

Meeting Executive
Portfolio Area All
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CORPORATE PERFORMANCE QUARTER TWO 2021/22

KEY DECISION

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To highlight the Council's performance across key priorities and themes for quarter two 2021/22.
- 1.2 For Members information a presentation will be provided at the Executive meeting which will cover updates in relation delivery against FTFC Cooperative Corporate Plan Priorities and the key themes resulting from the key performance indicator information.

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 two 2021/22, together with the latest achievements, be noted.

- 2.2 That the continued impacts of Covid-19 on the Housing Options service and actions to recover performance are noted (para 3.72 to 3.77).
- 2.3 That performance challenges relating to housing voids are noted and actions to improve performance are endorsed (para 3.78 to 3.84).
- 2.4 That the challenges related to garages with asbestos and the letting of council garages, and the planned measures to improve performance are monitored and endorsed (para 3.85 to 3.92).
- 2.5 That challenges within the Customer Service Centre (including Complaints and Website) are noted and improvement plans endorsed (para 3.93 to 3.114).
- 2.6 That the Executive Action Tracker at Appendix 3 be noted.

3 BACKGROUND

Future Town Future Council Programme

- 3.1 Members approved the FTFC Cooperative Corporate Plan in December 2016. This sets the Council's 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.



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 14 July 2021, the Executive agreed the deliverables for each of the five FTFC programmes. The town and Council's COVID recovery plan, were agreed in July 2020, with key actions now largely embedded within the update FTFC programme.

- 3.4 'The Council published its Annual Report for 2020/2021, in July 2021. A copy is available online: <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/documents/about-the-council/annual-report/annual-report-202021.pdf>
- 3.5 This report highlights and showcases the Council's achievements in a challenging context and outlines its priorities for 2021/22. The report highlighted a number of successes and achievements from the year, including the construction of the new bus interchange, the development of Queensway North, revitalisation of the Town Square, securing a £37.5m Towns Fund allocation to support the delivery of the Town Centre Transformation programme.
- 3.6 The Annual Report also set out some of vital work undertaken through the pandemic, providing emergency accommodation to 77 people at risk of rough sleeping, supporting businesses and residents through our Local Outbreak team, and supporting hundreds of vulnerable residents via the Stevenage Helps Hub.
- 3.7 The Report also highlighted the ongoing work to build over 270 new Council homes to date, and invest in housing stock via the Major Repairs Contract and other vital works to Council homes. Stevenage Council teams have adapted and worked hard to maintain service delivery, maintaining over 5 million square metres of grass, achieving five green flag awards for our parks, and 33,500kg of waste collected over the last year, and putting in place a Cooperative Neighbourhood programme to work with residents to improve local areas.

Customer, Place and Transformation and Support

- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 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 (para 3.59).
- 3.10 Towards the end of Quarter 4 2019/20, Covid-19 began to impact on both FTFC programme activities and on council services. The Covid-19 pandemic is continuing to impact performance in certain areas and is highlighted throughout this report.

COVID-19

- 3.11 Stevenage as a town, and Stevenage Borough Council, faces an almost unprecedented set of challenges that are impacting on our financial and operational performance.

- 3.12 The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic continues to stretch our resources to adapt and deliver services that lessen the impact on local communities. This has seen increasing demand for a number of services, including homelessness support and advice, significant and ongoing demand for property repairs, high levels of demand related to advice for 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. Council teams have reprioritised workloads to address particular challenges, for example, to deliver £22.5Million of business grants and £32Million of business rate reliefs and a range of grants, and working with commercial tenants using a Covid-19 policy to help them pay their rents.
- 3.13 As we enter the winter period, continuing efforts to encourage vaccinations (including boosters), to maintain critical service delivery and to respond to changing national trends also provide further challenges. This comes at the same time as the furlough scheme ending, increased energy and fuel costs, supply chain difficulties arising from Brexit and the removal of the Universal Credit uplift are all impacting local residents and businesses.
- 3.14 Council 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.
- 3.15 In this context, the report that follows shows some impact on performance caused by the cumulative impact of these multiple challenges. However, it also demonstrates the continuing commitment of this Council to implementing clear action plans to address and improve performance where necessary.

Future Town, Future Council Programme progress update

- 3.16 The focus and scope of the FTFC programmes for 2021/22 is outlined in Appendix Two. Delivery of the agreed outcomes is monitored to ensure that the Programme remains on track.
- 3.17 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.

Future Town, Future Council Programmes

Transforming Our Town Programme

Programme Delivery Update

- 3.18 The SG1 programme with Mace is underway. The Deed of Variation to the Development Agreement for key demolition sites to progress the SG1

programme has been finalised and preparation took place to commence demolition of Plot K (Former Police Station and Towers Garages).

- 3.19 Works have continued on site for the bus interchange both externally and internally including the completion of the coach stand on Lytton Way and installation of the glass screen “gates”. The ancillary building and canopy works have continued to progress.
- 3.20 In Quarter 2, the new Co Space facility in the Town Square completed and was opened, providing high quality events space, office accommodation and co-working space in the heart of the town centre.
- 3.21 Plans for the multi-storey car park (MSCP) have been progressed and there is a related report on the December agenda.
- 3.22 Practical completion for Blocks A & B of the Queensway site has slipped due to issues with the supply and delivery of materials. Target practical completion date for Block C is December.
- 3.23 The Visitor’s Centre was re-opened to help provide local information and an opportunity to find out more about the Town Centre regeneration programme.
- 3.24 On 13th October, Full Council agreed to give delegated authority to Executive to approve the business cases for projects which make up the Stevenage Town Investment Plan. This Investment Plan brings forward a range of projects to help transform and revitalise the town, from funding towards a new sports and leisure facility, to contributions to walking, cycling, a heritage trail, funding towards a New Towns Heritage Centre, provision to support skills development and job opportunities in the town, and further improvement to the town centre. Work is well underway to prepare each business case by the end of March 2022.

More Social and Affordable Housing Programme

Programme Delivery Update

- 3.25 Work continues both internally and externally at the North Road scheme (21 homes). The scheme is expected to be delayed by approximately 6 weeks as a result of delays to the necessary highways works enabling access to the scheme, however delivery of the scheme is still expected in Quarter 3 as anticipated. A further reservation has been made with sales now totalling £3.1m and generating funding towards Council and affordable house building.
- 3.26 Work has progressed at the Symonds Green site (29 homes) with the steels for the roof structure now installed on the site. Work is also continuing internally with stairwells, lifts and window installation all in progress.
- 3.27 Foundation work has completed on the first phases of the scheme, including block A1, and is mostly complete on A2 of the Kenilworth Close site and work continues on the properties accessible from Stirling Close. The properties at Malvern Close are progressing well with the installation of roof tiles as well as

internal decorations being underway in a number of the plot. A further reservation has been made now totalling 6 of the 7 properties.

- 3.28 Demolition at the Dunn Close scheme has been carried out with the site now clear. Alongside that, the planning application for the scheme has been submitted. Following the conclusion of consultation regarding the scheme, the scheme will be considered at Planning and Development Committee.
- 3.29 The Marshgate Wholly Owned Company (WOC) is exploring two current routes of delivery, including potential open market acquisitions as well as sites for development. An offer has been accepted on an Open Market Acquisition (OMA) which is intended to be purchased by the WOC as part of the Rough Sleeping Accommodation Programme (RSAP) funding offer, with another unit subject to an offer and pending a decision from the seller.

Co-operative and Neighbourhoods Programme

Programme Delivery Update

- 3.30 Work on the Co-operative Neighbourhoods working model has continued to progress this quarter. Ward walkabouts with Members have been completed and feedback is being collated and reviewed. Pop-up events have also taken place with over 250 conversations with residents collated as part of these activities so far. The findings from both of these will be shared via Officer and Member Neighbourhood meetings in due course.
- 3.31 A new Neighbourhood Action Tracker for each Co-operative Neighbourhood area has been created and is to be utilised more as an officer issued management tool to help resolve issues highlighted by Elected Members and Stevenage residents.
- 3.32 Blake House Co-operative have been commissioned to undertake the creation of a film that highlights good examples of Co-operation and Partnership working in Neighbourhoods. Stevenage Borough Council, alongside colleagues from North Herts District Council, Burntwood Town Council and Sunderland City Council submitted case studies that form the basis of interview and content for the film.
- 3.33 The Council received a further £100,000 Health Protection Board (HPB) funding in addition to the original £100,000 awarded in quarter one. This funding is intended to help local Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise organisations to mitigate the ongoing costs of the pandemic, now that central government support has started to be drawn back, and they are able to resume operations. This further funding will be used to help support organisations who have already applied for funding, but who could not be covered by the initial tranche as well as new applications.
- 3.34 The Stevenage Equalities Commission (SEC) held its initial meeting as well as its first thematic meeting on health inequality this quarter. Both meetings were well attended with a range of partners and key speakers at the sessions.

- 3.34.1 The Major Flatblock Refurbishment programme has continued to progress. The third phase of the programme is continuing and the fourth phase has also commenced. The pandemic continues to affect material and labour supply to the programme, but this is being monitored closely by the contractors and officers.
- 3.35 The Garage Improvement Programme is continuing and two sites with 25 garages were handed back from the contractor during Quarter 2 and the garages are now let. A further 20 sites were approved to proceed for refurbishment or rebuilding, with a combined order value of just over £1m. The team are now working on securing agreement and payment from the owners of freehold garages on these sites to enable the work to proceed.

Making Your Money Count Programme

Programme Delivery Update

- 3.36 An update on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the General Fund was presented to the Executive in September.
- 3.37 A report on the Making Your Money Count programme for 2022/23 will be considered as part of today's meeting agenda.
- 3.38 Since the recruitment of the commercial officer for trade waste in quarter one, £70k of additional income from trade waste has been generated including 17 new waste contracts signed. The Council is currently on track to meet its income target of securing an additional £54k of income for 2021/22.
- 3.39 The Council's new advertising and sponsorship partner, CP Media, have submitted 13 applications for 35 separate roundabout sites in line with Hertfordshire County Council guidelines. A filming proposal and filming terms and conditions have been created for review at the next Commercial and Investment Working Group.
- 3.40 Members of the Executive approved the high level principles underpinning a transformation programme this quarter. This will improve customer experiences and provide greater financial resilience for the General Fund and HRA.

A Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town Programme

Programme Delivery Updates

Clean and Green

- 3.41 The Council has successfully retained all five of its Green Flag awards, which is particularly commendable in the context of the demands on front line services during the pandemic, and reinforces the quality of some of our key green spaces.

- 3.42 Phase 2 of the SDS Operations service review is well underway and once complete, in February / March 2022, will provide an enhanced and more flexible structure to deliver Clean & Green services going forward.
- 3.43 Works to implement more sustainable planting are in development for seasonal bedding displays following support expressed through public consultation. These schemes will be monitored in terms of feedback from the community in due course. Continuing the sustainability theme, following the increased scope of natural meadowlands provided this summer; a review is underway to inform the programme for spring 2022 onwards.

Healthy Stevenage

- 3.44 Discussions have continued this quarter in relation to suicide prevention work with a number of partners including Thameslink, Mind in mid Herts, Network Rail and Samaritans. Consideration is being given to the commissioning of a crisis café and discussions are being held with the Integrated Care Commissioning team.
- 3.45 Officers met with partners from the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) applied research collaborative to identify a wider range of partners who could take some of the findings from the Covid-19 food study policy briefings forward.

Community Safety

- 3.46 Plans are progressing on the opening of a new Stevenage and North Herts Women's Centre in partnership with the Probation Service and organisations that run services for women that need to have a safe place to meet with their female clients.
- 3.47 Community Safety officers have continued to work co-operatively with partners to deal with concerns in the community around drug use. The team have been successful in obtaining a Closure Order and an Injunction which has banned an individual from Stevenage.
- 3.48 SBC Officers are continuing to drive a fly-tipping action group to explore more targeted interventions to tackle fly-tipping in parts of the town as is being highlighted through Co-operative Neighbourhood meetings. This has drawn officers from Community Safety, Stevenage Direct Services, Hertfordshire County Council and Highways England. Plans are also underway to develop a concerted campaign around littering over the winter months.

Stevenage Re-Imagined

- 3.49 The Borough's Arts & Heritage Strategy (AHS) continues to deliver cultural growth for our communities. In the last quarter, the strategy continued to support Junction7 Creative (J7C)'s use of a vacant Town Square retail unit in line with its meanwhile use aims. Beyond enhancing town centre regeneration and its cultural offer, the space has bolstered community development through new connections and ideas that support the AHS's wider aims/projects.

Officers are exploring meanwhile use options of the current bus apron area, following the completion of the new bus interchange and supporting the future garden square development.

- 3.50 J7C and Be-Me co-produced the second phase of SBC's arts commissions in St Nicholas and Martins Wood. This comprised of a second underpass arts installation and celebration event centred on the themes of racial equality and love. Another partnership project centred on racial equality, Stevenage Legacy & Resilience, has begun a new stage that will highlight local stories and people from Stevenage's BAME communities through new audio-visual productions.
- 3.51 The Council has worked with Hertfordshire Cultural Education Partners to recruit a programme producer and begin delivery of the Hertfordshire Cultural Education Partnership programme, which is piloting partnership development and project activity between the Stevenage Museum and primary and secondary schools. Moreover, the council has collaborated with music partners, Stevenage Music Centre and Practice Roomz, to produce and release music with disadvantaged young people, centred on youth experience during lockdown.
- 3.52 The New Town; New Art programme, supported by Arts Council England, is in its final stages of production. This will include installation of a major cycleway and an exhibition centred around local LGBTQIA+ communities and histories, which will provide foundation for future public art place making ambitions.
- 3.53 Finally, work continues to develop options for the New Towns Heritage centre, as part of the town centre regeneration programme. Members of the Community Select Committee and Officers undertook site visits to explore case studies in tandem with the development of the Towns Fund business case.

Community Wealth Building

- 3.54 Officers have been successful with the county-wide bid for funding to support Community Wealth Building activities from Central Government. This decision was initially expected to be reached in late July. Working closely with the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, the £715,000 funding will be vital in continuing the work to give businesses and people in Stevenage the opportunities they need to help them fulfil their potential.

Climate Change

- 3.55 The Stevenage Together partnership held a climate change summit to look at innovative ways the council and local organisations are helping tackle the climate emergency and moving towards the target of reaching net zero by 2030. A number of highly innovative companies presented to the group their own approaches to tackling climate change.
- 3.56 An annual update on the council's climate change action plan and associated activities was presented at the Executive during October 2021. The report

provided an overview of the action taken to tackle climate change by Stevenage Borough Council and with partners, through the Council's joint working on the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP).

Sustainable Transport

- 3.57 Stevenage has been formally accepted onto Hertfordshire County Council's Sustainable Travel Town (STT) programme. Officers have been in regular contact with HCC since the beginning of the year to help identify the infrastructural and non-infrastructural schemes which the STT programme could deliver to improve the modal share of sustainable transport in our town. This Outline Plan was finalised earlier in summer and HCC Councillors on the Highways and Transport Cabinet Panel formally approved the Outline Plan, and therefore Stevenage's inclusion on the programme, at the beginning of September.
- 3.58 The emerging Stevenage Connections Area Action Plan has been consulted on widely during quarter two as the first step towards its adoption. Officers ran multiple engagement events and stalls across the town to garner public opinion on some high level options for the creation of a high quality environment in this crucial 'gateway' area for the town, and looking at the potential for redevelopment and enhancement of the area. Officers will assess the consultation responses prior to developing a "preferred option" and re-consulting with the public on that.

Corporate Performance highlights and areas for improvement

- 3.59 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 at Appendix One. The overview of these results for April 2021 to September 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
46	32	1	12	1*

* (Explanations in paras 3.138 to 3.139) ECHFL5: Repairs satisfaction missing)

- 3.60 There are also 8 new baseline measures in 2021/22 (Appendix One refers). These will be introduced into the corporate suite in 2022/23.
- 3.61 Three community safety partnership measures are also monitored through the Corporate Performance Suite. The data for these measures is provided by the Police and HCC.
- 3.62 The Police have advised that ASB levels and crime in general is back to "pre pandemic normal crime level" when compared to 2019 data. The Community

Safety Team continues to work closely with Police colleagues and partners including councillors to target hotspot areas for ASB and nuisance behaviour.

- 3.63 With regards to Domestic Abuse, the highest number crimes were recorded in Bedwell Ward. The team are investigating the cause of this with partners and will consider action that could be taken.

Spotlights and Areas for Improvement

- 3.64 A summary of Council areas for improvement (April 2021 to September 2021) is set out in the following paragraphs across the three key delivery themes: Customer, Place and Transformation and Support.
- 3.65 The Council's performance should be considered in relation to the challenging operating context caused by Covid-19. The Council continues to face financial impacts (income and cost related) and abnormal pressures / demands on some of its services.
- 3.66 The number of people who have seen their income impacted by the pandemic continues to rise, with the full implications of furlough ending, the universal credit uplift of £20 per week being removed, increased energy and fuel bills yet to become clear. The number of people facing eviction or at risk of becoming homeless is increasing. People's health, including their mental health, has come under unprecedented scrutiny, with many seeking additional support and/or re-evaluating their housing circumstances, employment, work life balance and other priorities.
- 3.67 Some local authorities have been unable to maintain all their services and have taken difficult decisions about what to continue, suspend or stop providing altogether. This includes some registered social landlords moving to emergency only repairs, and waste collections becoming less frequent.
- 3.68 That Stevenage Borough Council has been able to continue providing all its current services, as well as introducing new ones (such as Test and Trace), at the same time as progressing priorities in the Future Town Future Council programme, is testament to the hard work of Members and officers.
- 3.69 Despite best efforts it has not been possible to maintain all services at the same level as they were previously. There have been some unavoidable drops in performance in some areas, as staff have been reassigned to higher priority services and demand in some areas has increased to pre-pandemic levels (and in some cases, beyond).
- 3.70 The Council' is focussing on these areas of challenging performance, and considering how to address them whilst continuing to support residents through the pandemic and what many expect will be a difficult winter period for people and services. The sections that follow set out the impact of the challenges the Council faces, but also the proposed actions that are already being implemented to address them. Whilst it will take time for the impact of these mitigations to materialise there are already positive signs against some

measures and the ongoing scrutiny of Members and officers should ensure that meaningful and sustained progress is achieved over the coming months.

- 3.71 The areas of focus below were reported to be at red or amber status for Quarter 2. They have been split into five main areas of challenge – Temporary Accommodation, Voids, Garages and Customer Services.

Temporary & Emergency Accommodation

NI156: Number of households in emergency/temporary accommodation at the end of the quarter

- September 2021 target 195 households
- September 2021 actual 210 households (red)

- 3.72 The Council's Homelessness Services are continuing to face increasing service demand and increased costs due to the following factors:

- Increasing homeless presentations to the Council and as a result, a greater case load. The current homelessness caseload is 622 which represents a slight decrease of 24 on the total for Quarter 2. This includes those who are seeking housing advice, but who may not currently be threatened with homelessness. The complexity of the issues faced by presenting clients also remains challenging.
- The introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in 2018 which has caused cases to remain in temporary accommodation for a much more substantial period.
- There are reduced options for preventing homelessness caused in part by a moratorium of evictions for arrears during 2020/21 and into 2021/22. This means there is a reduced number of private rented sector (PRS) properties becoming vacant and available for prevention purposes.
- Affordability issues have also impacted on individuals' ability to secure their own PRS tenancies even with the financial support for deposit and rent in advance payments which we offer.
- Pressures placed on Local Authorities under the Everyone In directive, to support the significant rough sleeping challenge during the pandemic.
- Challenges of operating services throughout the pandemic.

- 3.73 Based on projections for 2021/22 it is anticipated that the Council will face a 10% increase in emergency temporary accommodation placements before the end of the 3rd quarter of this financial year.

- 3.74 The Temporary Accommodation Team is in regular liaison with the Lettings and Voids Teams to obtain updates on void properties and ready to let dates. They continue to let all available Temporary Accommodation units as soon as is possible which is evidenced by the performance (KPI) results achieved for

turn around on emergency accommodation units this quarter (known as indicator EA1).

- 3.75 The Housing Development and Housing and Investment team are also working closely together to identify future accommodation opportunities. This will reduce the need to use bed and breakfast provision and will secure additional temporary accommodation units (30) from January 2022.
- 3.76 Taking steps identified in the temporary accommodation action plan, including the provision of a pipeline of additional units coming on board over this financial year and during 2022/23 will also help reduce the number of homeless households in bed and breakfast accommodation.
- 3.77 Officers are also reviewing other Hertfordshire authorities homeless trends, which are currently lower, to seek to understand policy differences and the likely drivers for demand in Stevenage to help inform a review of the Council's policies and processes.

Void Loss, Voids Sheltered, Voids Sheltered Major Works, Voids General Needs & Voids General Needs Major Works

VoidLoss1: Void Loss in year (£)

- September 2021 target £164,594
- September 2021 actual £279,964.85 (red)

VoidsSheltered: The time taken to relet standard sheltered voids

- September 2021 target 70 days
- September 2021 actual 188.93 days (red)

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

- September 2021 target 70 days
- September 2021 actual 192.6 days (red)

Voids GN: The time taken to relet general needs voids

- September 2021 target 32 days
- September 2021 actual 38.86 days (red)

Voids GNMW: The time taken to relet major works general needs voids

- September 2021 target 65 days
- September 2021 actual 68.44 days (amber)

- 3.78 As presented at the November 2021 Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting Void loss and void turnaround times and for domestic properties have been heavily impacted by a number of factors during this financial year, as previously reported in Quarter 1. These include:
- A threefold increase in the number of void properties requiring void works.

- National material shortages – some supplies are now delayed by an additional 4 to 6 weeks.
- New electrical supplier on-boarding, meaning delays whilst they get up to speed.
- As the properties that have been empty for some time are let, we will inevitably see an increase in the time reported to let void sheltered properties. The Specialist Accommodation team proactively working to let the remaining Sheltered Standard and Major properties that have been historically void for a long time, as well as the properties that are returned continuously. This includes actively contacting new applicants to the housing register who are eligible for Independent Living and providing assistance to move where required.
- An increase in the number of tenants transferring into independent living scheme units alongside the decanting of some schemes is further increasing the total number of void properties.
- Recruitment and retention of staff which like, the material shortages issues, are a national matter which is not unique to Stevenage.
- Pent up customer demand on the Repairs and Voids Service post the lockdowns.
- An increase in more complex works required when properties are void e.g. roof replacements, or substantial works required at the end of long-standing tenancies.
- Major Refurbishment Contract (MRC) Programme works extending void periods and impacting outturn figures. Material supply chain delays have also affected the time taken to complete major works. However, in the longer term changes through the MRC such as studio conversions to make properties more attractive to prospective tenants should help reduce the number of voids.
- Additional void times being incurred as part of the HCC contract for Flexicare, as there are not enough suitable referrals coming through from Adult Care Services for the properties/service where people meet the scheme criteria.

3.79 The number of voids is currently 3 times higher than was expected. For the budget we had a projected and overall void rate of 0.64% across different types of stock. This included some stock like sheltered and temporary accommodation, which tends to have a higher void rate, while general needs void rate tends to be lower. At the beginning of the financial year it was projected that there would be a budget loss of £290K by March 2022.

3.80 The target for void loss for the year has been recalculated by officers due to the higher than expected number of voids. At Quarter 2 on a straight line projection the void loss would be £588K, which represents an overall void rate of approx. 1.42%. However, in modelling for the latter part of the year, Officers anticipate improvement in void turnaround times during the back part of the year and therefore a loss of £480K is now forecast. This is based on a void loss of 1.17% and would represent a 33% improvement over the loss rate to Quarter 2. This would result in a further pressure of £190k on the void budget compared to the projection at the start of the financial year.

3.81 The table below shows the number of voids coming in each month. This number is significantly higher than the target.

Total Voids	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept
GN Standard Target	12	12	12	12	12	12
GN Standard	14	23	27	41	50	85
GN Major Target	6	6	6	6	6	6
GN Major	10	2	5	5	6	19
SH Standard Target	15	15	15	15	15	15
SH Standard	65	56	53	54	54	26
SH Major Target	7	7	7	7	7	7
SH Major	4	2	4	5	4	2
Other Voids	25	27	29	26	27	5
Total Target	40	40	40	40	40	40
Total	118	110	118	131	141	137
% of total rented stock Target	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49
% of total rented stock	1.49	1.39	1.49	1.65	1.78	1.77

3.82 The Repairs and Void and Providing Homes teams are implementing a range of actions to seek to mitigate or reduce the impacts of the factors listed in paragraph 3.78. These include:

- Streamlining the lettings process so that lettings are completed within six working days, and reducing the verification process to five working days. The Lettings Team and Voids Team are working together to ensure that as much prior notice as possible is given when a General Needs property is ready to let. This enables the Lettings Team to prepare customers for their move sooner which should reduce or avoid delays. This improved process has resulted in lettings times being within target during Quarter 3.
- Completion of the end to end process review for void properties which ensure all parts of the voids and lettings process are working together effectively. This has already started to have a positive effect.
- Proactively working to let historically empty properties. In the short term the lettings figures and void loss for sheltered voids will be affected but over time performance will improve as the average time to let properties reduces and the backlog of empty properties is addressed.
- Reviewing the resources allocated to the sheltered housing re-let process. Steps are also being taken to provide more accurate indication of re-let times and associated void loss where sheltered housing units have been identified for repurposing or redevelopment.

- Refreshing the council's HRA Asset Management Strategy which will deliver a more effective cyclical and planned maintenance approach to maintaining and repairing council homes.
- Continuing to work with partners and contractors to seek to improve material supply times.
- A third (temporary) voids project officer being recruited and using contractors to supplement the Voids team where required.
- Working closely with suppliers to seek to reduce material delays
- Redeploying housing staff to support the Lettings team.

3.83 An action plan is being finalised by relevant teams across the Council, the implementation of which will be tracked on a regular basis.

3.84 Based on current projections and the above actions being implemented, it is anticipated that the council will see an improvement in void turnaround times quarter by quarter. However the end of year cumulative targets are unlikely to be achieved.

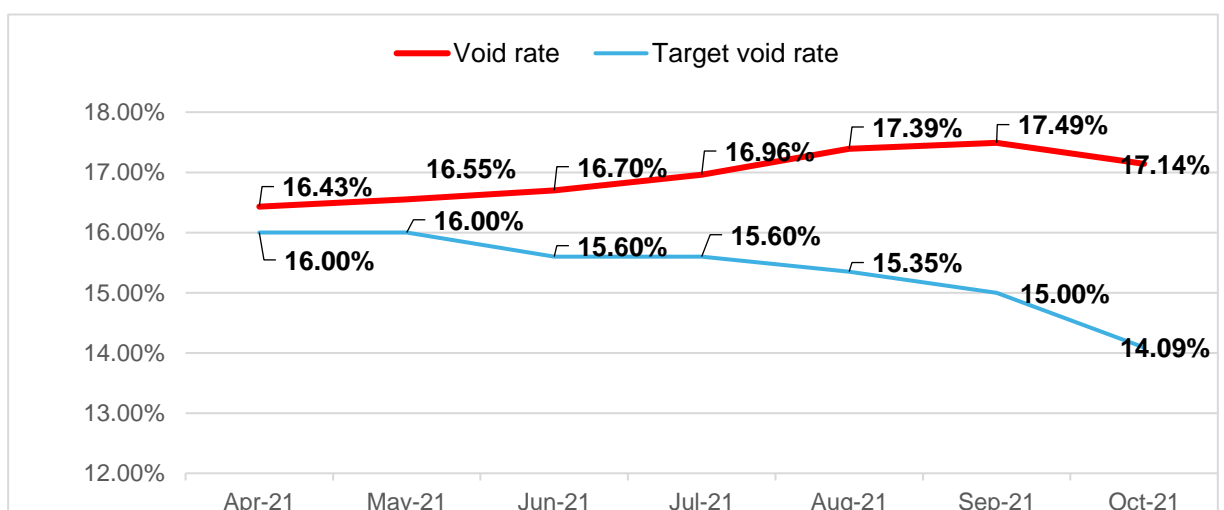
Garage Voids

CNM2g: Garage Voids as a Percentage of Stock

- September 2021 target 15%
- September 2021 actual 17.49% (red)

3.85 The targets for 2021/22 were based on an underestimation of the extent of the impact of sprayed asbestos on the garage stock, processes and garage services capacity, and the assumption that Choice Based Lettings would go live on the original date of May 2021 (now expected spring 2022).

3.86 The graph below shows performance against target this financial year.



3.87 A review of the council's void management procedures has recently been undertaken and a process map for the 'lifecycle of a garage void' has been produced to identify key areas where delays are being experienced so that

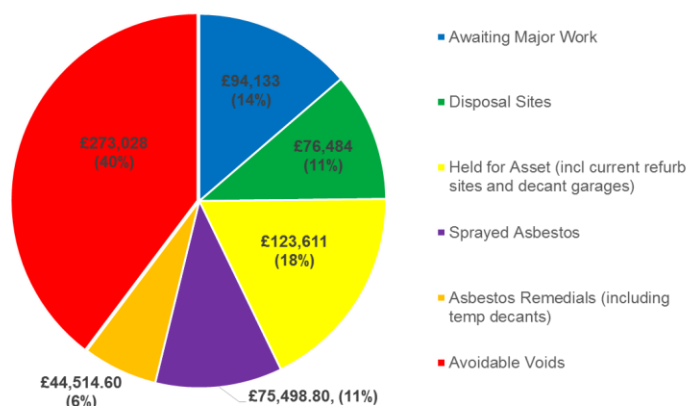
issues can be addressed and resolved. The process map highlighted that the high void rate is due to a combination of factors resulting in a current lack of available stock to offer residents and a turnaround time of 3 months on some garages being re-let once terminated.

3.88 The contributing factors include:

- Sprayed asbestos being found in 120 void garages that needs to be managed.
- 84 additional garages that are in need of separate asbestos remedial works.
- Significant delays in commissioning standard void works due to capacity issues in the Estates team and undertaking asbestos surveys on avoidable void garages due to challenges with contractor capacity (450).
- 127 Garages are awaiting major works which need to be commissioned. The Garage Management team have reviewed them all and a small proportion can be picked up by day to day repairs to bring them back into use sooner. The other sites will be evaluated for feasibility through the Garage Improvement Programme.
- 125 garages units are being held as disposal voids as sites have been earmarked for asset disposal. These sites are being progressed through the council's Estates team who are negotiating with freeholders.
- Voids being held to support the Garage Improvement Programme and to support the decanting of garage tenants. These sites are intentionally void and are used for temporary decanting/to support the Garages Improvement Programme.

3.89 All these factors have led to a lack of available garage stock and lower offer rates for garages (55 offered per month against a target of 120, acceptance rate 43%).

3.90 The current categorisation of void type and current associated void loss can be seen in the chart below (1134 garages):



- 3.91 An Officer performance clinic was held on 15th November to fully explore and challenge current performance, identify underlying issues and consider the proposed mitigations in more detail. Officers have identified that to decrease the void rate and improve current performance a minimum of 120 offers have to be made per month with a 50% acceptance rate.
- 3.92 An action plan has been developed with specific timescales and owners. This will be closely monitored by the Assistant Director for Stevenage Direct Services and a cross service officer working group to ensure it has the intended impact on performance throughout Q3 and Q4. A summary of the actions being taken forward can be seen below:
- Development of options and a prioritised programme of work to address the garages impacted by sprayed asbestos and where other remedial asbestos related works are required.
 - Interim asbestos contractor appointed mid-October to address backlog. The contractor has got off to a good start.
 - Contractor(s) to be appointed to undertake specialist asbestos surveys within improved timescales.
 - A new building surveyor was appointed at end of September and will focus 90% of their time on garage repairs. Improvements have been made to the scheduling and tracking process for minor repairs.
 - A call off contract for reactive repairs is being explored to increase availability of contractors and shorten delays in void repairs being completed.
 - A review will be conducted to try and reduce the number of voids being used for Garage Improvement Programme decant purposes.
 - A review of all garage disposal sites is to be undertaken in November 2021 to ensure there is a robust plan for disposal or for voids to be released back to the Garage team.
 - The Garages team have reviewed and amended the lettings process to reduce the time taken and improve customer experience. A new process was implemented on the 11th October where the CSC is offering 10 appointments per day specifically to make it easier for people to collect garage keys.
 - Consideration is also being given to alternative ways for people to collect keys, such as Amazon-style lockers that will allow for improved relet and income collection timescales.
 - Choice Based Lettings (CBL) will enable residents to make instant offers on garages which should reduce the time the garages are void, thus increasing the income. Work has started on moving garages across to 'any day' tenancies from April 2022.

Customer Services and Complaints

CSC12: Percentage of calls abandoned in the Customer Service Centre

- September 2021 target 15%
- September 2021 actual 35.10% (red)

CTOC1: Percentage of customer complaints responded to within deadline

- September 2021 target 95%
- September 2021 actual 65.37% (red)

Website Satisfaction (WebSat1: Customer Satisfaction with Council website.
(|This is calculated using three different options for customer to provide feedback, a red face, amber face, green face, which in turn relate to a score of -1 negative score, 0 neutral score, +1 positive score and is then drawn together into a total result)

- September 2021 target 0
- September 2021 actual -0.26 (red)

3.93 Customer demand across a range of services, particularly housing-related, grew significantly upon the government's announcement of the "permanent" ending of lockdown in March. This demand has continued throughout Q1 and Q2.

3.94 The reasons for this appear to be complex and caused by a range of factors including:

- Catch-up for services that were disrupted or suspended by the pandemic such as Repairs and Lettings.
- High expectation from some customers that "everything had returned to normal" even though many services had backlogs of work and/or were still spending time on additional covid support and safe working measures.
- Change in living situations and customer perspectives driven by lockdown and residents spending more time at home creating more demand for services such as street-scene, and resolution of neighbour disputes.
- As a result of the factors above, the increased demand then leaving some services struggling to meet their usual service standards, creating further enquiries and follow up activity.
- Staff recruitment and retention. Exceptionally high levels of staff turnover have also occurred since March, with 45% of CSC advisors leaving to the end of September. Most have moved to other more senior roles within the council, but this has still substantially reduced the number of experienced advisors, and put additional pressure on the management team to carryout higher than normal levels of recruitment and training.
- Significant planned efficiencies were made during 2020/21 to meet savings targets, with the number of advisors reduced by 20% through natural turnover. This means there has been less resource than there was previously to cope with the increased demand.
- Our current telephony choices when a customer calls Customer Services have remained broadly the same for many years. Whilst they are simple, they do not support the need for higher

priority enquiries to be answered more quickly, than say a routine enquiry that many customers could self-service to resolve online. This means, through these particularly busy two quarters, we have not been able to prioritise our Customer Services advisors towards those in most need.

- 3.95 This has led to significantly increased waiting time and abandonment (measure CSC12) on the telephone and has driven customers to use other contact channels more. For instance, Customer Services are now receiving double the number of emails as pre-pandemic.
- 3.96 Unlike a telephone call, emails can be queued and triaged for responses but there are a number of weaknesses that mean they are a less favoured channel for first contact. These include: many emails are too brief and require back-and-forth follow up to find out all the required information, other emails require follow-up to clarify the precise nature of the enquiry, and finally that customers often chase for a reply within a day or two despite the advertised 10 working day response standard.
- 3.97 While waiting times are higher than normal, customers continue to report high levels of customer satisfaction and the Council is meeting its target (measure EAA1: Customer Satisfaction). It is possible that we will see impacts in this as we start making the changes described below to develop the service; as people often react poorly to change before becoming used to it.
- 3.98 This year the Customer Services team have started collecting a measure of enquiry resolution as reported by customers (CSC13). This is done through a survey at the end of calls that is carried out by Govmetric on our behalf. Despite the challenges faced by the CSC, the measure evidences that two-thirds of enquiries are being resolved at first point of contact. This measure is being watched closely as we build a fully picture.
- 3.99 At the same time as there's been increased demand for our advisor-handled channels, the use of digital self-service has also increased in line with our targets (measure Dig1). Because of the limited reporting available to us, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions, however, the rise in self-service appears to be supported by both more use of existing services and from the on-going rollout of new functionality.
- 3.100 It has been identified in some cases, having digital services in place has been successful in reducing demand. For example, the number of missed-bins reported has fallen by approximately 50%. This is a result of the end-to-end system that disallows missed collections to be reported in cases where the waste team reported the recycling as being contaminated or bins not being put out for collection. So while an increase in online transactions is usually positive, in cases such as these a reduction is what we aim for.
- 3.101 During the first two quarters there has also been a significant increase in complaints and performance challenges in some services as some services have struggled to respond to very high levels of demand and complexity.

- 3.102 Quarter 1 cumulative on complaint response performance was 65.37%, which is lower than the Q1 2021/22 performance figure of 69.66% and Q1-Q4 2020/21 performance figure of 92.31%. There was however more flexibility on complaint deadlines in Q1-Q2 last financial year to account for the operational changes and redeployments needed to support COVID-19 pandemic work.
- 3.103 Housing cumulative performance Q1-Q2 2021/22 was 68.42%, compared to 2021/22 70.07%, 2020/21 91.26% and 2019/20 96.53%. Non Housing cumulative performance Q1-Q2 2021/22 was 63.48%, compared to Q1 2021/22 69.38%, 2020/21 93.18% and 2019/20 92.03%.
- 3.104 Late complaint closures in Q1-Q2 have primarily come from six services: Repairs, Residents & Estates, Environmental Health, Engineering Services, Gas and Investment. The total number of direct complaints handled Q1-Q2 was 18% more than the same period in 20/21, and 40% more than the same period in 2019/20, (often about service delays caused or compounded by the pandemic).
- 3.105 The sharpest rise in volume received is for Member Enquiries. The total number of Member Enquiries (customer issues reported via members) handled Q1-Q2 was 78.87% more than the same period 20/21 and 56.95% more than the same period 2019/20. High customer demand is also compounding officer capacity to respond to complaints within target timescales. In some cases it's been found that complaints were closed with the customer on time, but had not been closed in the system, and so have had their closure date retrospectively amended.
- 3.106 Actions to improve customer service performance that are already underway fall within four broad categories as follows:
- Prevention
 - Promoting self-service.
 - Nudge messages on phone and conversations with customers.
 - Within letters and other corporate messages.
 - Web wizard/ kiosks in the CS reception to help self-service.
 - Resolution at first point of contact
 - Co-hosting of duty officers from other teams, to help provide the right skills and knowledge to address complex matters.
 - Enabling duty officers and Customer Services team leaders to look at complex cases face to face which improves working relationships.
 - Working with Repairs service to refine the respective service processes.
 - Updating processes to reflect changing working practices and influence of materials pressures.
 - Complaints and escalations
 - Working group on complaints in place and meeting regularly.
 - Resolved backlogs of overdue complaints in Engineering and Environmental Health.
 - Reduced overdue complaint backlogs in Housing Repairs (70 July > 15 Sept).

- Strong operations
 - Doubling message capacity on the phone system.
 - Ensure customers hear the messages they're supposed to when waiting.
 - Re-starting our rolling recruitment programme.
 - Advisor role open ongoing for expressions of interest - Builds a pool of candidates and reduces recruitment timeline.

3.107 Beyond this, further opportunities (set out below) have been shaped in October with input from Executive Members, particularly the portfolio holders for Neighbourhoods & Co-operative Working, and Housing, Health and Older People.

3.108 Service timescales and limiting chasing

Delivery timescales will be re-checked with service managers to ensure that customers are given accurate information, even if the delivery of some services or responses are taking longer than normal. CSC Advisers and other officers will also be clearer with customers that the Council won't chase services for updates unless the circumstances require it, which will put a stronger onus on services to manage their caseloads. The Customer Services team will also work with colleagues in Housing & Investment to improve the use of case management systems so that Customer Services can resolve more issues at first point of contact.

3.109 Re-prioritising telephone options

A new set of telephone options will also be developed to enable better prioritisation of calls to Customer Services. As mentioned previously there is no prioritisation in place for particular topics, and the longest waiting calls are answered first. However, changing and expanding the telephone options somewhat could enable customers who require support from urgent services (potentially services like emergency repairs and homeless-on-the-day) and important welfare services (potentially services like benefits or topics like debt), to be prioritised ahead of other callers. This approach should help to ensure that valuable advisor resource is prioritised on the situations and customers that will most benefit.

3.110 Directing to self-serve

The council will also be taking a clearer approach to promoting our best online self-service such as non-emergency repairs, missed waste and recycling collections, and parks and streets problems. This will be achieved by asking customers for these services to use online services, unless the phone is their only option. Taking this approach would enable Advisers to support customers who don't have internet access over the phone or have greater complexity, and at the same outline how customers could do more things for themselves. Self-service is available 24-hours and at the weekend, so as well as the benefits for the council, it is also very quick and convenient for many customers.

3.111 Website improvements

Officers have been using the feedback comments received to carry out targeted improvements. Particular examples this quarter include changing some waste and recycling pages so that they make more sense to customers, a re-write of the whole Council Tax section to simplify the information, and addressing a reliability issue with online payments.

On-going use of feedback like this has enabled the council to consistently improve its overall score quarter by quarter as below:

Non-cumulative performance since the new site launched: Q3 20/21: -0.35
Q4 20/21: -0.29 Q1 21/22: -0.27 Q2 21/22: -0.23

Looking further ahead, officers are looking at how the feedback mechanism can be adjusted to help separate feedback that is mostly about the website, away from feedback that is mostly about the service, policy, event etc. This is in conjunction with an aligned piece of work to find a way to consistently measure the customer experience of users of our digital self-services.

It is also proposed that next year this measure will cease being cumulative because it tends to obscure detail between quarters.

3.112 Transformation programme

Longer term improvements are being identified through the Customer workstream of the Transformation programme. Throughout Q3 workshops and analysis are being undertaken to identify improvements to 20 priority high volume processes, to improve the customer experience and save money. The transformation is focused on delivering digital options that customers choose to use, and officers expect savings to be realised from 2022/3. However short term – as outlined with the options above - there is a balance to be struck between enabling customer choice and delivering a leaner operating model in response to budget pressures, and options are being put forward to support the 2022/23 Making Your Money Count financial plan.

3.113 Complaints management

The Assistant Director Digital and Transformation has established a monthly working group on complaints, with key service managers to identify issues and solutions. Reminders have been sent to service managers on the correct process for handling a complaint, and additional help has been offered to the services that are struggling most. It is anticipated that monthly performance will start to improve following the introduction of these measures. However, there are many cases beyond target date that will have a detrimental effect on the service level once they are closed. Accordingly the cumulative target will not be achieved this financial year.

The Customer Focus team is providing monthly reports for each service area which highlights their performance to help improve resolution timescales.

They are also providing detailed weekly reports to the six service areas with the highest level of late and overdue complaints.

Housing have temporarily brought in additional Complaints Managers to help them catch up on their backlog of overdue / complex cases.

3.114 The forecasted KPI performance for the rest of the year can be seen below:

Measure	Q3	Q4	Notes
CSC12 - % of calls abandoned in Customer Services	39.2% (Target 15%)	40% (Target 15%)	This assumes that staff turnover returns to a normal level, and there are no further significant operational changes incurred due to the pandemic
EAA1 – Customer satisfaction with Customer Services	90% (Target 90%)	90% (Target 90%)	Anticipating that satisfaction will meet target. There is some risk that satisfaction will fall due to the plans to prioritise responses but this is difficult to predict.
CTOC1 - % of customer complaints responded to within deadline	It is difficult to forecast performance as the previously mentioned service areas have cases that are beyond target that will adversely affect service levels when the matters are closed. Due to the high volumes it is possible that, even with the outlined improvement activity in place, it will be several months before the service levels start to improve.		
Cust1 - % of complaints progressing to stage 2 and 3 that are upheld	25% (Target 35%)	25% (Target 35%)	Trend assumed on basis of Q2 performance levelling-off
Dig1 - % of digital customer transactions	21% (Target 21%)	24% (Target 24%)	Trend assumed to follow targets
WebSat1: Customer Satisfaction with Council website (-1 negative score, 0 neutral score, +1 positive score)	-0.24 (Target 0)	-0.23 (Target 0)	Ongoing improvement trend is anticipated

Finance

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

- September 2021 target 60.2%
- September 2021 achieved 58.2% (amber)

BV9: % council tax collected

- September 2021 target 61%
- September 2021 achieved 59.3% (red)

3.115 The Shared Revenue and Benefits service always encourage those in arrears to contact them to arrange a repayment schedule and point to any agencies that will help residents deal with debt issues.

3.116 In the event that no contact is made and that arrears persist or any agreed repayment arrangements are not adhered to, the service will seek to formalise recovery if the avenues above have been exhausted. However, the ability to commence Council Tax recovery has been affected by limited availability of the Courts, earlier in the year it was difficult to get court dates to issue summons, the situation is now improving.

3.117 The government announced reliefs for the hospitality and retail sector in March 2021 but, unlike during 2020/21, there was more relief in the period April to June with this diminishing in the next 9 months and subject to a threshold. This meant that accounts with reliefs had to be rescheduled at the end of June, to remove the higher level of relief and award at the second level. The first instalment of payment was therefore in August and even those that would normally have paid by 10 instalments, thus finishing by end of January, were given until end of March to pay. Due to the in-year skew of payment profiles as a result, with more being collected in the last two months of the year, the profile for 2021/22 has been adjusted to reflect the revised payment dates.

3.118 Other areas that are red or amber status for Quarter 2 that are also being monitored are below:

Household Waste

NI191: Residual household waste per household (kgs)

- September 2021 target 267kg
- September 2021 actual 285kg (red)

3.119 The Q2 figure for residual household waste is currently estimated because the actual figure is reported from an external source and will not be available until December 2021.

3.120 The actual figure for Q1 was 7% higher than for the same period last year. The estimated figure for Q2 is therefore based on the same period last year + 7%.

Jobs Created through the Business Technology Centre

BTC1a: New jobs created through the BTC (ytd)

- September 2021 target 30
- September 2021 actual 15 (red)

3.121 Due to the nature of this measure having targets coming from a contract which is now in its 3rd year it may well be difficult to achieve target this year because the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on the economy are not reflected in the original targets that were set.

Missing Measures

3.122 There is no data for quarter two for the measure below.

ECHFL5: % of repairs service customers satisfied

3.123 The Repairs Team are unable to provide data for this measure for Quarter one. This is due to a fault with the Cloud Dialogues SMS system, which is used for satisfaction surveys.

3.124 As reported in Quarter 1 the team having been working on building an in house system. Reporting will begin from midway through Quarter 3.

Next Quarter Focus

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

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

- Continuing to implement Housing First plans to assist with numbers in temporary/emergency accommodation (paras 3.72 to 3.77)
- Continuing to implement plans and improve processes for Voids measures (paras 3.78 to 3.84)
- Ensuring that issues with the letting of council garages are recognised and performance is monitored closely. Implementation of plans to improve the process of garages lettings. Implementation of plans to recover from asbestos issues (paras 3.85 to 3.92)
- Implementing improvement plans within the Customer Service Centre (including Complaints and Website) (para 3.93 to 3.114)

3.127 In addition, the development and implementation of the ICT 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.

3.128 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.

3.129 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.

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.

APPENDICES

- Appendix One: Compendium of Performance Results
- Appendix Two: Future Town, Future Council Programme Scope/Focus for 2021/22
- Appendix Three: Executive Action Tracker