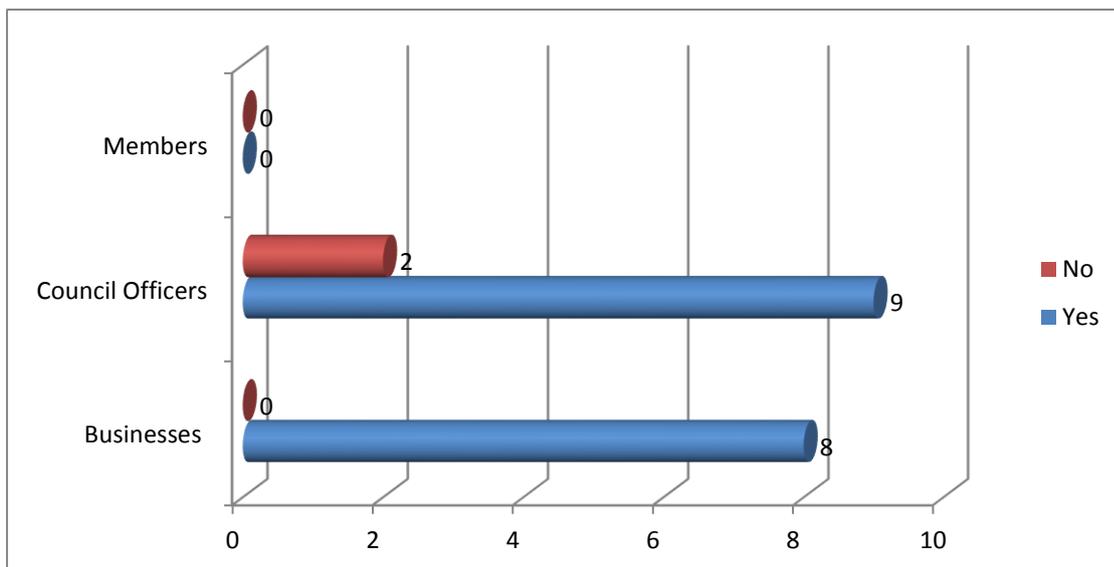
Question 2: Having read the draft strategy, do you think it will encourage local and small businesses to bid for council contracts?



Written information supplied to 'No' answers (Council Officers):

- It is fine for bigger companies who understand Local Government processes but from a small business perspective it seems complex and difficult in particular the jargon and policies they have to have in place.

Question 3: Do you think the strategy supports Stevenage Borough Council in being fair and open to all potential suppliers?



Written information supplied to 'No' answers (Council Officers):

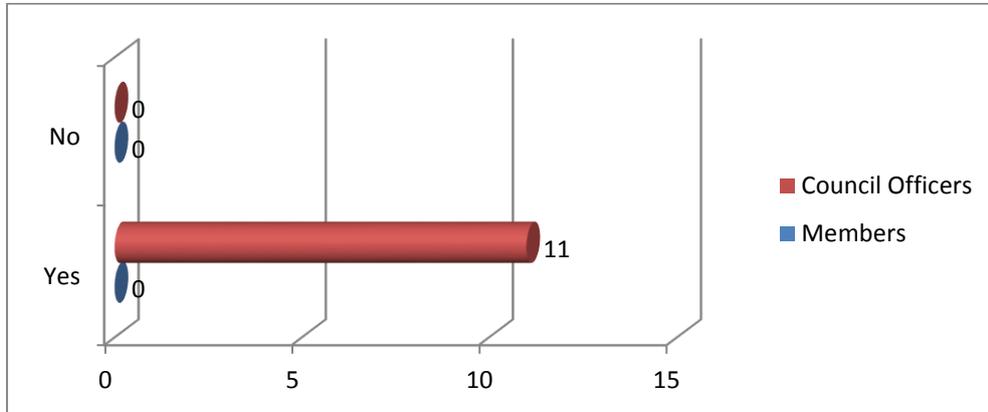
- It will exclude many small businesses as they don't have the knowhow or time. Fine for bigger businesses though.
- Although on the face of it the strategy is fair, it doesn't make a particularly strong bid to show diversity and inclusivity and therefore attract suppliers who normally would be left out. I believe the language should be more deliberate about targeting not just the smaller suppliers, but also the unusual ones or less culturally embedded.

Question 4: Please use the box below to add any other comments or suggestions

Council Officers	We need to include with the section 5 something about reducing expenditure/costs as well as income generation as both will ultimately reduce costs to the council.
Businesses	The Council should do all it can to ensure that organisations it contracts with to provide large infrastructure projects subcontract locally as much as possible.
	The system needs to be fairer for SMEs to be able to compete.
	We understand things are tough at the minute so therefore expect nothing.
	The report speaks of co-operative working. Although a co-operative council for some time now, it is evident that the behaviours of the council have yet to change. One example is the council recent claims of having held a Virtual Stevenage Day in 2020, whereas the limit of its involvement was to reach out to other organisations on our behalf and record a message from the Mayor and Leader of the Council.

Question 5: Do you think our five principle procurement foundations (community wealth building, sustainability, social value and ethical procurement, commercial and insourcing and pro-active procurement) are fit for purpose to meet the Council’s ambitions for 2021-2024?

This question was for Council Members and Council Officers only.

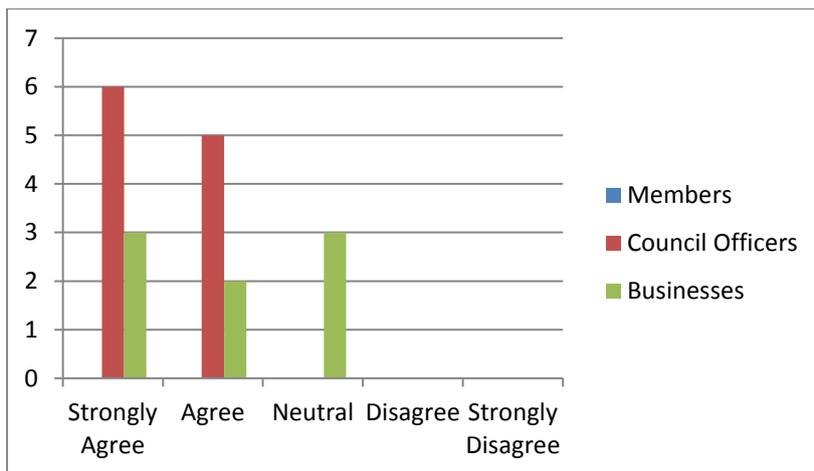


Question 6: To what extent do you agree with our proposed outcome delivery targets for each principle procurement foundation (on pages 18-26)?

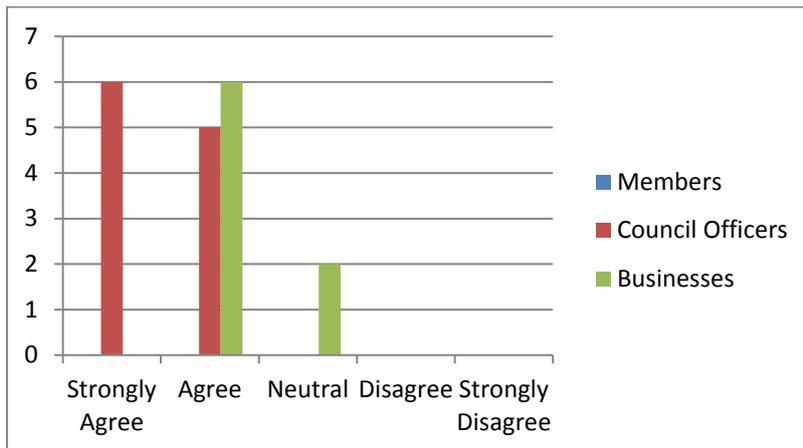
- Community Wealth Building?
- Sustainability?
- Social Value and Ethical Procurement?
- Commercial and Insourcing?
- Pro-active Procurement?

This question was based on a response of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree.

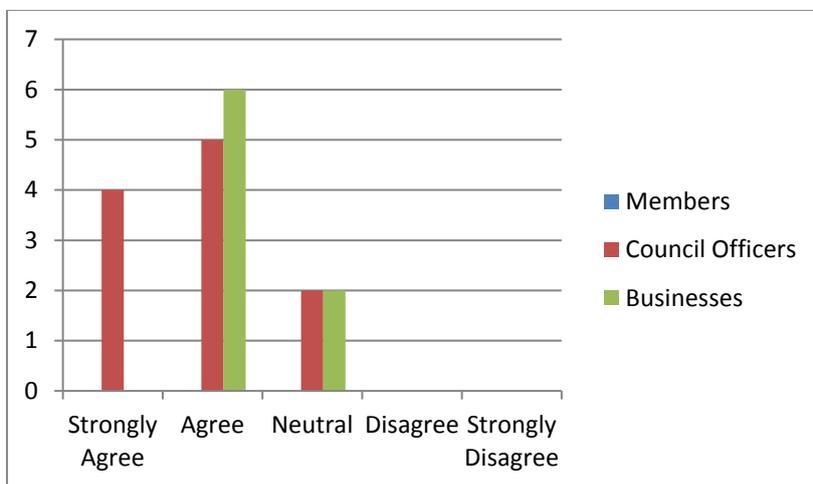
Community Wealth Building



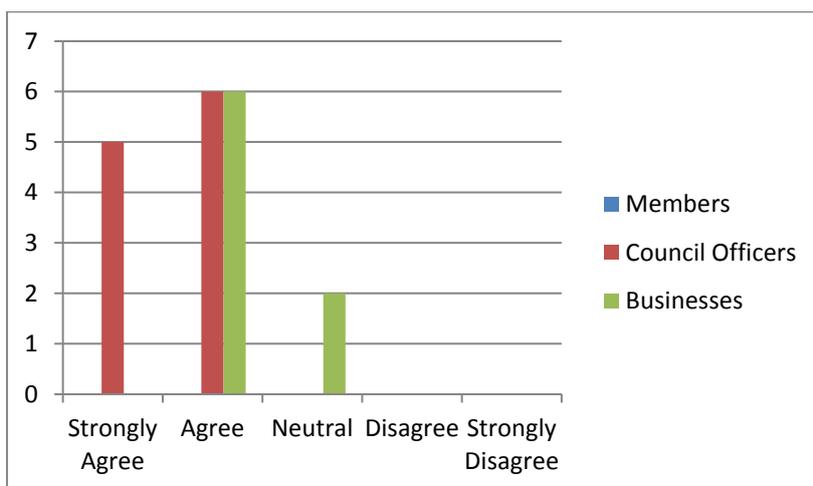
Sustainability



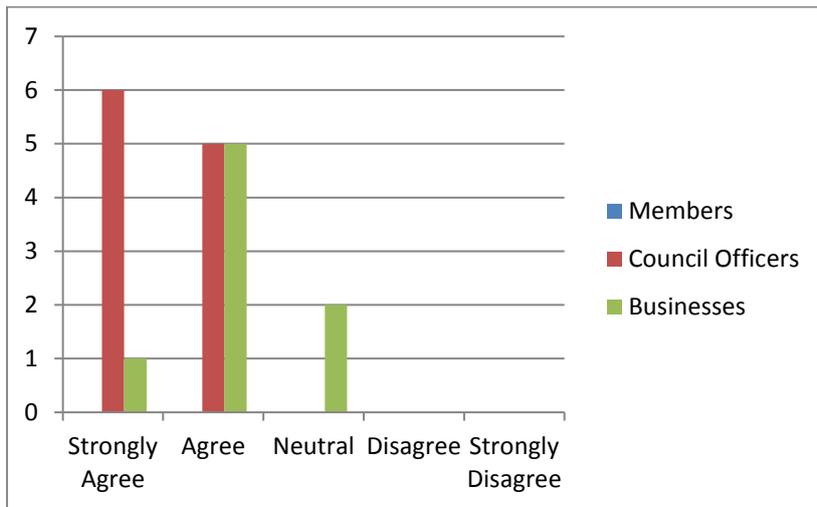
Social Value and Ethical Procurement



Commercial & Insourcing

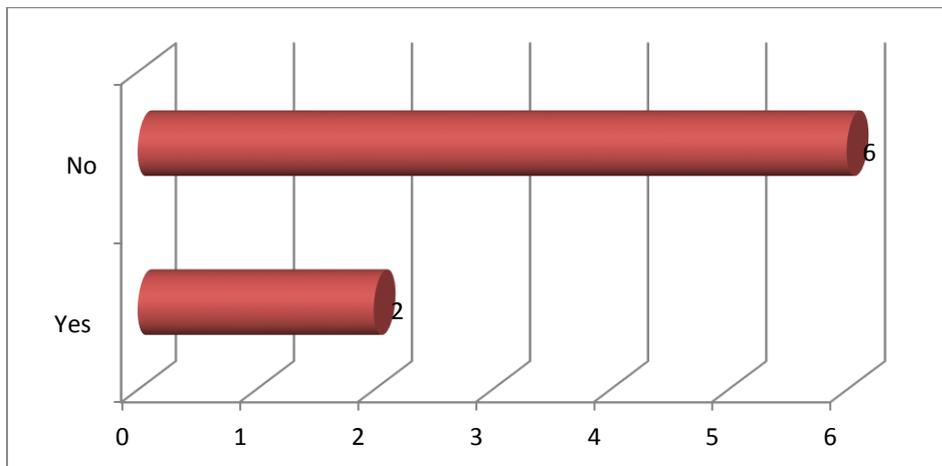


Pro-active Procurement



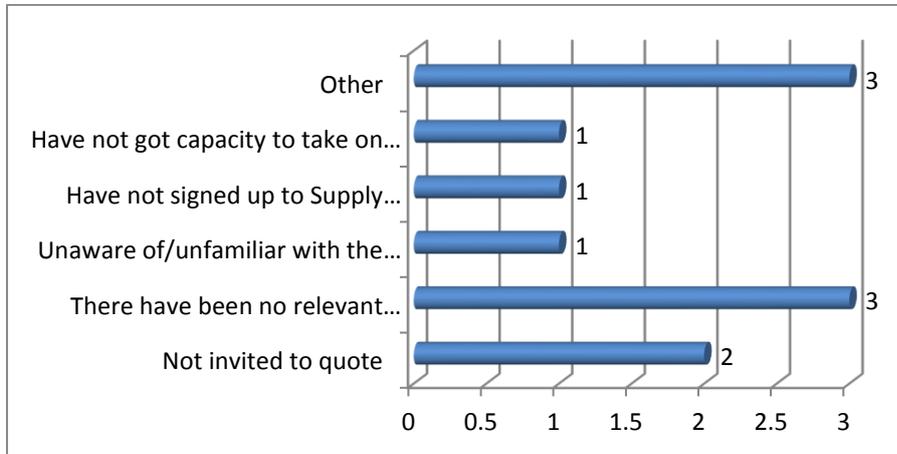
Question 7: Have you bid for a contract with Stevenage Borough Council in the last five years?

This question was for businesses only.



Question 8: Please tell us why you haven't bid for a contract with Stevenage Borough Council in the last five years (please tick all that are relevant)

This question was for businesses only.

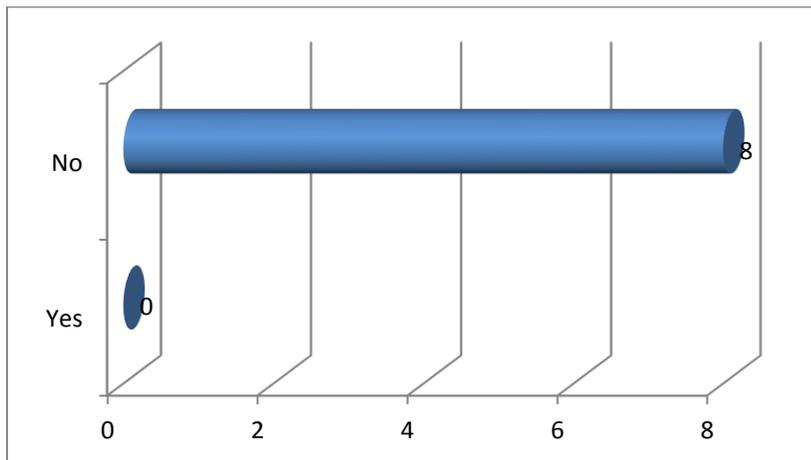


Written information supplied to 'other' answers:

- Only just opened
- Given up - Multiple Bids over 5 years ago there was lots of work for a small business and had no feedback when asked
- All of the above

Question 9: Have you been awarded a contract with Stevenage Borough Council in the last five years?

This question was for businesses only.



Question 10: Please tell us if there is anything Stevenage Borough Council could do to encourage you to bid for council business in future

This question was for businesses only.

Clarification of the business group that we fell into, didn't really reflect what we do but was the closest available.
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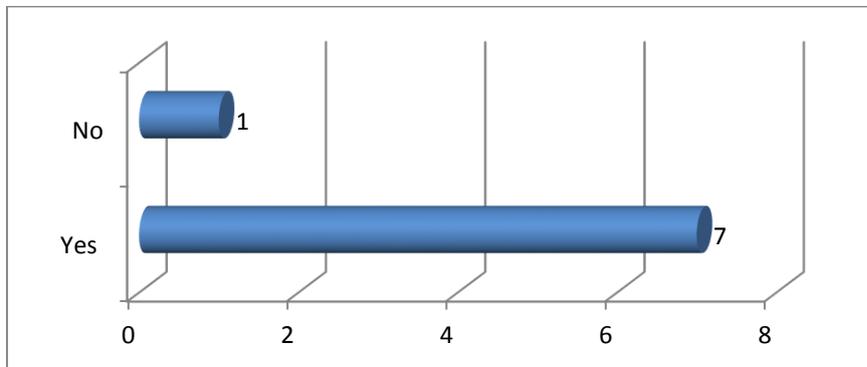
Allow new bidders to win contracts. There is a trend to allow new bidders and then just award the contract to the incumbent.
--

Please email about procurement / resourcing opportunities etc.
--

Feedback so we know how to adjust/improve within the bidding process
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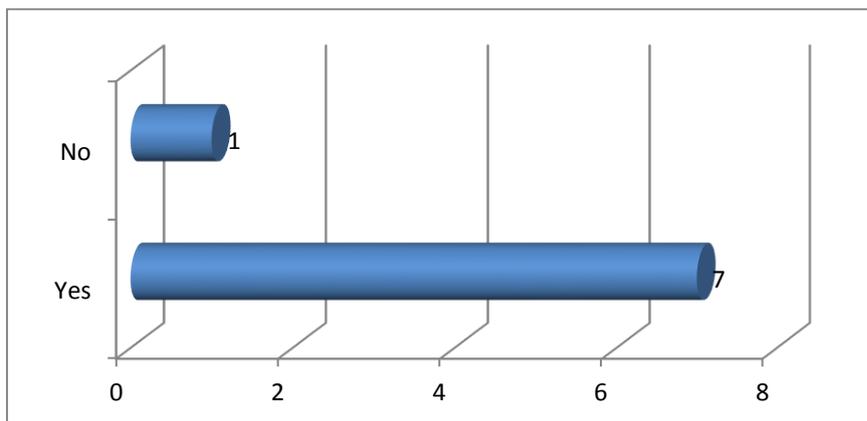
Question 11: Are you a small business with a turnover of less than £25 million per year?

This question was for businesses only.



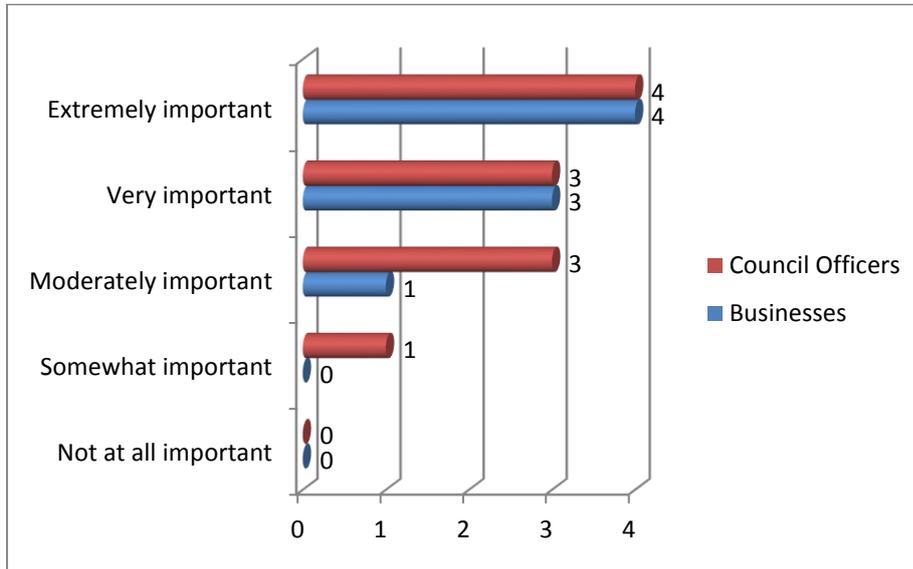
Question 12: Has your business got a base or outlet in Stevenage?

This question was for businesses only.



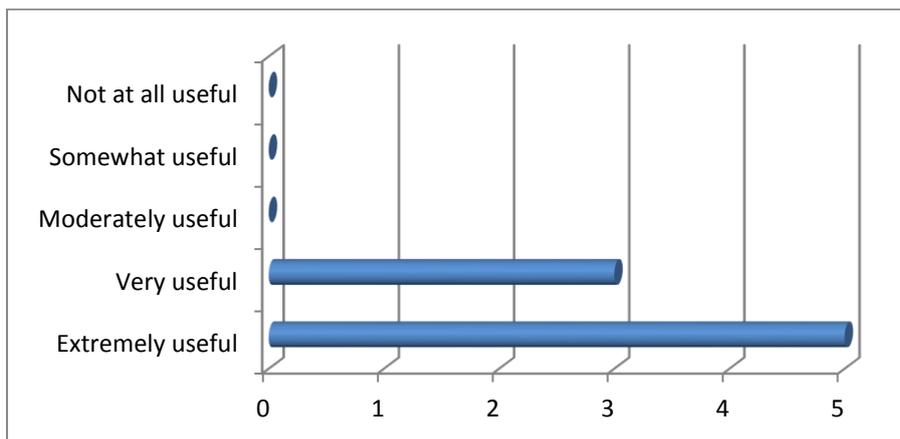
Question 13: We last consulted you on our Procurement Strategy in September 2016. Your feedback helped shape the final version that the Council approved. How important is it that we include this information to show how the Council listens to your views and acts upon feedback where possible?

This question was for Council Officers and businesses only.



Question 14: Our strategy has outcomes which support the Council understanding the local supply base and opportunities for local suppliers. How useful is this for your business?

This question was for businesses only.



A second part of the question asked to explain why the response chosen had been selected:

Extremely useful for a business like ours as it will allow us to assist all businesses/people in Stevenage which is a massive aim for us.

By procuring locally the Council not only supports local business but also reflects well on those companies. Not to procure locally is ultimately a poor reflection on the capabilities of local companies.

Unless you understand our business, its strengths and drives, how can you work with us?

Understanding what is required is half of the battle in winning work from the council as long as the awarding process is also transparent

You need to support your local businesses - they will then in turn support you

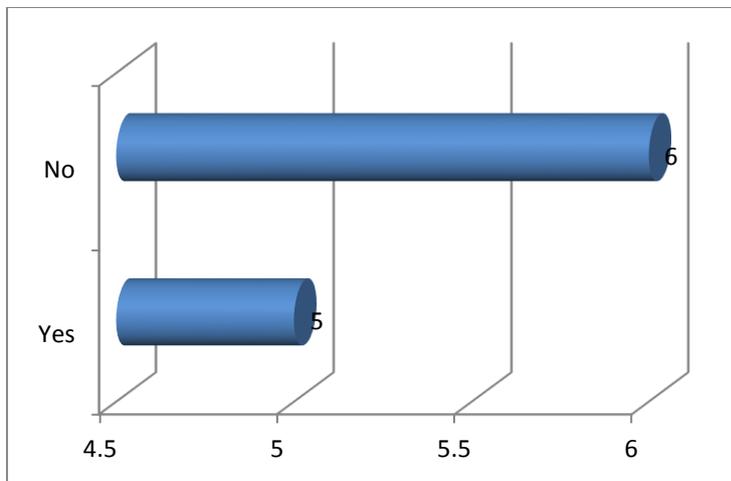
I think it's good to know updates and what's going on in the local community

Adding community to procurement helps but some environmental expectations are hard to balance whilst remaining commercial. However being such a small business along with ethical processes and procedures means our environmental impact is small.

As a local CIC we would benefit from having access to suppliers local to us to encourage community engagement.

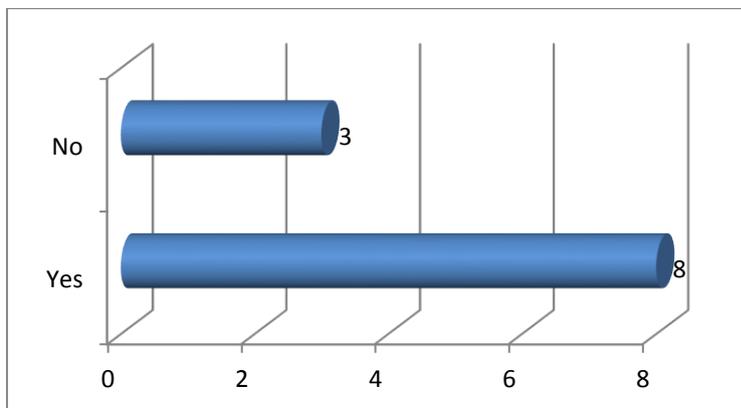
Question 15: Has your Strategic Delivery Unit let a contract to a local supplier in the last 12 months?

This question was for Council Officer's only.



Question 16: Do you think we need to do more as a Council to encourage small and local suppliers to bid for our business?

This question was for Council Officer's only.



A second part of the question asked to suggest ways the Council could encourage small and local suppliers to bid in the text box:

Further workshops for small businesses, regular communication published across website, social media etc. about the opportunities we have for local suppliers to bid for contracts
Departments need to be open to talking to new suppliers who could respond to quotes
Post smaller/relevant opportunities on our social media channels
Invite them in, contact them, talk them through the process and provide help and advice on policies
Provide support to local businesses to take them through the Tender Process - this can be quite daunting, and smaller organisations actively refuse a contract as they do not wish to go through the tender process
Where we advertise is important - work with bodies like the Equalities Commission, to deliberately welcome bids from specific groups.
Keeping it simple and easy to understand, giving them plenty of time as they don't have bid teams on hand. Encouraging officers to move away from price only bids for works as whilst less hassle this encourages officers to keep inviting only suppliers they already know and not adding new names to the pot.
Having an open forum to discuss work with suppliers in confidence to identify areas where opportunities might exist - i.e. before any formal procurement process - I bet there's stuff local firms could do that we don't know they can do, and they don't know we need it!

Specific Comments made by responders

The Council received some additional comments around the Procurement Strategy by email from a Member and from Council Officers, they are as follows:

- Could we consider a rebranding of the Strategy to “Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2021-2024 – Building Wealth in our Community”
- Can you please supply more in-depth information on the volume of external procurement of goods and services, so we can gain a sense of the scale of procurement across various budget areas, for instance: How much of the current £60m is divided between GOODS, broken down between IT, consumables, energy supply, stationery, office equipment etc. SERVICES, broken down between maintenance contracts on plant and equipment, professional services, other services. Turnkey contracts like construction projects.
- In the context of the Council’s spend; circa £60 million – I do wonder if there is more that can be achieved within the ‘commercial and insourcing’ theme to drive greater efficiencies and economies via smarter/joint procurements (internally across sections and externally with other authorities) and whether we need more of an emphasis focus on this. Even a tiny saving of 0.1% would achieve £60k towards the savings target.

Actions for Procurement

The Corporate Procurement Team will remind procuring Officers of the five principle foundations of the revised Corporate Procurement Strategy 2021-2024 and will work with the Contracts and Procurement Group to achieve the actions set within the five principle

foundations. The following outcomes will be highlighted to Procuring Officers via the Contracts and Procurement Group:

- Increase the number of local suppliers we use within Stevenage year on year from our current baseline
- Reduce waste through smarter procurement
- Measure the delivery of social value
- Increase the number of insourced contracts or where there is a commercial opportunity
- Provide commercial intelligence to ensure we are achieving value for money

Reminders to businesses to sign up to the Council's Supply Hertfordshire portal will be advertised through social media on a regular basis and Corporate Procurement will specifically respond to the participants of this survey to advise where the Council's tenders are advertised and the procedure relating to quotations.

Information Regarding Specific Comments made by responders

Question 2

Note 1 – The Council Officer suggesting that the process is complex and difficult in particular with jargon and policies in place for SMEs will be able to signpost suppliers to a webinar run by the Corporate Procurement team to help encourage and simplify the process.

Question 3

Note 2 – The Council Officer suggesting that the strategy will exclude small businesses as they do not have the knowhow or time will be signposted to both the URL for Supply Hertfordshire and to the webinar run by the Corporate Procurement team.

Note 3 – Corporate Procurement will work with the Council's Business Relationship Manager to support smaller, unusual or less culturally embedded suppliers to encourage them to register on the Supply Hertfordshire portal.

Question 4

Note 4 – The Council will create links for larger suppliers to use our local supply chain in delivery of the required project, capturing the number of suppliers and amount spent within the local economy.

Question 8

Note 5 – Corporate Procurement will advise procuring officers to give detailed feedback to all bidders of a procurement process when requested.

Question 10

Note 6 – as note 5 above.

Question 14

Note 7 – The Council will advise procuring officers to conduct research, identify supplier engagement activities, and work with key local supplier representatives to understand more of what our local supply base comprises of.

Question 16

Note 8 – The Council will deliver webinars to support and help local and small suppliers understand the public procurement process.

Note 9 – The Council will use social media to advertise tendering opportunities and will promote the registration of Supply Hertfordshire through these channels.

Note 10 – See note 7 above.

Author: Lisa Baldock

Original: 10th September 2021

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Meeting: EXECUTIVE

Agenda Item:

Portfolio Area: RESOURCES



Date: 20 OCTOBER 2021

TITLE OF REPORT: COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2022/23

Authors – Su Tarran Ext. 01279 502076
Contributor – Clare Fletcher Ext. 2933
Lead /Contact Officers – as above

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To consider the current local Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme at Stevenage and whether any changes to the scheme should be implemented for 2022/23.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Executive approve the existing CTS scheme of 8.5% council tax liability for those working aged claimants on maximum benefit, (subject to any benefit uplifts) for financial year 2022/23.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Government made provision within the Local Government Finance Bill to replace the former national Council Tax Benefit (CTB) scheme from 1st April 2013 with localised schemes for Council Tax Reduction Schemes (CTS) devised by individual local authorities (LA's). The schemes are valid for one year and must be approved by Council before the 11th March immediately preceding the financial year in which it is to take effect.
- 3.2 The Government require that major preceptors (County and Police) are consulted each year, and if there is any change to the scheme a full consultation open to all tax payers in the district is required. There is no specific timescale prescribed but the period must allow for meaningful consultation.

- 3.3 Additionally, consideration must be given to providing transitional protection where the support is to be reduced or removed. The financial impact of any decision on Council Tax Support also needs to be included when setting the budget and Council tax levels at the same time.
- 3.4 Since the introduction of CTS in April 2013 a number of changes to the scheme have been considered, but the scheme has remained the same. This means that CTS scheme for all working age claimants (WAC) will be based on 91.5% of their council tax liability and that a WAC on maximum benefit will only have to pay 8.5% of their council tax bill.
- 3.5 The cost of the scheme is reflected in the tax base, in the same way as other discounts which reduce the collectable debit.
- 3.6 The history of Council Tax support scheme at Stevenage is detailed in Appendix A.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 This report details the current position on Council Tax Support, and seeks support to continue the current scheme for 2022/23.
- 4.2 The CTS scheme for 2021/22 can be summarised as follows:
- That the CTS scheme for all working age claimants will be based on 91.5% of their council tax liability.;
 - All local discretions currently in place continue e.g. war pension disregards;
 - Other aspects of the Council Tax Support scheme mirror the previous Council Tax Benefit scheme.
- 4.3. The current CTS scheme works and protects the most vulnerable customers by the use of applicable amounts and income disregards. However the challenges and opportunities introduced by Universal Credit (UC) prompted a review of the structure of the scheme, but conclude that until the majority of claimants are in receipt of UC, any alternative would add further complexity.
- 4.4 **The impact, challenges and opportunities of Universal Credit.** Universal credit full service roll out took effect in this area in October 2018. This means that customers who would previously have applied for Housing Benefit (HB) and CTS are now applying for UC and CTS. The DWP's pilot of moving existing HB claimants on to UC from only achieved a small change in caseload although this has increased during the pandemic and the DWP are reviewing and potentially re piloting a transition, before seeking government approval for further managed migration.

- 4.4.1 There are certain groups of HB claimant that will not, in the foreseeable future migrate to UC, as they are deemed too complex. This means that in addition to the pensioner case load there will be a residual working age caseload to manage.
- 4.4.2 There is therefore no information available currently to determine when this councils existing working age HB caseload will move to UC.
- 4.4.3 Customers claiming UC who apply for Council Tax Support do not require the Council to carry out means testing on their circumstances. They need only provide their UC entitlement letters (details of which can be confirmed through LA's access to the DWP systems). These claims are already means tested and have differential applicable amounts applied by the DWP, and the only income element that is needed for an award of CTS is earnings. Consideration has to be taken of any deductions being made for overpayments or recovery of advances, but these lend themselves to a simplified assessment and processing system, and could be incorporated into a discount scheme.
- 4.4.4 The reduction in new claims for HB might seem to reduce the services workload, however as the current scheme requires the same preparation and processing to award a CTS claim as an HB one, there is no saving. Currently claims or changes in circumstances are prepared and input and both awards (HB & CTS) are processed simultaneously. Claims not requiring an HB assessment simply produce one output (CTS award) rather than two.
- 4.4.5 UC claimants have to apply to the council for CTS entitlement. There is a common misunderstanding among claimants, who have not previously claimed benefit from the council, that it is all covered by their claim for UC. The council therefore often only gets to engage with these new customers when their council tax account is in arrears, and additional recovery action has to be taken. Clearly this is an additional administrative burden for the council, and costly for the customer.
- 4.4.6 Universal Credit is reassessed monthly, and those customers who are working (nationally this is estimated at more than 40%) are likely to experience variations in the UC entitlement each month. This is attributed to salary and wages frequencies affecting the 'monthly' assessments. Each time there is a change in the UC award, their entitlement to CTS has to be reassessed. Every time the CTS is reassessed, it produces a new Council Tax Bill. These constant changes in bills and amounts due are not only confusing to the customer trying to budget, but it also resets any recovery action being taken for non-payment.
- 4.4.7 The service has experienced a significant increase in workload from these monthly changes. They are received electronically from the DWP using an existing process called ATLAS. However significant progress has been made in automating the processing of many types of changes, and this is helping to mitigate the impact.

- 4.5 Identifying and acknowledging these challenges from UC requires, any potential change to the CTS scheme to consider:
- 4.5.1 **The potential for automation of UC notices** on live CTS claims, thus reducing the new increased workflow. Progress has been made in the last year to automate increasing numbers of these changes, and work continues to include more types of changes into the automatic updates.
- 4.5.2 **Mitigations for changes in UC entitlements to revise council tax liability**, and thus avoid resetting recovery action. This could be achieved if the CTS scheme set bands of entitlement, or fixed periods in which changes in income would not result in a change in entitlement, within the scope of a set range.
- 4.5.3 These options have the potential to be very expensive. The software supplier is estimating a cost in excess of £25k for each Council moving towards a banded CTS scheme. Herts County Council have previously declined to contribute to any costs associated with changing the scheme, despite being the biggest preceptor for Council Tax. Any changes to the scheme require full and meaningful consultation with all taxpayers in the district and there are significant costs associated with this level of consultation.
- 4.6 Response to the challenges and opportunities of UC.**
Work has previously been carried out to develop a banded scheme for all working age claimants. This included modelling of current claimants into a banded scheme, to assess the impact and identify any unintended consequences.
- 4.6.1 As it is not currently possible to have a separate scheme for just UC cases, all current working age claimants would have to be included. After testing the data it was clear that the intended simplicity of a banded scheme would be compromised as the need to differentiate between all the many and varied disability premiums and incomes would require too many bands for each category of household, to ensure sufficient protection for these non UC groups.
- 4.6.2 In addition there would be all the costs of changing the scheme but no savings in administration, or increased simplicity for the customer.
- 4.7 Conclusion in relation to Universal Credit.**
- 4.7.1 Whilst the number of monthly changes is increasing, the improvement in automation of these changes is balancing the demand for resources. It is still recommended therefore that a two stage approach be followed as we move forward. Firstly, instead of looking to change the current scheme in the short term, we continue to introduce more automation of UC change notices. Secondly, once actual caseload migration is timetabled, consideration of a banded scheme or a discount scheme is revisited.

4.8 Other options that could be considered in redesigning a scheme

4.8.1 There are a number of options that could be considered when redesigning the current scheme, although all revisions would affect working age customers only, given that pensioners have to be fully protected by our scheme.

4.8.2 The Government continues to make changes to the Housing Benefit regulations which are not currently mirrored in the CTS regulations. This means the schemes are no longer aligned. The frequency of changes to Housing Benefit and Universal Credit schemes, make it impossible to mirror these in the CTS scheme, not least of which because of the difference in timing. The Housing Benefit and Universal Credit schemes are changed when needed during the year, and the CTS scheme can only be revised annually.

4.8.3 Consideration was been given previously to align some of the more significant differences between Housing Benefit and Council Tax support but the financial implications across the caseload have been assessed as small, and the changes would have required a full consultation exercise, to achieve only a temporary alignment, and therefore these were not recommended by members.

4.8.4 In previous years, consideration was given to an income-band scheme which appeared to offer an opportunity to simplify entitlement criteria and the treatment of income and capital. This was driven by the imminent roll out of 'full service' Universal Credit, (impacting in Stevenage from October 2018) so there was a need to look to reduce the impact of monthly changes in universal credit on entitlement to CTS and Council tax collection.

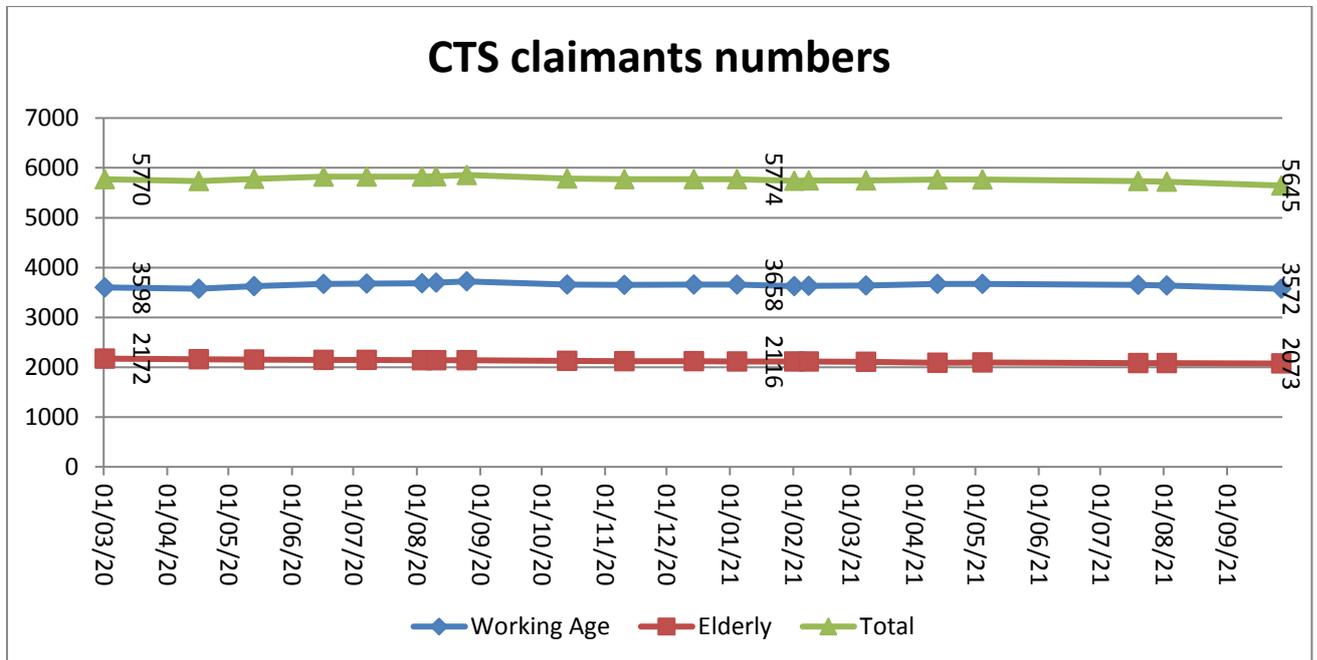
4.8.5 Consideration has also previously been given to each of the following changes, but each relies on the basic scheme construction remaining the same and members did not recommend any of these.

a) Changing the level of "minimum payment" for all working age customers

- I. The current scheme assumes that all working age customers are asked to pay at least something towards their Council Tax, and as described earlier the minimum payment is 8.5% of liability. The Council could consider making a change to that amount but in doing so, the full impact of that decision needs to be considered.
- II. If the Council chose to increase this minimum payment to say 10%, this does not mean a straight line reduction in the amount that the Council will spend out. For individuals already finding it difficult to pay at the current level, it can be seen that increasing this amount could increase their hardship levels further, especially as these customers are likely to be receiving other benefits, which have been affected by the on-going

Welfare reforms.

- III. Given our latest information shows that the collection rate for those working age customers in receipt of CTS is already significantly lower than the overall rate, officers would need to consider adding further amounts to our bad debt provision in respect of potential non-collection of our debts. Having done some indicative modelling, we estimate that increasing the minimum payment to 10% could result in a decrease in Council Tax spend of approximately £73.6k. This would be virtually wiped out by the need to increase bad debt provision. In addition with the potential increasing caseload as result of COVID-19 when the job retention scheme and other government support measures end, they may exacerbate losses further and cause further hardship.
- IV. Conversely, if we were to consider reducing the minimum amount to be paid by the claimant, this would increase the cost of the scheme, particularly at a time when CTS caseload may increase. SBC pays less than 12% of the overall scheme with the County paying the largest share, but if COVID-19 significantly increases the caseload then this could have a significant impact on the taxbase and collectable council tax. On current estimates, we believe the additional burden on the taxbase could be upwards of £420k, and customers currently not entitled would also be eligible to apply.
- V. The CTS caseload trend is summarised below.



Between April 20 and May 21 there was a net increase of 39 cases. Whilst between October 20 and May 21 there was a net decrease of 25 cases. However it is not clear the impact of the end of furlough will have on the case load in the current year, although to 1 October there has been an overall

reduction since April of 154 cases.

b) Introducing a band cap (so limiting the amount that we would pay to a value of a lower property band, for example Band C)

In some Local Authorities, they have introduced a band cap where the scheme will only pay up to the equivalent of say a Band C property, even if you are in a higher banded property.

This could disproportionately affect those with a requirement for a larger property as they have children, other dependents due to caring responsibilities or a disability. These groups could already have been hit by other areas of Welfare reform including the Benefit Cap and the Spare Room subsidy limitation.

Considering the current live caseload, these could impact on 266 households and reduce spend by £80k. The table below shows the potential loss in entitlement per year for those in bands D and above, both at the 91.5% liability and on those who receive a single person discount (SPD).

Potential loss in entitlement if Band C cap applied

2021/22	BAND	91.50%	with SPD	91.50%	91.50%	with SPD
A	£ 1,269.47	£ 1,161.57	£ 952.10	£ 871.17		
B	£ 1,481.04	£ 1,355.15	£ 1,110.78	£ 1,016.36		
C	£ 1,692.61	£ 1,548.74	£ 1,269.46	£ 1,161.55		
D	£ 1,904.20	£ 1,742.34	£ 1,428.15	£ 1,306.76	£ 193.60	£ 145.20
E	£ 2,327.36	£ 2,129.53	£ 1,745.52	£ 1,597.15	£ 580.80	£ 435.60
F	£ 2,750.51	£ 2,516.72	£ 2,062.88	£ 1,887.54	£ 967.98	£ 725.98
G	£ 3,173.67	£ 2,903.91	£ 2,380.25	£ 2,177.93	£ 1,355.17	£ 1,016.38
H	£ 3,808.40	£ 3,484.69	£ 2,856.30	£ 2,613.51	£ 1,935.95	£ 1,451.96

c) Introducing a minimum amount that would be paid out

Some Councils have introduced a minimum level at which they will support residents. An example is that you have to be entitled to at least £5 a week to be supported. This means someone who is currently entitled to a lower amount, would not receive it, despite the fact that we have assessed them as currently requiring support. There are no real savings in terms of administrative costs because the Council would still have to undertake an assessment to find out what would not be awarded. In addition, the fact that they are currently entitled to support indicates that they are financially vulnerable and the likelihood of being able to collect that additional amount from those residents is low. Therefore the potential reduction in costs overall is minimal and outweighed by an increase in bad debt provision and recovery costs.

Considering the current caseload this would impact on 96 households and save £17k.

d) Changes around discretions for Disability, Children and other Dependents

- I. This would change the nature of the scheme overall. Stevenage , when setting its original scheme were clear that all would contribute equally as the core scheme already differentiates preferentially to those with disabilities, children etc.
- II. Any complexity that is added to the way in which we calculate entitlement, will make the administration of the scheme both more complex for our officers to manage both in terms of calculation but more importantly, to explain to our residents.
- III. This would also mean that the general working age population may need to pick up an even greater share of the cost if the scheme is to remain affordable and equitable.

e) Other adjustments

There include; income tapers, non-dependent deductions, income disregards etc. but all carry the same risk to bad debt provisions, potential recovery costs and costs of administration. The more complex the scheme, the more difficult it is to comply with and customers' levels of understanding could be compromised.

4.9 Other considerations in addition to the impact of universal credit

- 4.9.1 The impact of Covid -19 on the economy in the short, medium or long term is as yet unknown.
- 4.9.2 In 20/21 the Government allocated funding to enable a top up of up to £150.00 (limited by outstanding liability) to each working age claim. The balance of the funding has been rolled into a hardship fund for 2021/22 to support Council Tax payers suffering financial difficulty.
- 4.9.3 In 2021/22 The Government has allocated funding to local authorities to compensate them for anticipated increases in the number of CTS cases. Stevenage has been allocated £118,919.
- 4.9.4 In previous years the cost of CTS on the taxbase has been reducing in real terms. This is demonstrated below, and has supported previous recommendations to retain the current scheme.

	Actual cost	Change	
2013/14	£6,605,773		
2014/15	£6,137,922	-7.08%	
2015/16	£5,755,876	-6.22%	
2016/17	£5,683,162	-1.26%	
2017/18	£5,828,125	2.55%	The Band D value of the 2017/18 taxbase increased by 4.5% on 2016/17,
2018/19	£5,935,167	1.84%	The Band D value of the 2018/19 taxbase increased by 5.8% on 2017/18
2019/20	£5,779,820	-2.60%	
2020/21	£6,011,347	4.01%	The Band D value of the 2020/21 taxbase increased by 4.18% on 2019/20

- 4.9.5 This reduction has been achieved as a result of a reducing caseload.
- 4.9.6 The impact of this reduction , needs to be considered in light of the ongoing economic recovery from Covid.
- 4.9.7 The taxbase for 2021/22 was calculated in October 2020, and assumed at that time a band D value of 3389.57. At 1 May 2021 the actual band D cost of Council Tax support was 3305, which is less than budgeted for.
- 4.9.8 Whilst the working age caseload has seen a modest reduction in recent months, the elderly caseload is also falling but at a much slower rate.
- 4.9.9 The Working age caseload could fluctuate but this is likely to be in part mitigated by the continued reduction in Elderly caseload.
- 4.9.10 It is perhaps not unreasonable to expect a spike after the furlough scheme ends, although the impact or duration of these potential outcomes is unknown. Changes in caseload are monitored monthly or more frequently so any trend would be promptly identified.
- 4.9.11 The taxbase is also impacted by other variables, and changes in anyone of them can impact on its ability to generate the expected income levels on which the budget is set. The Covid-19 pandemic may also have a dampening effect on new builds coming into the taxbase which will further reduce its income raising capacity.
- 4.10 The impact of other factors on the ability to pay.
- 4.10.1 Many customers now claiming CTS have been affected by other factors. Not only do they find themselves with debts to their council and landlord

that were previously paid for them, but their ability to pay the debts is diminished. This is demonstrated in the Council Tax collection rates. The overall in-year collection rate for all working age CTS customers was 74.24% in 2020/21. In contrast to the all tax payers in-year collection rate of 95.1%.

4.10.2 The actual cost per week of Council Tax for those customers required to pay the minimum 8.5% contribution is demonstrated below.

2021/22	BEFORE OTHER DISCOUNTS (e.g single person)			
	BAND	Annual full charge	8.5% Weekly charge	8.5% Per annum
	A	£ 1,269.47	£2.07	£107.90
	B	£ 1,481.04	£2.41	£125.89
	C	£ 1,692.61	£2.76	£143.87
	D	£ 1,904.20	£3.10	£161.86
	E	£ 2,327.36	£3.79	£197.83
	F	£ 2,750.51	£4.48	£233.79
	G	£ 3,173.67	£5.17	£269.76
	H	£ 3,808.40	£6.21	£323.71

4.11 Consultation

4.11.1 A Portfolio Holders Advisory Group was held on the 16 September and Members supported retaining the existing scheme as set out in the report.

4.11.2 The Council is required to send a letter to the other precepting bodies regarding the proposed scheme, letters have been sent to Hertfordshire County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

5.1.1 As detailed in the report.

5.2 Legal Implications

5.2.1 As detailed in the report

5.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications

5.3.1 An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken if there are proposals to amend the Council Tax support scheme.

5.4 Risk Implications

5.4.1 As detailed in the report

5.5 Policy Implications

5.5.1 As detailed in the report

BACKGROUND PAPERS

GLOSSARY

IS	Income support
JSA (IB)	Job seekers allowance (Income based)
UC	Universal Credit
PC	Pension credit
GC	Guaranteed credit
SC	Savings credit
ESA (IR)	Employment support allowance (Income related)

Appendix A The history of Council Tax Support (CTS)

1. The history of Council Tax Support (CTS)

- 1.1 Before April 2013, local authorities (LA) administered Council Tax Benefit on behalf of the Government. This national scheme was specified in legislation and LA's were reimbursed by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) through a subsidy claim submitted annually and subject to audit.
- 1.2 The level of subsidy reimbursement varied dependant on whether benefit had been awarded, backdated or overpaid, but the point to note is that entitlement and subsidy were based on assessing entitlement on 100% of somebodies council tax liability, net of discounts (like a single person discount).
- 1.3 The scheme was means tested and whilst the scheme differentiated between different client groups (providing extra support for disabled groups for example) there was little differential between Elderly and Working Age clients.
- 1.4 Clients fell into one of two groups, "passportd" and "standard claims." A passportd claim was one in which the DWP had already carried out a means test and then notified the council that the customers income was at or below the minimum income level for their household composition. They would be automatically entitled to 100% of their Council Tax to be paid by Council Tax Benefit. A deduction would however be made from this entitlement where there were non dependants living in the home.
- 1.5 The second group were called 'standard claims'. These customers had their means testing done by the council and awarded Council Tax benefit in accordance with the national scheme criteria. These customers had income above the minimum requirements and would be required to pay something towards their council tax liability. A deduction would also be made from this entitlement where there were non dependants living in the home.
- 1.6 In very simple terms entitlement was determined by comparing eligible incomes against relevant applicable amounts. When income equalled or fell below applicable amounts, the maximum entitlement is achieved. If income exceeded applicable amounts, entitlement was reduced by 20% of the excess. The applicable amounts were determined by the DWP in respect of Housing Benefit claims.
- 1.7 In more complex terms, every income and capital source had to be assessed in accordance with its type, and then determined if it was included in the assessment. Child benefit, maintenance paid to a child, PiP and DLA, war pensions etc were fully disregarded, whilst earned income was calculated after tax & NI, and 50% of pension contributions,

averaged over the relevant period. Payments to certain child care providers were disregarded, whilst capital (excluding the property occupied) included savings, shares etc and if the total exceeded £16k, the customer was excluded from entitlement.

1.8 In very general terms the full expenditure on the scheme was reimbursed by the DWP.

2 The impact of changes from 1st April 2013

2.1 The national scheme for Council Tax Benefit ceased, and Councils had to devise their own Council Tax Reduction Schemes for working age claimants. The Government continues to specify the scheme for Elderly customers through prescribed regulations.

2.2 Instead of the scheme being funded through a subsidy claim based on actual expenditure, the Government moved the funding into the Revenue Support Grant (RSG) settlement, fixing it at only 90% of the subsidy paid in a previous year. RSG was the amount of grant that Government gave to Councils to support their wider service delivery, and made up one part of the income of the Council in addition to Council Tax receipts, fees and charges and an element of Business rate collection. However the move away from RSG makes this funding element less obvious.

2.3 Each Council had to consider how to fund 100% of the cost of the Elderly 'national' scheme and provide a Working age scheme, whilst receiving 10% less funding.

2.4 Elderly (Pensioner) claimants are protected from changes through the provision of a statutory scheme.

2.5 Schemes must support work incentives.

2.6 The DCLG Policy Statement of Intent did not give a recommended approach to be taken, but indicated the scheme should not contain features which create dis-incentives to find employment. The current Stevenage scheme complies with this statement.

2.7 Local authorities must ensure that appropriate consideration has been given to support for other vulnerable groups, including those which may require protection under other statutory provisions including the Child Poverty Act 2010, the Disabled Persons Act 1986 and the Equality Act 2010, amongst others.

2.8 The DCLG issued Policy Statements that addressed a range of issues including the following:

- Vulnerable People and Key Local Authority Duties;
- Taking work incentives into account;

- Information Sharing and Powers to Tackle Fraud.

2.9 The Local Government Finance Bill stated that a Billing Authority must have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State. The current scheme has sought to address these requirements.

3 Stevenage’s Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTS)

3.1 The Council initially devised a scheme which replicated the previous national scheme but limited the Council Tax liability that was used to assess entitlement to 90% for working age customers. The Government offered a one off transitional grant to Councils who would restrict the reduction to 91.5%, and accordingly the Council amended the proposal and took the one off transitional grant. The Council has maintained this position for the first 8 years of the scheme.

3.2 From 2014/15 the 90% grant that was included in the RSG was no longer individually identifiable. Therefore calculating the total cost of the scheme i.e. the cost of the CTS scheme versus the CTS grant given by Government is now impossible.

3.3 The caseload for CTS indicates that the proportion of working age customers compared to pensioners is changing over time very slightly. At 1.4.19 the proportion of Working Age customers has reduced slightly against the proportion of Elderly customers for the first time. This may be attributed to new working age claimants claiming UC. The number of Elderly claimants has however also fallen since 1.4.2018.

Table 1: **Proportion of Working Age and Elderly claimants**

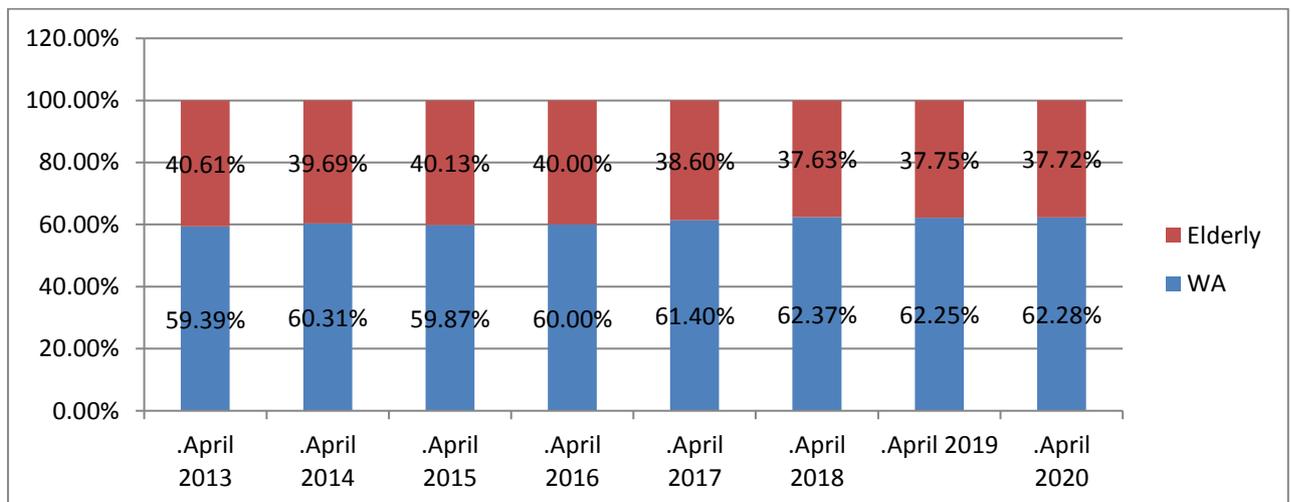
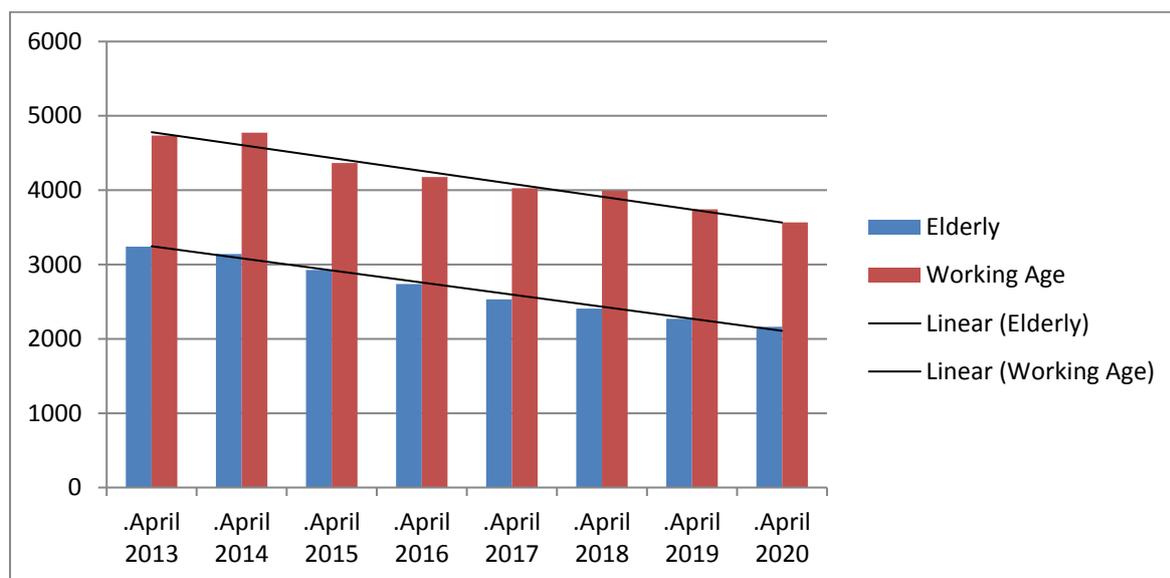


Table 2: Caseload Working Age and Elderly claims



3.4 Before the introduction of CTS there had been a number of years of constant case load increases, the caseload has since stabilised and reduced, alongside a growing taxbase due to new developments in the area. The impact on the cost of the scheme is demonstrated below.

	Actual cost	Change
2013/14	£6,605,773	
2014/15	£6,137,922	-7.08%
2015/16	£5,755,876	-6.22%
2016/17	£5,683,162	-1.26%
2017/18	£5,828,125	2.55%*
2018/19	£5,935,167	1.84%**
2019/20	£5,779,820	-2.60%

* The Band D value of the 2017/18 taxbase increased by 4.5% on 2016/17,

**The Band D value of the 2018/19 taxbase increased by 5.8% on 2017/18

3.5 What is certain however is that the level of spend on CTS has continued to reduce in real terms, mitigating in part the impact of overall reductions in income to the Council.

3.6 A large proportion of customers affected by the introduction of the CTS scheme had not previously had to pay anything towards their Council Tax bill. If they had been 'passported' under the Council Tax Benefit scheme their liability would have been discharged in full by a credit transfer onto their Council Tax account. Under the new arrangements all working age customer have to pay at least 8.5% towards their bill.

- 3.7 A publication (*Public Finance March 2019*) commented that in 2013-14 CTS schemes nationally provided 14% less support to working age households than the old national scheme, and that by 2018-19 it provided 24% less. Stevenage has maintained its scheme at 8.5% during this period.
- 3.8 It continues to be a challenge to support and educate these customers into a regular payment arrangement. We have;
- Offered flexible repayment options,
 - Given more time to pay,
 - Worked on a project with the Citizens advice Bureau to support customers with repeated arrears,
 - Promoted other debt and advice agencies.
- 3.9 The in-year collection rate for working age claimants who had only the minimum 8.5% liability to pay was 62.9% in 2014/15 and 69.67% for 2019/20
- 3.10 The overall in-year collection rate for all working age CTS customers was 70.7% in 2014/15, and 74.04% in 2019/20. In contrast to the all tax payers in-year collection rate, which for 2014/15 was 96%, and 96% in 2019/20.
- 3.11 Many of these same customers have been affected by other welfare reforms introduced ;
- the spare room subsidy scheme
 - the new Benefit CAP,
 - Reviews of disability benefits etc.
- Many families find that they have increasing debts with their councils and landlords for bills that were previously paid for them.
- 3.12 We make assumptions in respect of the level of non-payment of Council Tax when determining the tax base, alongside assumptions over each of the variable elements of its composition. The in-year collection for all Council Tax payers was 96% in 2019/20, but this was dampened by only 74.04% collected from those working age customers in receipt of CTS. Those customers who under the old scheme would have not paid anything towards their council tax (passported customers) paid only 74.04%
- 3.13 The liability not paid in-year becomes arrears on which a bad debt provision has to be established, which is a further cost to the council. Where the outturn taxbase exceeds the estimated performance it generates a surplus on the collection fund, and conversely when the taxbase does not achieve its expected performance because of negative variations in the component elements, the collection fund would be in deficit. The Council is required to make precept payments during the year regardless of any in-year variations.
- 3.14 In recognition of the fact that the additional Council Tax liability is more difficult to collect, a collection rate of 98.25% has been assumed.

- 3.15 Currently (2020/21) 77.37% of the tax base income is precepted by County and Council and 10.84% by the Police, and accordingly they have a vested interest in the value of the CTS scheme as it directly impacts on their ability to raise funds. The lower the cost of the scheme, the higher the tax base on which they can precept.