

Appendix 1: Draft Annual Report 2021/22, including priorities and FTFC programme focus for 2022/23

NB A FULLY DESIGNED VERSION WILL BE PUBLISHED AS AN ADDENDUM PRIOR TO THE MEETING

Stevenage Borough Council's Annual Report 2021 -2022

Introduction by the Leader and Chief Exec...

Sharon Taylor – Leader, Stevenage Borough Council

Reading this year's Annual Report makes me so proud of what we as a council have managed to achieve in 2021-22. This year has been challenging for us all – the restrictions of COVID, the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, the horrors of the war in Ukraine – the difficulties we face now are very different to those we faced when I became leader of the Council in 2006. I am very proud of the last 25 years I have spent serving Stevenage as a Councillor, and never more so than during the past year where we have continued to deliver the priorities we know are important to residents. Through our Cooperative Neighbourhood programme activities, and the feedback provided through the Residents and Tenant Surveys, we have listened to your views and will continue to act on these so that we can deliver the services that matter to you most.

We know from talking to local residents on the doorstep that the cost-of-living crisis is having a significant impact on everyone, especially the poorest in the community. Through the Stevenage Together Partnership we have worked tirelessly to provide food and clothing to those who need it most. We will continue to lobby Government to make sure that more funding is provided so that no-one in our community must choose between feeding their families or heating their home.

The hard work of the council, the support for local people in the community and the dedication to delivering the services has been heartening to see and the spirit of our community has been evident through our support for the Homes for Ukraine Scheme and our commitment to the wider Afghanistan and Syrian resettlement programmes. We will continue to work hard to ensure that the right support mechanisms are in place for every refugee who needs our help.

During 2022/23 we will continue to work hard to support our community and provide the day-to-day services that our residents rely on. We will continue to progress our towns regeneration so that Stevenage can deliver social housing for residents, provide a wonderful home for residents, be a great place to do business and a fantastic place to visit.

Matt Partridge – Chief Executive, Stevenage Borough Council

Welcome to our 2021/22 Annual Report, which sets out the past year's achievements and outlines our priorities for 2022/23. We have made significant progress in our regeneration programme through the successful opening of the Town Square and the new Bus Interchange. Our work on climate change has been a huge achievement, ranging from securing funding for vital de-

carbonisation projects to our bio-diversity work such as planting 6 new orchards. There is so much to cover and I would urge you all to read the report in full.

The achievements in this report are only possible because of the hard work and dedication of our staff. I am constantly impressed with their commitment to getting the job done and keeping council services going despite the challenges.

During 2022/23 we will continue to deliver against our key priorities, listen to the views of our community and ensure that our residents remain at the heart of what we do.

Responding to COVID...

The challenges of the pandemic have remained throughout 2021/2022 with COVID restrictions in place for part of the year. The council has continued to work with our partners and communities to ensure that local resident safety and wellbeing drives our approach to living with COVID.

This year we have:

- contacted 2,100 COVID contact tracing cases and visited 420 of these to carry out welfare checks
- assisted up to 360 taxi drivers to work safely with the Travel with Confidence Scheme for COVID
- completed 870 visits to businesses to provide advice on COVID controls in accordance with business restrictions
- recruited a team of 6 Covid Marshalls/Neighbourhood Wardens to patrol the town and provide advice on available support and education on restrictions
- secured over £200,000 funding from the local Health Protection Board to support the local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector to help manage the ongoing impact of community transmission, increase vaccine take up and to help build a response to emerging health inequalities
- Through our work with public health and VCSE partners we saw a significant uptake on vaccinations with almost two thirds (64.3%) of residents receiving a booster vaccination by March 2022, up from 62.7% in January 2022
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Cost of Living...

The rising cost of living in the UK is an issue that impacts us all. As a council we have worked with our partners and local communities to help alleviate the impact on residents and help provide the support they need. We will continue to ensure that this support is provided throughout 2022/23.

This year we have:

- provided food bank stock to 14 voluntary groups
- supported 16 local schools to supply lunch, healthy snacks, shoes and clothing to children, as well as provide onsite food banks and supermarket vouchers to struggling families
- provided 2 charities with funding to help their vulnerable clients pay heating and fuel costs
- secured Community Renewal Funding to support the work of the Social Inclusion Partnership in 2022/23. This includes work to determine the impact of the increasing cost of living and headline gap on Stevenage residents and raising awareness of services and support

- paid out £172,000 in Discretionary Housing Payment to claimants who are unable to meet housing costs
- paid out £65,000 of Exceptional Council Tax Hardship Relief for residents who are unable to meet the costs of their council tax
- paid out £6.1 million from the Council Tax Support Scheme to help eligible households reduce the cost of their council tax liability

Delivering for Stevenage...

As a District Council we employ nearly 700 people to help deliver housing, leisure and recreation, environmental health, waste collection, planning applications and local taxation services. In 2021/22 we have worked tirelessly to ensure that council services operate effectively and local people continue to receive a high quality service that provides value for money.

This year we have:

- collected 20,201 tonnes of refuse (37,780 bins) equivalent to an average of 535kg per household
- reused, recycled or composted 13,591 tonnes of refuse. That's the equivalent of filling the Stevenage Swimming Centre pool 8 times!
- provided 52 new homes of which 24 have been allocated to council tenants
- prevented or relieved 225 cases of homelessness and we have housed 3 Afghan families
- removed 165 tonnes of illegally dumped waste. That's the equivalent weight of 33 Stevenage Polar Bear Sculptures!
- responded to 235 Anti-Social Behaviour cases and served 32 Community Protection Warnings and Community Protection Notices
- received 171,329 calls to Customer Services
- provided 53 families with support and safe space accommodation as part of Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse programme
- worked closely with our partners to ensure that 96 adult and children safeguarding cases have been investigated and appropriate support provided
- undertaken 315 food safety interventions at food businesses, registered 98 new premises and inspected 75 new businesses
- undertaken a taxi tariff review at the request of the drivers and revoked 2 drivers for not meeting the terms of their taxi licence
- carried out over 400 vehicle condition checks on taxi and private hire vehicles.
- carried out 166 mid-term Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licence inspections to check compliance with licence conditions, responded to 76 HMO enquiries and investigated 11 suspected HMOs
- dealt with 8 filthy and verminous premises and took enforcement action against 7 under public health legislation
- investigated 53 complaints of accumulations of rubbish at residential properties, and successfully concluded 8 enforcement notice requiring clearance
- followed-up 107 service requests regarding poor housing conditions and served 23 housing enforcement notices requiring works to remove serious hazards

- investigated 444 noise complaints, served 9 noise abatement notices and successfully concluded two noise prosecutions
- successfully resolved 93% of the complaints we receive at the first stage

A Cooperative Council...

Co-operative councils are local authorities that are looking to deliver services in a radical way, giving more say and choice to local people.

Co-operative councils work with local organisations, residents and communities to change local services. They seek to move away from top-down imposed services and instead embrace the traditional values of the co-operative movement. Central to this approach is the principle of Community Wealth Building which focuses on how much money is held and reinvested in an area for the benefit of local communities.

In 20/21 we successfully secured £715,000 Community Renewal Funding as part of our Community Wealth Building ambitions. So far, through working collaboratively with partners, we have supported:

- 35 people to engage in job searching and 62 people supported to engage in life skills
- 6 micro businesses supported on a one-to-one level with business support programmes
- 97 people have been supported face-to-face in total with 60 receiving 1-5 hours of support, 10 receiving 16-20 hours of support, and 27 receiving over 20 hours support.

Alongside Community Wealth Building, and as a member of the Co-operative Councils Network we want to reclaim the traditions of community action, community empowerment and civic engagement. This year we have worked with Burntwood Town Council, North Hertfordshire Council and Sunderland City Council on an exciting project to demonstrate how co-operative councils can embed neighbourhood working. Titled 'Operations at Grass Roots' the informative guide includes 4 case studies which set out each council's approach to consultation - ensuring better outcomes and better value for money for residents. The report and accompanying videos can be viewed at www.councils.coop

Future Town Future Council Achievements

Our Corporate Plan 'Future Town Future Council' sets out how we will reform and revitalising both the town and council for the 21st century. Our key aims and objectives are laid out across 5 programmes of work:

- Transforming our Town
- More Social and Affordable Homes
- Cooperative Neighbourhoods
- Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town
- Making your money count

The following pages set out the achievements under each programme for 2021/22.

Transforming our Town

We aim to create a vibrant town centre where people want to live, work and play

This year we have:

- Opened a new bus interchange. The interchange provides safe bicycle parking, a comfortable and modern waiting environment for passengers and capacity for electric bus charging, as well as a cafe and mobility store.
- Successfully launched the Town Square regeneration (in partnership with Co-Space launch) and a re-opening of the Visitors Centre in September 2021. The co-space deal signed represents the first phase of the Town Centre redevelopment and provides over 15,000 sq.ft. of design led, in-demand workspace as well as a roof terrace, event space and break out areas for communal use.
- Marked the build of the European Manufacturing Headquarters of Autolus through a ground-breaking ceremony at the former Marshgate carpark site. Autolus, a biopharmaceutical company, have decided to locate their manufacturing HQ in the town creating over 400 jobs and committing their future to Stevenage.
- Delivered the Queensway mixed-use scheme. The site consists of 45,000 sq ft of new retail and restaurant space, a gym, new offices, an innovation and technology centre including:
 - ❖ 110 homes, 12 retail units and 8 commercial/office units
 - ❖ 24 affordable rented units
 - ❖ Commercial units including Puregym, Cake Box, Châteaux Cafe and Card Factory

Next year we will:

- Progress regeneration work including:
 - Multi Storey Car Park & Cycle Hub
 - Public Sector Hub
 - Garden Square
 - Stevenage Innovation & Technology Centre (SITEC)
 - Cycling & Pedestrian Connectivity and Heritage Trail
 - New Towns Heritage Centre
 - Stevenage Sport and Leisure Hub
 - Station Gateway

More Social and Affordable Homes

We will increase the number of social and affordable homes in Stevenage and improve access to the housing market for a greater number of local residents.

This year we have:

- Reinvested into more affordable and social homes through the private sale of properties at Ditchmore Lane– including 9 new properties at Addison House which have all been let as council tenant properties
- Provided 29 one, two and three bed apartments at Symonds Green for council rent which are due for handover to the new tenants in Summer 2022

- Provided 21 private sale properties at De Havilland House which are expected to generate an income of £6.7m, with the money to be re-invested in social housing schemes
- Used the income from the sale of 7 units of accommodation at Malvern Close to help fund the 118 units of council accommodation and new retail and community spaces at Kenilworth Close
- grant funded money to the Elliot Road scheme which will provide 13 new properties at affordable rent rates

Next year we will:

- Progress works at the Dunn Close scheme and Phase 2 of for Brent Court and Shephall View
- Progress Kenilworth Close site (150 units) and handover of Stirling Close
- Progress the Helstone (27 apartments) and Oaks cross (11 bungalows) schemes

Cooperative Neighbourhoods

We will work with our communities to understand what matters to them, and we will lead on improving our neighbourhoods in partnership with residents.

This year we have:

- launched the Stevenage Equalities Commission to undertake a strategic assessment of the nature, extent, causes and impact of race inequality in Stevenage. Five sessions have been held and a recommendation report will be published in July 2022
- engaged with residents and local community groups to help develop the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and Strategy (2022-2026) which sets out our commitment to advancing equality, diversity and inclusion across our workforce and the community
- put up 13 Cooperative Neighbourhood Noticeboards throughout Stevenage which are updated on a monthly basis by Neighbourhood Wardens with awareness posters, planned local events and information
- completed ward walkabouts in all Co-operative Neighbourhood areas with over 500 conversations collated as part of the pop up event activities – the findings will be used to inform our community and neighbourhood priorities for 2022/23
- obtained over 1100 responses as part of the Residents and Tenants Survey, the responses provided valuable insight into residents' perceptions of their neighbourhood, the council, and priorities for the town and will be used to shape our plan, priorities and actions for the future
- signed up over 1000 residents to receive Digital Neighbourhood Newsletters which contain good news stories from their local area as well as information on local planned events
- provided secure tenancies to 232 new council tenants
- provided temporary accommodation to 362 new tenants (including through our Housing First scheme)
- 816 property repairs were reported online
- 2,175 online housing applications were received – an increase of 68% since last year 572 garages were refurbished
- As part of our housing maintenance programme we installed 47 replacement kitchens; 61 bathrooms and 264 heating systems

Next year we will:

- Continue the development of the Co-operative Neighbourhoods Programme
- Continue to develop innovative ways of capturing and analysing resident feedback
- Ensure the successful delivery of Equalities Commission objectives & Community Renewal Funding priorities
- Deliver Phase 3 and 4 of the Housing Investment Major Refurbishment programme
- Deliver the Garage Improvement Programme including 80 new build garages
- Deliver the St Nicholas teen shelter project

Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town -

We aim to improve the quality of life for Stevenage residents and enhance the experience of visitors. This is achieved through our approach to tackling climate change, our focus on community safety, the vision for culture and leisure, and our plans for a healthier Stevenage.

Climate Change

In 2020 we launched our Climate Change Strategy which set out our ambition to achieve net zero by 2030. Progress against our objectives has gone from strength to strength ranging from how we influence legislation to how we involve local people to really make a difference. For instance, we remain the first district or borough council in Hertfordshire to have a Biodiversity Action Plan.

This year we have:

- planted an additional acre of woodland in the north of Fairlands Valley Park which involved Green Space Volunteers planting around 400 new tree saplings to extend the existing Memorial Wood
- Coppiced 1 acre of Whomerley Wood to help increase habitats for wildlife
- Managed around 33 ha of meadow grasslands for wildlife. This is an increase of 1500% over ten years
- Undertook scrub management to protect Shackledell Grassland for crickets, grasshoppers, butterflies and other wildlife
- Took control of invasive species, such as laurel and holly, in some of our woodlands
- consulted residents about future planting on our roundabouts with over 77% of respondents indicating that they would like to see sustainable planting displays (trees, shrubs, perennials and bulb) delivered in future
- were successful in being awarded £30,000 from the Urban Tree Challenge Fund to support the planting of six new Community Orchards
- schools and Green Space Volunteers helped to plant 36 fruit trees (apples, pears, plums and damsons) to create 3 new orchards at:
 - ❖ Shephalbury Park – Shephalbury Park Primary School
 - ❖ Raleigh Crescent – Green Space Volunteers
 - ❖ St Nicholas Park – The Leys Primary School
- been supported by our fantastic Green Space Volunteers who collectively gave around 800 hours helping out with over 70 tasks, including:

- ❖ Butterfly surveys to meadow grasslands
 - ❖ Hampson Park: hedge and tree planting
 - ❖ Lanterns Lane Woodland: felling dead pines
 - ❖ Martins Wood: access improvements
 - ❖ Shephalbury Park: installing bird boxes
 - ❖ Town Centre Gardens: planting shrubs and pruning roses
- successfully retained 5 Green Flag Awards confirming the high quality of local parks:
 - ❖ Fairlands Valley Park
 - ❖ Town Centre Gardens
 - ❖ Hampson Park
 - ❖ Shephalbury Park
 - ❖ Weston Road Cemetery
- invited children attending the Play Centres to enter an artwork competition to support a Clean Green litter campaign. The 4 winners' work has already been used to create banners on the sides of two of our refuse freighters. The art will also be used to produce posters and social media posts to help raise awareness of the problems with littering
 - As part of the Keep Britain Tidy 'Great British Spring Clean' initiative 185 volunteers collectively spent over 15 hours picking 94 bags of litter from six locations around the town
 - we secured funding of £133,000 to convert tired shrub beds to grassed areas
 - As part of our Climate Change Strategy we established a Citizens Panel which provided the following recommendations for incorporation into the Climate Change Action Plan:
 - Become a Zero Food Waste Town
 - Establish a collaborative framework to achieve sustainable infrastructure to reduce pollution
 - Improve communications and recycling awareness incentives to public and commerce
 - Implement climate emergency education and create awareness for Stevenage residents, businesses, and visitors

Following a successful bid for the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Stevenage will see around 400 social homes with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of D or lower receive upgrades to improve their energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions
 - became a founding launch authority partner for the UK100 programme - a network for UK councils focused solely on climate, clean energy and clean air policy
 - signed up to the Race to Zero platform as part of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 26) global campaign. The objective is to build momentum around the shift to a decarbonized economy by pledging to actively commit to climate action.

Community Safety

The wellbeing of residents is vital to a thriving town and in 2021/22 we worked closely with partners from the SoSafe Partnership to implement the Community Safety Action Plan and make a real difference locally.

This year we have:

- helped 594 residents receive crisis intervention along with client led support through the No More Service (Adults and Youth) intervention programme - which offers holistic support to people, when drugs, alcohol or offending negatively affect their daily life, and the Evolve perpetrator programme – which provides support to explore perpetrator triggers, signals, and challenges perceptions. This is an increase of 364% from last year
- created the Together Project (fondly known as ‘Art Club’) in conjunction with Junction 7 Creatives to tackle social isolation for up to 191 No More Service clients. Sessions have been running weekly since November 2021
- provided a number of essential items including 189 food parcels, 33 mobile phones and 21 hygiene parcels through the No More Service
- have responded to 1369 referrals through the Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) service has, an increase of 74% on the previous year
- investigated 4,733 reports of Anti-Social Behaviour and environmental crime and successfully obtained 3 prosecutions
- provided 23 safe spaces for families and supported 53 families through the Stevenage Women’s Refuge
- received 134 male referrals through the SADA programme - an increase of 120 % since last year
- supported 17 clients with no recourse to public funds
- received 166 calls through the SADA Out Of Hours service.

Culture, Leisure and a Healthy Stevenage

We have a vision of culture, leisure and health that will ensure we remain a lively town which is a great place to live for residents as well as a great destination for visitors.

This year we have:

- re-opened our Play Centres following covid / lockdown-related closures and since then we have had 5,405 sessional visits
- In partnership with the Stevenage World Forum and Hertfordshire Community Foundation – held 5 history reminiscence sessions called ‘Stevenage Legacy and Resilience’. 60 people attended the events and oral history recordings and portraiture from the event will be displayed at the Stevenage Museum in 2022/23
- worked with local artists to deliver the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning ‘Out in Stevenage’ exhibition – which explored LGBTQ+ experiences of cycling in Stevenage and was attended by 40 local residents on opening night
- successfully installed the Lytton Way Heritage Timeline along the hoarding for the Swingate House SG1 development – the timeline shows a brief history of Stevenage since it became the first New Town on 1 August 1946
- worked with 105 young people across three outreach pop-up events during the summer period, and 106 young people at basketball roadshows during the summer half-term and school summer holiday as part of the Stevenage Young Person Health Hub.
- generated significant online interest in the Young Person Healthy Hub with 5,967 website views and 40,257 people reached through Instagram, resulting in 486 click-throughs to partner organisations

- encouraged 149 children to receive training as part of the as part of the Health Stevenage Strategy Cycle Hub initiative, a further 28 children attended the Go-Ride Club and 34 adults took part in training courses ranging from bike repairs to absolute beginners
 - organised the eighth Stevenage Walking Festival with partners across Stevenage and North Herts – at least 3 daily walks of various difficulties were arranged every day for a week (from short sessions to 12 mile challenges!)

Next year we will:

- Deliver educational & behavioural change initiatives to help prevent littering and dog fouling
- Convert tired shrub beds to grassed areas
- Identify ways we can improve the appearance of the Town
- Increase recycling rates and reduce the nuisance caused by fly-tipping
- Deliver a programme of cyclical work throughout the year (spring clean, grass-cutting, leaf clearance, tree planting etc.)
- Deliver Biodiversity Action Plan activities including the development of community woodland and new meadow grassland sites
- Retain 5 Green Flag awards and extend the network of Community Orchards
- Promote the reporting of hate crime and further promote equality within the community
- Provide a whole housing approach to support victims of domestic abuse and their families
- Work with partners to further improve the safety of women and girls in the town
- Support the development of Junction 7 Creatives and the wider Arts & Heritage Forum partnership
- Develop further youth-centred activities that increases access to cultural activity
- Continue to contribute to the Stevenage Together Action Plan focussing on supporting the mental and physical health of the town

Making Your Money Count

We aim to ensure sufficient resources are available to deliver on the Council's priorities while remaining financially resilient to withstand the impact of COVID and our recovery.

This year we have:

- provided £12.4 million in business rate relief and £6.2 million in business grants to local business that have been adversely impacted by the pandemic
- collected £53.8m in council tax with a collection rate of 94.5%. paid out £44.4m in Housing Benefit 2021/22
- held 2,798 face- face appointments to help local people access the services they need
- seen an 86% increase in the number of visits to the council website (www.stevenage.gov.uk) with the number of online contacts (online forms and self-service) rising from 16% at the start of 2021 to 22% in March 2022
- we have hosted our first paid for production as part of our commercial filming opportunity ambition outlined in our Cultural Strategy. A 6 part BBC Drama called 'Gold'!
- Through insourcing services delivered combined savings of £53,000 by charging for meadow grass cutting, collection and disposal of waste and window cleaning for council housing

- we have launched a corporate SBC events brochure for 22/23 and secured income from roundabout sponsorship through the launch of the Council's Advertising and Sponsorship Framework and new partnership arrangements with CP Media,
- seen the creation of 3,661 new online accounts so residents can access information or make payments for local authority services such as Council Tax, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support, Landlord and Business Rates.

Next year we will:

- implement digital solutions to improve customer outcomes as part of our Transformation programme
- Implement our Co-operative Commercial and Insourcing Strategy initiatives to maximise savings
- Enlarge the Shared Revenue and Benefits service to help us identify and pursue more available savings
- Complete the update of the General Fund Medium Term Financial Strategy and the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan so that the impact of COVID losses and cost of living crisis are incorporated