

**Meeting** Executive  
**Portfolio Area** All  
**Date** 9 June 2021



## CORPORATE PERFORMANCE QUARTER FOUR 2020/21

### KEY DECISION

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### 1 PURPOSE

1.1 To highlight the Council’s performance across key priorities and themes for quarter four 2020/21.

### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the delivery of priorities which form the Future Town, Future Council Programme and performance of the Council across the key themes for quarter four 2020/21, together with the latest achievements, be noted.
- 2.2 That the impacts of COVID-19 on the Council’s ability to deliver against the following key performance areas and, where appropriate the improvement actions outlined against them, as identified in the paragraphs outlined below, be noted:

- Number of households in emergency/temporary accommodation (para 3.69 to 3.76)
- Homelessness preventions (para 3.77 to 3.81)
- Job Creation through the Business Technology Centre (para 3.102 to 3.104)
- Food establishment compliance checks (3.105 to 3.107)
- Letting of council garages (para 3.109 to 3.115)
- Collection of Council Tax and Non-Domestic Rates (para 3.122 to 3.123)
- Ability to identify and remove HRA/GF savings (para 3.124 to 3.128)
- Ability to mobilise the Decent Homes programme (para 3.95 to 3.93)
- Amount of residual waste collected per household (para 3.108)

2.3 That the impacts of Universal Credit and COVID-19 on the rent collection rate are noted and continuing delivery of the income action plan is endorsed (para 3.82 to 3.91).

2.4 That the level of void loss, and the way in which this is impacted by sheltered and major works void property re-let times, is noted, and improvement activities are endorsed (para 3.94 to 3.101).

2.5 That the proposals to further improve website satisfaction are endorsed (para 3.116 to 3.121).

### 3 BACKGROUND

#### Future Town Future Council Programme

3.1 Members approved the FTFC Cooperative Corporate Plan in December 2016. It reflects the Council's continuing focus on cooperative working and outlines the key outcomes and priorities for the town through the Future Town, Future Council (FTFC) Programme as seen in Figure 1.

Future town future council



Figure 1: Future Town, Future Council Programme

- 3.2 At the Council meeting on 24 February 2021, Council agreed to continue with the current Co-operative Corporate Plan beyond the original 5 year term, subject to further review in Autumn 2022.
- 3.3 At its meeting on 8 July 2020, the Executive agreed both the deliverables for each of the FTFC programmes and the town and Council's recovery plans, which have very strong synergies. Progress against the agreed actions is summarised within this report.

### **Customer, Place and Transformation and Support**

- 3.4 In addition to monitoring progress on the delivery of the FTFC Programme, performance across all Council services is monitored throughout the year to highlight achievements and identify any areas for improvement.
- 3.5 A complete set of performance measures aligned to both service delivery and the FTFC programme delivery is attached as Appendix One. Summaries of performance measure results are outlined at paragraph 3.65.
- 3.6 Towards the end of Quarter 4 2019/20, Covid-19 began to impact on both FTFC programme activities and on council services. Covid-19 impacts on performance are highlighted throughout this report.

### **COVID-19**

- 3.7 Given the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council's Directors have provided an overview of current performance. The effects of the pandemic have required the Council to adapt services to provide support for residents and to manage the impacts of the pandemic, for example to scale up the Stevenage Helps and the Local Outbreak teams, including creating a local track and trace team during the most recent lockdown period, support vaccination efforts and maintain critical service delivery. Council teams have reprioritised workloads to address particular challenges, for example, to deliver £16Million of business grants and £21Million of business rate reliefs and a range of grants, and to work with commercial tenants using a Covid-19 policy to help them pay their rents.
- 3.8 The pandemic has had significant impacts on residents and businesses in the town, which is reflected in areas of increasing demand or pressures in different service areas such as homelessness support and advice, Council Tax and Housing Benefits, income and rents, and the capacity of Environmental Health team who have played a leading role in Local Outbreak Management. In addition, as with similar organisations, Directors expect there to be high demand for particular services such as homelessness, non-essential repairs and works to properties, following the third national lockdown. A plan is being developed for implementation during 2021/22.
- 3.9 SBC teams are focussed and engaged on delivery of the agreed priorities, from creating new social and affordable housing, to driving forward the

regeneration of the town centre, cooperative neighbourhoods and wealth building.

### **Future Town, Future Council Programme progress update**

- 3.10 The focus and scope of the FTFC programmes for 2020/21 is outlined in Appendix Two. Delivery of the agreed outcomes is monitored to ensure that the Programme remains on track.
- 3.11 Programme delivery updates for the FTFC Programmes together with an outline of any focused activity being implemented to keep the programmes on track are set out in the following paragraphs.

### **External Facing Future Town, Future Council Programmes**

#### **Stevenage Town Centre Regeneration Programme**

##### **Programme Delivery Update**

- 3.12 Since the holding direction was lifted on the planning application decision for SG1 in January 2021, developer Mace has continued to work on the new programme for the development.
- 3.13 Following the announcement of the Budget in March 2021, the Stevenage Town Investment Plan (STIP) was successful in securing funding of £37.5million from Central Government. The STIP will now move in to stage 2, the creation of business cases. The project team have been working together to complete the programme of business cases by 24<sup>th</sup> March 2022.
- 3.14 Letters were circulated to businesses on Queensway South and surrounding residents regarding the demolition of the former police station site, providing a robust frequently asked questions supplement and offering virtual consultation sessions. The consultation took place on 18th March 2021 and was positively received.
- 3.15 Discussions have continued to take place with the lead project sponsors to progress the hub project. An accelerated delivery report was presented to the Executive in March 2021, which was approved by the committee. Work is now underway to mobilise the programme.
- 3.16 The construction of the physical site is now well established for the bus interchange. Further discussions are taking place with the contractor and Hertfordshire County Council in relation to public realm and highway works to Lytton Way respectively.
- 3.17 Physical works to the Town Square and North Block have been completed this quarter. The North Block building has been handed over and a lease has been signed with a tenant who is now fitting out the space, with anticipation to open late summer 2021. The works to the public realm have also been completed.

- 3.18 The tender for the design works for the multi-storey car park (MSCP) was underway at the end of the quarter with the closing date in Quarter 1 2021/22.
- 3.19 The Queensway North scheme is progressing well with construction to the residential units due for completion during Quarter 1. The project includes working with retail agents to secure tenants for the new retail units.

## **Housing Development Programme**

### **Programme Delivery Update**

- 3.20 Work is continuing on the North Road site. Three reservations on plots had already been made at the end of the quarter, and the estate agents continue to receive regular enquiries from interested buyers.
- 3.21 The social rent schemes at Shephall Way (9 Homes) and Symonds Green (29 Homes) have continued to progress this quarter. At Shephall Way the scheme received building control sign off in early April, with final snagging work carried out before letting. At Symonds Green, the brickwork, blockwork and enhanced insulation is continuing on the first floor in preparation with work due to start on the second floor shortly.
- 3.22 Work at Kenilworth Close has continued this quarter. At the Malvern Close site brick and block work has progressed and it is anticipated roof works will commence in Quarter 1. At the main site, work is progressing with foundations being poured.
- 3.23 Following positive feedback on the pre-application for the Brent Court site, the Housing Development team are developing a plan to enable meaningful consultation with local residents, which will commence in Quarter 1. A pre-application has now been submitted for Shephall View to planning services, highways and the local flood authority and plans are also being developed for public consultation. Design work will continue, being influenced by comments from these processes. Submission for planning for both schemes is now expected in Quarter 2, subject to the feedback received from consultation with residents and relevant statutory consultees.
- 3.24 Work to progress and refine the masterplan for the Oval continues with the current design team and is due to be complete in Quarter 3 2021/22. The team are developing a regeneration document that demonstrates the vision for the area. As well as this, the team will be examining the feasibility and ordering of the phased delivery and will provide a guide on architectural styles, materials and design. Soft market testing with retailers has shown strong interest as well as identifying funding avenues from Homes England.
- 3.25 The Wholly Owned Company (WOC) report received Full Council approval in February, and work is now underway with a project team in order take the necessary steps to progress this to be functional in Quarter 3 2021/22. A draft governance document and various service level agreements (SLA) between

the WOC and internal support departments have been written which are currently being reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose.

- 3.26 Three open market acquisitions (OMA) have completed this quarter, with a further two properties in the pipeline. Works will now take place to make the acquisitions ready to be let.

## **Co-operative and Neighbourhood Management (CNM) Programme**

### **Programme Delivery Update**

- 3.27 The neighbourhood improvements programme has delivered some projects this quarter, but difficulties with community engagement continue to be experienced due to the pandemic. Projects that have progressed include art installations, putting in place heart defibrillators in the community and targeted work in areas highlighted by the local communities.
- 3.28 Work on the Co-operative Neighbourhoods working model has progressed this quarter. The Strategic Board for the CNM programme met in January to agree the strategic direction of the new operating model and revised milestones. It was agreed that programme management support would be provided by restructuring of the former Co-operative Neighbourhood Manager post to create a Co-operative Neighbourhoods Programme Manager. This post was successfully appointed to and the post holder joined the team in April 2021.
- 3.29 The Community Engagement Strategy is being shared with the Housing and Investment service and an engagement proposal form is in draft format to support this. The Community Development team are also planning to produce a guide of 'How to Develop a Community Plan' which will include a list of the bespoke engagement tools currently used by the Council and work in conjunction with the engagement strategy.
- 3.30 The Estates team continue to progress the Locality Reviews process including consideration of the long term sustainability of the Council's Community Centre assets. This includes the medium and long term benefit realisation of the Hub and Spoke model outlined as part of the Community Centre Review.
- 3.31 The Co-operative Council Innovation Network (CCIN) Policy Lab group met to re-scope its remit in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. It has been agreed to reframe the lab to develop the model of neighbourhood working and community networks to build new models of collaboration in local communities. A conversation is currently being pursued with the CCIN about sourcing a provider to undertake this work. A final report will be produced for the CCIN in September 2021.
- 3.32 Improvement works to the Council's garages has continued to progress this quarter. Work to refurbish 140 garages at a cost of £300k is near completion which has included new roofs, fascias and guttering, new doors and repairs to the hardstand areas. The Council has already seen void rates fall from 45.5%

to 25.3% across the refurbished sites and another 17 garages have been reserved for new tenants.

- 3.33 Garage sites that have been sold for redevelopment have generated £200k for the Council, which will be re-invested to fund improvement work to the Council's remaining garages.

## **Excellent Council Homes Programme**

### **Programme Delivery Update**

- 3.34 The flatblock refurbishment programme continues to be impacted by the pandemic, but contractors and Council staff have worked to ensure adherence to government guidance. Throughout Quarter 4 work has continued steadily to external and internal areas and Council teams have continued to work closely with contractors to mitigate potential issues should the contract period need to be extended, owing to the pandemic. Phases one and two of the programme are complete and officers have worked with contractors to finalise the accounts to provide necessary information for billing. Phase three is in progress.
- 3.35 The lift refurbishment programme continued at good pace throughout Quarter 4. Lifts at Truro Court, Norman Court and Grosvenor Court have been completed and works will begin at Pitt Court in Quarter 1.
- 3.36 Concept designs have been reviewed for the Sprinkler project during Quarter 4, queries have been issued by the fire safety and Construction Design Management (CDM) consultants and amendments have been made. Queries relating to the design have delayed the Building Control application, however it was due to be issued early in Quarter 1. The scope of work has been agreed and communications are being prepared to advise residents of what works are included in addition to the sprinkler system. Council teams have also been briefed in preparation for the works to begin.
- 3.37 The Rapid project, that looks to streamline back office databases for better use for staff when onsite, has continued to progress steadily. The caretaking app is now in use and fortnightly meetings take place with the team to resolve any user issues. Amendments have been made to the flat block inspection & tenancy form and scoping sessions for the Housing Options forms are ongoing.
- 3.38 Progress has also been made with the 'Chatbots' project. Testing and feedback is currently underway, and will inform a more detailed business case. This is a pilot piece of work with the Connected To Our Customers programme to determine whether Chatbots might offer sufficient cost-benefit for a full implementation, by encouraging online transactions and reducing use of other more expensive channels. This will not eliminate the use of customer communication and support will remain in place via CSC channels, but may provide a quicker response for those who want it.

## **Connected to our Customers Programme**

### **Programme Delivery Update**

- 3.39 The Website Accessibility Monitoring team at the Cabinet Office chose the Council's website from a random sample of Councils to be monitored in Quarter 4. They tested a selection of pages and checked that the accessibility statement was compliant. The website accessibility statement is compliant. The website is now at 96.6% accessibility and is continually monitored and issues addressed as they arise. Work also continues to make PDFs accessible.
- 3.40 Development to the digital platform, used for online customer transactions, has continued, which will act as an enabler for future projects. Elements of this are now in final stages of testing and should be available for customers shortly. Training on the platform has also been rolled out to the wider members of the team which will improve team resilience and capability.

### **Place of Choice Programme**

#### **Programme Delivery Updates**

##### **Climate Change**

- 3.41 A wide range of consultation has been undertaken with residents, and a focussed meeting of a citizens panel. Key points and recommendations have been incorporated into the Climate Change Action Plan and Communications and Collaborations (C&C) Plan. Future engagement will come through the C&C Plan in 2021, showing how we can best engage, educate and collaborate with our residents and businesses to support each other to reduce our carbon outputs.
- 3.42 Work has continued to progress the Council's commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions and working towards Stevenage wide net zero carbon emissions by 2030. Working with partners across Hertfordshire we have identified 4 key areas; Water, Carbon reduction, Transport and Biodiversity for which detailed Action Plans are nearing completion. As a Council we have adopted a Biodiversity Supplementary Document (SPD), and Sustainable Transport SPD for Planning and our work on a new low carbon bus station is progressing at pace. We have reduced our carbon outputs by over 560,000 Kg by switching to a zero carbon electricity provider and are working up a carbon costs plan for 2021/22 with a full update planned to be reported to the Executive in September 2021.

##### **Community Safety**

- 3.43 Work to update the Community Safety strategy and action plan continued this quarter. Following consultation with residents and partners the draft Community Safety Strategy has been finalised. Approval of The Community Safety Strategy will be sought at full Council in July 2021.



- 3.44 The council has led conversations with other districts across Hertfordshire to protect and sustain the support for young people around substance misuse and offending, which was due to end in March 2021. From April 2021 Stevenage will deliver the scheme through the No More Service across the county for an initial period of 6 months. Recruitment is underway for Youth Worker positions and the council is in dialogue with the PCC and other funders to look to extending the service. Alongside Survivors Against Domestic Abuse, the No More Service is now being recognised as a Stevenage service that can be commissioned by others to support community safety efforts.

### **Community Wealth Building**

- 3.45 A meeting took place with the Lottery regarding the potential for a Community Wealth Building application. In particular, this would help to take forward themes linked to cooperative and social economy growth and employment and skills.
- 3.46 The Government launched its Community Renewal Fund, which aims to support the transition from EU programmes to the UK Social Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). Stevenage is not a priority area for the fund, which should form part of the rationale for preparing an application to the Lottery. Nevertheless, work has already been undertaken with the Growth Board that will help the Council and partners to prepare for the UKSPF, which is expected to be launched in April 2022.

### **Healthy Stevenage**

- 3.47 The Young People's Healthy Hub (YPHH) hosted their first Community Kitchen online to 8 families in partnership with Stevenage FC Foundation. A dedicated counselling service for young people 11-16 years old was launched during Children's Mental Health Week in February 2021 with a mixture of online and face-to face delivery by Mind in Mid Herts. The YPHH also hosted its first online summit with a welcome address from the youth mayor and portfolio holder for children, young people, leisure and culture. Workshops were delivered by partners including Herts Mind Network, BeeZee Bodies, Fit Kidz, CGL Spectrum and others.
- 3.48 The second virtual consultation by the Stevenage Dementia Involvement Group was held in February 2021. Recommendations from National Institute for Health research ARC & University of Hertfordshire (UoH) initial reports have been disseminated and are in development, including a new dementia friendly walk for Stevenage residents.

### **Stevenage Re-Imagined**

- 3.49 Planned cultural engagement and installation programmes have continued throughout quarter four, despite the pandemic. This included continued work on the COVID Cobra project and on both the St Nicholas and The Oval arts programmes. Also new funds were obtained for underpass artwork from St Nicholas councillors and the Youth Mayor.

- 3.50 Junction 7 Creatives will occupy 17a Town Square, with a public opening following the elections.

### **Sustainable Transport**

- 3.51 The Council has an approved Future Town Future Transport Strategy, with a number of projects underway to deliver the strategy. In support of this strategy, Stevenage has been provisionally accepted into Hertfordshire County Council's Sustainable Travel Town (STT) programme, and we understand HCC aim to have Action Plans for STT towns developed this summer, for review and consideration by HCC and relevant Borough and District Councils.
- 3.52 The Emerging Parking Strategy was presented to the Executive who approved a period of public consultation prior to adoption. A consultation strategy has been developed for significant engagement after the May elections, with a target to consider consultation responses during autumn in time to formally adopt the Strategy at a meeting of the Executive in December 2021.
- 3.53 In February the emerging Stevenage Connections Area Action Plan was presented to the Executive who approved a period of public consultation on the document. The final document will become part of the Development Plan for Stevenage and will guide how the area around the Rail Station can provide a welcoming gateway to the town, support sustainable transport, promote a more efficient use of the land, enabling connections with the cultural and heritage offer of the town and growing areas of the economy, and greater connections to the Leisure Park and Town Centre to the west and east respectively.
- 3.54 Consultation has been undertaken related to potential improvements for cycling and walking on North Road. This is being funded by the Department for Transport's Emergency Active Travel Fund (tranche 2) and was put forward by HCC (as Local Highways Authority) on our behalf due to the strategic importance of improvements here, as identified in our recently published Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan. Further meetings with HCC and the Department for Transport are expected in Quarter 1 with confirmation of the scheme and funding expected later in summer 2021.
- 3.55 The Council's Future Town, Future Transport Strategy underwent a 12 month review. An overview of progress with the schemes contained in the strategy was presented to numerous Council Committees including the Executive who agreed to progress with the Strategy in January 2021.

### **Enabling Future Town, Future Council Programmes**

#### **Financial Security Programme**

#### **Programme Delivery Update**

- 3.56 The HRA and General Fund revenue budgets were approved at the January and February Council Meetings respectively.

- 3.57 The Fees & Charges for the General Fund were largely implemented in February 2021 with the exception of garage and market fees and the HRA options will be implemented in April 2021.
- 3.58 The Council's Commercialisation & Insourcing strategy was agreed by the Executive in August 2020, and regular updates are given to the newly formed Commercial and Investment Executive Committee. The strategy is focussed on ideas to find savings to contribute to the one year budget package. A consultant has been engaged with the Strategic Leadership Team to focus on ideas to find savings/generate income, and the outcome from this work will be fed into the subsequent work of the strategy.
- 3.59 Work is underway to consider options and concepts for the future transformation of the organisation and a report is due to be presented at the Executive meeting in July. This will help to deliver the Council's Financial Security programme in future years, and also assess opportunities to enhance customer experiences.

### **Employer of Choice Programme**

#### **Programme Delivery Update**

- 3.60 Activities throughout Quarter 4 focused on supporting the Council's response to COVID-19 and the associated recovery planning, which has resulted in the temporary pausing of some elements of the Employer of Choice Programme. The programme has continued to focus upon future ways of working, through learning lessons about how our workforce is working differently during the COVID-19 response.
- 3.61 Extensive work was undertaken to develop a new Workforce and Organisational Development strategy during Quarter 2, including consultation and engagement with SLT, staff, trade union and Portfolio Holder Advisory Group (PHAG) engagement. The strategy was presented and approved by the Executive in Quarter 3, and rollout of the specific strands of the strategy have taken place during Quarter 4. Examples of activity include a staff focus group for BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) employees discussing their experience of SBC as an employer within the Inclusion and Wellbeing theme and rollout of the new remote working policy and remote working ICT kit to those expected to continue to work remotely in line with the ways of working theme. Work to implement and embed the Workforce and Organisational Development strategy will continue into 2021/2022.
- 3.62 Additionally the re-tender of current agency supply framework concluded in March 2021 with a report presented to the Executive.
- 3.63 Further work to digitalise HR processes took place during Quarter 4, with the procurement starting for an applicant tracking system for use during the Council recruitment process and further developments to the core HR and payroll system.

## Performing at our Peak Programme

### Programme Delivery Update

- 3.64 Enhancements have been made to the risk and performance modules of the InPhase performance management system during Quarter 4. However, there has been insufficient capacity to undertake further development work in relation to this programme due to resource being diverted to Resilience activities associated with the response to Covid-19. As a result, the main focus of the corporate performance/governance function has continued to be on 'business as usual' activity.

### Corporate Performance highlights and areas for improvement

- 3.65 Results for the full set of current corporate performance measures across all themes (FTFC programme and the Customer, Place and Transformation and Support themes) are attached as Appendix One. The overview of these results for April 2020 to March 2021 are outlined below:

Number of Measures Reported	Meeting or exceeding target	Amber Status (within a manageable tolerance)	Red Status (urgent improvement action required)	Missing Data
53	31	6	12	4*

\* (Explanations in paras 3.129 to 3.132) CSC13a: % of calls to the CSC resolved within the CSC, ECHFL5: Repairs satisfaction missing, FS3 & 4 % of savings identified for 3 year target

- 3.66 In comparison to Quarter 3 2020/21 the position is:

- 1 less green measure
- 1 more amber measure
- 2 more red measures
- 2 less missing measures
- Of the 12 red measures, 8 of them are COVID-19 related

- 3.67 A summary of areas for improvement for April 2020 to March 2021 is set out in the following paragraphs across the three key delivery themes: Customer, Place, and Transformation and Support.

### Spotlights and Areas for Improvement

- 3.68 The measures below were reported to be at red or amber status for Quarter 4.

#### Households in Emergency/Temporary Accommodation

##### NI156: Number of Households in Emergency/Temporary Accommodation

- March 2021 target 120
- March 2021 actual 184 (red)

- 3.69 There are a large number of clients residing within hotel accommodation due to the ongoing and prolonged demands that have been placed upon the Housing Options Team and high levels of homelessness presentations.
- 3.70 It is unlikely that the numbers of applicants placed in Emergency and Temporary Accommodation will substantially reduce whilst we remain in a period of national restrictions and continue to see a constant flow of approaches to the Housing Options team. Also the Council may not see any real reduction in homelessness presentations if the national eviction ban is lifted in the near future.
- 3.71 The impact of COVID-19 has meant that applicants are spending longer periods of time in temporary accommodation. The Providing Homes team continue to work hard to move applicants out of hotel accommodation and into the Council's own stock, which is being utilised for temporary accommodation. The amount of temporary accommodation has increased by 36 units in 2020/21 and is due to increase further in the coming weeks.
- 3.72 Further to this the team are continuing to prioritise all moves for those owed a duty in Temporary Accommodation, through the Housing Register and in the Private Rented Sector.
- 3.73 The Council is continuing to source accommodation at pace. The Housing Supply team have rehoused 27 rough sleepers within the private rented sector this financial year and this work is continuing.
- 3.74 Key officers meet frequently to review B&B spend, monitor B&B usage and to agree what actions are being taken to reduce this. Housing Benefit submissions are continuing and payments are steadily coming through. Improvements are being made to the way that this data is reported and analysed.
- 3.75 The Housing First project team were successful in their proposals for the MHCLG Next Steps revenue and capital funding which totals approximately £1.3million for accommodation, support, security and Severe Weather Emergency Provision. The service is actively co-operating with MHCLG to apply for new funding streams to improve and expand the Housing First model in order to relieve pressure on temporary accommodation and provide safe, secure accommodation with included support networks for these clients.
- 3.76 The team will be submitting an application for the Ministry of Justice funding bid to assist prison leavers in the Private Rented Sector. The team have also placed a bid for a second round of Next Steps Accommodation Programme funding for Housing First properties and officers and await the outcome in June. The team have also applied for funding from; the Rough Sleeper Initiative to cover security costs and staff and are awaiting the outcome.

## **Homelessness Preventions**

### **BV213: Homelessness Preventions**

- March 2021 target 360 preventions

- March 2021 actual 262 preventions (red)

- 3.77 The caseload at the end of Quarter 4 was 543, a decrease of 7 on the total for the previous quarter. This includes those who are seeking housing advice, but who may not currently be threatened with homelessness. The service has had capacity challenges during this quarter relating to sickness and vacancies. The capacity issues coupled with the difficult Private Rent Sector (PRS) market have meant that preventions remain lower than targeted. This will take time to improve.
- 3.78 The Council is recruiting additional staff to provide the capacity to catch up on casework and strive to assist with achieving preventions for a backlog of cases that built up during lockdown. This should also assist to ease the numbers in emergency/temporary accommodation.
- 3.79 The demand for the service continues to remain high following the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act on 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2018. Approaches from customers to the service are detailed in the table below:

	<b>2018/19</b>	<b>2019/20</b>	<b>2020/21</b>
<b>Approaches to the service (total)</b>	1314	1571	1514
<b>Approaches to the service (average per week)</b>	25	30	29

- 3.80 There have been fewer preventions this financial year in comparison to last. However this is due to the ban on evictions meaning that there is not the turnaround in stock that there otherwise would have been. It has been harder to find accommodation that is affordable for applicants, taking into consideration the challenges in the employment market during the pandemic.
- 3.81 As evictions resume, this is expected to impact on service delivery and demand in two respects: on the one hand, overall homeless demand is expected to increase, putting more pressure on the service; on the other hand, the private rented sector itself is likely to ease, providing more options for supporting customers in finding suitable accommodation.

## **Rent Collection**

### **BV66a: Rent Collection Rate**

- March 2021 target 98.6%
- March 2021 actual 97.8% (red)

- 3.82 Income collection for end of year (Q4) is 97.81%. Performance is below the set target due to a number of unprecedented challenges throughout the financial year that have had a direct impact on income collection and arrears recovery.
- 3.83 The number of UC cases since end of March 2020 has continued to increase and stood at 1650 as at end of March 2021. Of these accounts 705 are in arrears totalling £469,457.58, which equates to 58% of the overall gross arrears. The income team are experiencing increasing levels of highly complex cases.
- 3.84 It is projected that more tenants are likely to migrate to full-service UC over the next 12 months; however this projection could be increased further dependent on the impact of the post-lockdown furlough process ending. Work to mitigate the impact will continue focusing on sustaining income collection and arrears recovery and tenancy sustainment.
- 3.85 There has been an increase in the number of tenants that have been affected and are furloughed, on job retention schemes or made redundant. Please see the table below:

	<b>No of Cases</b>	<b>No in Arrears</b>	<b>Total Arrears</b>
<b>Furloughed</b>	191	137	£103,967.13
<b>Retention</b>	57	44	£30,130.91
<b>Redundancy</b>	25	20	£16,140.05
<b>Total</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>201</b>	<b>£150,238.09</b>

- 3.86 Although Government suspension of legal proceedings in court was lifted at the end of August 2020 and the team have resumed taking cases to court, there are delays in obtaining hearing dates. This has resulted in a large backlog of cases which has an impact on arrears recovery.
- 3.87 The Government ban on eviction action has been in place since March 2020. This has been extended numerous times through subsequent lockdowns and was due to end at the end of this month. It has now been extended until May 31<sup>st</sup> with restrictions tapering off from June. This has had an impact on the level of arrears. There are 15 cases at the eviction stage with arrears totalling £26,855. In past years the team have collected an average of £50,000 from cases escalating to the eviction stage. With the eviction ban in place last year, it was not possible to collect more income this way.
- 3.88 The combined insecurity of the COVID-19 pandemic and increased financial pressure has seen some of our tenants opting for permanent debt solutions and so far there are 4 cases in the process of obtaining Debt Relief Orders (DRO) with arrears totalling £11,220.

- 3.89 Emergency (EA) and Temporary Accommodation (TA) arrears remain high. The total number of cases is 184, of those 100 are in arrears totalling £51,971, this is a reduction of 21% since Quarter 3. The team continue to experience high levels of homeless presentations as confirmed by the suite of indicators for Homelessness.
- 3.90 The service is now in the second year of the income recovery action plan and work to mitigate the long term impact of Universal Credit as well as the economic consequences of COVID-19 is underway. The team have delivered on most actions and this has resulted in a reduced level of current tenant arrears of £807,441 at the end of March 2021, compared to a peak of £1,249,042 in August 2020.
- 3.91 The Income Services team's collective and individual effort will be directed towards sustaining income collection to expected levels and tenancy sustainment, whilst supporting those tenants experiencing financial challenges. This will be closely monitored to ensure continuous improvements in collection of all income streams under the service is maximised.

### **Decent Homes**

#### **ECHFL1: % of homes maintained as decent**

- March 2021 target 70.1%
- March 2021 actual 68.8% (amber)

- 3.92 The Investment team did not achieve the target for this quarter as there has been a delay on mobilising the Decent Homes Programme due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The variance of 1.3% equates to 104 homes.
- 3.93 The team expect that the shortfall of properties will be picked up in the new financial year now that the contract is underway.

### **Void Loss, Voids Sheltered & Voids Sheltered Major Works**

#### **VoidLoss1: Void Loss in year (£)**

- March 2021 target £319,245
- March 2021 actual £409,224 (red)

#### **VoidsSheltered: The time taken to relet standard sheltered voids**

- March 2021 target 70 days
- March 2021 actual 123.6 days (red)

#### **Voids ShelteredMW: The time taken to relet major works sheltered voids**

- March 2021 target 70 days
- March 2021 actual 105 days (red)



- 3.94 Void Loss has remained red this quarter and was 28% above the target at the end of the financial year. This situation has been closely monitored throughout the year, but with the influx of Independent Living and Flexicare properties becoming void as a direct result of the Covid19 pandemic, the figure has been heavily affected, as these are the slowest properties to re-let.
- 3.95 The largest single contributing factor to rent loss at this time is the historic list of properties awaiting letting. At the end of this quarter there were 78 properties awaiting letting and 87% of these properties were sheltered/ independent living homes. This list accumulated approximately £28,000 of rent loss per month by the end of the quarter, a much higher level than would be expected in normal circumstances.
- 3.96 In terms of re-let times, the turnaround performance for the repairs element of these KPI's has been favourable compared to target yet again, owing in part to the flexibility and resilience shown by the Voids team and also the utilisation of responsive operatives when lockdown restrictions reduced. The key performance indicator however continues to be significantly affected by the time taken to let these properties once repair works are completed and, this has been heavily restricted as a result of the pandemic. The situation has been compounded by the restrictions to viewings and lettings during this period, although these have slightly eased in recent months.
- 3.97 Of the 14 Standard Sheltered properties let in Quarter 4, 10 took over 100 days to re-let (key to key) including 4 properties that took 388, 385, 238 and 224 days to let respectively; each of these properties had their repairs completed approximately 10 days under target. These properties accumulated £34,530.42 of void rent loss between them, broken down into £4,290.28 of rent loss whilst the property was with Repairs, and £30,240.14 after the property was ready to let.
- 3.98 There were 2 Major Work Sheltered Voids let in Quarter 4 with an average turnaround time of 157.5 days, the repairs elements on these properties took an average of 36 days which is 23 days under target.
- 3.99 During 2020/21 53% of lettings were over target. Further analysis of the reasons for the delay in letting homes indicates that delays to the turnaround time once a property is ready to let, are often due to our customers' inability to move quickly owing to them having higher support needs. During the last financial year the evidence shows 39% of properties were let at between 7-20 days and 8% were let at 20 days plus.
- 3.100 An officer working group is in place and has been tasked with reducing void loss and improving turnaround times for both standard sheltered voids and major works sheltered voids.
- 3.101 Following an informal review in March 2021 the Lettings Team now forms part of the Housing Supply Team and work is underway to review and improve void turnaround and lettings processes to ensure void turnaround targets are met in the future.

## **Jobs Created through the Business Technology Centre**

### **BTC1a: New jobs created through the BTC (ytd)**

- March 2021 target 60
- March 2021 actual 33 (red)

- 3.102 The jobs created through the Business Technology Centre (BTC) during 2020/21 did not meet the target; however the team still managed to create 33 jobs during challenging economic circumstances, including 11 in Quarter 4.
- 3.103 The target output for jobs created for the whole of 2020/21 was 60 and for new businesses was 24. These figures relate to a funding agreement between the council and EEDA (East of England Development Agency) for the second phase, to support an extension at the BTC. EEDA are no longer in existence and responsibility now lies with Homes England. The agreement ceases November 2022.
- 3.104 The latest quarterly return has been steady at the BTC, with some businesses outgrowing the BTC and moving on, but also downsizing or moving to work from home. The BTC has also seen start-ups and new businesses take up space at the centre through this period. It should be noted that during the pandemic the BTC has achieved its target for new business start-up this financial year.

## **Food Establishment Compliance**

### **NI184: Food Establishments in the Area Broadly Compliant with Food Hygiene Law**

- March 2021 target 95%
- March 2021 actual 82% (red)

- 3.105 The Food Standards Agency (FSA) gave the greenlight for a partial return to a 'business as usual' inspection programme during Quarter 4.
- 3.106 Officers prioritised COVID-19 response work during the early weeks of the quarter in response to a rise in the Incidence Rate locally; additional resources were secured and the inspection programme stepped up during the second half of the quarter.
- 3.107 Inspections have resumed of premises that are trading. A number of new food businesses have registered with the authority, but are not necessarily trading; we are unable to inspect if the business is not operating. Officers have resumed visits to premises to inspect and ensure compliance with food hygiene legislation, prioritising high risk activities over premises which are outstanding by due-date or newly-registered.

## **Household Waste and Recycling**

### **NI191: Residual household waste per household**

- March 2021, target 520kg,

March 2021, estimate 542 kg (amber)

- 3.108 The Quarter 4 figure for residual household waste is currently estimated because the actual figure is reported from an outside source and will not be available until June. Volumes of household waste during the first three quarters of 2020/21 were 8-10% higher than in 2019/20, due to more people being at home during the pandemic. The estimated figure is therefore based on last year's figure for the same period + 10%.

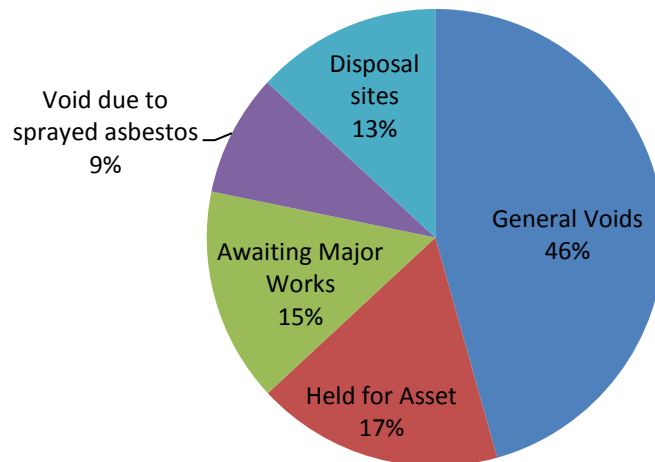
### **Garage Voids**

#### **CNM2g: Garage Voids as a Percentage of Stock**

- March 2021 target 15.38%
- March 2021 actual 16.01% (amber)

- 3.109 Following the rent increase notification and communication around the transition to 52 week per year charging, the garages team have received 67 garage terminations this quarter. There is provision in place to re-let these assets as quickly as possible.
- 3.110 The new Choice Based Lettings scheme will go live by July 2021 and the team will be communicating the process change to applicants currently on the waiting list. A communications plan is in place to then actively promote the new scheme to the residents in Stevenage along with a more detailed communications piece about other garage news which will focus on information on asbestos, repairs and garage improvement. It is anticipated that introducing Choice Based Lettings will mean that more residents will accept low demand garages through the online provision and will allow the garages team more time to focus on the high demand void list with a view to converting them into lettings.
- 3.111 Void garages account for 1,046 of 6,537 of total residential garages. The breakdown of void residential garages can be seen below:

## Void Residential Garages



3.112 Asbestos issues have taken 346 garages out of circulation and this has impacted on the voids rate as many tenants have requested a garage transfer. There continues to be a slow return of garages that have been sent out for pre-asbestos inspections however this is being addressed. There are 4 areas of Stevenage where the garages are being actively inspected for asbestos (Broadwater, Shephall, Old Town and Bedwell) and this has made it difficult for the garages team to be able to make any offers for voids located within these wards.

3.113 The Garages team have identified some initiatives around how voids can be reduced and income can be increased during the next financial year (articulated in the Garages Service Plan 21/22), these include:

- Identifying an increase in charges for low demand garages that have been refurbished and are now deemed to be of high demand.
- Requesting garages back in high demand areas, where the tenant no longer lives, and offering them a garage in a lower demand area.
- A differentiated marketing and lettings plan, based on the type of garage and data around the demand.

3.114 With regards to the Garage Improvement Programme (GIP), most void garages have been let in 2 large garage sites where refurbishment work has been completed. The 3rd site was completed in Quarter 4, and will be offered out to applicants during Quarter 1 of 2021/22. Of the 10 sites which started in January, 2 are nearing completion. A further 11 sites were approved at the March GIP board and are being programmed in with the Council's contractor - Wates.

3.115 Through the programme KPIs there is a target for at least 20 garage offers per week with a 50% acceptance rate. At this time the average monthly

acceptance rate is 51.06% for Quarter 4. With the rent being credited back to those garage accounts showing in arrears due to asbestos, a true reflection of arrears can be seen, which shows there has been a positive decrease to £47,464 following end of financial year communications.

## **Website Satisfaction**

### **WebSat1: Customer Satisfaction with Council website (-1 negative score, 0 neutral score, +1 positive score)**

Govmetrics is a benchmarking tool used across approximately 70 local authorities to measure customer satisfaction. The measure is the average rating users give (1 being a smiley face, 0 being neutral face, -1 being a negative face). So a score of above 0 means that the website received more positive than negative ratings. For example:

- 1 green and 1 amber response would total 1, so the average score we use as a performance measure would be 0.5
- 3 green, 1 amber and 1 red score a total of 2, so the measure would be 0.25.
  
- March 2021 target 0.16
- March 2021 actual -0.08 (red)

- 3.116 Customers rated the website pages 1740 times in 2020/21 through the Govmetric tool, which equated to once in every 3,200 visits on average. Approximately a third of the time they provided further written feedback. The vast majority of feedback is anonymous (86%), but when a customer does provide their contact details then Customer Services or the web team will reply directly or else it will be passed to the right service to respond as appropriate. In many cases the team are able to point people in the right direction, ask if a particular website improvement would help them, or else request more detail so the team can follow up.
- 3.117 The website was used considerably more during 2020/21 than 2019/20, with a staggering 5.5million page views, compared to 3.2million the previous year. Customers have had a wider and different range of needs compared to previously, and have increasingly gone online to find what they need and communicate with the council.
- 3.118 Fluctuations in the website customer satisfaction score can happen as a result of a relatively low volume of feedback on any particular topic. Accordingly the team also look at the trends across the website, as well as any overall score. Looking across 2020/2021, areas of high satisfaction on the website included bin collection changes for bank holidays, positive responses to the Council providing free meals to children in October half-term, homelessness support and the SADA service. In Quarter 4, further positive feedback included the responses to webpages explaining the different waste and recycling containers.

3.119 In Quarter 4, key areas of low satisfaction included allotment prices, housing repairs and council housing. This suggests that as with other Councils, part of the website customer feedback also relates to customer perception of the service itself, topic or policy, in addition to website functionality. We have reviewed feedback on these areas of lower satisfaction. In relation to Council Tax, some customers reported difficulty of communicating a change of address. This is being considered in a review of our Revenues and Benefits content with our Shared Service partner. Following earlier feedback, we have made further steps to help make the 'contact us' information more visible for key service areas such as Waste, Repairs and Council Tax, and have received other comments from customers seeking a year of collection dates for Waste and Recycling online.

3.120 Online payments received the most comments of any part of the website, and across 2020/21 were of average satisfaction, compared to having been one of the highest rated elements in 19/20. This was due to several periods of supplier reliability issues that led to the payment system not working, and a specific issue with a parking contractor meaning online PCN payments were unavailable for several weeks.

3.121 Further actions being undertaken to strengthen the website include:

- Putting in place additional customer testing of the website after the pre-elections period
- Identifying ways to improve reliability of online payments
- Working with portfolio holder to establish a member working group to consider key website topics in more detail
- Looking at ways to increase the proportion of customers that provide feedback on our website

## **Council Tax**

### **BV9: % Council Tax Collected**

- March 2021 target 96.8%
- March 2021 actual 95.1% (amber)

### **BV10: % of non-domestic rates due for the financial year received by the authority**

- March 2021 target 99%
- March 2021 achieved 97.8% (amber)

3.122 As of March 2021, the council has agreed alternative council tax payment arrangements with 6,260 households to support them through the COVID pandemic, these arrangements included offering delaying payment and extending instalments. The council has awarded £545K of Hardship funding with the remaining 30% of the grant retained to support residents over the coming months.

3.123 SBC has supported its local business through the pandemic by administering the Retail & Hospitality funding and the Local Restrictions Support grants as well as one off top up payments and the Additional Restrictions grant.

### **GF/HRA Savings**

#### **FS1A: % GF approved savings removed from GF for current year**

- March 2021 target 92%
- March 2021 actual 67% (red)

#### **FS2A: % HRA approved savings removed from HRA for current year**

- March 2021 target 91%
- March 2021 actual 40% (red)

3.124 There has been a reduction in the 2020/21 savings/income generation achievable due to the impacts of Covid-19.

3.125 £794K of General Fund savings were proposed for 2020/21 of which £272K have not been achieved. £113K of this relates to fees and charges increases which have not been implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic with the majority related to parking services. Other savings not achieved include £58K of income generation from commercial leases, £50K of additional income generation from revised parking proposals, £15K relating to a finance SLA for the WOC which was developed and approved later than anticipated and £10K due to a delayed Business Unit review for Stevenage Direct Services.

3.126 £400K of HRA savings were proposed for 2020/21 of which £238K have not been achieved. The undelivered savings include £100K due to delays to a reconfiguration of the Housing Repairs Function, £48K due to the reconfiguration of Out of Hours & Standby Arrangements which has not been achieved as subcontractors have been required to undertake out of hours works, £40K for an anticipated revenue contribution from HCC for the Blackwell Close scheme which has not been realised as a capital contribution was made instead, £26K for the HRA's share of parking related income and £21K savings anticipated from the final stages of the Business Unit review.

3.127 Normally, a three year view of savings is proposed as part of the Budget Setting process (MTFS) and agreed by Members to ensure that there are sufficient options in the pipeline to deliver a sustainable budget.

3.128 However due to considerable uncertainty about the future year impacts of Covid-19, Brexit and any recession on the Council's budgets, along with the financial pressures this has had and will continue to have on the Council's services, a one year budget setting approach is being taken for 2021/22. Due to this decision the team are unable to report on the measures, FS3: % of GF savings identified for 3 year target, and also, FS4: % of HRA savings identified for 3 year target.

## **Missing Measures**

3.129 There is no data for Quarter 4 for the measures below.

### **Finance Measures**

**FS3: % of GF savings identified to meet three year target**

**FS4: % of HRA savings identified to meet three year target**

3.130 These measures will not be reported until 2021/22 (para 3.128). The savings targets have been changed to one year rather than three years due to the impacts of COVID-19.

### **Repairs Measures**

**ECHFL5: % of repairs service customers satisfied**

3.131 The Repairs Team are unable to provide data for this measure for Quarter 4. This is due to a fault with the Cloud Dialogues SMS system, which is used for satisfaction surveys. The team are in talks with the supplier and they are trying to work through the issue with them.

**CSC13a: % of calls to the CSC resolved within the CSC (by CSC advisors)**

3.132 As reported in Quarter 3, the Customer Services team have implemented a new system in the CSC. There have been issues with the reporting capabilities of this system and this is now being developed, with a view to reporting a re-baselined measure, which will take and account of new processes in Customer Services, from Quarter 1 2021/22.

## **Next Quarter Focus**

3.133 The Assistant Directors are responsible for improving the performance of measures that fall within their Business Units.

3.134 Following a number of assessments, and the new red and amber measures arising at March 2021, the improvement activities outlined below have been identified for ongoing monitoring by the Senior Leadership Team:

- Continue to monitor satisfaction with the new Council website after introduction of the new site and address issues based upon customer feedback (para 3.116 to 3.121)
- Continuing to implement recovery plans for Temporary/Emergency accommodation use caused by COVID-19 (paragraphs 3.69 to 3.76)
- Continuing to implement Housing First plans to assist with Homelessness Preventions (para 3.77 to 3.81)
- Continuing to implement recovery plans for Rent Collection (para 3.82 to 3.91)



- Continuing to implement plans and improve processes for Void loss, Sheltered Voids and Sheltered Major Works Voids (para 3.94 to 3.101)
- Continuing to work with/follow advice from WENTA about BTC job creation and new business start-up (para 3.102 to 3.104)
- Ensuring that compliance checks for food establishments resume and checks for high risk establishments continue (para 3.105 to 3.107)
- Monitor the level of residual waste per household (para 3.108)
- Ensuring that issues with the letting of council garages are recognised and performance is monitored closely. Implement plans to improve the process of garages lettings (paragraphs 3.109 to 3.115)
- Ensuring that improvement plans for collection of Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates are in place (para 3.122 to 3.123)
- Ensuring that General Fund and HRA savings are closely monitored (para 3.124 to 3.128)

3.135 In addition, the development and implementation of the IT strategy will continue to be monitored by the IT Shared Service Partnership Board to ensure that services are delivered that meet customer needs and are fit for the future.

3.136 A Member session on the IT strategy is being arranged.

3.137 The Senior Leadership Team will also continue to closely monitor the impact of Covid-19 on performance across all service areas during 2021/22. This will help to establish the level of impact and inform where activity and resources need to be allocated.

3.138 The Council's approach to performance management and monitoring allows the organisation to proactively identify issues and challenges and ensure prompt management intervention. The fluid nature of the framework enables the Senior Leadership Team to amend targets to ensure that they continue to reflect revisions to service delivery models where necessary and to support and drive forward additional improvements in services for the benefit of internal and external customers.

#### **4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS**

4.1 The information presented in this report is collated from the information provided to monitor delivery of the Future Town, Future Council Programme and corporate performance for the quarter. It aims to give Executive an overview of the achievements the Council has made for the year to date, with a focus on the previous quarter and identifies plans for continued improvements in some areas to ensure the Council is fit for the future.

4.2 The Senior Leadership Team and Service Managers have been consulted to determine the appropriate content and to identify the key achievements.

4.3 A number of areas have been identified in section 3 of this report where a particular focus on improvement or COVID-19 recovery is required and outline

plans have been set out. The Executive is recommended to note and endorse these improvement plans.

## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **5.1 Financial Implications**

5.1.1 There are no direct financial implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, officers responsible for improvement activity identified will need to identify and consider any resulting financial implications.

### **5.2 Legal Implications**

5.2.1 There are no direct legal implications from the recommendations contained in this report. However, officers responsible for improvement activity identified will need to identify and consider any resulting legal implications.

### **5.3 Equalities and Diversity Implications**

5.3.1 The report outlines performance against key priorities that form the Future Town, Future Council Programme and performance of the Council across key business unit themes. Where necessary, Equality Impact Assessments will be completed for improvement activity identified.

### **5.4 Risk Implications**

5.4.1 There are no direct significant risks to the Council in agreeing the recommendation(s). Officers responsible for developing performance improvement plans will need to consider any risk implications from the improvement activity identified.

5.4.2 The Council has an embedded approach to risk management that mitigates any adverse effect on delivery of the Council's objectives and internal control processes and also provides good governance assurance.

### **5.5 Other Corporate implications**

5.5.1 Improvement activity outlined may impact on the development of future policy or procedure.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- Executive Report 10 July 2019: 2018/19 Annual Report & Performance Overview

## **APPENDICES**

- Appendix One: Compendium of Performance Results
- Appendix Two: Future Town, Future Council Programme Scope/Focus for 2020/21